Inquiry of audience about diversity assessment in their institutions

Let’s begin with audience participation – not to put you on the spot, but to find out a little about the experience, expertise and resources in our audience:

1. How many of you have specifically defined and planned diversity initiatives? Do they include a diversity committee or council? How about a staff person with specific responsibility for diversity initiatives?
2. How long ago did your efforts officially begin – if you know? More than ten years? More than five? Less than five?

Introduction

The goal of this presentation is to show that diversity initiatives can be assessed – i.e., that an organization can determine how “real” its diversity and organizational climate are -- and that those assessments can be used as tools to manage and identify areas of growth and development for organizational change.\(^1\) The presentation should enable the audience to understand that assessment can be used as a way to realize the benefits of real, productive diversity. (“Real” signifies integration into the organization of the principles and values of inclusion, respect, personal responsibility and empowerment, high performance and commitment to the organization. Real diversity says, “We are all on the same team, with our differences, not despite them.”\(^2\))

This presentation will have the following elements:
- Rationale for diversity assessment generally;
- Current research and efforts in diversity assessment in libraries;
- Experience of University of Maryland Libraries with a major assessment and plans for a second;
- Adaptability of research and other libraries’ studies for audience.

Before we do any of that, though, we need to say what we mean. As you know, diversity can be an elusive term. As DeEtta Jones wrote in the Association of Research Libraries’ Leading Issues:

Early affirmative action legislation focused on a narrow set of groups; over time, the discussion has become more inclusive. To endorse a broad definition of diversity, some libraries have created diversity statements. The University of Michigan is among the
pioneers in this work and adopted this language: ‘Diversity is all the characteristics that can be used to describe humans. We are all diverse in many ways. Unique intersections of these characteristics define each individual’s diversity. Examples – in alphabetical order -- are:

- age
- ancestry
- cognitive style
- cultural background
- economic background
- ethnicity
- gender
- geographic background
- language(s) spoken
- marital/partnered status
- nationality
- disability (mental, learning, physical)
- physical appearance
- political affiliation
- race
- religious beliefs
- sexual orientation

Although diversity initiatives per se are not the focus of my presentation today, I must say how important it is that an organization define what it means in a diversity initiative and what goals it wants to gain and how those goals are to be reached – i.e., the concept of managing diversity. R. Roosevelt Thomas, Jr. posits that managing diversity is different from affirmative action or the approach of valuing differences. He sees managing diversity as a “way of thinking toward the objective of creating an environment that will enable all employees to reach their full potential in pursuit of organizational objectives.” Another take on it is “This diversity framework highlights the reality of the diversity forest that is greater than an individual’s pet diversity tree.”

In his wonderful book, Building a House for Diversity: How a Fable about a Giraffe & an Elephant Offers New Strategies for Today’s Workforce, Thomas writes that context is everything. A compelling motive must be developed in three key areas: the workforce, workplace and marketplace. Without this motive, efforts are seen as extraneous, and commitment is minimal.

I support Thomas’ approach in that it moves diversity away from being a program or a movement or a trend. It becomes a way of life. It becomes “real” diversity. The challenge is determining whether “real” diversity exists in our organizations.

Rationale for diversity assessment generally

As we have acknowledged already and as the shows of hand just confirmed, diverse workforces in supportive and productive work environments are reported to be major concerns of many libraries. However, diversity assessment has only recently become a tool in libraries for measuring and planning change, and as a result, assessment of diversity initiatives is still scattered. As an aside, I will note we are not the only profession in which this is true. A member of the Association for Assessment in Counseling noted in Issues in Advancing Diversity through Assessment: “This title suggests an important focus which is recent in our profession; using assessment as a proactive tool to initiate change rather than in a more passive, defensive way to insure that we aren’t harming someone.”
The thesis of this presentation is that, for large libraries, anecdotal or observational evidence of how the organization is faring with diversity efforts is inadequate and that systematic, reliable assessments must be undertaken. (“Large” libraries include, but are not limited to, those belonging to the Urban Libraries Council or the Association of Research Libraries. Library systems with multiple sites are also good candidates for systematic assessment.)

