A Multi-Faceted Look at Diversity: Why Outreach is Not Enough

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ABSTRACT

A shift is taking place among organizations that utilize volunteer services as more leaders recognize the benefits of incorporating diversity. Yet many volunteer managers are not sure how to recruit and retain volunteers of diverse backgrounds, and become frustrated with short-lived successes. In this article the authors introduce a model, the Diversity Diamond, that provides a simple, visual way to take an overview of the complexity of organizational diversity. The model directs attention to the multiple aspects of a diversity initiative and is useful for conducting a comprehensive assessment and planning coordinated action steps. The article provides explanations of each facet of the Diversity Diamond and then considers implications for taking action. A key conclusion reached is that initiatives that focus on only one facet of diversity work, such as outreach or awareness training, will do little to promote diversity in the long run.

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INTRODUCTION

A shift is taking place among organizations that utilize the services of volunteers. More often than ever before, organizations recognize the tremendous benefits of incorporating diversity in everything that they do. Yet although there is interest, many volunteer managers are not sure how to recruit and retain volunteers of diverse backgrounds. Often the question is asked: What can we do to attract more people of color (or women, city dwellers, people of different income levels)? Alternatively, after a successful recruitment drive, the question may be asked: Why is it that people of diverse backgrounds don't stay active? Volunteer administrators often become frustrated—no matter how hard they try, the organization ends up where it started, with essentially the same demographic profile as before the recruitment effort.

As consultants who work with volunteer organizations, often with groups seeking to promote social or political change, we hear these laments. One critical lesson we have learned is that diversity requires much more than outreach or recruitment. Recruitment is vitally important, but changing the composition of the volunteer pool is not enough to successfully incorporate diversity and ensure retention.

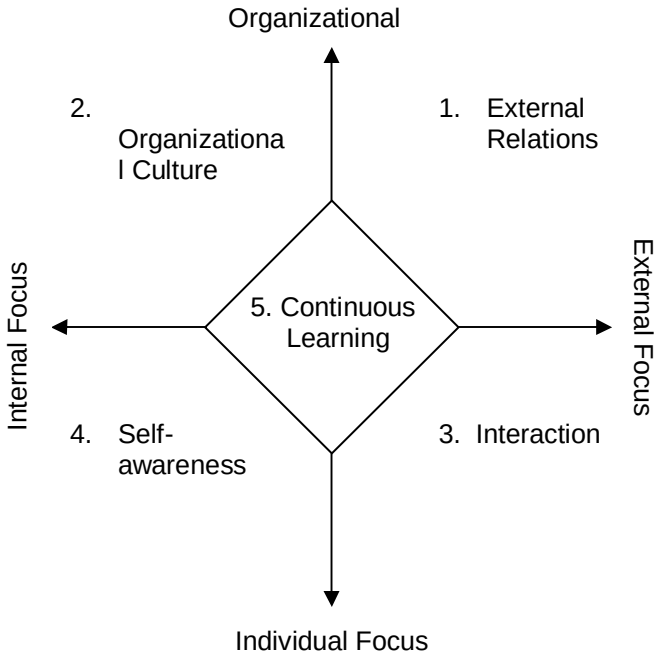
In this article we introduce a model that illustrates that outreach is but one of several critical elements that need to be considered when embarking on diversity work. The model provides a simple, visual way to take an overview of the complexity of organizational diversity. The model is useful for assessment, indicating areas for action and what kinds of results to expect from different types of action.

THE DIVERSITY DIAMOND

Organizations are complicated entities, so it is not surprising that diversity initiatives are also complex. As shown in Diagram 1, the Diversity Diamond represents several dimensions of organizational life and makes connections to diversity work. First, attention can be focused at the level of individuals in the organization or on the organization as a whole. This distinction is represented by the vertical axis: *Individual Focus— Organization Focus*. It also makes sense to distinguish between an *External Focus* (how organizations or individuals interact "outside of themselves" with others) and an *Internal Focus* (the "inner workings" of organizations or individuals), and this distinction is represented by the horizontal axis. How individuals communicate, negotiate, and solve problems with each other, therefore, would be an *individual* and *external* focus. Organizational policies and procedures— "the way things work around here"—would be considered an *organizational* and *internal* focus. We refer to each of these areas of focus as a facet of organizational life.

