

## Diversity, Inclusion, and Followership

The Jamson Manufacturing Company is a privately held family-owned business in the Midwestern U.S. For the past thirty years, it has been manufacturing wiring harnesses for the aviation industry. Jamson is a medium-sized firm with deep roots in the community. The population of the town that it serves is a diverse mix of Caucasians, Native Americans, African Americans, Hispanics, and Asians. Its main plant is located near a large Indian Reserve with a population that is slightly larger than the town itself. While relationships amongst these groups are generally good, each community tends to socialize separately.

The senior leadership team of Jamson Manufacturing is exclusively white and male. The Vice President (VP) of Operations is the brother-in-law of the CEO, the VP of Finance is the son-in-law of the CEO, and the VP of Marketing is the daughter of the CEO. Additionally, the Director of Human Resources (HR), who has accountability for all of Jamson's HR functions and reports directly to the CEO, is married to the VP of Operations. These vested leaders have differing levels of education, all are experienced in their respective areas of responsibility, and the company has been profitable for most of its existence. Other than relatives of Jamson's owners, upper and middle management of Jamson (i.e., VPs and Directors) are also mostly white and male.

One notable exception is Paul Jones, Director of Accounts Receivable, an African-American who earned his MBA at the local state college. Recently, at a company-sponsored senior leadership retreat, Paul noticed that he was the only person of color in attendance. Paul had been vocal about the lack of diversity within the company and suggested to his boss, the VP of Finance, that the company should hire additional African Americans at various levels of the organi-

zation including supervisory positions. Paul and his boss get along well; they play golf together regularly and Paul has always been encouraging and supportive of his boss's decisions. While Paul believes the company is ready to embrace greater diversity in its workforce, he has been disappointed by the pace of change and the lack of an HR policy supporting it.

Most employees have worked several years at Jamson and depend upon the security of their employment to support their families. When initially hired, the majority of these employees did not complete an extensive training process; they were expected to learn on the job. Nevertheless, the workforce is mostly competent and experienced thanks to a work culture where helping each other is the norm. Teams form the backbone of Jamson and people recognize that the team's accomplishments are a result of individual commitment combined with the skills and competencies of a few especially skilled staff. Teams act largely as self-contained units, with the team lead not only managing the work of the team, but also bridging communications between the teams and supervisory staff. However, relationships between teams are not always strong and some competition at this level is encouraged.

### The New Hire

Carl Peterson was recently hired as a supervisor for the first shift on the production floor. With a bachelor's degree in production management and ten plus years' experience in manufacturing, Carl was well qualified for the position. He was excited about being hired and moved his wife and two children from Duluth, Minnesota to the town near Jamson's plant. His excitement, however, soon turned to dismay as he noticed a drop in production by the three teams on the shift that he supervised shortly after his arrival. He began to overhear rumors of employees expressing

their disappointment that Sally Onida, an internal applicant, was not selected for the supervisory position that Carl had accepted. Carl was also concerned about increasing incidents of detrimental conduct and poor attitude that he personally witnessed on the production floor.

Sally Onida, a Native American, began working for Jamson 15 years ago. She worked as a machine operator for 12 years and was promoted three years ago to one of the company's three team lead positions on the first shift. She has never had any performance issues and her evaluations have all been exemplary. When her supervisor, Mark Rollins, recently announced his retirement from the company, Sally expressed an interest to her male co-workers in applying for his position. As Sally left the break room where everyone was seated, she overheard Mark smirk, "Don't worry guys, I will do anything that I can to keep an overweight woman from getting my job. I don't care how good she is." Upset by his comment, Sally decided to speak to Human Resources (HR). HR thanked her for the information and told her, "we will take care of it." Mark was not fired over the incident, but he did retire quickly. Sally anticipated that Mark's supervisory position would be offered to her and Sally's team members agreed. Instead, Carl Peterson, who had only recently been hired, was promoted and given Mark's job.

