Professionalizing Diversity and Inclusion Practice:  
Should Voluntary Standards be the Chicken or the Egg?

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ABSTRACT. Workplace diversity and inclusion (D & I) practices today are based primarily on unevaluated experience and intuition rather than empirical evidence. Would voluntary professional practice standards in this field effectively raise the level of current and future practice? Or would they be premature? On balance, we believe the former. However, this positive outcome will require I-O psychologists to join their D & I colleagues in overcoming four barriers to progress: (a) limited evaluation of D & I practices (addressable through research); (b) limited conceptual and analytical skills among D & I practitioners (addressable through education and training); (c) employer concerns about self-incrimination (addressable through policy advocacy); and (d) limited employer commitment to D & I itself (addressable through conceptual rigor).

Key words: SHRM, ANSI, best practices, employment discrimination, informational regulation
Diversity and inclusion (D & I) initiatives are now prominent among the employment practices with which many I-O psychologists work. It is rare to attend a workplace-oriented conference without being accosted by providers of diversity training; to view an employer’s website without encountering a “diversity” link; or to complete a consulting assignment without hearing about the client’s employee affinity groups, celebrations of diverse cultures, and “business case for diversity.” At least half of all U.S. companies with over 100 employees have some form of D & I program, including more than 75% of the largest firms, with expenditures on these activities totaling $10 billion annually. An estimated 5,000 practitioners deliver these services, a number rivaling SIOP’s own 7,000 active members (Bendick, Egan & Lofhjelm, 2001; Forbes, 1997; SHRM, 2010b).

Unfortunately, many D & I activities are not equal to the scale and complexity of the problems they are intended to address. These problems include continuing discrimination, both conscious and unconscious, against women, minorities, older workers, persons with disabilities, and other groups in the workplace (Bendick, 2007). They also include widespread employer failure to engender employee engagement and fully utilize talent among employees of diverse backgrounds (Macey, Schneider, Barbera, & Young, 2009).

In some cases, employers initiate D & I activities primarily for public relations benefits or “feel good” reasons, with little concern about their effectiveness. In more typical situations, however, employers are sincere, but their efforts are to some degree ineffective. In large part, this ineffectiveness reflects a shortage of solid, evidence-based information to guide these initiatives. D & I programs are commonly based on practitioners’ unevaluated experience and intuition, with the primary rationale for each employer’s D & I strategy often little more than
“that’s what other employers are doing.” Best practice advice offered in books, the trade press, and conference presentations is often loosely described, seldom formally evaluated, sometimes contradictory, and almost always problematic to transfer among workplaces. Although a more rigorously conceptual, evidence-based state of the art is slowly emerging, this body of research is only beginning to accumulate, let alone influence D & I practice.

In this paper we argue that in these circumstances, promulgating voluntary professional standards for D & I practice now can significantly advance the effectiveness of D & I activities in both the short and the long run. These standards would thereby promote the fair, efficient workplaces to which I-O psychologists are professionally committed.

In reaching this conclusion, we first briefly review the current state of D & I practice. We then propose four reasons why voluntary professional standards are likely to promote more effective professional practice. Next we describe a current D & I standard-setting effort by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM). Finally, we identify four barriers that must be overcome to have such efforts succeed in improving D & I practice. In closing, we enumerate opportunities for I-O psychologists to participate in addressing these barriers, as well as ways in which these standards may affect the work of I-O psychologists.

**D & I as an Evolving Workplace Practice**

In early usage during the 1980s, the term “diversity” typically referred to demographic differences among people in the workforce, particularly differences in visible characteristics such as gender, race, age, and disability. This interpretation reflected the evolution of diversity work out of the Civil Rights era of the 1960s, which granted dramatic new legal protection against employment discrimination for these groups.
Even in those early days, however, the nascent diversity movement looked beyond this legal focus. In fact, some observers attribute the emergence of diversity management in the corporate world during the 1980s directly to the weakening of the legal approach at that time, reflecting conservative appointments to the judiciary, unfavorable court decisions, and the sometime-discouraging consequences of legal action. “Diversity programs came into being in part as a response to this legal vacuum. Astute business people realized there were problems of discrimination in the workplace, and the law was not then a significant force in addressing them” (Paskoff, 1996, p. 47; see also Dobbin, 2009).

