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Managing Diversity: Establishing an Agenda for Organizational Change

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**Managing Diversity:
Setting an Agenda for Organizational Change
A University Case Study**

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Abstract

Managing organizational diversity requires managing change. Contemporary organizational leaders must prepare people to adapt to changes in organizational membership and effectively motivate all members of a diverse workforce. However, diversity initiatives are controversial and often met with employee resistance and a backlash of resentment, dissatisfaction, and group polarization. This paper advances a Dialectical Diversity Audit procedure that results in an effective agenda for diversity-related cultural change. The usefulness of the procedure is demonstrated through a Diversity Audit of a mid-sized public university in the southern United States. Using focus group interview techniques and interpretive ethnography, the Diversity Dialectics Audit “gave voice” to university community members and resulted in an agenda for planned change likely to minimize backlash and empower employees at all levels to work toward the organization’s mission. Other organizations are encourage to follow similar steps to set their own agenda for diversity-related change.

Managing Diversity:

Setting an Agenda for Organizational Change

Organizational cultures change slowly. Cultures form by adopting functional practices that, when used overtime, result in shared beliefs, attitudes, norms, values, and expectations (Triandis, 1995). Organization culture is sustained through formal (e.g., employee orientations, mission statements, hiring practices) and informal (e.g., corporate stories, lunch room segregation) mechanisms which communicate the culture from one generation of employees to the next. These symbolic acts re-enforce shared values and maintain predictable practices which perpetuate the status quo and make organizational cultures resistant to change.

This natural resistance to cultural change has become a liability for many organizations trying to thrive in the contemporary, global economy. To maximize success in an ever-expanding multicultural environment, U.S. organizations must respond to societal changes and adapt to concerns for creating, valuing, and managing work-place diversity, especially as it relates to demographic characteristics. Initially, diversity-related goals were intensified by social concerns such as (a) a desire to promote social justice; (b) the limitations of affirmative action; (c) the *Workforce 2000* (Johnson & Packer, 1987) report showing that the U.S. working population will continue to become increasingly more diverse; and (d) the ensuing recognition that organizational cultures include multi-voiced subcultures (Frost, Moore, Louis, Lundberg & Martin, 1991). However, more recently launched diversity initiatives aim to maintain competitiveness in the global market and positively impact the organization's bottom line (Gottfredson, 1992; Carnevale & Stone, 1995). This business-oriented rationale is derived from two interconnected trends: (1) competitive importance of successful interaction among a diverse workforce and (2) increased diversity among clients. Therefore, if for no other reason than to

protect the organization's bottom line, today's organizational leaders must establish a change agenda which prepares employees to function effectively in a diverse world-of-work.

This paper advances a Diversity Dialectics Framework that can be used to audit organization cultures and to establish an effective agenda for managing diversity-related cultural change. The audit framework is situated within the diversity movement and grounded in the dialectics captured by Gottfredson's (1992) explanation of the five key diversity dilemmas. The audit framework incorporates focus group analysis and thereby follows Allen's (1995) thoughtful recommendation for organizational scholars to study diversity in a way that "gives voice" to participants. This paper also reports results from the initial application of this dialectical approach to assessing needs and creating an change agenda, with a mid-size public University serving as the initial case study.

The Diversity Movement

Diversity initiatives are controversial and often garner employee resistance because they ignite debate over valued, and sometimes competing, principles like equal opportunity, individual rights, and merit. The spirit of diversity movement washed over the country in waves that moved organizations closer to the goals of equal opportunity and work environments free from bias; but, as each wave moved on, it left behind some untended negative consequences. Programs that were designed to level the playing field, crack the glass ceiling, and create sensitivities, also resulted in resentment, dissatisfaction, and group polarization.

The diversity movement actually contains at least three successive and interrelated campaigns. The first diversity campaign rose from the grassroots and focused on equal opportunity or *creating* diversity. In this first campaign, change came in the form of new public policy such as civil rights legislation, affirmative action, EEOC guidelines, and ADA. For the

most part, these “right the wrong” programs effectively opened the workplace to diversity. In fact, many people in the United States believe that these changes in public policy ended inequities in the workplace. However, in actuality, these programs did little to change organizational culture. Instead, as in “melting pot” societies, employees were often either segregated or expected to assimilate into the established culture. At best, *creating diversity* programs resulted in a *tolerating-diversity* mind set, where employees from different demographic groups acknowledge the other’s right to work, but try to minimize cross-cultural interaction (Thomas, 1995). Too often, the government programs spawned a backlash of resentment within the established culture, dissatisfaction among the new workers, polarization between groups, and increased ethnocentrism.

The second diversity campaign, *valuing diversity*, grew out the need to improve interpersonal relations among disparate employee groups (Carnevale & Stone, 1995). When employees from different demographic groups work together, their ethnocentrism brings about misunderstandings and lower levels of attraction (Triandis, 1995), thereby decreasing job satisfaction and productivity. The *valuing diversity* campaign brought about initiatives designed to quell ethnocentrism among co-workers. Though the use of sensitivity training, race relations seminars, speaker series, and special holidays employers attempted to encourage awareness and respect for diversity in the workplace. Although the campaign to increase awareness was designed to overcome — but not overshadow — differences, it often produces widely mixed results. In some cases, the valuing diversity approach encourages people to focus on similarities, not differences (Thomas, 1995). Training employees to focus on building relationships encourages them to search for similarities and avoid the challenges associated with differences. This may attenuate underlying conflicts without adequately addressing diversity-related tensions

(Nemetz & Christensen, 1996). Despite its imperfections, however, the valuing diversity campaign has fostered some improvement in employee relations at the interpersonal level (Carnevale & Stone, 1995) and now even includes activities which “celebrate diversity.” These celebrations aim to inspire a supportive organizational climate free from bias, within which woman and minorities can thrive. Unfortunately, unless valuing-diversity initiatives are part of a comprehensive diversity management scheme, this type of diversity training program does not positively impact economic performance (Carnevale & Stone, 1995) and can . To be successful, the programs must be augmented with management practices that reflect the organization’s commitment to value diversity (Gaudron, 1993). They must focus on changing organizational bias, not just individual bias (Thomas, 1991).

