

# CONSULTING FOR DIVERSITY AND SOCIAL JUSTICE: CHALLENGES AND REWARDS

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Consulting and training for cultural diversity is both challenging and rewarding. This article issues a call to face the challenges of diversity consulting and describes strategies and approaches for successful work. Using examples from the author's practice, the author calls on consultants to (1) get up to speed with knowledge about diversity and social justice, (2) avoid consultations that are too superficial, (3) balance content and process, (4) find ways to sustain themselves and their clients, and (5) work for the Common Good. A social justice frame is seen as a necessary adjunct to promoting equity and excellence in organizations.

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In a prominent place on my bookshelf is my copy of the Summer 2005 issue of the *Journal of Consulting Psychology* containing a reprint of Paul Winn's 2004 presidential address to Division 13. In his address, Dr. Winn reflected on moral responsibility and called on consulting psychologists to "revisit our professional mission" and urged us to "ask ourselves what we stand for and what we intend to achieve in our respective roles" (p. 176). In this current issue of the journal, authors have been asked to consider "the major challenges posed by cultural diversity factors" in our own consulting. This is an opportunity to consider how questions of cultural diversity and questions about our mission and roles as consulting psychologists converge.

As we are all aware, our nation and its workplaces have undergone a remarkable demographic transformation in the past several decades. We have seen an increase in refugees and immigrants from Asia, Africa, and Latin America, and increasing rates of interracial marriage and the number of biracial and multiracial children. There has also been a steady increase in the number of people of color and women who have climbed to positions of leadership in our national institutions. This transformation challenges us as consulting psychologists to recognize that the organizations where we consult in the 21<sup>st</sup>

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century do not look the same as the organizations where we consulted in the previous century. Executive coaches are asked to coach more women and more people of color than ever before. In many of today's organizations, multiple languages are spoken by the clients and the workers. Laws supporting domestic partnership and marriage benefits for same-sex couples bring the diverse sexual orientations of many workers into the light.

This demographic transformation is only beginning. By 2050 it is predicted that the majority of people in the United States will be people of color. Spanish is already the dominant second language in many states and is becoming increasingly common throughout the United States. Given this reality, we must ask ourselves whether we are equipped to consult effectively. We must revisit our mission as consulting psychologists and ask ourselves where we stand in relation to these demographic shifts and what we hope to achieve in our work with increasingly diverse organizations.

My work as a consulting psychologist has been almost exclusively in the world of human services agencies, arts organization, and educational institutions ranging from prekindergarten through university (Romney, 2000, 2003, 2005; Romney, Tatum, & Jones, 1992; Romney, Ferron, & Hill, 2008). In this article, then, I consider the challenges of cultural diversity in an important, though often neglected, client group—the not-for-profit sphere. My consulting “niche” is defined by deeply held values and commitments, both personal and professional, and affords me the advantage of focusing on organizations and people who work for the greater good of society. In turn, I have the luxury of putting people first. The organizations to which I consult are certainly fully attuned to economic realities—some are quite affluent and some are seriously under-resourced—but their work is not based in a for-profit orientation. Their bottom line is most often mission-driven and value-oriented. As will be apparent in this article, however, psychologists consulting in these domains encounter not only positive values and uplifting missions but also biases, discrimination, ignorance, and inter-group conflict functioning alongside commitment to service and visions of a better world.

When I reflect on Paul Winn's question, my answer is quite clear. What I stand for and what I hope to achieve in my role as a consulting psychologist is nothing less than the full actualization of positive potential in my clients in all of the environments and contexts in which they function (family, workplace, and community). My good fortune and my greatest challenge has been the work that I do with clients to develop their individual and collective potential for creating environments characterized by equity and excellence. As our nation, its people, and its organizations become more diverse and multicultural, I believe the role of consulting psychologists in facilitating positive organizational change presents tremendous opportunities. We also face some imposing hurdles.

Many organizations in the not-for-profit sphere are committed to equity and justice. Others, although engaging in good work, turn a blind eye to the inequities and the biases rife in their own organizations. Still others are aware of the challenges but need assistance in making change. In this article, I describe some of the challenges I have encountered when consulting on diversity and some of the perspectives and approaches that I have found effective in responding to the challenges.

### Facing the Challenge

In an article entitled “Diversity Twenty Years From Now: Do We Have 2020 Vision?” Dennis Bisgaard (2005) recalls a quote by James Baldwin that was reprinted on the cover

of the Spring 1991 issue of *Independent School*. It read, "Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed unless it is faced" (p. 44). This idea has resonance for us as psychologists.

I often marvel that the word itself—*diversity*—seems so hard to face. It appears to strike fear into the hearts of so many Americans. Consulting psychologists are not immune. Although our branch of psychology is increasingly diverse, practitioners in our field are still predominantly White, and our conversations and writing about diversity are still at a fledgling level.

Uncertainty and anxiety about diversity is noticeable also when working with clients. The word *diversity* itself seems to evoke confusion. "What does it mean?" I am often asked. "What do *you* mean by diversity?" Somehow people know what diversity means when they are talking about developing investment portfolios, and even when they are planting gardens. But when it comes to diversity in the human realm, the minds of otherwise good, intelligent people go blank. People profess not to know what it means and, furthermore, they often believe they don't have to concern themselves with diversity in their organizations. "We don't have to worry about it at our agency; we don't have a lot of diversity," they say. Or "We don't have to worry about diversity at our college; we are already very diverse."