In place of a legal orientation, D & I practitioners emphasized the role of D & I efforts in supporting employers’ operational needs and business goals. Initially, this “business case for diversity” emphasized demographic trends which were interpreted (or mis-interpreted) to predict that white males would soon be outnumbered by women and minorities among those entering the labor force (DiThomaso & Friedman, 1995; Johnston & Packer, 1987). Because employers would increasingly have no choice but to rely on such supposed “newcomers” as their workforce, it was argued, employers needed to learn how to manage them productively (Kochan et al., 2003). In addition, advocates of diversity management argued that employee diversity opened doors to new customers and expanded sales, and that diversity in work teams could enhance employees’ productivity and creativity (Cox, 1997; Thomas & Ely, 1996).

Over the decades since the 1980s, the concept of workplace diversity has evolved in both scope and sophistication. On the simplest level, this evolution has involved encompassing additional demographic characteristics as part of the employee diversity that must be considered in the workplace -- for example, religious practices, family status, and sexual orientation. In a
more complex way, and not without controversy, some have added invisible differences among individuals on dimensions such as educational background, functional specialty, work style, personality traits, and thinking styles (Hays-Thomas, 2004). In this spirit, we offer a
contemporary expansive definition of diversity as the mixture of attributes within a workforce that affect how people think, feel, and behave, and how others respond to them.

The last phrase in this definition -- “how others respond to them” -- signals a profound reorientation in diversity thought: the emerging insight that what matters in managing workforce diversity is not only employee characteristics *per se* but also the way others – such as fellow employees, customers, and the employing organization itself – respond to those characteristics. Since the 1990s, that shift in thinking has commonly led to pairing the term “inclusion” with “diversity” in everything from scholarly writing (e.g., Holvino, Ferdman, & Merrill-Sands, 2004) to the titles carried by employers’ diversity staff. In this pairing, diversity continues to draw attention to the characteristics of an employer’s *workforce*, while inclusion focuses new attention on the policies, practices, and climate of the *workplace* – the workplace culture – that shapes the experiences of employees with those characteristics. For example, one current definition describes inclusion 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 et al., 2011, p. 1265).

This emphasis on employers’ responses to employee characteristics in large part arose out of the failure of many early efforts which focused on employee characteristics alone. Early efforts at targeted recruitment for women and minorities often failed to produce sustainable change in workplaces’ demographic composition, let alone the increased productivity, creativity,
and sales that these change in workforce demographics were supposed to unleash (Thomas, 1990). Early efforts at “diversity awareness” training for supervisors and employees often engendered resentment and created inter-group conflict rather than the intended harmony (Cross, 2000; Hemphill & Haines, 1997).

Diagnosing these disappointing results, it was frequently observed that in these efforts, the newcomers were commonly expected to assimilate to the norms of the dominant group and the existing workplace culture. The failure of these initiatives taught us that to maintain and benefit from workforce diversity, employers had to create a more inclusive workplace – changing their own perceptions, attitudes, practices and behavior in ways that lead people of difference to become fully accepted and equitably rewarded in the employment setting (Cox, 1997; Ferdman & Sagiv, 2012; Ross, 2011).

To some extent, all this activity -- including both successes and failures -- has begun to attract the rigorous evaluations and careful research that I-O professionals and other workplace advisors would hope to have to guide such efforts. Some studies have used laboratory simulations or analogues of the workplace to test the effects of D & I initiatives (e.g., Dovidio, Hewstone, Glick, & Esses, 2010). Other research has used or reviewed quasi-experiments and other designs in real workplaces. For example, several studies have sought to measure the impact and identify correlates of success for the most common D & I initiative, diversity training (e.g., Bendick, Egan, & Lofhjelm, 2001; Bezrukova, Jehn, & Spell, 2012; Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006). Other work has attempted the same for other common D & I activities such as demographically-targeted recruitment and mentoring (e.g., Kulik & Roberson, 2008; Pitts, 2009). Still other studies have analyzed the effects on employee absenteeism and turnover, productivity,
innovation, sales, or market share of a workforce’s demographic diversity (e.g., Ely, 2004; Frink et al., 2003; Herring, 2009; Jackson & Joshi, 2004; Leonard, Levine, & Joshi, 2004).