The third diversity campaign, *managing diversity*, surfaced in the United States when the demand for competent labor, competition for markets, and the need for responsiveness under conditions of rapid change converged within expanding workforce diversity (DeLuca & McDowell, 1992; Miller, 1995). This mix of economic and demographic change forced organizations to turn values into actions (Thomas, 1991) and focused their attention on how organizational bias and workforce diversity effects an organization’s bottom line (Carnevale & Stone, 1995). *Managing diversity* required leaders to devise methods for maximizing the potential of workplace heterogeneity as they direct workers actions toward fulfilling the organization’s mission. As such, diversity management involves initiatives designed to empower employees at all levels to contribute to their full potential in pursuit of organizational objectives (Carnevale & Stone, 1995). In short, managing diversity means managing organizational change (DeLuca & McDowell, 1992).

Effectively managing diversity and promoting diversity-related organizational change

requires responding appropriately to an organization's particular diversity mix (Thomas, 1996). Managing diversity actually subsumes creating and valuing diversity. Therefore, in general, a comprehensive diversity management program incorporates a combination of (a) hiring practices which create diversity; (b) awareness programs that highlight the existence and value of diversity; and (c) organizational change programs which activate diversity values and transform the workplace from a top-down, efficiency-based mind set to an empowerment-focused, effectiveness mind set. Although this general formula establishes the categories of activities important to diversity management, it does not prescribe the specific blend of initiatives to be employed within a particular organization. Instead, the specifics of any diversity management campaign should arise only after ascertaining what particular type of action is appropriate given an organization's current culture (DeLuca & McDowell, 1992; Thomas, 1996).

Unfortunately, many well intended organizational leaders fail to audit their organizational culture before hiring diversity consultants to "fix the problem" (Rossett & Bickham, 1994). In so doing, organizational leaders save the time required to ascertain needs and avoid the risks associated with directly addressing diversity-related tensions. However, with no grounding in organizational history and values, consultants' programs — which are typically canned training workshops — often engender resentment and hostility (Nemetz & Christensen, 1996). Unfortunately, the organization's members get caught in the backlash and the organizational culture became less, rather than more, diversity friendly (Caudron, 1993).

Ineffective diversity programs often create more problems than they solve (Caudron, 1993). To minimize the unintended consequences from well-meaning diversity initiatives and effectively manage diversity, organizational leaders should audit their organizational culture (Gottredson, 1992) and use the results of their examination to develop an agenda for change that

will optimize, not polarize, the work force and promote, not retard, market-based responsiveness.

Dialectics of the Diversity -- Framing the Audit Procedures

Much of the backlash and controversy created by ineffective diversity programs stems from organizational leaders' failure to realize the fundamental differences in employees' perceptions of the desirable state of organizational multiculturalism (Nemetz & Christensen, 1996). Gottfredson (1992) identified five questions which suffuse the diversity movement and represent the major diversity-related dilemmas present in contemporary organizational life in the United States. Each of the dilemmas contain value-oriented dialectics for which both courses of action have advantages and disadvantages; so, neither pole can be considered the universal "right" one. The diversity dilemmas involve the following dialectics: (1) Should organizations focus on employee commonalities or differences? (2) Should organizations promote candor or sensitivity in workplace language? (3) In order to be fair, should organizations provide equal treatment or differential treatment to women and minorities? (4) Should women and minorities be treated as equals or victims? and (5) Should change bubble-up through employee volunteerism or be imposed through strong leadership? A detailed outline of the questions implied by these dialectics appears in Table 1.

(INSERT TABLE ONE ABOUT HERE)

Whether diversity initiatives represent net gains or losses in productivity and fairness depends to a large degree on their handling of the dilemmas inherent in the managing diversity process. Determining how organizational members would answer these five questions could help organizational leaders ascertain the organization's diversity-related cultural values and set an agenda for change that would make organizational policies and practices consistent with those values. By matching policies, practices and programs to the organization's cultural values,

organizational leaders should be able to develop a diversity management process that effectively creates diversity and empowers employees at all levels of the organization to work toward achieving the organization's mission. In doing, the organization makes the important shift in mind-set and accepts that the organization — not just the employees — must make the effort to embrace differences.

With this grounding, I developed an extensive diagnostic guide for ascertaining the diversity-related values within an organizational culture. The resulting frameworks for a Diversity Dialectics Audit is ground in the assumption that there is no inherent positive or negative value associated with the poles of the dialectics (Gottfredson, 1992). Instead, whether or not a particular response to diversity-related dilemmas is appropriate depends on the organizational circumstances (Thomas, 1995). To assess the utility of this audit framework, I conducted a Diversity Dialectics Audit of a mid-sized public university in the southern United States. The results of this case study are reported below.

SETTING A UNIVERSITY'S AGENDA FOR CHANGE

The Researcher

At the time of this research, I was an associate professor of communication at this University and well known across campus for my pro-diversity attitudes and activities. A white female from mid-west, I often worked closely with the Assistant Vice President for EEO/Affirmative Action/Diversity on diversity initiatives. This activity was balanced by my membership on the executive committee of the faculty senate and my heavy involvement in many other aspects of University life. For these reasons, I was selected as the to conduct our Diversity Audit. I received one-course release time to gather data and a summer supplement to support the writing of the report. The University agreed to allow me to use the Diversity Audit to advance

knowledge of Organizational Diversity issues and, in turn, I promised confidentiality to all participants. To prepare for the project, I conducted one-on-one interviews with University employees from a variety of job classifications and demographic categories and immersed myself in work-place diversity literature.

Project Background

This Diversity Audit was commissioned by the Office of the President and coordinated by the Assistant Vice President for EEO/AA/Diversity, with the following publically-announced mission:

“The Diversity Audit Project was designed to assess faculty and staff perceptions of the organizational culture. Specifically, the project focuses on soliciting feedback related to racial and gender equity issues. The information gathered during the Diversity Audit Project is to be used to discover prevalent themes, to which the University can develop appropriate responses. As such, The Diversity Audit Project supports that portion of the University's Strategic Priorities which stipulates our goal to foster a pluralistic environment that is supportive of individual differences and characterized by mutual respect and freedom from bias.”