Understanding what diversity means is a starting point. I use this definition: "Diversity is the range of human differences that exist among people, including age, gender, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, physical ability, social class, religion, education, place of origin, job, rank within the hierarchy, and other characteristics that go into forming a person's perspective."<sup>1</sup> Diversity, then, is simply a description of variation along a number of dimensions. "Cultural" diversity is reflected in all of these identities, in that all groups develop culture, not just ethnic or racial groups. We have diversity, or we are *diverse*, to a greater or lesser degree. Increasing diversity is an important first step for many organizations, but it is only a first step toward equity. Work on diversity in organizations is only a gateway to other questions—questions of access, equal opportunity, cultural competence, bias, conflict management, climate and culture changes, and overall multi-cultural organizational development. Ultimately, our work on diversity must also deal with issues of power and privilege. As the work of many writers (Chesler, 2005; Lott, 2002; McDonald, 1999; Michaels, 2006; Miller & Garran, 2008; Neito, 2000; Peterson, 1994; Pinderhughes, 1989; Rothenberg, 2007; Spring, 2004; Tatum, 1997, 2007; Thomas & Gabarro, 1999) has made clear, power is endemic in organizations. Yet, even when it comes to diversity, there is an inclination to deny the role of power and privilege.

An equally relevant concept for consultants in diversity and social justice is Kardiner's (1939) definition of *institution*. This term had a particular meaning in the mind of this early psychoanalyst, and I still find it useful today. We speak, for example, about our "political institutions," and we refer to the "institutions of church and state." Consider for a moment the definition of institution that Kardiner developed many years ago. Kardiner advanced the idea that an institution is "any fixed mode of thought or behavior . . . which enjoys common acceptance, and infringement of, or deviation from which creates some disturbance in the individual or in the group" (p. 7). When I introduce my students to this idea, I ask them to think about the "institution of marriage," which is not a building or an organization, but the very type of institution to which Kardiner alluded. Until very recently, in all quarters, marriage

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<sup>1</sup> This definition is in the public domain. The exact source is not known.

was thought of as the union of a man and a woman. The gender distinctions did not need to be named or codified because they were commonly accepted. Today, as same-sex couples rightly press for the same rights as heterosexual couples have had, these requests are viewed as an infringement in many quarters. They are seen as a deviation from the norm, and a disturbance arises in the body politic.

Consulting on diversity and social justice often involves disruption of an organization's "fixed mode of thinking," whether it involves helping the organization to introduce partnership benefits or removing barriers to the advancement of women. Our work involves holding and guiding organizations through the "disturbance" that is the necessary side effect of all change efforts. Psychologists are specifically educated to help clients with cognitive, emotional, and behavioral changes; we must equip ourselves with knowledge about diversity.

### Challenge 1: Getting Ourselves up to Speed

Limited knowledge about diversity and its partner, social justice, can have a serious impact on our practice. Most of us, certainly those who were in graduate school before the 1990s, were educated in decidedly monocultural institutions where the curriculum was lacking in the examination of culture and cultural differences. As a Black psychologist, educated in the 1970s, this had a direct impact on me. The lack of a diverse curriculum has affected all of us in psychology. Although it is often only the "diverse" among us who are aware of what is missing, we all have much to learn.

Whether by color, nationality, culture, class, race, age, or religion, people are different in many ways that enrich (and also complicate) organizational life. The opportunity we have is to help fortify organizations with the strength that diversity brings. For-profit organizations need diverse customer bases. Independent schools seek increasing diversity in their students and in their faculties for both economic and educational reasons. Many colleges and universities have diverse student bodies and are struggling to increase the diversity of their faculties. The clients and consumers who come to human services agencies more and more frequently speak different, most often non-European, languages. Our workplaces are even more diverse than the communities in which we live. Consulting psychologists who work with businesses and other organizations have a significant role to play, but we must be ready. We must have the cultural competence and the cultural humility to work with the diverse populations we encounter in the workplace. We must ask ourselves: Are we continuing to see organizations and our individual clients through the same lenses? Are we using the same tools? Are we having the same kinds of dialogues? Are we consulting only to the top levels in organizations, or do we use our skills to work vertically in organizations reaching both the high and the low? Are we "revisiting," "retooling," and engaging our clients in constructive conversations about difference? Are we attuned to issues of diversity and social justice even when the presenting problem does not at first appear to be diversity related?

### *Responses*

We can begin by developing our cultural competencies and our cultural humility. Cultural competence is the knowledge, attitude, and skills required to work with people from different cultures. Although cultural competence is critical, Melanie Tervalon and Murray-Garcia (1998) remind us that cultural humility, the commitment to "continually

engage in self-reflection and self-critique as lifelong learners and reflective practitioners" (p. 118), is also important.

With these perspectives in mind, we must monitor our journals for inclusion of diversity issues of all kinds. We must know the diversity literature in our areas of specialization even if we do not work directly with diversity. We need to amplify our seeing and our hearing so that we notice when diversity issues may be the elephant in the room that no one wants to talk about. We must also uncover our own biases.