Within this final group, the boldest, although not necessarily the most rigorous, research has investigated the relationship between staff demographics and firms’ “bottom line,” measured by profitability or stock prices. For example, one study of Fortune 500 publicly-traded companies found that the top 25% of these firms in terms of women in senior management generated returns to their stockholders more than 30% higher than their peers in the bottom 25% (Catalyst, 2004; see also Hersch, 1991, and Wright, Ferris, Hiller, & Kroll, 1995).

Unfortunately, such empirical quantitative analyses represent a minority within the D & I state-of-the-art. In designing and implementing their initiatives, most employers rely primarily on personal experience, theoretical reasoning, and case studies of “success stories” in other workplaces. Such guidance is readily available from trade magazines (e.g., DiversityInc, Diversity Executive, and Profiles in Diversity), how-to books (e.g., Cox, 2001; Ross, 2011; Theiderman, 2008); case studies (e.g., Anand & Winters, 2008); textbooks (e.g., Bell, 2007; Carr-Ruffino, 2009; Mor Barak, 2005), and conferences and training organized by human resource organizations (e.g., SHRM, the Conference Board) or consultants. Instant access via the internet to a proliferating number of D & I blogs and chat groups further expands this flood of unscreened advice.

Anyone seeking to draw on these varied sources of information to design practical workplace policies and practices faces difficulties in separating correct recommendations from incorrect ones, identifying which advice is based on hard evidence, and understanding under what conditions the advice will apply. This final consideration is particularly important and yet
widely overlooked. I-O psychologists are well aware that the effects of any employer action may vary depending on the organizational context into which it is introduced. Yet diversity case studies seldom explicitly examine the conditions for transferability of one successful experience to other workplaces.

One mechanism for improving knowledge and practice in such situations is the development of formal standards and metrics. We now turn to a discussion of that process.

**Standards as a Strategy to Improve D & I Practices**

One conclusion that might be drawn from the previous section is that setting standards for D & I practice is premature at this time. Until the field has developed a more extensive and rigorous body of knowledge, promulgating standards might enshrine folklore, not science, and proliferate rather than eliminate inefficient, ineffective, or harmful activities. Moreover, conformity to these standards might discourage experimentation that could lead to new, better practices. Alternatively, employers might tend to ignore the standards, because compliance will often require significant expenditures of dollars, staff time, and managerial attention for which there is little definitive evidence of a positive return.

*Voluntary* standards would seem to be particularly vulnerable to the fate of being ignored. However, the dynamics of this process may be more complex than that. On the one hand, even supposedly mandatory standards are often ignored. For example, although in many states, psychology licensure may be legally required to engage in certain types of work, some I-O psychologists may treat this process as applicable only to clinicians, even when state law does not recognize that distinction. Conversely, supposedly voluntary standards sometimes command essentially universal compliance. For instance, although accreditation of universities
and higher educational programs is nominally voluntary, it is often \textit{de facto} necessary when students in unaccredited programs may not have access to financial aid and graduates of unaccredited programs may not be eligible for certification, licensure, or employment in their field of study.

The findings of research on previous standards-setting efforts are similarly complex. When establishing consistency or compatibility on technical issues in well-established fields such as accounting or engineering, many efforts have been judged both influential and beneficial (e.g., www.iso.org/iso/home/standards/benefitsofstandards). In more emergent fields such as corporate social responsibility, environmental stewardship, or international labor standards, the record tends to be more mixed. In some corporations, the process of standards has triggered major improvements in the organization’s policies and practices, while other corporations have sought the public relations benefits of meeting standards despite essentially no changes in their behavior (Edmonds & Pavcnik, 2005; Egan, Mauleon, Wolff, & Bendick, 2009; Helms, Olivier & Webb, 2012; Koehler, 2007; Yin & Schmeidler, 2008).

