Managing Diversity

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The role of managers includes conceptualizing and achieving an organizational vision, with the support of professionals and other staff in any aspect of organizational leadership. Managers also have the responsibility of articulating the vision and motivating staff. In the area of diversity, the vision and managerial responsibility relate to articulating a rationale that is compelling, fostering recruitment and retention, and fostering services and an organizational climate that is conducive for organizational success. With diversity, there is a range of organizational, professional, and societal issues that complicate the realization of diversity goals. This article provides a summary of the issues that define the complexity of diversity as an organizational and societal issue. Using the societal discussion of diversity as a frame of reference, that complexity is reflected in the difficulty in defining diversity, and the fact that issues of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation, among others, are emotionally laden, and thus complicate both discussion and the articulation of a rationale for diversity efforts.

Despite the fact that recruitment in particular has been a central focus of diversity efforts in library and information services, as is the case in other professions, there has been relatively limited progress in changing the composition of the profession. In spite of national recruitment efforts, the levels of underrepresentation have changed very little in nearly every type of library organization and professional category. Thus, this article addresses the research within the profession and beyond, summarizing what we know about diversity in organizations, including the research associated with the relationship between diversity and organizational success. In addition, research related to the comprehensive evaluation of diversity performance in the library context, in relation to staffing, collections, services, and organizational climate, is summarized.

In order to foster and enhance organizational performance, managers are responsible for addressing diversity issues that arise in organizations, but also for defining and achieving diversity-related goals that reflect aspects of the societal context, including the increasingly diverse population in which libraries operate. In addition, there is a need for managers to understand and articulate a rationale for diversity for staff, funders, board members, and others that reflects both the compelling nature of the issues and the societal context, which is so central to understanding and achieving goals related to diversity.

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Societal Context

The discussion of diversity as an organizational issue requires the consideration of the societal context in which libraries and library managers operate. In this regard, the societal context includes the political, policy, and legal context in which organizations operate, as well as the social and cultural context. The political and policy context is important because of the laws, governmental and organizational policies, and legal precedents that often define the nature of the work. The social and cultural factors represent and inform attitudes, including those of board members, parent organization leaders, library employees, and patrons–individuals who have a role in shaping organizational direction and contributing to organizational performance and evaluation. In addition, the social context includes perceptions of the legislation; policy and legal decisions; and the societal perceptions of race, gender, and other demographic factors. Lastly, the issue of diversity in the profession of library and information services is part of a larger societal consideration of diversity, in the private and public sectors and in higher education, in particular, which further defines the professional context.

The increasing diversity within the U.S. population, based on immigration and population growth among some segments of the population, for example, has been a major topic in a number of respects, including the changing nature of employment pools and client bases. The fact that the increasing diversity (in terms of racial, ethnic, and language diversity, for example) is not limited to large cities on the east and west coasts and in border states has emphasized the need for an enhanced focus on diversity as both a societal and an organizational issue. Issues of diversity include access to and representation in both higher education and employment, among other contexts. Of late, diversity is arguably most prominent in societal discussion,

in relation to the election of the first African American president and a range of emotionally charged issues. These issues include provocative statements made by individuals, such as comedian Michael Richards and radio personality Don Imus, as well as issues of profiling, gay marriage, and interracial marriage. Provocative issues also include hoaxes in which African Americans have been implicated in crimes, garnering extensive media coverage. Such incidents include the 2009 case involving Bonnie Sweeten, who claimed that she and her daughter were kidnapped by two men fitting a specific racial profile, as well as the nearly identical 1994 claim of Susan Smith, who drowned her sons but initially blamed others.[1] Other examples include the recent coverage of immigration and boarder control questions; the Don't Ask, Don't Tell controversy in the U.S. military and gay marriage initiatives on the ballots in many states; profiling questions related to the mass shooting at Fort Hood, Texas, by Nidal Malik Hasan and his questionable behavior and link to radical Islamic leaders; and Sammy Sosa's skin lightening development, all of which keep the topic of diversity in discussion, typically without resolution.

