MANAGING DIVERSITY: TOWARD A GLOBALLY INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE. Michèlle Mor Barak, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 2005, 327 pages.

This book is a most welcomed addition to the emerging dialogue on diversity management. Mor Barak strongly encourages work organizations to adopt a new perspective on diversity. Building on its expanding importance to the workplace amid local, regional, national, and international socio-demographic and legislative trends, Managing Diversity comprehensively addresses the importance of inclusiveness as part of workforce management, which is scaleable from small community-based organizations to large multinational service agencies.

Practical relevance is threaded throughout the book, such as the important distinction that Mor Barak makes between visible (i.e., observable differences) and invisible diversity (such as not readily apparent attributes as religion, education, seniority, or world view). While intolerance toward either kind of diversity is unacceptable, the definitional nature of invisible diversity presents managers with the added challenge of monitoring behaviors that are not as easily quantified.

The first part of Managing Diversity delves into the complex web of skills, knowledge, and values that combine to shape the inclusive workplace. From an overview of diversity-related employment legislation around the world, to theoretical perspectives on diversity and its meaning in different cultural contexts, to cross-cultural communications, the book is filled with colorful, well-researched examples. The challenges of cross-cultural verbal as well as nonverbal communication are explored, as are other cultural norms—such as power distance, individual or collective group relations, the valuation of competition, and level of
comfort with ambiguity—highlighting the potential for misunderstanding. Fortunately, Mor Barak helps us to clearly understand the values that comprise and undergird these cultural differences and similarities through theoretical and practical examples, as well as diagrams and case vignettes.

The latter part of Managing Diversity focuses on management of a diverse workforce within an international organizational context using the inclusive workplace model. Diversity management is presented as a proactive approach to good management practices, a win-win for organizations, policy makers and others committed to equal opportunity and affirmative action programs. The inclusive workplace model is fully developed in four areas of interaction: in the work organization as well as within distinct collaborations at the community, state/national, and international systems levels.

At the work organization level, companies are presented with five principal areas for diversity implementation: management leadership, in which senior management plays an active role; education and training among employees; performance and accountability, whereby managers are rewarded for reaching compositional goals to assure balanced representation; work-life balance, which accommodates diverse lifestyle with flexible arrangements; and career development and planning, to assure fair promotion of underrepresented groups.

At level two—inclusion through corporate-community collaborations—the work organization broadly defines its stakeholders to include local residents, elected and appointed officials, and allied community-based health, education, and human services institutions. Breaking out of conventional notions of corporate responsibility (which Mor Barak argues appear shallow in today’s fishbowl of public opinion), Managing Diversity suggests that an organization’s economic influence at the community level is reciprocated vis-à-vis improved image, increased employee morale, and payback in resource acquisition.

At the state or national levels, third in the inclusive workplace’s hierarchy, the focus is on the values that determine the work organization’s policies concerning disadvantaged populations, which may include welfare recipients, victims of domestic violence, or distressed youth. It is the role of management in the inclusive workplace to help the disadvantaged to overcome barriers to workforce employment (i.e., childcare, remedial and on-the-job training, and transportation). By reaching out to those outside of the mainstream, whether in the United States or in other parts of the world, these organizations often find their actions to be in parity with social and legislative change. In essence, taking the
ethical and moral high road at the community level is another way of realizing positive image, loyalty, and possibly, new workers in tight job markets.

Finally, inclusion through international collaborations refers to fairness in dealings, respect for differences, and pluralism in commerce and in managing employee workforces abroad. Mor Barak astutely notes that more and more businesses are being attracted to countries with surplus workforces and developing economies. Though the opportunity is ripe for shortsighted exploitation, the inclusive workplace framework offers a plan—which is rooted in fair-trade principles—to offer services across borders and cultures, and to employ workers who will enjoy the same benefits, display the same loyalties, and may look to the same hopeful futures as their counterparts at headquarters.

This book has made a substantial contribution to the social work management literature, and is a must read for social work management professionals and others committed to social justice in the workplace.

Gary Bess, PhD
Principal, Gary Bess Associates
Adjunct Professor, School of Social Work,
California State University, Chico

Another version of this review has been published in the Diversity Journal, 7(2), March/April 2006.