I began my work as a consulting psychologist in a clinical psychology graduate program. Under supervision, I began to learn the role of a consulting psychologist by first serving as a clinical consultant to a daycare center in the South Bronx. Asked to consult on issues of enuresis, fire setting, and other classroom behavior problems among 3- and 4-year-olds, it was impossible not to recognize the domestic cultural diversity issues extant in the task. The children were poor, and black or brown. Their parents were on welfare or were members of the urban working poor. Certainly not all of the preschoolers had behavioral and psychological problems, but I could not divorce the children and their behavior problems from the surroundings: streets filled with broken glass, daycare centers with an absence of books and outdoor play spaces, and the other overwhelming challenges of poverty and ghetto life.

Lacking substantive information in my course work to help me understand the social and economic issues at play, I looked into my political social change library. I reacquainted myself with the work of Frantz Fanon, now from the vantage point of a budding psychologist.

Frantz Fanon, psychiatrist, Martinican, Black, and Jungian, was my first theoretical guide to understanding the issues of cultural diversity in individuals and organizations. Writing exclusively in French, with many of his works still not translated, his work called attention to a divide that I still struggle to bridge in my work today—the battle between conceptions of cultural diversity and conceptions of social justice. As illustrated in his first book, *Black Skin, White Masks* (Fanon, 1967), Fanon began his work as a psychiatrist thinking about race and the scars resulting from racism's devastation of the Black psyche. His work in France and later Algeria and Tunis led him soon to think about the impact of culture and, ultimately, the profound role of power. His articles on racism and culture, sociotherapy, ethnopsychiatry, sociotherapy, and his book *Wretched of the Earth* (Fanon, 1963) were my earliest guides to integrating psychology, cultural diversity, and social justice.

Today there are many useful resources on cultural diversity and consulting (Adams et al., 2000; Alderfer, 1987, 1990, 1997; American Psychological Association, 2003; Jackson, 2005; Thomas and Gabarro, 1999; R. Thomas, 2005). We are challenged to stay cognizant of the reality that, in most cases, issues of difference are part and parcel of our work with clients. We must make our observations and assessments more robust by uncovering the often hidden connections between manifest organizational behavior problems and covert social justice problems, and we must equip ourselves to have the conversations and know the interventions that will make a difference.

Information about diversity must connect with a positive attitude about the potential of all people. In my own life, experiences of racism and sexism coupled with a growing appreciation of my own privilege along economic, religious, and many other dimensions have given me a balanced perspective. Growing up in an immigrant family has given me a global perspective. It is important for consultants working in the area of equity to examine their privilege as well as their lack of advantage and find points of connection to the stories of others across the diversity spectrum.

## Challenge 2: Diversity Anorexia

Although hungry for assistance with their diversity management problems, some organizations are in defensive mode when it comes to diversity. They rationalize and conclude that the problems they are experiencing have nothing to do with color or with cultural or gender differences; they construe them as "just personality problems." Or they deny that there are any organizational diversity issues and believe that it's just that a gay or immigrant employee was a bad hire and has begun to cause problems.

Over the years, I have received scores, if not hundreds, of requests from organizations to do diversity training with their staff. Most often the request is for a day of training, sometimes the request is for a half-day or, on occasion, as little as 2 hours. Short-term or one-shot diversity training is a real trap for a consultant and usually provides little benefit to the organization.

Sometimes an issue of bias reveals itself so prominently that it is impossible to overlook. In one example, a school administrator went on a fundraising trip while traveling in an Asian country and was overheard by one of her colleagues making a biased comment about Asians. The school then mandated a 1-day "diversity training" for the senior administrators who traveled on behalf of the school. Needless to say, the administrators who attended the workshop were highly resistant to this mandated training. When it is impossible to avoid acknowledging its diversity issues or challenges, a resistant organization will opt for just a taste of diversity, nothing more. However, change takes time, and 1-day training does not afford enough time. There are alternatives.

### *Responses*

When possible, diversity work should begin with a full organizational assessment and continue through to the implementation of recommendations on the basis of that assessment. Interviews, questionnaires, focus groups, observations, and review of archival material, the standard tools of organizational diagnosis and assessment, are all essential. An internal change team or microcosm group should be established representing people from all levels of the organizations and staff members diverse in terms of ethnicity, race, gender, and other identities. The role of the change team is to co-manage the initiative, guide the intervention, and facilitate the consultants' work. Training can then be developed on the basis of the findings and the needs of the organization and with detailed organizational outcomes and training objectives. Benchmarking can be established. Essential metrics and outcome measures can be identified.

In one large complex human service agency with a firmly committed CEO and 1,000 employees, diversity assessment was the first step in what became a 4-year diversity initiative. The members of the 12-person Diversity Leadership Committee were recruited from the organization as a whole and consisted of people who were White, Black, and Hispanic, gay and straight, managers, service providers, and clerical staff.

The collaborative effort of the Diversity Leadership Committee and the consulting team resulted in the development of a 3-day training program for all staff and an additional day for all managers. The modules we developed were based on data from the organizational assessment and were on cultural competence, antibias training, multicultural conflict resolution, and multicultural organizational development.