It is important to acknowledge that the societal discussion of diversity and related topics is not only difficult but often associated with backlash. The research indicates that expanded societal discussion and media coverage of racial, cultural, and gender-related issues have been linked to backlash that is often violent. In particular, research has indicated that violence against Mexicans occurs as a result of societal discussions of immigration, that increases in violence against women have been correlated with discussion of efforts associated with gender equity, and that the coverage associated with the incidents of 9/11 was correlated with violence against Arabs and Muslims, or those who were perceived as such.[2] Certainly, while the research has shown correlations, causality has not been shown, particularly with the other variables that are likely at work.

There is little doubt that there is often an emotionally laden societal response to individual issues related to diversity. A number of researchers have suggested that the societal response to the election of the first African American president was reactive and emotionally laden in multiple ways, including the deep emotional responses on election night and the increase in bias crimes.[3] Similarly, researchers in various spheres, such as diversity management, journalism, and legal education, have written about where society stands in relation to diversity, race, and related issues following and in light of the election results. Researchers have also speculated about what the election portends for diversity programs in organizations.[4]

Defining Diversity

The term *diversity*, used in relation to issues of representation, race, and gender in particular, was introduced most prominently in the legal decision of 1978's *University of California [at Davis] vs. Bakke*, a major reverse discrimination case that challenged the University of California's policy of affirmative action in university admissions. Supreme Court Justice Powell "argued that the attainment of a diverse student body broadens the range of viewpoints collectively held by those students and subsequently allows a university to provide an atmosphere that is 'conducive to speculation, experiment and creation—so essential to the quality of higher education.'"[5] The rationale associated with the learning environment that is enhanced by a more diverse student body became known as Powell's "diversity rationale," and has been supported by academic leaders and challenged by others, but upheld in subsequent cases, including the two cases involving the University of Michigan in 2003.[6] However, the complexity of diversity as a principle was evident from the beginning. As the *Bakke* case followed (and certainly preceded) federal legislation defining affirmative action, equal opportunity, and non-discrimination, the segments of the population included in the legal definition have not been widely understood, which may have been the source of the limited progress in some areas.

The formal definition of affirmative action conceives programs related to the four "protected" minority groups—Hispanic Americans, African Americans, Native Americans, and Asian Americans—and women. In general, equal opportunity programs' non-discrimination legislation and policies are broader. They have focused on those five segments of the population as well as other factors, such as national origin, age, and religion. A small percentage of the population demonstrates an understanding of the distinctions. The societal discussion related to affirmative action reflects both a biased view and some limited understanding, often following the presentation of incomplete information by the media and others. In addition, in spite of the number of the racial and gender categories included in the legal definition of affirmative action, in spite of the fact that women have benefited more from affirmative action policies and programs than have members of minority groups, and in spite of the fact that diversity is broadly defined in many organizations, the research indicates that members of the general public associate affirmative action with African Americans specifically. In particular, the research indicates that public perceptions about affirmative action indicate what has been termed "the racialization of affirmative action in mainstream discourse."[7] The research results are particularly evident in the study of queries of members of the public, showing the extent to which the survey research focuses on questions about African Americans, as opposed to others. According to sociologist Maria Krysan, "Racial policy attitudes are opinions about government policies that are concerned with African Americans and other minorities. Generally speaking, the survey questions used to tap support or opposition for racial policies ask about programs that 'protect blacks,' 'help blacks help themselves,' or 'assist blacks.'"[8]

The research indicates that the majority of Americans exhibit a negative view regarding affirmative action as a concept. This does not appear to be unrelated to the fact that the majority of people equate the concepts of "diversity," "race," and "African American." Conversely, most people indicate the importance of fostering diversity in organizations and society, while there is less public support for the concept of affirmative action.[9] In this regard, the way that diversity is defined is not unrelated to how the concept is viewed by individuals and the extent to which diversity programs realize success.