There is another important facet to consider: what lessons organization members learn from

DIAGRAM 1
Diversity Diamond Model



one effort to another. At the core of any organizational change effort, including promoting diversity, is the ability for organization members to learn collectively— in effect, the entire organization must increase its understanding and skill. *Continuous Learning* is the central facet of the Diversity Diamond model. The next sections of this article provide explanations of each facet. Following the introduction to the model, implications for taking action are considered.

EXTERNAL RELATIONS

The *External Relations* facet (Area 1 of the diagram), is defined by an external focus at the organizational level. Groups interested in becoming more diverse often start here—they ask how they can best "outreach" to communities they are interested in. Outreach is one element of the External Relations facet of the Diversity Diamond (that is, a focus on how the organization interfaces with the world at large). Questions that often arise when considering outreach include: How do we attract "those people" to our organization? What do they want? How can we make them want what we have to offer?

One national nonprofit organization we worked with considered how they could present themselves through their marketing materials to be attractive to people of color and young people. The organization used a number of ways to reach out: producing promotional materials with pictures of diverse people, selecting projects that might be of concern to diverse constituencies, inviting representatives of diverse communities to speak at public events, translating materials into Spanish, and giving awards to individuals and organizations that promoted diversity.

These actions could have been an integral part of a comprehensive approach to diversity but were insufficient on their own. Although these various efforts allowed the organization to have successful recruitment drives, those who had been recruited often did not remain active. That is, effective recruitment brought people in—but without addressing the rest of the diversity diamond, the organization was not prepared for new member volunteers who were different from the existing majority. New members and volunteers often expressed frustration with an organization and its members that seemed committed to its old ways

Brochures, marketing pitches, and other recruitment devices represent the public face of an organization. Without attention to the other dimensions of the diversity diamond, newly recruited volunteers may begin to have doubts. New recruits will want to know how fully the picture of diversity presented to the outside world represents the actual organization. Is there a diverse range of people in the decision-making bodies that create the programs and promotional campaigns? New volunteers will be quick to recognize whether diversity is incorporated throughout the organization.

Organizations that focus on External Relations but do not take a comprehensive approach (that involves all five facets of the diversity diamond) to diversity work all too often set new volunteers up to fail. Volunteers primarily recruited because of one characteristic, such as race, ethnicity, physical challenge, or sexual orientation may immediately be put in charge of a high profile

event or project without sufficient knowledge of the organization or a thorough discussion of the volunteer's interests. A newly-recruited volunteer of color is all too often expected to represent all minority interests in the organization and to be an ambassador for the organization to the larger community (demonstrating how diverse the organization is).

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

Area 2 of the diagram represents an internal focus at the organizational level, that is, a focus on *Organizational Culture*. Ultimately the success of volunteer recruitment efforts is evaluated on the basis of the contributions recruits make to the organization over time. In other words, recruitment drives will be wasted without equal attention to retention, which requires an examination of the internal workings of the organization—the Organizational Culture facet of the Diversity Diamond.

Just as different ethnic groups have identifiable cultures, so do different organizations. An examination of an organization's culture includes looking at formal structures and policies as well as informal habits and norms—*the ways of the organization* that constitute its particular style. Are people's interactions generally friendly and congenial or formal and distant? Is volunteer recognition based on team or individual achievement? Is information shared widely or kept close? Do people communicate primarily on paper, electronically or verbally? Is the authority structure relatively flat or are there many layers to the hierarchy? Is the organization open to innovation or is the focus on doing things the established way?

It is critical to consider this facet of the Diversity Diamond because all too often the organizational culture ("the way things are done around here") is out of step with publicly espoused values, such as valuing diversity. Well-intentioned leaders *may not even be aware* that the organizational culture and espoused values are not aligned, which can lead to great bewilderment if volunteers of various racial and ethnic groups do not stay involved.