The modules were developed on the basis of the findings of the organizational assessment. Understanding that the largely White, working-class staff members were resistant to "diversity" and resentful about the topic of racism, we designed the first day

of the series as a workshop on cultural competence. In a highly interactive and engaging day, staff were introduced in an inviting and personal way to the notion of culture. They learned what culture means and how cultures differ. They reflected on their own cultural identities and were introduced in a nonthreatening and interesting way to the cultures of their peers. They considered the cultures of their clients. Now, as a result of the internal assessment, deeply knowledgeable about the organization and the hard work and dedication of the service providers, the training team was able to connect in a positive and nonjudgmental with staff members who knew little about diversity.

The topic for Day 2 was bias. This introduction and the building of relationships of mutual respect made possible an open exploration of the concepts of bias, discrimination, and equity. These concepts were linked to ideas about the common good, and aligning the training to the organization's purpose and mission, the training opened with an exploration of biases against the severely developmentally disabled clients with whom the staff worked. These dedicated staff members knew the resistance of community members who did not want houses for developmentally disabled people "in their backyards." They told stories about how "consumers" were stared at in restaurants and how some of shopkeepers said they didn't want "those kind of people" in their stores. This intimate reflection on bias toward people with whom they worked and cared for allowed most of the staff to grasp the concept of bias quite easily and to extend that awareness to an awareness of themselves as undervalued workers who were often discriminated against because of their low level of education and the kind of work that they did. From there, hearts and minds were open to understanding bias against coworkers because of their color, their language, or their sexual orientation.

The third day of training was a session on multicultural conflict resolution. This was a favorite day. Staff worked on a daily basis in settings where staff and clients were increasingly diverse in gender, ethnicity, age, language, and economics. Coming from neighborhoods all around the region, this group of low-paid service providers experienced conflict daily. After the second day of training, they were able to give voice to how difference and diversity affected these conflicts.

In a 4-year period we trained almost a half of the staff in this ever-changing workforce through the 3 days of training conducted on consecutive Thursdays. All managers in the agency took the 3 days of training as well and had the benefit of an additional day of training focused on multicultural organizational development. In this workshop staff conducted miniassessments of their own agency in which they assessed the extent of diversity at all levels of the organization, examined hiring and retention patterns, looked at organizational policies and practices, and the impact of those on a diverse workforce and diverse client base. Finally, they used the template of a multicultural organizational development plan to see how far they had come as an organization and how far they had left to go along the continuum from a monocultural to multicultural organization (Jackson, 2005).

This was work focused on deep and lasting organizational change. In addition to what the staff learned in terms of content, these trainings built teamwork and a shared perspective. The training program was effective because it did not stand alone. Mentoring groups were developed for women and people of color. Ongoing team-building activities and diversity training were provided for the leadership committee. Training was followed by coaching for managers who needed additional support in managing a multicultural workforce. One result was that harassment of gay and lesbian staff abated. Hiring and promotion goals were set. In my position as lead of the consulting team, I acted as executive coach to the agency's director. My goal was to act as a guide through the change

process and to build his courage and commitment to real change. For the first time in the history of the agency, people of color joined the senior management teams. We held annual diversity conferences for the entire organization and annual diversity summits for the Diversity Leadership Committee. This organization engaged in deep learning and deep change.

Another example of deep work was our consultation to a prestigious private high school with a mission to educate youth from a wide diversity of backgrounds. Driven by a commitment to excellence, the school wanted to ensure that the Black and Latino students had high levels of academic achievement. They had a sense that these students were not achieving their highest levels, and they wanted some actual data and some guidance. When we shared research with the school that showed that organizational climate and culture have been found to be integrally related to academic achievement in students of color (Bowen & Bok, 1998; Steele, 1997; Tatum, 1997), the school engaged us to assess Black and Latino student performance within the context of a climate for learning for all students. Over a 1-year period, our consultants dedicated themselves to developing an intimate knowledge of the school. We researched the school's history, visited classes, participated in extracurricular activities, developed and administered climate surveys pre- and postintervention, as well as self-esteem and identity surveys. We did a comparative study of students' grades and achievements and interviewed and surveyed hundreds of students, faculty, alumni, and parents.

In our study, Black and Latino grade point averages were found to be comparable to those of White and Asian students. Specifically, we found no statistically significant difference in grade point averages between the racial and ethnic groups. The school's questions about academic achievement then went deeper. What about the inadequate number of students of color in advanced classes and in the school's honor society? We found that this concern was part reality and part misperception. Specifically, the relatively small percentage of students of color in the school skewed perceptions to some degree. In a school where Black and Latino students represented less than 10% of the student body, the perceived absence of Black and Latino students from upper level classes was in part an artifact of scarcity, not underachievement. This led us to understand that if schools buy blindly into the idea of an achievement gap, they may create or reinforce the "reality" they fear. Still, there was more to understand.