At the time of the audit, the University had 933 employees of which , 747 (80.0%) were white; 137 (14.7%) were black; 22 (.24%) were Asian, 12 (.13%) were hispanic; 9 (.010%) were American Indians; and 6 (.006%) were non-resident aliens. The University employed slightly more females (51%, $n = 474$) than males (49%, $n = 459$). However, national demographic data suggested that the number of women and minorities qualified and available to fill faculty and administrative positions at universities was proportionally higher than the University's employee demographics.

This disparity was likely affected by two immutable conditions. First, as one of the smallest universities in the State University System, the University had a low salary base and a lack of resources to compete for qualified minority candidates. Second, the University is located

in a mid-sized, conservative southern town that likely lacks appeal for many well-educated, female and minority professionals. However, the presence of a few discrimination complaints, some anecdotal evidence, and disparate employee population statistics suggested that campus receptiveness to diversity also was a factor affecting its promotional practices and its ability to attract and retain women and minorities for faculty and administrative positions.

A close look at the employee demographics revealed disparate group outcomes for hiring and promotion at the University. For example, at the time this audit began, the University had a total of 61 full professors, 10 of which were non-white males. Of those 10, six were white women and four were members of a minority group. There were no black full professors. In addition, 88 percent of the administrative and professional staff were white and 62 percent were white males. In the clerical and secretarial staff, 75 percent were white females, 13.7 percent were black females, and only .07 percent were white males. However, in the maintenance classification, 73 percent were black, while only 27 percent were white males. These statistics describe a culture led mainly by white males and a fairly low glass ceiling for both women and minorities on campus.

Although few formal complaints of racial and gender discrimination or harassment were filed each year at this University, the disparate outcomes and other forms of subtle or blatant discrimination concerned the University central administration for legal, social injustice, and productivity reasons. These administrators were aware that, despite the low number of employee complaints at their University (and most others), the Higher Education Research Institute nationwide faculty survey revealed that 55% of minority faculty and 45% of female faculty said subtle discrimination causes stress for them. However, women and minorities often refrain from filing formal complaints out of fear of retaliation from those discriminating, or fear of being negatively labeled by colleagues or supervisors. Complaints are even less likely to be present

when the demographic make-up of an organization's chain of command supports the stereotypes of a "good ole boy" network, as is the case for this University. In addition, administrators were aware that commonly told organizational stories of what happens to those who did file complaints led to a lack of faith in the integrity of the system to effectively address employees concerns. As such, they suspected that the actual number of formal complaints under-represented the instances of racial and gender discrimination or harassment.

Nonetheless, without formal complaints, University administrators saw few direct avenues of redress or remediation that did not violate contracts with employee unions, and the long-standing University values of free speech, the right to due process, and faculty tenure. Simply put, in the absence of formal complaints, the University had little chance of winning a legal battle against the offending employee. Therefore, administrators turned their attention to changing the organizational culture, using the Diversity Audit Project as means for ascertaining where to start.

Project Overview

Focus group interviews were used to conduct a Diversity Dialectics Audit designed to ascertain faculty and staff perceptions of diversity issues within the University's organizational culture. The University President sent a letter to all supervisors stating that all employees invited to participate in the audit should be encouraged to participate and released from their work obligations to do so. The President also sent a letter to all other employees announcing the audit and the possibility they might be randomly selected to participate. The letter encouraged open, honest communication during the focus group interviews, promised no retaliation for any comment made, and assured that the results of the Diversity Audit would guide changes in organizational policy, procedures, and practices.

Participants

Focus group interview participants were selected using stratified random sampling procedures. The sampling frame was a computer-generated list of all University employees grouped by job classification, gender, and minority status into 15 different demographic groups: (1) White female faculty; (2) Minority faculty; (3) Minority clerical/secretary; (4) White clerical/secretary; (5) Minority professional & technical; (6) White female professional technical; (7) White male professional & technical; (8) White male faculty; (9) Minority skilled craft/maintenance; (10) White skilled craft/maintenance; (11) Minority administrators; (12) Mix of minority faculty and minority administrators (those who could not attend previously scheduled meetings or requested opportunity for additional participation); (13) Female academic department chairs; (15) Male academic department chairs. Focus groups were conducted over a two month period in the numerical sequence listed here.

If the total number of employees in the group was 20 or less, all members of the group were

invited to participate in the focus group interview for their group (e.g. white female department chairs, n = 4). Otherwise, 20 people from each employee group were randomly selected and invited to participate in the focus group interview for their group.

Prospective participants were notified on President's Office stationary via campus mail and asked to RSVP via e-mail or telephone. No person refused to participate for ideological reasons or failed to show up as scheduled.

Diagnostic Guide

Using Gottfredson's (1992) five dilemmas as a diagnostic guide, I developed a detailed focus group discussion outline designed to engage employees in discussions about diversity-related organizational culture values. The outline began with an orientation, introductions, and the establishment of discussion "rules". Following this rapport building phase, was a low-threat, non-controversial discussion of the multiculturalism. Then, for each of the dilemmas, I constructed discussion questions that (1) established the existence of two legitimate positions; (2) probed for participants' position on the issues; and (3) asked for stories to support the value orientations. See Table 2 for example the discussion outline for Dilemma 4, B — What are the advantages and disadvantages of remediation programs and affirmative Action policies?

(INSERT TABLE TWO ABOUT HERE)

Focus Group Interviews

I conducted all focus group interviews. The Program Assistant for EEO, Affirmative Action, and Diversity provided administrative assistance and was also present during all focus group interviews other than Interview #4. Focus group interviews were held in private rooms on campus and scheduled to last two hours each. However, most lasted longer than three hours (\underline{M} = 3 hrs., 15 min.). The focus group interviews were audio-taped, producing approximately 49 hours

of transcribable data.

Interview results: A summary of employee perceptions

Given the sensitivity of the issues discussed, I promised all participants that no one other than the Program Assistant and me would read the transcripts and that we would not report results in a way that would allow participants to be identified. Therefore, all results are reported in summary form and contain the normal biases associated with ethnographic interpretation. Discussion excerpts are included where possible to illustrate the vocabulary used and to give a personal voice to the employee's values and stories. The summary of employee perceptions follows the organizational structure established by the outline of Dilemmas Organizations Face When Managing Diversity Issues (see Table 1).