Organizational Culture is often a blind spot in diversity change efforts, yet without addressing this critical facet, diversity efforts may be met with skepticism or cynicism. Often the implicit assumption among long- term members is that new recruits will assimilate into the organization and become "just like us." For example, in the national organization mentioned earlier, meeting time and location affected volunteer retention. Long-time members, who were generally older and economically well-off, had held meetings on weekdays in their suburban homes for many years. In many cases, newer members (recruited during a successful urban volunteer recruitment effort) who were often younger, had small children, and typically had inflexible work schedules, had great difficulty attending meetings and gradually dropped out.

How meetings are run also makes a difference. The board of a women's shelter, which included several white professional women, were comfortable with strictly task-oriented meetings that they considered to be highly efficient. As they worked to diversify the board, they found they needed to incorporate more social time in their meetings. A more subtle issue that this board considered was to understand why some people spoke up frequently and were heard while others were quiet and did not have as much input. The assertive style of some of the professional women was found to be alienating to others, including, it turned out, some of the other professional women. They decided to try using a meeting observer who would track who spoke when, how they were responded to, who was ignored, who shifted the direction of conversation, etc. A regular part of the meeting would then be devoted to sharing the observations and discussing people's reactions and perceptions.

Meeting style and substance is just one of many dimensions of organizational culture that can and should be examined. In short, how an organization conducts its internal affairs speaks volumes to new volunteers.

INTERACTION

Sometimes organizations attempt to create change by addressing the issue of culture without examining other dimensions of the Diversity Diamond. Changes in formal policies are made, new processes put in place, new rules

are legislated, but because work focused at the individual level of personal awareness and social relationships is not done, the changes remain superficial. Area 3 of the diagram, *Interaction*, describes an external focus at the individual level. Effective interaction—the ability to engage and work productively with people from various backgrounds—is necessary for building the inclusive organization. Interaction is the facet of the Diversity Diamond that focuses attention on how individuals relate to other individuals.

The key to effective interaction across differences is to make those very differences an explicit part of the conversation. It is by discussing our differences, rather than making them taboo, that people learn to better understand each other, negotiate more effectively, recognize everyone's contributions, resolve disagreements, and engage in creative problem solving. The board of the women's shelter previously mentioned began a discussion of what constituted assertive behavior. When was someone overbearing or merely assertive? Some of the board members were lawyers, practiced in the art of aggressively negotiating (without taking things personally). Others were unaccustomed and uncomfortable with this approach. At the same time, some members openly expressed their emotions, which they saw as demonstrating passion and energy, while others saw this as inappropriately expressing anger. By discussing these different ways of interacting, they were able to start to understand each other better.

Work in this facet of the Diversity Diamond involves the opportunity to develop a habit of learning how to navigate the various social and professional behaviors of our colleagues. We emphasize a habit of learning because developing cultural competence (the ability to interact appropriately with people of different cultures while minimizing culture shock for oneself and for others) is not the same as knowing exactly what to say and do at all times. Leaders in one volunteer organization asked us (in almost exactly these words), "What do African Americans want"? Essentially, they wanted us to give them guidance on how to successfully interact with all major racial and ethnic groups, so that they would be alert to the preferences of various groups and would not make any mistakes. Reaching that kind of perfect competence is impossible, and waiting until one gets everything just right is a sure way not to get started at all. Cultural competence requires, instead, adopting a stance of curiosity and inquisitiveness, learning to ask questions, and checking out our assumptions in a respectful manner.

Interacting with others who may be different in some important ways requires a large measure of humility. Because each of us is immersed in our own culture (racial, ethnic, religious, etc.), we are likely to think that our way is the way. Until we interact directly with those who are very different, we may have no cause to examine why we do what we do and think the way we do. Yet we are likely to judge those who act out of a different set of assumptions or culture. If we are not aware of the cultural underpinnings of our judgments, we can be prone to express unintentional bias. The careless comment, the irritation at new or different ways of approaching problems, the innocent joke, the rush to judge ways of interacting are all evidence of unintentional bias. Dialogue that allows people to explore the impact felt by some of the "well-intentioned" but careless comments or the "just-for-fun" joke helps bring unintentional biases to the surface. In the long run, such interaction can promote increased understanding and provide the basis for building trust and renewing relationships.