Clearly, there is some potential for practice standards in a relatively immature field such as D & I to perpetuate errors, be ineffectual, or some combination of both these undesirable outcomes. However, on balance, we believe that the opposite is more likely. The authors are members of the metrics section of a SHRM Task Force which since 2011 has been crafting standards for workplace D & I programs, D & I metrics, and Chief D & I Officers. Based on that experience, we see four reasons for optimism.

\textbf{Participant characteristics.} The first reason is the qualifications of the individuals who have volunteered to participate in these standards-setting deliberations. Our task force of 68
members includes prominent academics, chief diversity officers with strategic perspectives, D & I practitioners with varied specialties, and experienced consultants with exposure to a wide range of workplaces. Such backgrounds place the average participant’s individual knowledge and insights well above that of the average diversity practitioner, many of whom are short-timers and not formally trained in D & I itself (Cross, 2000). Moreover, by mixing academics and practitioners; persons from the public, private, and non-profit sectors; and persons with different professional backgrounds -- including I-O psychology, other behavioral sciences, HR management, strategic management, law, and economics -- the SHRM process benefits from a particularly rich collective experience that transcends that of any individual.

**Group processes.** Such rich participants’ background is of little use, of course, if the deliberative process itself does not ensure that a multiplicity of voices is heard. A second reason for optimism is that the SHRM process is overseen by the American National Standards Institute, ANSI (www.ansi.org). This non-profit organization is governed by organizations from the public, private, and non-profit sectors. Since 1918, it has convened the U.S. standards and uniformity assessment community in establishing standards on topics ranging from safe handling of dangerous chemicals to analysis of the impact of industry restructuring on energy prices. It is the U.S. representative to the International Standards Organization (ISO).

ANSI requires all standards-setting task forces under its auspices to follow systematic, transparent deliberative procedures, including: recruiting task force members from a broad cross-section of relevant professions and stakeholders, with no single perspective constituting a majority; dividing deliberations among multiple work groups within the task force; requiring consensus within these work groups that exceeds a simple majority; voting approval of standards
by at least two-thirds of all task force members; and subjecting proposed standards for 45 days of public comment and review (SHRM, 2010a).

Task Force members’ personal perspectives, of course, in no way substitute for empirical evidence based on scientifically-controlled studies. In the field of medicine, for example, new clinical research frequently causes panels of experts to over-ride their personal experience in setting standards for recommended patient treatment. To emulate such processes, our task force’s working group on D & I metrics commissioned a literature survey (Ramsay, 2011) to ensure exposure to relevant research and current practices. This survey helped our group form common understandings concerning the state of the art in D & I metrics and what was needed to improve on it. For instance, we learned that many organizations collect annual “snapshot” data on demographic categories required by government agencies, such as race and sex, but not on other dimensions of diversity, and they also commonly do not compare these annual data over time as a measure of D & I progress. These practices contrast to what research has long identified as the key role of quantitative monitoring in making abstract objectives such as diversity and inclusion effective as a daily operational goal for managers (Drucker, 1954), a concept embodied in the oft-heard mantra that “what gets measured gets managed.”

To further ensure that the consensus that emerges from our D & I metrics working group systematically encompasses a range of perspectives, our working group preceded drafting of standards themselves by debating and adopting 15 criteria for acceptable standards. For example, these criteria mandate that draft standards be workable for both large, sophisticated employers with dedicated D & I staff and for smaller employers; that the results of data analyses required by D & I standards be presented to, and responded to, by senior management; that
standards address D & I not just for current employees but also for potential employees, suppliers, community groups, and other organizational stakeholders; and that all measurement techniques used in meeting standards maintain generally-accepted professional practices for ensuring absence of bias, validity, and reliability.

Separately and together, these systematic procedures in our deliberative processes should tend to prevent self-interested or parochial viewpoints -- particularly those without grounding in scientifically-tested empirical evidence -- from dominating the outcome. The procedures also minimize (although, of course, cannot guarantee to eliminate) the social psychological phenomenon of groupthink in which pressure for conformity leads to poor decisions (Gilovich, Keltner & Nisbett, 2006).