Our findings showed several factors influencing the achievement of students of color. In interviews, Latino and Black students described a Eurocentric curriculum. They revealed the stereotyping they experienced by some teachers and students. They spoke about teachers' discomfort and lack of experience handling discussions of race in the classrooms. As a result of comprehensive work with the school, we were able to identify the key personal and institutional factors connected to achievement. In a surprising finding, we identified the unique way that Black and Latino students defined achievement, thus helping the school develop a more nuanced and culturally centered concept of achievement. Finally, we were able to identify 21 specific ways that the school could improve in its ability to provide an outstanding education to all students.

This full engagement with questions of diversity and academic achievement led the school to sponsor a major conference for independent schools on the achievement gap and resulted in an important publication on academic achievement. Again, the benefits of full and deep work on diversity were revealed.

Schools, colleges, and universities are quite business-like in the way they move to achieve concrete objectives. Strategic planning for diversity is essential in accomplishing widespread goals of increasing the number of faculty of color, achieving partnership

benefits for gay and lesbian staff, diversifying the student body, developing a more multicultural curriculum, and retaining faculty of color and mentoring them toward tenure (Kane & Orsini, 2003). Although one particular consulting team need not be involved in all phases of the work, the benefits of beginning with an organizational assessment and diagnosis cannot be overemphasized.

In our long-term work we have found John Kotter's (2002) work on change and Collins's (2005) work on excellence to be invaluable assets. Although Kotter does not write about diversity per se, his change model is a useful adjunct to diversity models. Our own ABC model for successful diversity initiatives guides our internal team work: We seek to *Align* diversity work with organizational mission and vision, *Build* internal coalitions of support, and *Coach* the chief executive toward courageous commitment and action. We have found that organizations that take on a full course of diversity work often succeed beyond their own expectations.

### Challenge 3: Balancing Process and Content

In the western United States, a large complex health system consisting of several facilities, with 10,000 employees and almost 1,000 beds, sought our services. Its senior vice presidents and vice presidents were all White. There were a few Black and Latino physicians and nurses. Their patients were increasingly diverse—Black, Latino, Asian, and immigrant.

In this consultation, the question of what the consultants meant by diversity was an ongoing question. Our four-person consulting team consisted of two Black women, a White woman, and a Latino man. I was the psychologist, the other Black woman was a physician, the White woman was a diversity consultant, and the Latino was a leadership consultant to Fortune 500 companies. We all tried in myriad ways to engage the diversity task force, which consisted of two senior vice presidents, one vice president, a handful of directors, and one practicing physician, all White, in a dialogue about what diversity meant to them. We explained that every successful diversity initiative involves people in the organization defining diversity for their own context and developing a diversity mission, vision, or statement of purpose. We had countless conversations about the need for them to define diversity in the context of their own organization by examining their own specific demographics and the particular challenges extant in their own organization. They were not content until we told them what diversity means. We provided a definition. We distributed a diversity wheel graphic, identifying primary and secondary dimensions of diversity, and discussed the definition of protective classes.

When we tried to have a discussion about what had motivated their decision to hire consultants and begin a diversity initiative, they asked the consulting team to do a presentation on drivers and motivators. It was as if we should tell them why they had decided to call us in to work with them on diversity. Our planning meetings were filled with the language of dates, data, schedules, and outcomes.

I typically begin my work with diversity task forces and diversity teams by doing individual interviews with members of the team. These interviews are focused on getting to know the members of a team and assessing their own relationship to diversity and their sense of the organization's diversity climate and diversity goals. When I introduced this

idea to Western Health Initiatives,<sup>2</sup> the chairperson of the diversity task force seemed concerned. He questioned my reasons for wanting to do this. I received his tentative approval, but when we shared the results in a feedback session, his discomfort was quite noticeable. When we attempted to do visioning with the organization, this was seen as a waste of time. They wanted to focus on benchmarking and the scope of work. Conversations focused on metrics, assignments, and target dates.

They had questions about best practices. The physician member of our team brought data from all over the country. Our business expert brought in the best diversity practices from business and industry. But when we spoke with them about health care disparities and attempted to engage them in a conversation about historic oppression and the concepts of agents and targeted group, the conversation stalled. This was not what they bargained for.

They wanted to do diversity work while keeping an arm's length relationship to social justice in health care. They did not want to engage in a process. They did not see diversity as, in part, a relational issue. This difficulty with process was particularly interesting because the recruitment of a more diverse staff was where they fell short. Other hospitals paid less and were less prestigious but attracted more staff of color. The other hospitals were seen as friendly and welcoming, whereas the hospital that was part of Western Health Initiatives was seen as cold and uninviting. Applicants of color did not like Western and had a hard time getting hired. Patient responses were similar. They experienced a great deal of medical competence alongside a lack of good human relations and cultural competence. There was competent treatment but not culturally competent "care."

Soon the consultation "took a pause." They were certain they would "be back in touch soon." This did not happen. They were not interested in internal change or the relationship between personal attitudes and institutional practices. They could not engage their CEO in the effort, and they did not really want to do the slow work that diversity requires. They were not interested in the process of change. They wanted something they could easily do, something like the nonsmoking policy they had recently implemented. They wanted us to provide an easy step from the best practices literature that they could implement. They wanted "deliverables," rather than real change.

### *Responses*

Certainly content, metrics, benchmarking, and outcomes are essential to a successful diversity initiative. Successful work on diversity is multifaceted. Diversity affects all aspects of complex systems; therefore, we must focus on all the major components of an organizational system. We must look at the organization through multiple lenses, as suggested by Bolman and Deal (2003), whose work focuses on structural, human resource, political, and symbolic frames.