You may need to undertake a systematic diversity assessment in order to meet the requirements or suggestions of your parent organization or you may wish to show leadership to your parent organization by undertaking an assessment before it is suggested or required that you do so.

Again I quote Thomas in his argument for auditing an organization’s culture:

If the goal is not to assimilate diversity into the dominant culture but rather to build a culture that can digest unassimilated diversity, then you better start by figuring out what your present culture looks like. Since what we’re talking about here is the body of unspoken and unexamined assumptions, values, and mythologies that make your world go round, this kind of cultural audit is impossible to conduct without outside help. It’s a research activity. . .

Current research and efforts in diversity assessment

I am indebted to Johnnie Love, formerly with the Texas A&M Libraries and now Personnel Programs Coordinator with the University of Maryland Libraries – and my valued colleague – for broadening my horizons about diversity initiatives and diversity assessments. In a chapter of the 2001 monograph, Diversity Now, Johnnie said that, through reviewing the literature, she found that, “other than reporting the number of new employees hired, few libraries have found ways to assess and document diversity progress.”

Because of the lack of models for assessing diversity in the academic library, she drew on corporate resources to develop a survey instrument with nine variables: awareness of diversity issues, shifting of power, diversity of opinion, lack of empathy, tokenism, learning, participation, overcoming inertia and racism. These variables were developed to assess all services and operations of the library. The objective was to assess observable and unobservable behaviors and attitudes. The survey was used with three pilot groups.

The data from her study showed diversity assessment as a viable tool for diagnosing how prepared academic libraries are to integrate their diversity initiatives into all services and operations. She reported, “The academic libraries in the study were not meeting the needs of all staff members, thereby not making the workplace a welcoming environment.”

Another notable assessment of diversity climate is in the Fairfax County Public Library. In an article in Library Administration and Management, Summer 2000, Fairfax staffers wrote, “Evaluating diversity initiatives is still a new phenomenon, with only a few academic and public libraries attempting such studies.” The authors said Fairfax County PL may have been the first public library to do an assessment. The Columbus Metropolitan Library in Ohio used the Fairfax model to do a study as well.
The motivators for the Fairfax study were Diversity Committee members who wanted feedback on how they were doing. They wanted to evaluate their success and think about new directions. The idea for a survey originated with the Diversity Committee. A survey was designed in-house and was divided into four sections:

1. FCPL Practices and Policies
2. Diversity in the Workplace
3. Staff/Patron Interaction
4. FCPL’s Diversity Program

The Fairfax authors concluded with these statements: “What Fairfax County Public Library discovered from its Diversity Climate Survey was not only what needed to be improved, but what it was doing right and also where new diversity activities should be headed. . . . Future plans include a possible follow-up survey in three to five years. . . . Other libraries should find such evaluation tools extremely useful in the new demographics of the twenty-first century.”

The Fairfax approach may be unusual in that the assessment was done in-house. It appears more common to contract it out. As a matter of fact, the Association of Research Libraries, or ARL, has sponsored at least one workshop, “The Role of Assessment in Advancing Diversity for Libraries, for which its stated goal is “to provide participants with vocabulary that will facilitate their interaction with researchers and consultants who systematically collect information and do survey research.” ARL has also offered this workshop online several times in recent years, as part of its Online Lyceum.

Of course, if you are comfortable doing surveys in-house, you might consider shorter, less formal surveys, done periodically, to take the temperature of your organization and see how it compares over time. One handout is an example, provide by the University of Maryland’s Ombuds Officer for Staff. It is titled, “Survey of Workplace Climate.”