Melting pot or salad? Multiculturalism and the Value of Diversity

Does the multiculturalism philosophy threaten the existing culture or is it a fact we have to deal with? Employees in all job classifications and across racial and gender lines recognized that the University has a multicultural philosophy and believe this philosophy is appropriate for a university. However, their comments suggested that the University's multi-cultural priorities should not be tied to the diversity of the region; but, should expand to include international cultures, as well. In fact, employees mentioned that focusing on the region's diversity may detract from the type of multi-cultural philosophy appropriate for a university. In their words:

"It seems that, around here, minority equals Black and a multiculturalism philosophy means "hire more blacks."

What does it mean to say that we value diversity? Although employees in all job classifications spoke of the importance of "valuing diversity", there was disagreement among employees regarding how we should operationalize that value. The points of disagreement ran

along the continuum with strong advocates for affirmative action on one end (mostly professional, minority women) and strong advocates of a color-blind meritocracy on the other (mostly older traditional WASP males and young male high achievers). The most prevalent voice spoke of the need for diversity of ideas, perspectives, and talents - all of which have nothing to do variables typically associated with diversity issues.

In general, employees said that "valuing diversity" means showing mutual respect for people regardless of race, gender, age, nationality, religion, and job classification.

"It's not about race. It really isn't, is it? It's about respect for us as people and showing that they realize that, if it weren't for us, they couldn't do their jobs."

In addition, employees also expressed concern about "Christmas parties", clubs that deny membership on the bases of race or job classification, and work-related social outings that are likely to exclude women.

"Some of the stuff is so obvious, I can't believe they don't see it — take the Christmas Party — why is it called a Christmas Party instead of a Holiday Party? I just don't understand them being exclusive, when being inclusive is so simple."

"It's called the Black Employee Association — not the Minority Employee Association — what kind of message does that send?"

"Do you realize that some retired administrator's wife — who never worked at this university — can join the University Women's Association; but we can't — we work out here all day long every day but only female faculty and wives of faculty and professional staff can join. How do you think that makes us feel? Certainly not valued."

What is the value of creating and maintaining a diverse university culture? Participants in all groups said the University should be a model for the rest of the working community and a marketplace of ideas for students. Many employees implied that a diverse workforce is one way to display that we follow equal-opportunity guidelines. The most common remarks noted that a diverse workforce (a) ensures the infusion of alternative perspectives needed in the classroom and in problem solving situations; (b) provides role models for a diverse student population; (c) and

allows the University to collect talented people who can make the variety of contributions needed to achieve the its mission.

Should we require politically correct language?

How can the university get past political correctness to sincere mutual understanding and respect? Focus group participants overwhelmingly supported the use of politically correct (i.e., non-offensive) language, because it is one way to demonstrate mutual respect. Only a few, older male faculty members said that, due to the “*over-sensitivity*” of some groups, it was, at times, difficult to know what language might be offensive. Likewise, some minority employees said that it was relatively easy to know when a person was sincere or just using politically correct language to hide their bigotry or racism.

Interestingly, however, many employees made common faux pas and used politically incorrect language when participating in focus group discussions. (e.g, use of "chairman" instead of "chairperson"). Most participants guilty of such slips immediately apologized when the error was pointed out by their peers. However, a few tried to justify their words by saying there is "truth in the stereotype" or that others are overly sensitive.

“You know those janitors are lazy — the one in our building takes a nap under the stairs everyday.”

Some participants said they didn't "mean" to use offensive language, but had trouble changing old habits. Most of their co-workers responded negatively to this excuse. For example:

“That type of person is either (a) a "lazy" employee that might change with some motivation or enlightenment, or (b) a son-of-a-bitch that ought to be fired.”

In order to be "fair" and provide equal opportunity, should we treat people equally or differentially?

Are all groups of people at the University treated fairly or is there evidence suggesting that some types of people are treated differently than others? For the most part, participants in all job classifications talked about "fairness" and "equal opportunity" as ideals for which managerial actions did not match the publically-stated University philosophy. They told dozens of stories relating instances of what they considered to be unfair treatment, favoritism, and being left-out. During this story telling, participants displayed a strong degree of support for each other's concerns and the belief that if a practice or action hurts one of employee, it hurts all employees.

Given the focus of this study, it was surprising to me that all participants who responded to this question said that the unequal treatment had little to do with diversity variables and more to do with (a) job classification; (b) the informal network (e.g., "who they knew"); or (c) whether or not they "sucked-up" to their supervisors.

Across the board, employees held upper administration responsible for these problems. The prevailing perception is that, despite "lip-service" to the valuing diversity philosophy, discrimination and favoritism occurred because upper administration does not act in a way that sends a message of "zero tolerance." This perception was linked to a sense of helplessness and hopelessness for many lower-level participants.

Should we make adjustments in work schedules to accommodate the demands of a diverse work force? Participants in all focus groups believed that we should try to make adjustments in work schedules to accommodate employee needs as long as the demands of the job were satisfied. Despite University policies that provide for such provisions, employees reported that some supervisors do not allow work-week flexibility in their shops. They also said this

created bad feelings and damaged morale in those areas.

Should we adjust salaries up in order to entice women and minorities to work at the University? Participants held mixed feelings about the use of elevated compensation as a means of creating diversity. This practice is not present in support staff employee groups which are comprised primarily of women and members of minority groups. In fact, these folks perceive that white males receive higher salaries than other employees. However, most faculty and professional staff believe the practice is present among faculty and higher-level staff positions. Although participants in those groups articulated, the "*market-value*" argument, they also said that paying higher salaries for "*ascribed, rather than earned, characteristics*" is inappropriate because it devalues merit, creates resentment, and promotes a hostile work environment for all involved.

Most faculty and academic department chair participants supported the need for physical diversity among faculty ranks and realize that the pool of available applicants makes it necessary for the University to offer higher salaries to attract and retain minority faculty. Some voiced frustration over limited resources to compete with other universities and support the demands of various accrediting bodies, especially when both the university and the accrediting bodies hold departments responsible for not having minority faculty among their ranks.

Again, the issue of how to define diversity arose. Most employees strongly advocated a focus on diversity of ideas, perspectives, and ability to make contributions more than (but not at the exclusion of) diversity of physical characteristics.