It is also the case that the argument in favor of diversity, particularly in relation to staffing and college admissions, focuses on the potential conflict between diversity and quality. Research suggests that there is a societal perception that diversity programs often necessitate lowered standards in order to "let in" minorities or women, for example. In addition, the societal context also includes the fact that many Americans believe that affirmative action is no longer the law. Thus, concerns regarding potential legal challenges may define how organizational diversity programs are defined or limited. Therefore, the role of managers includes not only providing substantive information regarding issues of diversity, but also communicating in ways that take into account potential perceptions and biases.

The communication is further complicated by the suggestion that "diversity" is a euphemism for race, racism, sex, sexism, sexual orientation, and homophobia, among other terms, as well as for affirmative action.[10] Diversity was described by those who were in opposition to the use of affirmative action by the University of Michigan in *Grutter v. Bollinger*, as "the latest euphemism [and another] form of discriminatory subterfuge."[11] The suggestion that diversity is a euphemism for race, racism, sex, or sexism is reflected in the interpersonal communication research on issues that are known as taboo topics. Individuals exhibit particular difficulty in communicating about issues that include "illegal or embarrassing activities, such as drug use and sexual behavior," HIV risk factors and birth control, alcohol use, incest, menstruation, death and illness, as well as issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, sexism, racism, among others.[12]

In addition, there are other topics that are considered inappropriate for discussion "in public or in polite society, race and related issues being among those topics."[13] In professional communication and many aspects of personal communication, there appears to be an attempt "to facilitate communication about difficult subjects in a more benign, less direct way."[14] Thus, individuals and groups develop "communication norms and rules . . . to preserve the expressive order."[15] Whether the focus is that of researchers who are trained in gathering data from human subjects on sensitive topics; that of medical practitioners who must discuss health, behavior, illness, and death; or that which abides in interpersonal relationships, individuals appear to identify other ways to communicate about and around difficult subjects.

Techniques include the "use [of] such linguistic strategies as slang terms, circumlocutions, pronouns, and euphemistic deixis."[16]

Thus, the context in which diversity is addressed in organizations is one in which there is likely avoidance of direct communication and attempts to depersonalize the concept, based on the emotions and lack of comfort surrounding the issues. The potential to fulfill diversity-related goals is thus limited because the issues are not necessarily well-defined, emotions and biases are likely dominant, and the problems are not easily resolvable. The emotion surrounding issues of diversity is often reflected in circumstances in which organizations implement diversity training. There is the need for such training to address issues that are viewed by many as "undiscussable."[17] While the subset of diversity training known as sensitivity training is frequently implemented in response to some precipitating event, research indicates limited success of such training in addressing the organizational problems and attitudes, in many cases. The research indicates that the training is often characterized by finger pointing, "shaming and scape-goating," with white people (and white men, in particular) reporting feeling "targeted and maligned."[18] Thus, there is reduced likelihood for success of such training, based on both the emotional climate in which the training is taking place and the emotional nature of the training, which fosters more backlash than progress.

One technique used in diversity training and other discussions of diversity has related to the use of a broad, inclusive definition of diversity (not limited to a focus on race and gender, for example) in order to increase the likelihood of engagement by the widest audience possible and to reduce the provocative nature of the discussion. This type of model, which was used by the Association of Research Libraries, drew criticism for creating the potential of equating all types of difference, independent of issues of documented discrimination and legal and policy requirements and guidelines related to certain segments of the population.[19] Necessarily, the role of managers in communication about diversity and in decision making regarding the appropriateness of diversity training content requires an informed understanding of the organizational context and consideration of the available options in the selection of the appropriate approaches in addressing diversity issues and further organizational goals. In this context, managers also face the challenge of conceptualizing and articulating a rationale for diversity that is compelling and that motivates staff to work toward the achievement of diversity goals in support of overall organizational success, and that takes into account the emotional components of the issue and the numerous components of the diversity rationale.