SELF AWARENESS

No one wants to believe that they have biases, but even people who are well-intentioned and support diversity in principle have them. Others are likely to be more aware of unintentional biases than the person who holds them. If and when confronted, a person can legitimately say, "I didn't mean anything by it", or, "I had no idea." One's ability to increasingly recognize biases and interact with others effectively depends to a great extent on one's own awareness. Socrates calls to us across the ages with the injunction, "Know thyself." With respect to diversity, *Self- Awareness* (Area 4, the facet of the Diversity Diamond that focuses on individuals' internal life) refers to increasing understanding and acknowledgment of one's

own personal beliefs, attitudes, assumptions, and behaviors. Everyone is part of the diversity picture, and through self-reflection, the individual learns to see that diversity is about "me" as much as it is about "them."

For example, in a small non-profit office, an African-American woman was upset by the work habits of her Latin-American colleague. Rather than conduct himself with the fastidiousness she was accustomed to as a federal worker and school teacher—clear and adhered-to schedules, formal meetings, clearly demarcated personal office and work space—he preferred a more gregarious approach. He was talkative, invited people into his office at all times regardless of what was already scheduled, and moved in and out of her office freely. One day in conversation, he revealed that he was raised in the mountains in a small village where the houses had no doors. People came and went into each other's homes with impunity. Immediately, she understood that what she had seen as disrespectfulness and poor work habits were, for him, exactly the opposite. He was being responsive and accessible, critical work values for him. Until they had this discussion, both parties judged the other from their own cultural lens.

As awareness increases, often through interactions with those who are different, individuals can better understand their own contributions to the dynamics of diversity and take responsibility for their part in organizational dynamics. Some members of an all-volunteer cross-cultural task force initially resisted the idea of participating in a diversity training workshop that we facilitated. As one member (a woman of color) put it during the evaluation, "I didn't understand why we needed diversity training— we're already diverse!" Yet as group members explored their own personal understanding and their interactions with each other, they identified incorrect assumptions they had been making about each other. They recognized that they had a wide range of views regarding diversity and acceptable behavior, even within their exceptionally multicultural group. The workshop offered individuals an opportunity to focus carefully on their values and preferences, how those preferences shaped their perceptions of others, and what kinds of interactions they valued. With greater awareness, they were better prepared to interact with each other more effectively and to join together to further their work in the community.

CONTINUOUS LEARNING

The willingness and ability to learn from each new interaction and each new program is central to diversity work— *Continuous Learning* (see Area 5 of the diagram, page 3) is at the core of the Diversity Diamond. The world is changing too rapidly for any of us to have all the answers. And whatever answers we may believe we have will only be "right" for a limited time. It is better to begin a diversity effort knowing that the process will require that we update and revise previously held truths rather than expecting to figure it all out once and for all.

A change made in one facet of the Diversity Diamond will have an impact on another facet. An organization may begin a diversity effort by creating new outreach programs only to learn (if the group's members are open to learning) that the organizational culture does not welcome of diversity. The program may be launched with great fanfare, only to fizzle out soon after when newly recruited members leave. Alternatively, after participating in awareness-building training and interacting with people from a wide range of racial and ethnic backgrounds, group members may realize the need to take broader action in the organization to ensure that improved individual interaction is supported through the formal and informal organizational culture. What has worked for years may need to be reviewed: a group may have created effective relationships with the local African- American community, but may now need to decide how to respond to an influx of immigrants from Southeast Asia into the neighborhood. Even when there is one kind of diversity, for example, racial diversity, an organizational culture may not be as supportive of those who are gay, much older (or younger), or physically and emotionally challenged. Recognizing that there will be ongoing learning means that an organization must be open to a broad range of changes. Rather than seeing diversity as a "quick fix" solution to the challenge of the moment, the goal should be incorporating diversity throughout the organization.

CHOOSING ACTION STEPS

We have found that successful diversity initiatives require:

- Strong leadership commitment coupled with realistic expectations.
- Seeing the effort as an ongoing process.
- Focusing attention on multiple facets of the organization.
- Using multiple types of interventions.
- Learning from successes and mistakes.