University of Maryland Libraries’ experience with a major assessment and plans for a second

This next portion of my presentation will summarize the experience at the University of Maryland Libraries. I will cover

- reasons for the initial assessment,
- approach and tools used,
- results,
- significant follow-up or interventions undertaken as a result of the 2000 assessment,
- current plans for a second assessment to determine the success of the interventions.

In November 1995 the University of Maryland Dean of Libraries appointed a Coordinator of Services to Diverse Populations and a Diversity Committee. The staff person’s title was later renamed to “Diversity Coordinator.” The three main goals of the Libraries’ Diversity Initiative, as then stated, were

1. To hire and retain a diverse workforce,
2. To foster a work environment where all employees are valued for their uniqueness and personal contributions.
3. To provide services and collections that meet users’ individual and diverse needs.

In 1998 and 1999, the Diversity Committee began planning for a diversity training component in staff development programs that would address diversity issues. The diversity assessment was initiated with the goal of determining whether there was a need within the Libraries to conduct diversity training and, if so, what content areas should be included. In September 1999 the Libraries’ manager of Staff Training and Development approached the chair of the campus Industrial/Organizational Psychology Department about conducting a diversity needs assessment for the Libraries.

The parallel and underlying purpose of the diversity assessment was to provide a snapshot of where the Libraries were then in achieving the principles of diversity, particularly focusing on individual attitudes and beliefs, organizational culture, and management practices and policies. It provided baseline data against which the organization's future progress could be measured. Because diversity issues are only one aspect of the whole organizational system, we soon determined that it would be necessary to collect information about the general organizational culture in addition to information about diversity issues.

The I/O Psychology Department researchers, three doctoral students assigned to our project, began with focus groups, the goal being to sample at least 15% of the employee population. There were eight focus groups with forty total employees, who responded to five questions regarding general climate perceptions and diversity at the Libraries:

1. Please tell us about your experiences while working in the Libraries and the kind of climate in which you work (i.e., the kinds of events and/or practices that are rewarded and are expected of employees).
2. Can you tell me about the interpersonal relations between employees in this organization?
3. Please tell me about any problems that you have seen in this organization that are related to diversity issues.
4. How do you think employees feel about the Diversity Initiative and how do you think they feel about diversity issues in general?
5. What recommendations do you have for the Libraries’ Diversity Initiative?

A survey for all library employees was then constructed. The researchers did a literature review to determine what important predictor and outcome variables to include. They also wrote questions and included published scales that reflected the themes that emerged from the focus groups. One purpose of the survey was to examine whether or not the issues that surfaced in the focus groups were representative of the library employee population at large, and to link employee perceptions of organizational culture and diversity to organizational outcome variables. The survey’s questions and scales dealt with topics such as organizational commitment, job satisfaction, distributive fairness, ethnic and gender harassment, and perceptions of fair interpersonal treatment.

Since our goal was to assess the attitudes and experiences of all library employees through the survey, we aimed to administer it to as many employees as possible. The survey was not sent to people. Instead, we booked a large library conference room, set up tables and chairs, provided snacks, and the researchers administered the survey in that room. The survey was administered
on four different days and took an average of 45 minutes to one hour to complete. Library employees received a letter from the Dean in advance, requesting their participation. In addition, employees who could not participate during any of the four days could fill out the survey and mail it to the researchers. Two hundred sixty employees participated (82% of library employees) and every division in the Libraries was well represented.

The survey consisted of two types of scales. The first reflected the themes encountered in the focus groups, as well as items that reflect common themes found in the diversity literature. This type of scale was designed to reflect whether the Libraries have a climate for diversity. The second major type of scale is those drawn from previous organizational research. These scales include the following: Ethnic Harassment, Gender Harassment, Armed Forces Ethnic Experiences Inventory, Job Satisfaction, Organizational Commitment, Organizational Withdrawal, Perceptions of Fair Interpersonal Treatment, Distributive Justice, Continuous Learning Culture, Managerial Practices, and Work Group Conflict. Each of these scales was used to evaluate an aspect of the Libraries' organizational culture, or individuals' experiences.