Rationale for Diversity

The rationale for diversity programs has typically centered on the consideration of some combination of four issues:

past inequities, current unfairness, underrepresentation in relation to societal demographics, and (only recently) the relationship between diversity and organizational performance and success. There is research to support each of the individual rationales. For example, documentation regarding underrepresentation, discrimination, and inequities in employment, college admissions, and other areas is extensive, as is research that indicates biases in evaluation processes and application of review criteria for job candidates. However, there are challenges associated with using any of the individual rationales alone in making the case for diversity in organizations. In many ways the rationale associated with demographic changes and the increasing diversity in society is limited. The suggestion that simply mirroring the population in organizational staffing is important so that potential clients (or library patrons, for example) will see someone who looks like themselves and exhibit greater comfort is simplistic and fails to reflect a more substantive basis for greater diversity among employees. In addition, the emotional component of the reaction to diversity initiatives has been fueled, in part, by some aspects of the changing demographics equation, such as immigration and higher birth rates among certain segments of the population, such as Latinos in the United States or Muslims in Europe.[20]

In addition, maintaining focus on diversity as a priority in difficult economic times may be compromised if the organizational rationale centers on more altruistic motives related to correcting past inequities and ensuring a "fair" environment, with consideration for how diversity relates to more central organizational priorities and return on investment. The diversity research, conducted primarily in the private sector and, to a limited extent, in higher education, has shown a connection between organizational investment in diversity and overall organizational performance and success.[21] The research, based on the model known as leadership diversity, has indicated that the companies that are the most diverse (based on factors such as minority employment at all levels, including senior management, spending with minority suppliers, and underwriting business that goes to minority-owned investment banks) have also been identified as more successful companies overall.[22] The research results suggest that more diverse organizations benefit from the enhanced perspectives and higher quality decision making overall, as well as an enhanced ability to target various segments of the market. Similar results have been found in relation to the representation of women in leadership roles, as a component of the greater diversity of perspectives overall.[23]

The research has also shown that financial investment in the fulfillment of diversity-related goals is prevalent among private sector organizations.[24] Similarly, in the academic environment, the private colleges and universities and major public universities that have been the most successful with regard to diversity have devoted financial resources to the fulfillment of those goals.[25] The model of leadership diversity, which has shown the correlation between organizational investment in diversity and overall organizational performance and success, has been applied to the study of libraries as well, particularly liberal arts and urban public libraries.[26] Researcher Scott Page's work in applying mathematical modeling to the study of diversity in organizational teams has represented the cutting edge in this area. In applying the use of mathematical models to the study of creativity and quality of decision making, he has found that "diverse groups of problem solvers outperformed the groups of the best individuals at solving problems."[27] The diverse groups were better able to see problems from different perspectives and to identify better and more complete solutions collectively.

Diversity in Libraries

In library and information services, diversity goals have been identified as a priority for some time, often in support of the goals of the parent institutions of which individual libraries are a part. The focus of the diversity efforts has related primarily to concerns regarding representation, as well as collections and library services. The empirical research related to diversity in libraries has been limited in general and in the scope of coverage. The vast majority of published research related to diversity in the profession has focused on representation—based on the analysis of demographic trends and comparing the levels of representation of various segments of the general population to their representation in the profession, in individual types of libraries, for example, and in professional categories, such as senior management in academic libraries.[28] The diversity research has focused on academic libraries, particularly academic research libraries, to a large extent, with little original research based on the study of the other types of libraries. The research has indicated the levels of underrepresentation in the profession, among the major racial and ethnic minority groups in the United States.

Despite the diversity efforts in the profession, the levels of underrepresentation related to race and ethnicity are noteworthy (see table 1).

