



The Paradox of Diversity

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 Written by Karen Stephenson

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The Paradox: "Why Can't We All Just Get Along?"

The word "diversity" has become politicized over the years, taking away from the real issue of majority versus minority subcultures in (ascending from small to large populations):

- Communities** (immigration, ghettos, criminality)
- Corporations** (discrimination, affirmative action, glass ceilings)
- Countries** (refugees, pogroms, emigration)

We don't have the space here to take on all three issues of community, corporation or country, so this article will only focus on the corporation.

First, let me, the anthropologist, take the apology out of anthropology by defining what I mean by minority. A 'minority' can be a man or a woman, any race or ethnicity, an outsider or an insider, have's and have-not's, etc., and these types of distinction among classes or categories of people are ancient. A corporation's human resources (HR) policy attempts to adjudicate this constantly changing demographic landscape in the interest of achieving equity, opportunity or 'fairness.' Even when seemingly sound HR policies are put in place to redress imbalances, unintended consequences or perverse outcomes can result. For example, consider the following cases.

Case 1: J.P. Morgan

In 2001, I was asked by head of the European office of J.P. Morgan, headquartered in London, to analyze his director population, a horizontal slice across the firm. This population totaled 3,000 and surprisingly was comprised of 1,500 men and 1,500 women, all of them directors, peers and domiciled in the European capital cities. This kind of statistical parity is rare and begs the question, "How did this come about?" The president of Europe confided to me that a decade ago he had embarked on a mission of overturning the abysmal statistic of a 2-3 percent director pool of women. He proceeded to (surreptitiously) hire talented women over equally talented men in order to balance the books and in seven years he had achieved his goal of statistical parity that had held constant for another three years. His goal in asking me to analyze the networks was to see if the network patterns reflected the statistical parity he had achieved over a decade of selective hiring.

When I examined the networks, I made an unexpected discovery. Networking measures among the female directors were 75 percent less than that among the male directors. On interviewing the women, I discovered that the women directors who were hired (or promoted) over the last seven years consistently reported that their prior female predecessors had been connected to significant and influential male mentors at the firm. Instead of "dress for success" it was more like "mentor for success," so they mimicked the behavior. Recognize however, that the early female pioneers were truly in a minority. Over successive years, the statistical gap closed but the behaviors did not change. Adopting a male mentor was a behavior that came to be imprinted on successive hiring generations, resulting in inefficiencies as statistical parity was attained. The women directors still perceived themselves in a statistical minority when the reality was that they were a minority in mind only.

Case 2: UCLA

In the 1990's, I was asked by the National Science Foundation to analyze the social networks of the professorial ranks in the School of Education. For 10 years, the director of the Leadership Institute had instituted a program for professional female mentoring as part of the leadership curriculum. She encouraged all the female professors, assistant, associate and full, to attend this course as part of their professional training. Remarkably, over the



This article is the second in a three-part series of cases examining the root causes underlying failed change initiatives. [The previous article](#) explained why most cultures drift back to "the way we were" instead of embracing "yes we can." This article is about why we find ourselves trapped in a paradox of supporting diversity when there are forces that take us in the opposite direction. The next installment will be focused on how globalization may accelerate fragmentation rather than lead to unification and the democratization of information.

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course of 10 years she had programmatically changed the demographic face of the school from the abysmal 2-3 percent of tenured female faculty to a whopping 48 percent. No other department or school on the UCLA campus had such a program and as a consequence, their tenure rate held at a consistent at 2-3 percent.

What made the difference here?

In the JP Morgan case we saw that mentoring occurred but not at a programmatic level. The UCLA School of Education departed from JP Morgan because the women professors were looking after the women professors. There was a strong, trusted network of women connecting to women to ensure that their careers did not go off the rails and their high tenure rate was proof of the success of this approach. So mentoring really does matter - minorities can break the stranglehold of majority legacies if mentoring is done consistently and programmatically.

Conclusion

But hold on! In these two cases it took 10 years to achieve change. However, a decade is far better than the empty promises we hear decade after decade of "It's in the pipeline." Most glass ceilings stay in place because individual efforts cannot overcome the policy of divide and conquer etched into the glass. Hiring minorities and women doesn't necessarily mean that corporations or universities are doing a good job of promoting them.

Moral

Measure your networks! It's one way (and a subtle one at that) in which you can reliably validate your policies and manage for real change!

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