There is not time to tell you how the Libraries fared in each of those scales, but I will summarize the researchers’ findings and recommendations. In sum, the first recommendation of the researchers was for the Libraries to be cognizant of the critical role that organizational culture plays in the effective management of all human resources in the Libraries, and to be willing to challenge this existing culture. Other recommendations are as follow:

**Diversity Plan and Timeframe:** The assessment data provided in this report should be utilized to enact a detailed, well defined, long-term diversity plan that clearly defines all objectives and the steps necessary to attain the objectives of a multicultural organization.

**Defining Diversity:** This diversity plan should also include an explicit definition of diversity as it will be applied within the University of Maryland Libraries.

**Diversity Committee:** Management should work together with the Diversity Committee to establish the strategies necessary to implement the diversity plan. The Libraries' Diversity Committee should play a role that is more critically linked to organizational processes. The definition of the Diversity Committee should be expanded to include a broader range of functions and duties.

**Visible Change:** The change process began when the Libraries solicited the opinions of all employees, thus the Administration must follow through on the results of this survey.

The researchers had these specific recommendations for action:

**Managerial Training:** The results of this assessment suggest that the University of Maryland Libraries would benefit from managerial training. Indeed, over 90% of survey respondents agreed that managers should be required to attend interpersonal skills training. Such training would be important for addressing many issues that arose in the assessment, including the standardization of procedures across groups, fairness in the distribution of rewards, intercultural sensitivity and communication, how to encourage employee participation and voice, how to build effective teams, and how to play an active role in subordinates' development and mentoring. Diversity and awareness would play a part in such training. However, they would not be the primary focus.
Standardization of Procedures: Both focus group and survey results indicated that many employees perceive that the library administration should pay further attention to ensuring that the Libraries' policies, practices, and procedures are standardized across groups. Two critical areas of concern are the performance review and development process and the procedures for awarding merit increases.

Recruitment and Selection of Ethnic Minorities: The primary way to increase the proportion of ethnic minorities in upper management is to hire more minorities who have the background necessary to advance. More aggressive recruiting efforts need to be implemented in order to broaden the applicant pool. In addition, training should be provided for interviewers at all levels of the organization in order to minimize rater biases in the selection process.

Empowerment and Trust: Employees of the Libraries expressed an interest in having more voice and being more empowered in the decision making process. One of the most important guidelines for building trust is to follow through on one's commitments. If employees are to feel more empowered, then decision-making must be collective, and employees must be able to see that their suggestions are translated into actions.

Mentoring: There is clear evidence in the literature that mentoring serves a very important function in an individual's career success. Formal mechanisms for monitoring the progress of mentoring relationships should be established.

The Libraries' Social Environment: A suggestion that surfaced in the focus groups was that employees should be given more opportunities to socialize in a non-work environment (i.e., opportunities other than the holiday party in December). The majority of survey respondents (over 65%) agreed that the Libraries should sponsor social activities for employees.

Group Initiatives: Management should also be particularly aware of the high levels of reported satisfaction with co-workers across all groups, and use this finding to its full advantage. More specifically, the cultural survey and the focus groups both revealed that employees generally have positive relationships with co-workers in their immediate work groups. Furthermore, Library employees tend to react positively to group- or team-based initiatives. The Libraries are a prime example of an organization that could benefit from team-based structures and initiatives.

Advisory Groups: Feedback regarding the Advisory Group in Public Services has been extremely positive, and focus group and survey results suggest that other divisions would also benefit from such an opportunity.

Diversity Training: The results of this assessment indicate that the problems related to diversity in the Libraries are intricately linked to other organizational processes, hence the researchers suggested that the processes be examined as a system. They thought that the implementation of training that isolates diversity from other organizational processes would not be the best avenue for the Libraries at that time. Managerial training can address many issues discovered by this assessment, including aspects of cultural awareness and diversity, however the primary purpose of such training is not "diversity training."