Diversity work should also be collaborative and participatory. The most effective change processes occur when consultants work closely with internal change agents, and all good diversity work requires engagement with a process. The reality of bias, discrimination, and inequity evokes feelings of fear, resentment, and uncertainty. Defenses operate at full force. People carry these feelings into their work on diversity teams and task forces. Although "knowledge is power," we also know that information does not always change people's behavior or even their attitudes. As my colleagues and I have written, "process means that we are asserting that *how* we discuss" diversity "is as important as

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<sup>2</sup> Fictitious name.

*what we discuss*" (Romney, Tatum, & Jones, 1992, pp. 97–98). Paying attention to process ensures that deep change will occur. When organizations resist the process elements, it is often because they are not ready to make real change.

Effective practice applications involve including and legitimizing the voices of everyone, focusing on human interactions in the here and now. Guiding organizational members, especially diversity leadership teams, through a process that encourages them to examine their privilege, their power, and their own cultural roots is important, as is grounding their understanding of diversity in their own personal experiences by linking early learning and early memories to current experiences and realities. Engaging in intergroup dialogue (Schoem & Hurtado, 2001; Zúñiga, Biren, & Sevig, 2002) builds relationships and identifies allies for change. Encouraging self-disclosure and inviting diversity task force members to explore the interrelatedness of the diversity issues of social class, race, gender, sexual orientation, age, and organizational rank, among other issues, open the door to change. This process orientation involves experiential learning and recognition and engagement with one's own emotional responses. We see emotions as an important prerequisite for effective action. Our experience is that when we focus on process, learning occurs at a very deep level, and action is then grounded and empowered. We work to engage diversity committees at both cognitive and affective levels, aware that the knowledge that is gained through an experience of connection, empathy, and identification enhances personal and organizational development.

#### Challenge 4: Sustaining Ourselves and Our Clients

Consulting on issues of diversity, oppression, and social justice is an onerous task, and the impact on the consultant is weighty, particularly when the consultant is a member of a group that is targeted or discriminated against in the organization or in society as a whole. The task is emotionally demanding and requires a high level of skill as the consultant deals with the negative projections of some dominant group members and the high expectations of underrepresented or targeted group members.

In one consultation to the heavily unionized environment of a complex residential facility, I was asked to assist in the understanding and amelioration of serious conflict between White staff and the staff of color. There were vast power differences between these groups. With few exceptions, managers and clinicians were White and immediate service providers were people of color, mostly Haitian and West Indian immigrants. During the entry phase, I attended a meeting in which I was introduced to the all-White senior management team. Toward the end of the meeting, one White manager, who had been silent throughout the meeting, made the nonsequitur declaration that "Affirmative Action hasn't worked." She said she that she was "tired of quotas" and "tired of positions being held." When I inquired about what she was referring to, and asked whether these issues were a problem at the agency, she replied that these policies did not apply to their organization, but that she had seen examples in many other places. The anger, projection, and displacement that she displayed on that day recurred time and time again over the several years that I consulted to the organization, making it an extremely difficult atmosphere in which to maintain my professionalism and make progress on the goals of teambuilding and conflict resolution.

When high levels of acrimonious conflict are present in an organization, consultants get caught in a parallel process. Conflict also begins to surface on the consulting team, or between the consultants and various sectors of the organization, and even between the

consultants and the organization as a whole. During one meeting, a staff psychologist demanded of me, "Who do you think you are?" On another occasion, my facilitation of a meeting was interrupted, and I was blamed for the staff's intergroup conflict. Ultimately, all of my records were subpoenaed by the courts as evidence in a union lawsuit against the organization.

I was not the only person under attack in this consultation. Haitian immigrant staff members were also the target of demeaning treatment and physical threats. They were described by some managers as not caring about the patients, stealing from them, and neglecting them. On the other hand, managers maintained that they were color-blind. When a Haitian staff member tried to give an example of the negative treatment he had received while employed at the agency, he was accused of being racist toward White staff. In another meeting, in which many Haitian staff members were present, a White clinician expressed his resentment about having to "water down" his reports so that they could be understood by staff members whose first language was not English. He asked, "Why do I have to water down my reports so they can be understood by people with a third grade education?" He stressed the words *water down* and *third grade education*. He angrily repeated this comment three times in this one meeting. Haitian staff members requested a number of meetings with me to express their concerns. In one of these meetings, a Haitian woman took the floor. Apologizing for her accent, she said she wanted "to say something" in the hope that we "could understand" her. She spoke about how she and her fellow coworkers often felt about their jobs as caretakers. In halting, heavily accented English, she told how they hated to come to work in the morning and how they were unable to speak up for themselves, for fear of retaliation by their supervisors. "Even in meetings when we are asked to talk, we cannot speak," she said. "We are afraid. We get sick. This not speaking makes us sick, because we must hold it inside. We cannot let it out." She spoke of how she and other direct care workers were ignored: "You are treated like a chair or a table, a piece of furniture. They don't speak to you. You are looked down on, talked down to." She continued, "Those of us who have so small jobs are not respected by those who do big jobs." She whispered, "Even the Bible says we should respect one another. Even the Bible says this."