Resentment is present (even among those who see themselves as advocates of diversity) over situations where inexperienced, instructor-level faculty without the Ph.D. are paid higher salaries than their counterparts with Ph.D.'s and higher rank. Some pro-diversity female faculty even expressed concern about sharing that kind of information because they perceive it will be

"divisive" and hurt the diversity cause. Although, most faculty and staff said they support the general practice of using salary to entice fully qualified minority faculty to the University they also said it was bad for morale.

“On balance, the decreased faculty morale associated with the practice of paying higher salaries to lesser qualified minority faculty may outweigh the creating-diversity advantages.”

Should women and minorities be treated as equals or as victims of discrimination that deserve remediation until the systemic harm suffered by women and minorities is redressed?

Have women and minorities been victims of discrimination at the University? Many long-term University employees provided historical accounts of discrimination based on gender, race, and sexual orientation. However, few recounted current instances of blatant discrimination. They did provide several accounts of subtle discrimination or what they view as preferential treatment of specific others. Although, they did not describe the preferential treatment of others as discrimination against themselves, they clearly felt the pain on not being “*preferred*”.

Some employees think white males who are “*friends of the administration*” and attractive white females receive opportunities not available to others. But, many said this has little to do with race or gender and more to do with “*who you know*”. The prevailing opinion was that whether the job goes to a white male, minority, or attractive female, it only seems like “preferential treatment” when the person who gets the job is not the most qualified.

Employees also told a few current stories of practices by specific supervisors that, if found to be accurate, would constitute discrimination or harassment. Some involve racial discrimination, some age discrimination, some discrimination against females, and some

discrimination against males. Interestingly, all who told and heard these painful stories said they were the exception, not the rule. Not one focus group participant said that the culture was rife with discrimination. However, most did mention that, when discrimination or harassment did occur, the system often failed to protect the victim.

Some white and minority employees recounted stories of their minority co-workers who perform below standards and (a) "*play the race card*" to protect themselves from having to work harder and/or (b) are tolerated and sometimes protected by supervisors who are hesitant to reprimand a minority employee. Interestingly, minority employees found this particularly upsetting because "*it makes it so hard for the rest of us to be seen as credible*".

What are the advantages and disadvantages of remediation programs and Affirmative Action policies?

Should the University sponsor programs and policies that benefit one group of employees but not another group? Some employees are confused about the difference between Affirmative Action and valuing diversity. Those that equate the two tend to be less enthusiastic about diversity as it relates to demographic variables.

When it comes to Affirmative Action, employees are divided along the classic lines of disagreement. Those folks that support Affirmative Action say that without it, there would be discrimination and even fewer women and minorities on campus and in higher level jobs. Those who oppose it are typically insulted by that accusation, saying "*that was then, this is now*". Many who oppose Affirmative Action seem to sincerely value diversity; but, they simply value job-related qualifications more.

There is wide-spread support for existing faculty/staff development programs designed to prepare our current employees for promotional opportunities. People believe that the University should reward loyalty and show a strong commitment to employee growth and development.

Most employees support special programs for women and minorities but also believe the University should have more programs available to ALL employees (even white males). Employees across job classifications mentioned that the University needs to do more to facilitate participation in these programs through extensive publication of their availability, incentives for participation, and supervisor cooperation/support. Staff employees repeatedly requested that they be allowed to adjust their work schedule to accommodate daytime classes, noting that many supervisors do not permit such flexibility.

Employees also were confused about the difference between Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity programs and how they may compliment each other. Many caring employees experience dissonance over this issue because to them, Affirmative Action and Equal Opportunity are contradictory.

Equal Opportunity (usually referred to as "*fairness*") was labeled "*sacred*" by several focus group participants. At several different levels of sophistication, the different employee groups grounded their beliefs in democratic principles and the constitution. They mentioned that the University, of all places, should be a model of democratic principles. Their stories and requests for change accented a desire for equal opportunities not affirmative action. Most employee groups had little to say about affirmative action. But, they became quite animated when discussing issues of equity, fairness, and respect.

Should diversity related change be allowed to evolve out of the voluntary efforts or should the University demonstrate commitment to valuing diversity through strong leadership directives and a reward system designed to modify and/or redirect existing behaviors?

Should the University require EEO training for those involved in the interview process?

Most employees involved in employee selection interviews said they received adequate preparation for their tasks. However, when they described the preparation and the execution of

the tasks, it became apparent that selection interview training for all involved in the process would be beneficial.

Many employees recounted stories about how they conducted "*fake*" searches and got around the EEO/Affirmative Action guidelines. Members of the support staff have an "*underground*" network which they use to determine the viability of promotional opportunities. Their comments indicated that they value this network because it saves them the frustration of applying for positions which already "*belong*" to someone else.

Some supervisors, department heads, and administrators seemed to condone staff employee searches which are in direct violation of EEO guidelines saying:

"Why should I waste resources on a search when I already know who I want?"

Some University leaders admitted they had conducted "*fake*" searches and did not seem embarrassed to share stories about how they got around the rules. These violations also occur, albeit less frequently, at the faculty level, particularly in the instructor ranks. Department chair comments showed that graduate assistantships often are awarded through processes which violate EEO and affirmative action guidelines.

Should the University require diversity training for all employees?

General Diversity Training. Required diversity training is a controversial issue for all organizations and particularly for organizations which democratic processes, shared governance and academic freedom as nearly all universities do. Not surprisingly, then, many employees mentioned that required participation in diversity training would be met with resistance and, in some cases, resentment. However, Focus Group participants in all job classifications commented on the importance of following diversity-related policies such as equal opportunity for promotions and employee development, non-discriminatory assignment of work (i.e., disparate outcomes), equal treatment of students, use of non-offensive language, and sexual harassment. Some

employees lamented that those who need the training most would be unlikely to attend voluntarily.

“You’d just be preaching to the choir ‘cause the ones who really need won’t show-up.”

Sexual & Racial Harassment/Discrimination Training. Comments made during the focus group discussions made it clear that, even some well-meaning, open-minded employees simply lack knowledge of policies, laws, and what others are likely to interpret as offensive. In addition, participants told stories of a few employees who routinely engage in serious violations of sexual and racial harassment/discrimination policies. These stories appeared to be common-knowledge among focus group participants, with details added to the stories in a chaining-out process.

