

Employee involvement programs key to workplace diversity

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Alexandra Kalev is a researcher at University of Arizona. Credit: University of Arizona

A new study by a University of Arizona professor shows employee involvement programs that executives adopt to increase efficiency also end up improving their record on diversity.

The study was published in a recent issue of the *American Journal of Sociology*.

According to researcher Alexandra Kalev, UA assistant professor of

sociology, [women](#) and minorities are more successful and have better career opportunities when their companies offer self-directed work teams and cross-training programs.

The new finding, Kalev said, "means that companies can increase both quality and diversity at the same time, with the same programs."

"Most women and minorities are stuck in low-visibility jobs with little opportunity for proving themselves and for advancement. When companies put in place cross-functional work teams and cross-training programs, these women and minorities suddenly have more opportunities to demonstrate their skills and smarts," Kalev said.

Kalev, who has studied diversity programs extensively, analyzed 20 years of data on more than 800 companies and was able to isolate the effects of self-directed work teams and cross training programs on women's and minorities' access to management.

Other data reviewed include an extensive phone survey with managers in these companies and reports on workforce demographics that are sent each year to Washington.

Kalev said more than 40 percent of American mid-sized and large employers have already adopted self-directed work teams and cross-training programs. Cross-functional teams are project groups where workers from different jobs meet frequently and take responsibility for getting the work done and solving problems.

In cross training, Kalev explains, workers learn various jobs so they can perform their own job better or help others when needed. Women and minorities in these programs meet new people, participate and express their views, get responsibility and show managers that they can handle other duties.

Teams and cross training, she added, put talented women and minorities on the radar screen of managers and others who get to know them better and can mentor them and mention their names when there is a new opening.

Kalev points out that organizational psychologists have claimed for decades that stereotypes and prejudices will be counteracted if men and women, or whites and minorities, collaborate by working together as peers, rather than in functionally segregated, highly divided, work settings.

"Most workplaces have historically been organized in this segregated way, but companies are now adopting teamwork and cross training as ways to motivate workers and increase efficiency and quality," Kalev said.

It turns out these same programs also give new opportunities for women and [minorities](#) to shine and get ahead.

Source: University of Arizona ([news](#) : [web](#))

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