The Diversity Diamond helps focus our attention on different types of action and how they may be coordinated. While action is needed in all facets and should be coordinated, action need not be carried out simultaneously in all facets. It is more important to keep all facets in mind and ensure that they are addressed over time, than it is to try to do everything at once. Even small organizations with limited budgets can, like larger organizations, use the model to promote diversity by planning a long-term process, and identifying which changes in each facet can be accomplished with available resources, and those that will require additional funding.

GAINING AN OVERVIEW AND CONDUCTING PLANNING

As mentioned previously, it is common for groups to jump in headfirst and try a new publicity effort or new program (Outreach) or to organize a training session (Self- Awareness) without having a thorough understanding of the issues involved. A diversity initiative should begin, however, with the Continuous Learning facet: understanding the state of diversity dynamics in the organization and planning an effort that involves coordinated action in each of the five facets. For example, many groups want to increase the diversity of the Volunteer Board of Directors. Before bringing new members on board, the long-run success of the effort will be increased if the current board: (1) conducts a thorough assessment of its effectiveness, and (2) considers the current mix of board members' skills, experiences, interests, and racial and ethnic attributes. It may be the case, for instance, that the board is lacking someone who has experience and skill in accounting as well as lacking men of color. Board members could then make a focused effort to contact professional associations for accountants of color.

A solid effort at developing a baseline understanding of the current diversity picture in all facets of the Diversity Diamond is critical to determining a course of action. Information can be gathered in many ways, for example, through surveys, focus groups, interviews, benchmarking other organizations, and conducting a literature search. Questions of interest include: What are the current and projected demographics of the service area? How is the program viewed by current and potential constituents? What successes and mistakes have we already had in terms of diversity work and what can we learn? Without adequate information, it is difficult to set appropriate goals or develop adequate action plans, in which case diversity efforts are more likely to be scattershot or incomplete.

At the same time it can be tempting to get lost in the research alone and mistake it for action. The challenge is to learn enough to inform the start of the diversity process. After the initiative is underway, it will be necessary to continuously reflect on what we are learning as action in one facet of the model generates new learning and informs subsequent action in other facets.

INCREASING AWARENESS

After assessing the organization and developing a comprehensive plan of action, it is common to initiate some form of awareness-building activity, most commonly training for all staff and volunteers (Other actions that build personal awareness include reflection through keeping a journal, reading, and regular dialogue with others). As the organization embarks on the diversity journey, it is critical that the individuals within the organization are prepared to take their part. Their awareness of differences, and of their own biases and preferences, will be fundamental to shifting the dynamic in the organization.

Unfortunately, this is often the only action step that is taken. Training to increase awareness is vital, but should not be seen as an event isolated from other efforts. If self- awareness training is the primary focus of diversity work,

not only will the other organizational facets be ignored, but people often walk away feeling that they, as individuals, are being blamed for the organization's lack of diversity.

Personal awareness may begin to shift at a training, but it will need to be sustained and further developed after the training session is over. Attention will need to be paid to how the group as a whole will follow-up. Will there be support for changing behaviors and acting on the insights gained from the training? For example, individuals may decide to organize a group to increase their awareness through reading and discussing books about diverse cultures and ideas they are unfamiliar with. However, because there are likely to be differences of opinion, and because unintentional biases may be explored, dialogue and negotiation (both Interaction skills), and meeting design and facilitation (Organizational Culture) skills will be important. An awareness- building training session may encourage attendees to reflect on how unintentional biases affect team collaboration (an example of Interaction), but if supervisors do not allow or reward collaboration (in other words, the Organizational Culture does not support teams), the training session will have little long-term impact.

IMPROVING INTERACTION

Along with awareness training, many groups also initiate training in communication, negotiation, or conflict resolution skills—all of which are important, given the central role Interaction plays in promoting a diverse organization. Other action steps may include establishing dialogue groups in which discussion about differences can occur, and encouraging shared celebrations of diverse holidays.

Focus on interaction helps people translate their new awareness and curiosity about others into productive engagements. More effective and creative problem-solving and collaboration across differences is the desired outcome. However, it is important to remember that diversity involves more than how people "get along." Over- emphasizing interaction may lead to ignoring organizational policies and procedures. As one participant in a training session said, "What good is it if people are nice to me but I can't get ahead in the organization?"