Tokenism in the Libraries' Search Committees: Many library employees reported dissatisfaction with the current system of being forced to place an African-American on every search committee. While understanding the administrative constraints placed by the university, the researchers recommended the Libraries continue their role as a leader in diversity on campus by expanding the definition of diversity.
Interventions, Changes and Accomplishments as a Result of 2000 OCDA

The Diversity Committee and the Library Executive Council met jointly to review the results of the study. In October 2000, two forums were held to afford all library staff an opportunity to discuss the results of the cultural assessment and its implications for diversity in the Libraries. (By the way, those forums for general communication and sharing information continue to date as monthly all-staff meetings.) In the fall of 2000 we got to work to follow up on the study’s findings and recommendations.

We not only addressed the need for managerial training. In May 2001 we inaugurated the Learning Curriculum, a comprehensive learning and education plan of over 150 content hours that focuses on individual and organizational development. The Learning Curriculum is comprised of ten components which in turn include a number of modules. Here are the components:

- Introduction: Development of the Organization
- Defining Customer Service
- Measurement, Evaluation and Continuous Improvement for Planning and Decision-Making
- Development of Self, Teams and Workgroups
- Exploring Leadership and Followership
- Individual Improvement
- Computer Skills
- Library Basic Skills
- Leadership Development
- Train-the-Trainer

We’ve offered workshops in all these areas but have focused on leadership development, customer service, supervisory skills and computer skills to date. Notably, in 2003 we did a “Summer for Supervisors” series which included a “Dealing with Differences” component. It focused on methods to more effectively manage cultural differences in the workplace. In that same extended series we just had workshops on conflict management in April.

In 2002 we formalized support for participation in professional development and learning activities in Administrative Memo letting staff know that each person can use approximately eight hours per month of work time for workshops and other learning activities. That decision grew out of an earlier effort where several of the Libraries’ units and committees co-sponsored video showings of PBS’s Race & Diversity and Diversity & the Arts. We said staff could use up to three hours of work time to view and discuss theses videos.

We continue other efforts at open communication. One example from August 2001 is that a total of 96 library staff participated in two town hall meetings entitled: “Bridging the Gap: Overcoming Us vs. Them.” The program was designed as a means to surface issues and concerns and to create an open climate in which to begin discussing perceived barriers to moving the library forwards as an organization.
We strengthened support for staff and answered some of the findings of our 2000 assessment by describing and filling a new position in 2001 – that of **Coordinator of Personnel Programs**. Johnnie Love has this position. She works with others to assure that library employees have a productive, challenging work environment and that work planning and performance review and other personnel programs are similarly handled throughout the Libraries. This individual has begun several important programs, among them a **Support Group for Advanced Studies**, a pilot group of library staff who are interested in furthering their studies. It began with a core group of 14 staff members, and currently has approximately 19 members. Johnnie coordinates mentoring programs, both for library staff and for faculty librarians.

We also sponsor social occasions for library employees that are held on work time. For example, our Diversity and Goodwill Committees co-sponsored the **new staff luncheons** in October 2002 and 2003 and plan to do so again this year. Our Diversity Committee sponsors various activities like brown-bag videos. Last year they even published a cookbook of recipes from a multicultural staff!

Our **planning** has improved as well. We have library-wide diversity plans, as required by the university. The Libraries’ Diversity Committee has its own work plans that are more detailed for its purposes. In short, acting on the findings and recommendations of the 2000 assessment, we have tried to address learning time, social time, information-sharing and communication, and standardization of policies and procedures.

**Plans for Second Diversity, Cultural Assessment in 2004**

How well have we done? We’ll find out soon. Yes, we are indeed underway for the second major diversity and organizational culture assessment later this month. I hope you can tell from the activities I just summarized, plus many more, how much effort we have invested into acting on the findings and recommendations of the 2000 study. We need to know which have succeeded and why or why not and what we need to do in the future.

