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Broad Changes Are Needed to Move Toward Social Harmony

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Broad Changes Are Needed to Move Toward Social Harmony

By Vanessa Lopez-Littleton
UCF Forum columnist
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I wonder if the need for workplace-diversity initiatives is an indicator of an underlying societal issue? If so, could a more comprehensive approach to diversity serve as a catalyst for social transformation?

Many companies recognize the recruitment and hiring of minority-represented groups as an important aspect of diversity. But could the fact that many blacks and Hispanics live in segregated residential neighborhoods contribute to the lack of qualified applicants?

In a country where the number of racial and ethnic minorities is steadily increasing, serious thought must be given to the lack of access to resources and opportunity created by racial and economic segregation. This is particularly true when it comes to education. In the 60 years since *Brown v. Board of Education* declared separate was inherently unequal, many black and Hispanic children are finding themselves isolated in segregated neighborhoods by race and poverty.

If these young people are unable to escape the conditions of their communities and life circumstances, it is unlikely they will ever have the chance to compete for those coveted jobs. Although some will achieve and even excel, it has not been the norm. Herein lies the problem. The conditions in these communities have long-lasting negative effects, not just for the individual but also for society.

Companies grappling with how to increase and improve their diversity and workplace environment might be focusing too narrowly. Without systemic cultural changes, increasing the number of qualified blacks and Hispanics in the talent pool may remain elusive.

A more comprehensive approach to diversity is needed to disrupt institutionalized systems of segregation and inequality.

Singapore's use of ethnic quotas in public housing provides an ambitious example of promoting diversity. More than 80 percent of the country's citizens reside in public housing, which maintains a quota system under the Ethnic Integration Policy. The public-housing units are sold to families of ethnicity reflecting the national average. This is an attempt to avoid racial segregation and ethnic enclaves in a pursuit of social harmony.

Singapore's Deputy Prime Minister Tharman Shanmugaratnam says it is important for people to be comfortable with each other—through living, working and doing things together—and that children are educated together. This in turn will serve as an impetus for shared values and a shared future.

Workplace-diversity initiatives have served as a good starting point, but broader systemic changes are needed to move toward social harmony.

An ideal diversity initiative would be a collaborative effort aimed at creating inclusive-learning environments where children of all backgrounds have the opportunity to interact, learn and grow together.

Here are some suggestions for creating more diverse and inclusive experiences for the next generation.

- Establish diverse learning communities where multi-cultural experiences for students is the core and economic mobility is the result
- Develop systems that promote equality in the allocation of resources and access to opportunities for all students
- Examine inequalities in school systems to identify patterns of institutionalized racism and discrimination
- Promote the integration of public schools by allowing, supporting and encouraging a myriad of school-choice options
- Allocate resources (people and money) to integrate models that work into school curricular and extra-curricular activities
- Invest in integrated local leadership development programs to assist youth and young adults develop a shared vision to proactively solve problems

These may be idealistic but the possibility some may consider policies and programs that move us toward social harmony is a great “next step” for diversity.

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