Following Carl Peterson's promotion, Sally began to have problems with the other two team leaders, which escalated into shouting matches and disciplinary action for all involved. Recently, Sally has been late for work and tardy for production meetings. She began criticizing Carl's decisions along with his ability to motivate the team to achieve the shift goals necessary for production. Carl recognized these changes in Sally's behavior and work habits and arranged two counseling sessions with her in an effort to respond to the escalation of conflict between the

two of them. One of the sessions was informal and not documented; the second session was brought on by Sally's refusal to abide by Carl's suggestions from the first counseling session. At the end of the second session, Sally broke down and accused Carl of "not wanting fat women on the production floor." Unlike his predecessor, Carl is very aware of the necessity to include Sally in the decision-making process of goal setting and empowerment to help her better lead her team. He is also mindful of the need to address the attitude displayed by Sally before it escalates into an even bigger problem for Jamson Manufacturing.

#### Scholarly Commentary

To build an inclusive environment within an organization, there must be a commitment from the top, respect for diverse opinions, and equitable policies (Bendick, Egan, & Lanier, 2010). These inclusive work environments offer a place where employees are treated in a positive manner, as assets rather than liabilities (Sabharwal, 2014). Employees serve as a key ingredient to the overall process and everyone's input matters for strategic planning purposes and the establishment of short and long-term goals.

Inclusion in the decision-making process of an organization is an essential component of empowerment, and workplace empowerment is a product of "genuine inclusion of difference" (Prasad, 2001, p. 65). Inclusion has also been described as "the degree to which an employee perceives that he or she is an esteemed member of the work group through experiencing treatment that satisfies his or her needs for belongingness and uniqueness" (Shore, Randel, Chung, Ehrhart, & Singh, 2011, p. 1265).

The feeling of being included facilitates people unifying in order to work as a cohesive group. As Sabharwal (2014, p. 197) notes, “Diversity management is insufficient for improving workplace performance.” For this to occur, a greater inclusion of employees is required in a manner that promotes self-esteem and considers everyone’s input. The improvement of workplace performance is the result of the fact that diversity focuses on demography; whereas, inclusion focuses on the removal of obstacles to the full participation and contribution of employees (Roberson, 2006).

When individuals belong to a group, they become *members* by developing an association; a partnership with others and a social identity. Tajfel (2010) posits that individuals choose to join a group to build self-esteem. This process, however, creates separate and distinct out-groups and in-groups, which divides the population into “them” and “us”. As a result of the divide in the population, the in-group, in an attempt to heighten their own self-image, discriminates in some manner against the out-group. When individuals do not feel they are being valued within the organization, their work performances and morale becomes affected. These individuals can often begin to identify with the out-group and they may not be able to adequately connect with teammates. If this identification behavior continues, out-group workers may display a downward trend of morale and performance. On the other hand, in-group members will continue to act to heighten their own self-image until leadership has brought the issue to their attention, and remedies are put in place.

Social comparison theory (Sabharwal, 2014) suggests that individuals compare their skills and abilities to those attributes in others. However, this constant comparison creates per-

ceptions of inclusion or exclusion based upon social interactions. Feeling safe within a group is sometimes more valuable than being innovative or rewarded.

Creating an atmosphere where all workers feel they are accountable yet valued and appreciated is best for the purpose of organizational growth and excellence. By the early 1980s, American industry began to experience a destabilization of the status quo, and to develop towards a more diverse and inclusive work force. The globalization of business, advancing technological changes for employees, and the ongoing dynamic between business, labor and government put pressure on corporate systems. Dixon and Westbrook (2003) further note that globalization pressure altered organizational culture, and also has required a more fluid employee-employer social relationship. Unfortunately, this process of change has been hindered by a preoccupation with leadership, and has downplayed the importance of followers to an organization. According to Dixon and Westbrook (2003), "Being a follower is a condition; not a position" (p. 20). Being an exemplary follower is a state in which a person accepts the role of serving others and behaves in a manner that is respectful to others; while at the same time exemplifying the traits and characteristics of effective leadership.

Within any organization, there will be leaders and followers. The two must be cognizant of how to work together in a manner that promotes a connection to the business, a connection to the group, and a connection to each other as leaders and follower. Members who feel connected to a business are proud of the role they are given and willingly support leadership in setting clear and obtainable goals for the success of the organization. If workers feel alienated from the group, they tend to believe their voice is never heard and their competencies are not an essential com-

ponent for organizational progress. Being that there are more followers than leaders within the framework of a company or business, it is vital that each member feels valued and respected as they contribute to the organizational mission.