EXAMINING STRUCTURE, POLICIES, AND AUTHORITY RELATIONSHIPS

It can be challenging to identify aspects of Organizational Culture and the impact of the culture for diversity. No one individual can possibly identify all relevant characteristics, so it is important to encourage a frank sharing of views with staff, board members, volunteers, and potentially other stakeholders, such as colleagues in partnering organizations. Conducting focus groups, surveys, and discussion groups (activities that also contribute to Continuous Learning) can help. Based on the results of this exploration, it may be necessary to make some changes in the way volunteers are managed to make sure that they are supported and supervised appropriately.

For example, there may be subtle biases in the volunteer interviewing and assessment process. Managers may mistake a preferred style for actual skill. A manager may be more comfortable with one volunteer who is socially outgoing but be critical of another, quieter, volunteer, even though both volunteers effectively accomplish their work. It is important to ensure that the most exciting, sought-after projects, as well as mentoring and recognition, are provided equitably.

Volunteer managers should be sure that the organization is effectively accommodating people's differing volunteer schedules and special needs, such as childcare or physical challenges. For example, a requirement that all introductory training occur on Saturday mornings may inadvertently disadvantage some people who attend religious observances at that time.

Organizational Culture is a challenging facet to address because most people do not "see" it. Especially for people who have been in the organization for a while, culture is simply "the way things are done"; it is taken for granted. Developing a shared vision of the way the group would like to be and then identifying and implementing the behaviors and policies that support the vision are critical steps. One way to start to identify an organization's culture is to facilitate discussions with new and long-term volunteers and employees regarding "what it's like to volunteer (or work) here." How is it

different to be involved in this organization in contrast to organizations with similar missions and constituencies?

Culture does not change overnight. For this reason, it is often ignored or perfunctorily addressed. Yet if culture is given short shrift, it make it difficult for some to succeed, leading to confusion and disillusionment.

CREATING AND ADAPTING PROGRAMS, PROJECTS AND PRODUCTS

How an organization responds to diverse communities—External Relations—will be improved as work on the other four facets of the Diversity Diamond proceeds. Groups will be better able to conduct intentional and assured volunteer recruitment campaigns the more that members have a thorough grounding in diversity dynamics. A key to successful outreach, therefore, is not simply to employ better advertising, but to ensure that group members fully understand the concerns and perspectives of the community of interest. Establishing a community Advisory Council and conducting focus groups in the community are ways to gain feedback on people's perceptions of the organization's image and effectiveness. Including the community's voice in an organization's strategic planning efforts can both inform the organization's development of projects and programs, and build relationships with key stakeholders and communities. The information gained will inform other facets of diversity.

Overemphasizing External Relations through "outreach" carries with it the implicit assumption that all that promoting diversity requires is creating an effective slogan or advertising campaign. The need to look "inside" and increase awareness and skills or change policies and practices may be ignored. It is often expected that new volunteers or members will do all the changing and "assimilate" to the organization as it is. This can lead to the widely held view that many diversity efforts are just superficial "window dressing." On the other hand, the concerted effort to build partnerships with community groups and listen to the hopes and concerns of people from diverse heritages can demonstrate an organization's commitment to a multicultural society.

CONCLUSION

Creating change in organizations is difficult, regardless of the type of change desired, and promoting diversity is no different. It is a process, not a one-time event. In some ways, promoting diversity is no different than creating an organizational emphasis on customer service or continuous quality improvement. One day of training in customer service or quality is not enough to ensure that staff and volunteers have the understanding, skills, support, and resources to respond to customer service concerns effectively. And the development of a snappy slogan or inspirational slide show are not enough to sustain organizational diversity long-term.

The Diversity Diamond model directs attention to the multiple aspects of a diversity initiative and encourages a multi-faceted assessment and coordinated action steps. Most importantly, the model reminds us that ongoing learning is part of the process. We will make mistakes along the way, but mistakes provide the best opportunities for learning. The work is rich and ongoing; that is what makes it exciting.