Most male focus group participants, however, mentioned that they had already changed their behavior due to the on-set of the concern over sexual harassment. Most are especially sensitive to how their behavior might be interpreted by their interaction partners and those which observe their interaction with females. Some grounded their concerns in sincere respect for their female colleagues and students, while others were more worried about self-protection.

Female employees voiced several different levels of concern over sexual harassment issues. Females indicated that some male employees have not adequately altered their behavior. They provided several examples of avuncular male supervisors who routinely display inappropriate touch.

“They think because they are old enough to be my dad or grandfather that it’s o.k.....but, it isn’t o.k.....it makes me feel like they don’t respect me as a professional....and I hate it when other people see them treat me this way....I don’t want them to think.....”

Some female employees also resent the predominately male perception that cross-gender work relationships typically carry sexual connotations. Many females spoke of the importance of the mentoring relationship and the high positive regard they have for their male mentors. Females

also expressed resentment about having to deal with accusations of impropriety associated with those relationships.

"The boys around here need to grow up."

Also, employees at all levels simply may not have an adequate understanding of sexual harassment issues. Some females (staff and faculty) were surprised that males experienced sexual harassment. In addition, some males believe that only attractive females are sexually harassed.

"If an attractive female claimed sexual harassment, I would probably believe her. But, when an ugly female claims sexual harassment, I figure she is probably lying"

General Leadership Training. There is evidence that many supervisors across campus may need basic leadership training. Support staff employees in service/maintenance and a few clerical/secretary and professional/technical jobs repeatedly voiced frustration with bosses that "treat them like children," create a "military type" environment, or are "too authoritarian". Focus group participants described this type of treatment as "demoralizing", "counter-productive" and "unsatisfactory". Focus group participants used these comments to justify that some support staff supervisors employees (especially in the service/maintenance area) are in need of intensive training and may have been promoted beyond their capabilities.

All focus group discussion involving support staff employees contained extended discussion of the need for respect across job classifications. The support staff participants perceive that faculty and administrative/professional staff employees do not respect the contribution the staff employees make to the University. They described faculty and professional staff as "arrogant" and "class oriented". Even within the more professional areas (e.g.,

controller's office and some key segments of enrollment services), support staff participants described (a) rigid and overly structured work environments; (b) supervisors who focus on errors and enjoy demeaning people; and (c) problems with supervisors that higher-ups know about but "swept under the rug".

Even some administrative supervisors may need leadership training. Some female mid-level administrators mentioned that other administrators, their own office staff, and other's around campus do not respect the female administrators' position of authority. They think that this may happen because their own male administrative supervisors do not publically demonstrate appropriate respect for the female administrator's authority.

Most faculty participants agreed with staff participants' perception of faculty behavior and said it needed to improve. However, some did account for their attitude by saying things that suggest that faculty may need sensitivity training regarding the role of support staff in accomplishing the University's mission. For example:

"Well, let's face it, we aren't all equal."

"There is something qualitatively different between cleaning the washrooms and writing a book"

"If you sit under the stairwell all day, how to you expect to earn respect?"

Is it possible to change the culture through volunteer compliance or do we need incentives tied to employee evaluations on diversity related issues? Across the board, most focus group participants, especially those with long University service records, perceive that diversity-related change will not occur unless we begin to "reward" those whose behaviors match the University's stated philosophies and provide appropriate, "visible consequences" to those whose actions are not consistent with University philosophies.

Participants expressed frustration because they perceive that administrators are aware of supervisors who violate equity, fairness, and mutual respect guidelines, yet will not take action unless the employees file an official complaint. Participants also believed that, even if they do risk their job and incur the stress associated with filing a complaint, administrators will protect the supervisor, simply "*slap their hand*", or promote the supervisor into another position.

Participants provided several well-known stories which support this perception.

In various ways, the focus group participants suggested that the University define appropriate behaviors, establish clear expectations, and make compliance with these expectations part of the annual evaluation process. In addition, all non-white male groups mentioned the importance of improving responses to informal complaints.

“ Making a formal complaint is horrible for the victim. They get branded as a trouble maker, raked over the coals, and never get a promotion after that. You know what I’m saying is true. They know what is going on — there has got to be a way to resolve these issues without forcing people to file formal complaints.”

How we can create a supportive culture where all of us feel valued....not just tolerated?

Interestingly, focus group participants did not actually respond to this question. In all groups the question got reworded to something similar to "How can we create a University culture likely to lead to employee excellence, productivity, and job satisfaction?"

When directly asked, most participants commented on the five specific diversity-related dilemmas we had just discussed. However, the focus group participants invested most of their energy and talk time on serious issues which transcend traditional diversity-related variables to embrace core values.

The values most often mentioned as those which should be used to re-define the University culture were: integrity, accountability, excellence in work, fairness, mutual respect, loyalty, contributing to the group, and dedication to helping employees reach their potential.

By the end of the focus group interview discussion, participants in all groups demonstrated concern about issues related to (1) task performance (accountability, excellence, contribution to the group) and (2) adherence to the philosophy of equal opportunity, fairness, mutual respect, and providing opportunities for development.

Summary and Recommendations for Establishing an Agenda for Change

Results of this Diversity Dialectics Audit demonstrated the usefulness of the audit framework and for identifying multicultural values and setting an agenda for diversity-related cultural change. Participants comments in the focus group discussions described the existing diversity-related culture. In general, the employees' perceived an insidious disconnect between publically-stated organizational values and actual organizational practices. As would be expected in a large organization, employees told stories of "isolated" cases of gender and racial discrimination and harassment and voiced concern over the administration's response to these issues. What was more surprising was that employee's comments and stories often transcended typical diversity-related categories to reflect the overarching concerns for equity, fairness, and mutual respect regardless of gender, race, country of origin, sexual orientation, life-style, and, especially, job classification.

Employee's responses to the questions surrounding the five, interrelated diversity dilemmas can be summarized in to a list of diversity-related cultural values. First, employees seemed to recognized the false dichotomy in the "commonality or differences" dilemma, and called for programs and policies that focus on commonalities and differences. Second, employees argued for sincere use of respectful, non-offensive language, rather than unharnessed candor. Third, organizational members want job placement and advancement decisions to be based on what they know, not who they know. They also advocate policies and practices that recognize the diverse needs of all employees. Therefore, on the issue of equal or differential treatment, employees encouraged the development of policies and practices that accent equity

and fairness -- not necessary equality. Fourth, employees' comments show that they value special programs for women and minorities; but not at the expense of other employees. Therefore, they advocate providing advancement opportunities for all qualified employees. In addition, they called on the administration to make it easier for victims of unfair practices to report their concerns. Fifth, in an unequivocal plea for principled leadership guided by core values, employees called for administrators to lead by example and provide incentives for others to follow.