Blanchard, Wellbourne, and Bullock (2009) note that leaders are particularly essential to organizational success. However, little attention is paid to the other side of the leadership equation, namely followership. More training time should be focused on how followership is regarded and included within the organization. The two terms, leader and follower are closely intertwined to the point that effective followers can shape productive leader behavior just as effective leaders can develop people into good followers (Daft, 2008, p. 195). However, without focused training in regards to empowerment and inclusion, neither the leader's nor the follower's behavior can be influenced to help achieve organizational success.

Workplace empowerment is important to the followership side of the leadership equation. Unless leaders or managers have genuinely assessed their own personal feelings and perceptions regarding those they supervise, they might unconsciously experience leadership bias. This bias comes from an attitude of *I know best*, which can cause followers to experience feelings of shame and worthlessness. Self-righteous leadership sabotages inclusion. In order to empower workers, leaders must have a clear understanding of human capital and its significance in the overall prosperity of a business. Effective leaders will consider the diverse sets of skills, personalities, and demographics of each member. Prasad (2001) identifies workplace empowerment as an integral aspect of inclusion; meaning the inclusion of races, ethnicities, genders, classes, and the like. Hollander and Offerman (1990) postulate that workplace empowerment is understood as

increased responsibility and more participative decision-making. Workers feel more connected to their teammates and the organization when they are given ample opportunity to have a voice in organizational matters. Conger and Kanungo (1988) conceptualize workplace empowerment as the removal of conditions that lead to the feelings of powerlessness in the workplace. When members feel powerless and weak, they often experience an attitude of helplessness and insignificance in contribution and productivity; regardless of their true potential or worth.

Prasad (2001) argues that empowerment is only a single moment of inclusion. It is necessary to provide a more enduring sense of inclusion than empowerment provides. In the political realm, empowerment is in concert with some values and ideals of democracy and is also linked to the concept that power resides in the citizens. The concepts of empowerment and inclusion do not move easily between the realms of democratic politics to the world of corporate governance. Corporate governance in the United States is vested in the stockholders (i.e., in capital) and not the majority rule of the employees. Democracies work towards the inclusion of all of its citizens in order to achieve success and the legitimacy of the political system. Research in the arena of workplace democracy has emphasized worker inclusion, and as a result spurred an increase of empowerment opportunities for employees (Prasad, 2001).

Basically, an inclusive workplace would be one in which leadership embraces diversity and the richness of backgrounds and perspectives of all employees. Equal representation of worker talents and competencies is valued. Today, there is an increased focus on employee rights and representation, as well as women in leadership. Even though this is a work in progress, women are actually thriving in business environments all around the world. Issues such as em-



ployee rights and equal representation of women in leadership positions remain a valid concern for the labor-management workforce (Prasad, 2001). Empowering workers to demonstrate their potential with ease can only be accomplished if a business is open to the idea of differing views, gender, and ages. Inclusive leadership leverages diverse talents, where the participation of all members is welcomed. The process of open communication and acceptance of all should result in a winning solution for a multitude of business initiatives.

### Questions

1. How would you evaluate Sally as a follower? What could Sally have done differently to enhance her position and become a more favorable candidate for job openings in the future? Explain your response in terms of your experiences and the commentary.
2. As the Human Resources (HR) Director, your boss has asked you to develop a plan for employee development that will improve diversity and inclusiveness. Describe the program you might propose for employee development that will include all employees.
3. Do you believe Carl is aware he is a follower as well as the First Shift Supervisor? If you were the Vice-President (VP) of Operations, how would you ensure Carl understands what needs to be done to improve morale on the first shift?
4. Carl is aware of the necessity to include Sally in the decision-making process of goal setting and empowerment to help her better lead her team. If you were Carl, what might you do to continue to defuse the problem of Sally arriving late to work and displaying a negative attitude toward supervisors?

5. If you were the VP of Finance, and you were aware the company should hire a more diverse workforce at various levels of the organization to include supervisory positions, what could you do in the short-term to remedy the situation? What could you do in the long-term? Develop a plan for each.
  
6. If you were the CEO of Jamson Manufacturing how would you begin to create an atmosphere where all workers feel they are accountable; yet, valued and appreciated in a way that supports organizational growth and excellence?

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