**External stakeholders.** The third reason for optimism is the effect of standards in enlisting support for improved practices from external stakeholders. Within the organizations which employ them, D & I practitioners typically rank relatively low in the organization’s hierarchy both formally and informally. For example, in 62% of organizations responding to a recent survey (SHRM, 2011, p.1.), D & I practitioners were subordinate to Human Resources, which itself is typically not a major center of power and influence. That placement makes the impact of D & I efforts dependent on general management’s approval and support, and in that arena, they face stiff competition. “Other business initiatives that present more compelling, factual evidence of payback on investment win out over diversity initiatives, which seem to offer less predictable and tangible benefits” (Robinson & Dechant, 1997, p. 21).

Contemporary thinking about how to be more persuasive with general management often emphasizes managers’ responsiveness to the multiple networks of stakeholders in which they are
enmeshed (Egan et al., 2009; Springman, 2011). Instead of considering an organization such as a corporation as primarily an autonomous decision-maker, this perspective focuses attention on the influence of outside actors over decisions on subjects such as employment practices. For D & I, these influential stakeholders typically include current employees, potential employees, public policy advocates, unions, customers and clients, investors and investment advisors, government regulators, litigators, insurers, and the news media. These stakeholders can be particularly persuasive in supporting D & I initiatives when the stakeholders have clear, manageable “litmus tests” to articulate their preferences to employers and judge employer compliance. Within psychology, states commonly use graduation from an APA accredited program as a substitute for direct assessment of a licensure applicant’s educational background. “Are you meeting the ANSI/SHRM D & I standards?” can provide that same sort of quick, clear stakeholder-empowering test.

The SHRM/ANSI approach to standards contrasts sharply with currently available alternative simple tests for good D & I performance, prominently including widely-publicized rankings such as “Best Companies for Working Moms” (www.workingmother.com/best-companies) or “Best Employers for Minorities” (money.cnn.com/magazines/Fortune/best-employers). Investigations of the validity of such rankings finds them “more often an exercise in reputation building than they are an illustration of diversity as a tool for organizational transformation” (Metzler, 2012, p. 42). The rankings often lack clear conceptualization, transparent standards, and verified data collection. Some rankings may also be biased by financial considerations for their sponsoring publications (although systematic evidence of this point is hard to find).
Continuous improvement. The final reason for optimism about the benefits of setting D & I standards is the potential for an initial set of standards to accelerate development of new knowledge for improving those standards over the long run. Opportunities to incorporate research findings into improved standards create an incentive for academics and other researchers to focus their attention on these issues. Explicit standards can be translated directly into hypotheses to be tested in rigorous evaluation studies. Adoption by multiple employers of standards-conforming practices can create quasi-experiments in which the effects of a single “treatment condition” can be compared in different organizational environments.

Amplifying the Benefits of D & I Standards

Together, these four points strongly suggest the advantages of setting D & I standards now. However, to ensure that these standards generate their full potential benefits, several circumstances related to D & I will need to be addressed simultaneously with this effort. Four circumstances are particularly important.

The quality of existing research. The first is the predominantly soft state of existing research on D & I. As this paper has discussed, and multiple reviews or compilations of this material confirm (e.g., Bendick & Nunes, 2012; Brief, 2008; Davidson, 2011; Dipboye & Colella, 2005; Egan & Bendick, 2008; Ferdman & Sagiv, 2012; Henry & Evans, 2007; Ramsey, 2011; Stockdale & Crosby, 2004; Thomas, 2008; Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 2001), conceptually-clear, empirically-rigorous research in this field is relatively limited.

One review (Chugh & Brief, 2008, p. 4) attributes this dearth to researchers’ perceptions that research on D & I is “touchy,” “difficult,” “unimportant,” and “abstract.” Certainly the adjective “touchy” is often appropriate. Almost anything related to race, gender, and other
demographic fault lines in American society remains highly controversial in individual workplaces as well as national politics. Boundaries of political correctness and safety from litigation are easily inadvertently crossed.

The description “difficult” is also often justified. The most influential D & I research tends to be conducted in real workplaces, and obtaining employer cooperation for those studies often requires a prolonged search for willing employers and complex negotiations with these employers. Equally, in actual workplaces, it is typically difficult to control the multiple complex and often unpredictable factors confounding the experimental treatment.