My own emotional response during this consultation was difficult to handle. Overwhelmed by the perilous quest for organizational change in the contested terrain of this organization, I identified with the pilgrim in Rilke's poem "Ich bete wieder, du Erlaughter" (Barrows & Macy, 1996, p. 97):

I've been scattered in pieces,  
torn by conflict,  
mocked by laughter,  
washed down in drink.

In alleyways I sweep myself up  
out of garbage and broken glass.

This consultation was certainly unusual. Not all diversity consultations are so demanding or so heart-rending, but the challenges to consulting psychologists doing deep diversity work invariably require great competence and fortitude.

### *Responses*

A useful response is to seek first to understand. In the consultation described above, an in-depth assessment, again, helped our team understand the causes of the negative

behavior. This in turn strengthened our empathy. Staff survival was threatened. The organization had gone through several waves of downsizing. The agency was moving belatedly toward deinstitutionalization, which threatened people's jobs. Master's-level psychologists who had been with the agency for decades had good reason to fear that they would not be able to find new employment with comparable pay. The linguistic, racial, and cultural differences among the staff were huge, and the inequities were among the most extreme that I have witnessed. The organization was dying, and although this was obvious to all observers, the management refused to acknowledge it. The agency did ultimately close a few years later.

Although this kind of defensive and hostile behavior is rarely so extreme in many organizations, strong resistance is not uncommon when consulting on diversity. When this kind of process occurs in a consultation, a consultant's optimism and confidence can be deeply shaken. During this consultation, I struggled often with the question of whether organizational consulting, in its attempts to address problems and resolve conflicts in a rational, collaborative way, could really be helpful in untangling the hurts and horrors of injustice at the level of whole classes, whole ethnic groups, whole peoples.

Frankly, another struggle was with my own sense of competence. Thankfully, I understood that one of the ways that racism and sexism operate is that they strive to "deskill" and unnerve their targets (Howard & Hammond, 1985; Steele, 1997). There is a subtle way in which these factors operate in my work. Often in my consultation work I am referred to as "a diversity consultant," rather than as a psychologist. I do not take issue with that directly. It is, after all, one of the issues on which I consult. However, I always introduce myself as a psychologist, sometimes specifying that I am a clinical and organizational psychologist. The assertion of that identity reminds my clients that I have knowledge of human behavior and organizational behavior that complements and extends beyond my knowledge of diversity. Given that orientation, when the woman in the case described above demanded to know who I thought I was, I was able to tell her. In these encounters, although people tend to "forget" or underrate my credentials, I am able to function from a clear sense of professional identity and professional ethics. This does not mean that I am, therefore, unscathed. It does help me hold my center and proceed with my task in a confident manner.

When working with difficult clients (hostile, borderline, racist, whatever), I strive for a compassionate stance. More than any other organization in my practice, this one challenged me. I sought support through consulting with others who do diversity work. I was aided in my struggle by the question of a mentor: "Can you love them enough to help them learn?" The question encouraged me toward higher ground. What this meant was explained further in an article published after his death. The article (Wells, 1999) described the work of the consultant or "group-taker." He wrote, "The consultant must understand the heart of the group (i.e., the core of the group's experience), take the group to heart (i.e., give undivided attention to the group), possess heart (i.e., have the courage to steadfastly work to understand the group), and carry the group in his or her heart (i.e., constantly keep the group as a beloved object)." "The work of the heart," according to Wells (1999), "is to develop the passion, courage, and compassion to engage in a deeply contactful relationship with the group" (p. 383). Comparing the role of consultants to that of nautical navigators, Wells wrote, "Heart is analogous to loran (*long range navigation*) that establishes the geographical location and the direction of the vessel. The group-taker must use empathy to help locate the group in its current voyage" (p. 383). Observing that working with groups is based on the ancient Greek concept of *agape*, he added, "Love for mankind [*sic*] is the source of the group-taker's courage. Love of

learning is the source of the group-taker's commitment. Love and wonder of being fully human is the source of the group-taker's competence" (p. 389). To me, these words of Leroy Wells describe fully the relationship between consulting and loving, between professional competence and diversity work. Other researchers discuss the same concept in using the term *empathy* (Jordan, Kaplan, Stiver, & Surrey, 1991; Jordan & Romney, 2005). During a difficult consultation, they offered me succor and guidance and provided a perspective from which I could continue my work. I hasten to add that this perspective undergirded the concrete change work what I engaged in with this agency. We designed a management development program for aspiring managers of color. People of color did move into the administration and into the "front offices." A tone was set in which the racist and demeaning language of intimidation diminished. By the end of the consultation, a Haitian manager rose to become assistant executive director and was there as both symbol and leader of an agency with a new respect for the diversity of its staff.