We returned to the Industrial/Organizational Psychology Department on campus and fortunately the department was interested again in undertaking the study with and for us. We are following the same pattern as with the 2000 assessment and have actually already held focus group sessions so our researchers can gain insight into current concerns and use that information to refine the survey.

We want to test several important areas:

- how the views and experiences of staff who were here in 2000 and participated in that survey have changed;
- how the views and experiences of staff who were NOT here in 2000 differ from those who were here in 2000 and who participated in that survey;
- how the spread of a team-based environment has changed individuals’ perspectives and accomplishments.

The survey will again be administered over several days and staff will come to a large room to fill out the survey rather than having it mailed to them.
The survey this time will be shorter. We recognize we can cover specific areas with fewer questions and still have statistical reliability without the painful and nuanced redundancy experienced by some of us who took the survey in 2000. A big challenge for us, leading up to and into the 2004 survey, is to persuade staff to consider only what the Libraries internally have done, not the external environmental of the last couple of years, during which we have had reduced budgets, no merit or cost-of-living salary increases, and we have had to hold positions open.

Adaptability of research and other libraries’ studies for audience.

The final segment of the presentation will briefly outline how audience members might adapt the published research on diversity assessment and the University of Maryland’s approach. There are several factors to this potential adaptation:

**What outcomes you seek:** Do you have a venerable diversity initiative that needs new life and direction? Do you want to start an initiative but need to know first what problems or opportunities it needs to address?

**Which variables are most important to you:** For example, you may be interested in questions of justice. In your organization, is interpersonal, procedural, distributive or information justice more important to you? Where do you need to target your questions?

In other words, measure the right things. Measure what’s important in your organization.

**What interventions may be needed to make diversity as a way of life “real” in your libraries:** Are managerial and supervisory training and development needed? How about more open and consistent systems of communication? Do you need to pay more attention to how work planning and performance review take place across the organization and, if so, what will that intervention look like?

Contracting with outside experts for a diversity and organizational culture assessment is recommended. If you are in a university, you likely have some built-in resources. If you are in a city or town in which there is a university, you may likely have access to those same resources. Obviously, for public libraries, city or county governments’ departments of human resources are a source of expertise as well.

There are several other suggestions that may seem obvious but cannot be taken for granted if your assessment is to give you broad participation and reliable information:

- Support from senior managers and the head of the library,
- Assurance of anonymity of survey participants,
- Clear definition of diversity, diversity initiative, organizational culture, or other terms used in the survey,
- Definition of the environment one is to consider in answering the survey – e.g., ones immediate work unit, ones department, the whole library system?

We also need to be sure that our efforts are consistent with those of our parent organization.

**Conclusion**

The Association of Research Libraries identifies its assumptions about organizational assessment in its online course, “The Role of Assessment in Advancing Diversity for Libraries”:
Assessment is a sub-process of a larger system.

• The goal of assessment is to give us data about the reality in which we exist.
• Assessment without action can negatively impact organizational climate.
• Assessment methods should be honestly and thoroughly described before, during, and after the process.
• Planning for diversity should be based on an underlying knowledge of the organization.

ARL adds, “Effective assessment gives feedback to the organization that informs decisions related to resource allocation and areas for growth and enhancement. Most importantly, understanding organizational strengths and areas for improvement allows administrators to make adjustments that impact the organization’s performance.”

I will close with another quote in a similar vein, from my colleague, Johnnie Love: “Constructing and implementing diversity initiatives involves continuous experimentation, assessment, modification, and innovation. Assessment of diversity is an ongoing lifetime process of improvement.”

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iii DeEtta Jones, “Diversity: Where We Are and Where We Came From,” Leading Ideas 15


ix Love, 75.

x Love, 90.

xi Love, 97.


xiii Coats, 152.


xviii Ibid.