The specific content of the participants' stories prescribe changes that would make organizational policies and practices more consistent with what they see as the ideal, organizational cultural values. These recommendations were translated into specific, actionable agenda items for the University's organizational change. The resulting Agenda for Organizational Change is outlined in Table 3.

(INSERT TABLE THREE ABOUT HERE)

Conclusion

In work-place organizations, managing diversity effectively means managing organizational change effectively (DeLuca & McDowell, 1992). The challenges associated with these policy and practice adjustments are particularly difficult for organizations with a long history of ignoring the fact that, like social cultures, organizational cultures, are not homogeneous (Geertz, 1973). In fact, the challenge to effectively manage diversity can overwhelm even the most well-meaning organizational leaders. They simply do not know how to eat the diversity elephant without giving indigestion to all groups involved.

The Diversity Dialectics Audit procedures described here gives voice to employees, thereby taking the guess work out of managing diversity initiatives and offering organizational leaders a "one-bite-at-a time" approach to diversity-related organizational change. Determining how organizational members feel about the issues surrounding the five diversity dilemmas allows leaders to ascertain the organization's diversity-related cultural values and set an agenda for

specific change initiatives. Because the diversity initiatives are grounded in the organization's cultural values, they are likely to meet minimal resistance and avoid the backlash of resentment and polarization brought about by cosmetic initiatives or lack of action. As a happy bi-product, simply allowing a Diversity Dialectics Audit such as this to be conducted increases awareness of the diversity issues and demonstrates a sincere administrative commitment to addressing diversity-related concerns.

Author's note: Those people wanting to conduct a similar Diversity Audit may contact the author for a complete copy of the Diversity Audit Focus Group Outline.

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Table 1
Dilemmas Organizations Face When Managing Diversity Issues

- I. Should organizations try to create a common "melting pot" type of culture or should they explore ethnic and gender differences in an effort to move toward an approach that sees the organization more as a "salad" -- where the whole is enhanced by the diversity of its ingredients?
 - A. Does the multiculturalism philosophy threaten the existing organizational culture or is it a fact members just have to deal with?
 - B. What does it mean to say that you value diversity?
 - C. What is the value of creating and maintaining a diverse organizational culture?
- II. Should organizations accent the need for sensitivity about group differences and REQUIRE politically correct language or is candor needed to break down group barriers, misunderstandings and stereotypes that bar effective communication.
 - A. How can organizations get past political correctness to sincere mutual understanding and respect?
- III. In order to be "fair" and provide equal opportunity, should we treat people equally or differentially?
 - A. Are all groups of people in the organization treated fairly or is there evidence suggesting that some types of people are treated differently (less favorable or more favorable) than others?
 - B. Should we make adjustments in work schedules to accommodate the demands of a diverse work force?
 - C. Should salaries be adjusted up in order to entice women and minorities to work in the organization?
- IV. Should women and minorities be treated as equals or as victims of discrimination that deserve remediation until the systemic harm suffered by women and minorities is redressed?
 - A. Have women and minorities have been victims of discrimination in the organization?
 - B. What are the advantages and disadvantages of remediation programs and Affirmative Action policies?
 - C. Should the organization sponsor programs and policies that benefit one group of employees but not another group?
- V. Should diversity related change be allowed to evolve out of employee's voluntary efforts or should organizations demonstrate their commitment to valuing diversity through strong leadership directives and a reward system designed to modify and/or redirect existing behaviors?
 - A. Should organizations require EEO training for those involved in the interview process?
 - B. Should organizations require diversity training for all employees?
 - C. Is it possible to change the culture through volunteer compliance or do we need incentives tied to employee evaluations on diversity related issues?
 - D. How can the organization create a supportive culture where all employees feel valued....not just tolerated?

Table 2
Focus Group Discussion Outline for Dilemma 4, B

What are the advantages and disadvantages of remediation programs and affirmative Action policies?

- A. Most people agree that all potential employees should be treated fairly and with respect. But there is considerable debate about whether women and members of minority groups should be given favored treatment in the name of AFFIRMATIVE ACTION.
- B. Some people argue that Affirmative Action (even when quotas are not involved) is synonymous for "special treatment for women and minorities" and results in reverse discrimination....and could even decrease the self-esteem ...be demeaning to those who benefit from Affirmative Action programs.
- C. Other people say that Affirmative Action programs offer a ray of hope for opportunities that are still closed to most women and members of minority groups.
- D. Others focus on the labor statistics and say that Affirmative Action obviously has not resulted in reverse discrimination - women and blacks may be getting hired, but there white males still dominate most organizations...and the statistics show that they do at our University.
 - Q: What do you think? Should women and minorities be given special consideration during the hiring process?
 - Q: What are the advantages and disadvantages of remediation programs and Affirmative Action policies?
 - Q: How do all of us benefit by having a diverse workforce?
- E. Some people say that Affirmative Action and other remediation programs cause organization to hire less qualified people in order hire a female or minority candidate.
 - Q: Have you heard any comment like that around our University
 - Q: Have you seen any evidence that the University reduces it's standards to hire women or minorities at the University? That is, that a white male (or possibly a white female) was more qualified, but a female or member of the minority group got the job? Tell us about it.
 - Q: Have you seen any evidence that the University reduces it's standards to hire while males? That is, that a woman or member of a minority group was more qualified, but the white male was hired anyway? Tell us about it.
 - Q: How far should we go? How do you feel about lowering standards in order to bring women and minorities into the workforce ... expecting to train them on the job?
- F. Sometimes employees have concerns about subtle forms of mistreatment on the job. Females and members of minority groups sometimes say that, if they have success on the job, others sometimes others act toward them in such a way that makes them feel that the success must be because of their gender or minority status.
 - Q: Have you ever notice any of this kind of sentiment at the University?
 - Probe: Have you ever gotten the feeling that someone got their job just because of their gender or ethnic status?
 - Probe: Have you ever gotten the feeling that people felt that you weren't really qualified for your job?

