



4736 Onondaga Blvd, PMB 157 Syracuse New York 13219  
[www.hsaofcny.org](http://www.hsaofcny.org)

Managing a Multicultural Workforce  
By: Emad A. Rahim, M.S.M, M.P.M

There are many variables to consider when managing a multicultural workforce. In a “melting-pot” society, organizational leaders must learn to adapt an array of cultural differences. What one culture perceives as ethical actions, another culture may not? In an environment in which words and phrases that was acceptable one day could change connotations overnight. Ignorance or misunderstanding actions facilitated by organizational leaders in handling questionable employee conduct can result in a calamity of problems. Every year organizations spend millions of dollars settling lawsuits involving employee discrimination claims. According to a 2001 study by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) and FORTUNE Magazine, over 75% of surveyed organizations have engaged in some type of diversity activity or initiative to combat this dilemma. The problem with this approach is that these initiatives are predominantly targeting one group (Majority) and not the other (Minority). According to a study done by Black Enterprise (2005), diversity trainings rarely include the topic of ethics, which is affected by or culture, community, value, faith, education, race and economics. Andersen and Collins (1995) pointed out that many of the ethical difference among people are contributed by economic and cultural influences. These influences can be changed over time by introducing new influences, “The MCIM (multicultural change intervention matrix) addresses systemic planned change, multicultural organization development, and multicultural intervention and activities.” (Lum, 1999, p. 63). Many of these diversity training initiatives focus their attention towards embracing cultural differences, but avoid the topic of embracing ethical differences. Many sociologists believe that this is where the true dilemma stays dormant.

According to Alleyne (2005) many minority professionals feel that there is an underlining double standard placed on their work performance in comparison to their white coworkers, “...white managers are often satisfied with mediocre white employees...black employees can demonstrate exceptional performance in 90% of their job functions, but their managers will focus on the 10%.” (p. 53-54). Johnson an African American Employment Attorney and author of ‘Working While Black’ (2004), mentioned cases involving discrimination over job promotions where double standards were clearly a contributing factor in the situation. Johnson goes on to say that many of the white executives that he dealt with were oblivious to their actions, “...whites, including liberal whites, don’t get, is that even though our experiences as black people can be 85 percent the same as white people, some days that 15 percent difference is the only one we feel.” (2005: p.1-2). Double standards are also working against white professionals. A study done by the News Service Report (2005) showed that Black and Asian women with Bachelor’s degree earned more in wages than similarly educated white women, “ A white women with a bachelor’s degree typically earned nearly \$37,800 ...\$41, 100 - \$43, 700 for Black and Asian women with similar college and professional experience.” (Census Bureau: Syracuse Post-Standard. 2005). The study goes on to suggest that stereotypes which depicting Black and Asian women being more dedicated to their profession than white women because of the adversity many of them faced in order to gain respect and to be where they are at professionally.