However, the two remaining researcher perceptions -- “unimportant” and “abstract” – are definitely not consistent with the facts. Corporate CEO’s surveyed in 2012 about the greatest challenges their organizations will face over the next twelve months named efficient mobilization of human capital among their top three challenges, equal to global political/economic risk and matching the dizzying pace of technological innovation (Mitchell, Ray, & van Ark, 2012). Given the ongoing and even accelerating demographic changes in the American workforce, D & I is an unavoidable aspect of that mobilization. Researchers who move D & I from the margins to a prominent place in their studies will find a strong market among senior managers for their evidence-based findings.

**Practitioner skill.** A second circumstance that requires addressing is the limited skill set of many D & I practitioners. As discussed earlier in this article, many of these practitioners have little or no academic preparation for D & I work. In particular, many have very limited backgrounds in the rich behavioral science literature -- including that in I-O psychology – that, in our opinion, should be the conceptual foundations of D & I practice. To the extent that these
practitioners have formal coursework relevant to D & I, the content of that training has typically emphasized the circumstances of individual demographic groups (e.g., historic and contemporary sources of racial and gender disadvantage), rather than analytical tools for use in organizational work. This emphasis is clear from perusing most contemporary D & I textbooks (e.g., Bell, 2007, or Carr-Ruffino, 2009) and course syllabi (division.aomonline.org/gdo/teaching_syllabi_g.htm).

Typical gaps in practitioners’ analytic and conceptual background often include statistical analysis beyond the most rudimentary; techniques for validating employee selection and assessment practices; the construction or evaluation of psychometrically-sound metrics; and the psychology and sociology of stereotyping and in-group bias. For these practitioners to become informed implementers of the more conceptually-based approaches to D & I practice that standards should promote, these skills need upgrading through relevant degree programs as well as more rigorous short courses, conference presentations, and in-service training.

**Litigation concerns.** A third circumstance to be addressed is the legal issue of self-incrimination. For employers, any analysis, policy, or practice having to do with the employee characteristics prominently addressed in D & I, such as race and gender, raises concerns about creating liability for violating employment discrimination laws. In particular, employers commonly fear that gathering and analyzing data to motivate and guide D & I initiatives may document employment problems that would help potential plaintiffs build a case against them. Moreover, when these analyses are reported to senior management and remedial actions are not taken, the fact that management was aware and did not act may be cited as evidence that alleged discriminatory acts were intentional, potentially creating additional legal liability and enhanced
monetary damages. In the deliberations of our SHRM D & I working group, our colleagues have recounted multiple incidents in which, to avoid such situations, some employers severely restrict D & I analyses, for example, by disallowing cross-tabulation of the responses to employee engagement surveys by the race and gender of respondents.

Four decades ago, some courts began to recognize the adverse effects of such concerns on the public policy objective of having individuals and organizations confidentially evaluate their own legal compliance and self-correct problems without outside intervention. These courts enunciated a so-called “self-critical analysis privilege,” exempting some self-revelatory data and candid assessments from being used as incriminating evidence in litigation. Initially enunciated in the context of medical peer review, this doctrine has, in some cases, been extended to employment practices as well (Simpson, 1996; Pollard, 1999).

However, many courts have been hesitant to offer this privilege in the employment context. For example, the demographic profile of an employer’s workforce contained in annual EEO-1 Reports required of larger employers or Affirmative Action Plans required of federal contractors are generally open to discovery by plaintiffs. So, often, are voluntary D & I analyses by employers—for example, the results of the popular “implicit association” tests for measuring unconscious bias among managers (Dasgupta, McGhee, Greenwald, & Banaji, 2000; Pollard, 1999).

We by no means advocate indiscriminately privileging all employer self-analyses on D & I issues and employment practices. That would create perverse incentives to analyze issues on which the employer has no intention of taking action merely to place potentially-damaging information under wraps. But we do feel that the pendulum has perhaps swung too far in the
opposite direction. D & I work, in particular, often requires probing, candid analyses to motivate employers to act and to identify appropriate actions. Particularly with respect to very complex D & I issues -- for example an organization’s overall corporate culture or managers’ unconscious biases -- the appropriate remedial actions are often not simple or obvious, and more latitude in protecting self-critical analyses would be productive (Pollard, 1999).