Table 3

A University's Agenda for Diversity-Related Organizational Change

1. **Focus on employee commonalities and differences.**
 - A. Expand multicultural philosophy, programs, policies, and practices in a way that includes but also transcends regional social issues and demonstrates the value of diversity across many types of ethnic, religious, and life-styles differences.
 - B. Minimize talk about creating racial and gender diversity (hiring women and blacks) and instead focus on the value of creating the diversity of ideas, perspectives, and talents at all levels. This should reverse disparate outcomes and lead to racial, gender, and life-style diversity without creating resentment and the perception that people were hired or promoted for reasons other than merit.
 - C. Create meaningful opportunities for people in different job classifications to work in teams on various strategic initiatives, being sure to include representatives from all job classifications on each team. Provide training in teamwork at on-set of task.
 - D. Create an awareness program which spotlights different employees each month in an effort to highlight how members of each University job classification contribute to the University mission and strategic objectives.
 - E. Rename the Christmas Party the Holiday Party. Do the same for any other University sponsored social event whose name endorses a particular orientation, religion, or life-style choice.
 - F. Rename the Black Employee Association the Minority Employee Association and encourage all minority employees to become active participants.
 - G. Change the bi-laws of the University Women's Club to allow all female employees of the University to become members. Make a special effort to invite the female support staff to join and make accommodations that would allow them to attend meetings during their working hours. (i.e., hold some lunch meetings on campus)
2. **Encourage the use of language that demonstrates respect.**
 - A. Include "sensitivity training" as a part of comprehensive employee training.
3. **Create policies and practices that accent equity and fairness.**
 - A. Take concerted action to dispel perceptions of favoritism to friends by requiring all departments to clearly publicize job opportunities and all other opportunities for professional development. Whenever possible, have all placement or other selection decisions made by committee of diverse members, including representatives from different job classifications.
 - B. Be particularly diligent about following University policies and fair search procedures when hiring and promoting people to the higher paying, administrative and professional positions. Make search committee membership and the

procedures followed a matter of public information. When crisis requires deviation from these procedures, provide a public explanation and plan of action that assures a proper search at a specified future date.

- C. Develop quality control and assurance mechanisms that promote compliance with proper search and selection procedures and make expectations of compliance quite clear. This effort should include, but not be limited to, training search committee members about proper search and selection procedures, being careful not to assume that just because people have been involved in many previous searches, they know how to conduct a proper search.
 - D. Require all department heads to determine a method for allowing for flexible work schedules while still covering all work assignments and remaining in compliance with University policies and collective bargaining unit guidelines. For larger departments, this may best be accomplished by a team of department co-workers who are made aware of University policies and collective bargaining restrictions.
 - E. Involve current employees in the effort to seek outside resources (e.g. special government programs, donor cultivation or grant writing) that provide the funds needed to compete for minority job candidates, especially in the faculty ranks. Be careful to use these funds ONLY when a minority candidate has been identified as the top candidate through proper selection procedures.
4. **Provide advancement opportunities for all qualified employees and make it easier for victims of unfair practices to report their concerns.**
- A. Continue Affirmative Action practices, being sure that all women and minorities are hired or promoted through proper selection and advancement procedures.
 - B. After people have been selected for a position, make it clear to the University community that they were selected because of what they know, not who they know or their minority status. Publicize their qualifications and work experience in an employee profile article in the employee newsletter.
 - C. Develop a program involving University-initiated audits of all departments on a broad range of issues, including discrimination and harassment. This will allow people to report instances of discrimination or harassment, without having to file a formal complaint. Investigate all allegations carefully and take disciplinary action when appropriate. Provide true protection from retaliation to employees who report discrimination or harassment concerns.

- D. Debunk the “race card” and other similar implied threats by providing employment law and University policy training to supervisors. Encourage supervisors to provide needed guidance and or reprimands to all employees, including members of minority groups.
 - E. Continue to expand type and quantity of professional development opportunities for all employees who desire to advance within the University employment ranks, including white males. Aggressively publicize these opportunities and provide incentives for supervisors to encourage employees to apply. Make selection criteria public and assure selection by committee with diverse membership.
5. **Lead by example and create incentives for others to follow.**
- A. Create and train a team of volunteer diversity trainers who are well-respected members of the University community. Having “insider” trainers will decrease resistance and minimize the costs associated with providing on-going training to nearly 1000 employees. The trainers also become pro-diversity voices among their own work-groups. Be sure training is tailored to University culture and includes reference to gender, age, ethnic, religious, and life-style issues, as well as issues related to job classification.
 - B. Publicize the existence of this training team and provide incentives to department heads who schedule training for their employee group. For example, departments who participate receive enhancement funds.
 - C. Have the executive offices be the first to schedule training and publish a pro-training feature story on their experience in the employee newsletter. Avoid trite comments in this feature and show evidence of sincere dedication to learning more about managing and valuing diversity.
 - D. Make diversity-related training a part of the formal employee orientation procedures for new employees. Be sure this training includes sensitivity to gender, age, ethnic, religious, and life-style issues, as well as issues related to job classification.
 - E. Develop leadership training for supervisors, including those who are department heads and above.
 - F. Encourage open communication and fair resolution of employment issues by developing an Alternative Dispute Resolution process. An ADR process should provide an opportunity for employees to resolve their differences without filing a formal complaint but should not interfere with rights to file a complaint should the ADR process fail.
 - G. Involve employees in a University-wide effort to creating core values that will help define the University’s organizational culture. (e.g., accountability, excellence, fairness, mutual respect)

- H. Encourage all employees to operate, model and live by the University's core values by making job-appropriate commitment to University's core values part of the employee evaluation process for all employees.
- I. Develop a system that categorizes employee performance in both the task and core value aspects of their job. Then, borrowing from the ideas of General Electric CEO John Welch (1992), provide training, incentives, rewards and consequences according to this matrix below:

| | Does not follow core values | Does follow core values |
|--|---|--|
| Does not meet performance standards | DISMISSAL | JOB TRAINING INCENTIVES CONSEQUENCES |
| Meets performance standards | CONSEQUENCES VALUES TRAINING INCENTIVES | REWARDS |