Based on the data, all of the major racial and ethnic groups in the United States (with the exception of Native Americans) are underrepresented in the profession, as compared with the U.S. population overall (see table 2).

Levels of underrepresentation exist across all types of information organizations. It should be noted that while the research has documented levels of underrepresentation, which can inform diversity recruitment goals, the way in which diversity has been defined has been an area of controversy. The original research on diversity has focused on race and gender, and less so on ethnicity and national origin, with little original research related to age, disability status, sexual orientation, and religion. In fact, diversity research beyond the profession, has been criticized for an overemphasis on issues of race and gender.[29] It should be noted that, with regard to representation, in areas such as

sexual orientation, documenting the levels of representation in the general population is difficult for comparative purposes.

In addition, beyond the focus on demographic representation, there is one model for the study of diversity in libraries, which provides the basis for the comprehensive analysis of diversity performance in libraries. The model includes the analysis of four areas: (1) library collections, (2) services, (3) staffing (including recruitment and retention), and (4) organizational climate.[30]

In the area of staffing, for example, activities related to fostering diversity in recruitment and retention include defining positions and writing job announcements in ways that represent job requirements relevant to positions without overstating necessary qualifications; undertaking proactive recruitment, using proven techniques for increasing the diversity of candidate pools; preparing search committees for meeting legal requirements related to job announcement placement and conducting interviews, and fair evaluation of candidates; addressing organizational representation via webpages; providing hiring packages that are competitive; and designing and implementing retention programs. In addition, the staffing area includes staff training and professional development. In all of the areas of staffing, collections, services, and organizational climate, there is a need to identify benchmarks and best practices, within and beyond the profession for defining and measuring success in ways that support organizational goals but do not create liability issues for the organization.

Discussion and Conclusion

In the library context, the goals of supporting the research and information needs of users, in general and in relation to the diversity of the population, as well as addressing underrepresentation in the profession, highlight the importance of diversity. However, in the librarianship profession, diversity has been characterized by limited empirical research, which focuses primarily on levels of representation, and the results of such research, which indicate little change in those levels of representation, despite ongoing national and local recruitment efforts. The professional circumstance is informed by the broader context related to diversity. In general, diversity is represented by its complexity, as both an organizational and societal issue.

As a result, the roles of managers include taking a very informed approach to the issues. For managers, this means being informed about the diversity research, in general, including that which indicates the relationship between organizational investment in diversity and overall organizational performance and success, and the limited diversity research in the profession, including that which documents best practices and defines the model for the study of diversity in libraries. Ultimately, managers should be informed to ensure the level of decision making. However, there is also the need for managers to be informed in order to

Table 1. U.S. Libraries

Race	Percentage (%)
White	89
Black/African American	4.5
Hispanic or Latino	3.0
Native American	1.4
Asian or Pacific Islander	2.7

Source: Denise M. Davis and Tracie D. Hall, "Diversity Counts!," American Library Association Office for Research and Statistics Office for Diversity (Jan. 2007): 2, www.ala.org/ala/aboutala/offices/diversity/diversitycounts/diversitycounts_rev0.pdf (accessed Apr. 4, 2010).

Table 2. U.S. Census

Race	Percentage (%)
White	79.7
Black/African American	12.8
Hispanic or Latino	15.4
American Indian and Alaska Native	1.0
Asian or Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander	2.7
Two Races	1.7

articulate a vision related to diversity and to motivate staff to support diversity-related goals, as a part of fostering overall organizational performance. And, managers need to encourage understanding of diversity among staff at all levels and with varying degrees of skepticism and to encourage organizational commitment. Understanding the research is necessary because managers are compelled to communicate about diversity in ways that reflect the provocative, emotionally laden questions.

Thus, while diversity has been identified as a priority in the profession for some time, the progress in achieving diversity goals has been limited. Managers, in particular, have a key role to play in ensuring that the organizational responses to diversity challenges are pursued in an informed way in order to foster overall progress in the profession.

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