**Perceived importance of D & I.** The fourth circumstance that requires addressing is the credibility of the D & I field itself among the senior managers who decide what role it will play in their organizations. According to one recent survey, only 53% of the CEOs in a representative sample of employers believe diversity is important. Concurrently, only 28% of senior diversity managers in these organizations agreed that diversity enhances their organization’s competitiveness, and only 16% believed that it enhances their organization’s “bottom line” (SHRM 2010b).

Given the discussion throughout this paper about the generally suboptimal state of D & I practices today, such skepticism undoubtedly has some basis in reality. To raise the level of D & I practice is, of course, the principal goal of the standards we are advocating. However, the current level of skepticism could catch D & I standards in a chicken and egg dilemma, with low effectiveness reflecting low standards and concurrently reducing organizations’ willingness to invest in achieving greater effectiveness.

Perhaps the most promising way to break this paralyzing cycle of skepticism is to recast D & I itself, distancing it even further from its historic association with anti-discrimination law and emphasizing even more forcefully its foundations in managerial and behavioral science disciplines such as I-O psychology. This would require even more aggressively shifting the
emphasis, described earlier in this paper, from workforce diversity toward workplace inclusion. In turn, this change would require major changes in attitudes throughout the D & I community, including abandonment of some well-established D & I practices such as the content of the business case for diversity (e.g., Bendick, Egan, & Lanier, 2010; Kochan et al., 2003). D & I standards can play a powerful role in defining and disseminating this shift.

**Relevance of these Standards to I-O Psychologists**

The more I-O psychologists directly participate in the development of D & I standards, the higher the likely quality of the standards that emerge from standards-setting processes such as those of the SHRM task force described in this paper. In addition, I-O psychologists can advance the standard-development process by helping to address the four circumstances just discussed:

- I-O psychology researchers can put D & I issues at the center of their research agendas.
- I-O faculty can encourage D & I practitioners to obtain I-O degrees or academic preparation, perhaps by adding to I-O curricula courses explicitly labeled D & I.
- I-O trainers can repackage their materials and messages to make explicit their relevance to D & I and reach out to D & I audiences in conference and in-service settings.
- I-O practitioners can thoughtfully debate the proper scope of the self-assessment privilege and become public spokespersons for appropriate revisions. SIOP and the field of I-O psychology have substantial credibility on such subjects with decision-makers such as the courts, Congressional committees, and the EEOC, and this credibility can be mobilized in this effort.
• I-O thought leaders can bring their discipline’s well-developed conceptual perspectives to bear as active participants in the debate within the D & I field about issues such as the proper balance between “diversity thinking” and “inclusion thinking.”

Even I-O psychologists who do not actively direct their work in these ways should be prepared to have emergent D & I standards affect their work. For example:

• Those engaged in organizational consulting may be asked to advise client organizations on whether to undertake the work necessary to meet the SHRM/ANSI standards, and to assist in doing so. This latter effort might require developing new measurement techniques and analyses.

• Those engaged in research may see expanded opportunities for high-quality field research, perhaps in multi-researcher consortia (e.g., Kochan et al., 2003). Many intriguing research questions have already emerged from the standards’ setting process, such as: Where do concepts such as diversity and inclusion fit in the nomological network of established constructs such as fairness, social identity, and in-group status? What characterizes organizations that aspire to meet voluntary D & I standards? What are the organizational consequences when an employer seeks to meet such standards?

• Those engaged in education may be called on to rethink what curricula and academic experiences best prepare students to work in the field of D & I, how high-quality learning can be made available to graduates already employed in D & I, and what linkages can be developed between scholarly I-O literature and the real-world challenges facing organizations addressing issues of diversity and inclusion.
In grappling with these multiple challenges, I-O psychologists can importantly advance the professional goals they share with D & I practitioners: workplaces that are both efficient and equitable, and great places to work for employees of all backgrounds.
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