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"Diversity is a reality, inclusion is a choice."

Synopsis

Diversity, the most ordinary thing in the world?

Diversity is a reality. The essence of it is that differences are there! No one and no organization can ignore the differences among individuals. That is why diversity should be accepted as a matter of course. It delivers new insights and innovations and brings quality and strength to organizations. But there is also a downside: diversity sometimes leads to problems and conflicts between people, even in organizations. It is not always and everywhere rosy. There is still much work to do to make diversity a standard feature of the workforce and daily life. In this oration, some points of view are presented, along with paths that lead to inclusion in organizations where everyone may be different.

One argument is that a shift is needed in thinking about diversity, from groups like women and ethnic minorities to individuals. In practice, diversity is often associated with loft or group thinking. The problem of thinking in groups is that attention to the individual disappears. Diversity affects everyone, simply because we all are different and all part of society. What matters most is that we all want to be heard, known and recognized for who we are. Our varied talents deserve more attention than they currently receive in the labour market. One way to make diversity the most ordinary thing in organizations is to approach it from a system of values, meaning that everyone acts from deeper values such as freedom, equality and mutual trust – the common values that are deeply rooted in society. A focus on shared values can contribute to our connection with one another, increase inclusion in organizations and maximize talent utilization by embracing differences. More importantly, those values form the basis of organizational perspectives like creativity, binding and equality to stimulate diversity. When interventions are logically driven from these perspectives and underlying values, their effectiveness is bound to improve.

From the perspective of change management, the anchoring of diversity in the behaviour and culture of people and organizations needs more attention. Diversity is not merely an issue of human resources management; it is a leadership issue and a part of the overall organizational development. Diversity is not an end in itself; the organization's ambitions are at the centre, and the differences between people can contribute to realizing those ambitions. One important condition is a corporate culture where differences are recognized and embraced. If differences are seen, recognized and given room, individuals can develop themselves more fully and can contribute more to the organization. However, reality is stubborn. Think of the downside of diversity, such as conflicts that arise through differences between individuals and in the organizational context. Leadership is essential to allowing differences to flourish and increasing their added value contribution.

The Diversity Chair of the University of Applied Sciences Leiden studies how to make diversity a common cause for organizations and individuals.