I have described here how taxing consulting on diversity can be. Another step I take to retain my balance and competence is to monitor my caseload in an ongoing way and work to balance my list of projects so that consulting on diversity is only one part of the consulting I engage in. I maintain a "diversified caseload" so that, in addition to diversity work, I retain a focus on work that involves my other interests in teambuilding and leadership development. This helps me avoid being consumed by diversity work and retain my competence in consulting and coaching on topics other than diversity. Even when doing diversity work, I have found that focusing on specific content areas, such as recruitment and retention of faculty of color and pretenure coaching of faculty of color, has proved to be a relief from some of the more direct and difficult antibias work that diversity initiatives can involve. It is also important to note that I find diversity more and more valued in organizations, and although there is still much work to be done toward achieving full equity, the viciousness of racism that I experienced in the agency described above has, in my experience, diminished noticeably.

### Challenge 5: "Getting to We"

One of the most difficult aspects of diversity work is the ability to reconcile the interests of the underrepresented with the interests and needs of the organization as a whole. Boszormenyi-Nagy and Spark's (1984) work on multipartiality has influenced my own brand of multipartiality. Being on the side of all the members of a social system is essential. Successful diversity consultants must work for the underrepresented, those individuals and groups who are discriminated against and who look to us to help create change in the direction of equity and inclusion. At the same time, we must still hold the group or the organization-as-a-whole and help them together accomplish the organizational mission. When I speak to organizations about this need to come together, I refer to it as *getting to we*.

Two concepts—social justice and the common good—help me convey these ideas to clients and consulting teams. I define *social justice* as equity and fairness for members of organizations. Socially just organizations do not discriminate, and they work to include, empower, and promote individuals and groups who have been discriminated against.

The common good, a concept espoused by many leaders from all points on the political spectrum, is a public philosophy according to Raskin (1986). He writes that it is the principle that espouses what is good for the community, what will benefit society as

a whole. According to Peterson (1994), to achieve the common good, we must work together to develop a common social agenda (dialogue), recognize the inherent dignity of all people (respect), and distribute resources among all members of a society. Both the concepts of social justice and the common good are useful when doing work in schools with teachers, students, and parent groups. Social justice supports the common good, and these concepts work together to articulate shared interests and to balance the competing demands of groups in organizations.

In my mind the idea of "getting to we" not only brings social justice and the common good together; I see it as the sine qua non goal and guide of all authentic dialogue. I use these words often when consulting to independent schools. For me this phrase, this purpose captures what we need to do in schools to build community and promote equity. It demonstrates a goal, embraces hopefulness, and describes a journey we should all be on in a democratic society. The phrase *getting to we* addresses the challenge we have to engage in to really become "we, the people." Getting to we requires us to define what we really stand for.

### *A Response*

I had a 2-year diversity project with an independent school in a large city. Students came from the immediate neighborhood and the surrounding areas. The school had done an impressive job drawing a diverse population. They were Asian, Black, Latino, White. Students and families ranged from the extremely wealthy to average working folk. The school had a progressive political history, but the school community, although mostly liberal, also included families that were more conservative. This wide-ranging diversity led to many communication problems. How should students be grouped in classes? Should the school sponsor upscale events that some families could not attend? Why wasn't there more focus on diversity and social justice? Why was there so much focus on diversity and social justice?

We decided to construct an intervention that would help people build community, to guide them on a journey of "getting to we." We constructed a small dialogue group consisting of 12 parents. We defined this group as a model group, a kind of microcosm group, one that would learn to engage in respectful dialogue about the differences they had as parents about how the school should educate their children and how the school should take up issues of diversity and social justice. We sent an invitation to all parents, inviting them to submit a letter of interest. We cautioned them that it would be a small group, and we let them know that diversity (differences) would be the main consideration in constructing the group. After reviewing the letters of interest, we invited 12 people to meet monthly to read and talk over the course of a year. We composed the group of men and women; Blacks, Whites, Latinos, and Asians; elementary, middle, and high school parents; wealthy and less affluent parents; parents who had adopted children and parents who were raising children whom they had birthed; parents who were in heterosexual families and parents who were in same-sex marriages with children. Finally guided by the political range in the applicant pool, we included self-described liberals and self-described Republicans, including one who had strong negative feelings about diversity.

We spent the year in dialogue, and we accomplished our goal. By the end of the year, the parents requested that we continue. People certainly did not change their identities and their views and opinions shifted only a bit, but what did shift was their understanding and respect for one another's experiences, and with that came an increased tolerance for the diversity of opinion. Perhaps most important, they saw one another as human beings (and

not simply as opposing political positions), and they understood fully their shared interest in providing their children with the best, most equitable education possible. On these last two points, they did indeed “get to we.”

### Conclusion

The work of consulting on diversity is difficult and rewarding. This exploration of some of the challenges of diversity consultation and the interventions and responses I have found effective is grounded in the idea that good practice on diversity involves the head and the heart, as well as a thorough and “contact-full” engagement with the client organization. To be successful in this work, consulting psychologists must move from “sensitive attention” to cultural differences to the real and concrete work of inclusion, empowerment, equity, and justice. This is as true for our own professional organizations as it is for the organizations to which we consult. If we reflect on Enron, on widespread workplace violence, and on the discrimination and exclusion that still exist in organizations, we will acknowledge that psychologists who attend to social justice and the common good have an important role to play. I encourage all of us in Division 13 to answer Dr. Winn’s call with the assertion that we stand for excellence and equity in our work. For those who have the courage to stretch further, let us reach for justice.

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