CHAPTER 10

Playing the Long Game in a Short-Term World: Consequences and Strategies for Racial Justice Work

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Representatives of a volunteer organization want to understand and address the underlying causes for their lack of diversity. They have made modest progress toward diversity in race and class, and some chapters have successfully become more representative. But overall, despite action plans and good intentions, they are still overwhelmingly White. Given the demographic shifts in the USA, they fear the current slow loss of membership will accelerate if they do not change. They ask me, in almost plaintive tones, "What should we do first? What is the best way to proceed?"

A self-identified social justice organization asks how to integrate and reflect a racial justice lens in all they do, internally and externally. At the initial meeting with senior managers, they are eager to align action with analysis. "Where should we start?" There is disagreement about whether to start with the personal—awareness and healing—or the organizational—culture and strategy.

The key challenge in working toward racial and other diversity is mindset. Clients value action and expect a well-delineated set of steps they can follow to reach the desired diversity destination quickly and smoothly.

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They want content expertise and a technical solution to an adaptive problem (Heifetz & Laurie, 2001). In this chapter, after locating my own cultural orientation to diversity work, I describe approaches—systemic, being, process, and development—that challenge the short-term mindset characterized by the opposite orientations of linear, action, expert, and performance and, yet, paradoxically, provide demonstrable results. I conclude with dilemmas created by such positioning.

Cultural Shaping and Implications

I am fundamentally an immigrant. I came to the USA at seven years old from England, where I was born to Jamaican parents, to join family that was growing roots in New York in a larger Jamaican immigrant community at the time of the Civil Rights movement as it morphed into anti-war and anti-poverty movements. The larger dynamic and identity of the immigrant experience informs my work and life—deciphering this new place while tied, through family and community, to places of story but little direct experience. While inspired by movements for justice and inclusion, and drawn to the American promise, as an outsider, I experienced exclusion, ridicule, and even violence. I resolved to understand and address the cultural dissonance I encountered. My work now supports social justice organizations as they strive to embody and align their actions with their aspirations.

In that work, I have learned that means are ends. The way of doing is already the outcome. Results exist in the actions that create them. Justice requires acting justly. Love is cultivated by loving. Much of what individuals, organizations, and communities struggle with is the misalignment between their goals and the behaviors they use to achieve them.

From this realization flow several implications for consulting. First, it is best to be conscious of one's *true* intentions because the long term and short term are intimately and inextricably connected. Such intentions are beyond goal-setting. I help individuals, groups, and organizations attend to their values, deeper aspirations, and the ultimate visions that reflect those values. One group met to articulate their aspirations, yet initially they focused on what they thought they could achieve given significant opposition. They struggled to identify the ultimate vision that would bring their values into action. However, one year later, they reported the importance of establishing a shared vision, of being *for* something. They went from reacting to crises to building the community

they wanted to create, while creatively and effectively addressing the challenges they faced.

Second, focus on both the micro and the macro. If means are ends, then history, organizational or individual change are created in infinitesimally small actions, as well as the larger moments that are captured in official records. All past actions lead to the present state as parts of a system interact and adapt to each other. A linear approach assumes direct causality and can affect the system. But with an understanding of multiple interactions and variations, the linear approach is less comprehensive. When the terrain it assumes shifts and unacknowledged factors impact change, the linear approach externalizes responsibility for outcomes. A broader view of interplay among minute and large actions creates increased accountability and greater possibility for success. The client that wanted a clear roadmap ended up developing a process that accounted for multiple players and opportunities for input, feedback, and adjustment. After they spent time examining their own system and the many ways racial justice could be affected and reflected, they went from easy frustration with others to excited, if sober, accountability for themselves in interaction with their stakeholders.

Third, align actions with intentions. There is no distinction between action and being. If the micro constitutes the macro, then individuals and larger systems can investigate and hold themselves accountable to the enactment of their intentions in even, and especially the smallest ways. From Gandhi comes the guidance to be the change, to *demonstrate* desired changes, to bring the future into being now. It is an argument against expedience. Similarly, Schein (1992) establishes that leaders create organizational culture through role modeling and the observed criteria used for key decisions. In all cases, action is not separate from being but an expression of it. The Civil Rights Movement of the mid-twentieth century used simple yet powerful actions—sitting at lunch counters, registering to vote—whose potency came from aligning action and aspiration. After a client facing internal challenges of inclusion has identified its aspirations, we then discuss what actions will demonstrate the vision come to life. As one client said, "demonstrate, not pontificate." As the task force planned, they attended to details that would have gone unnoticed before—how to structure meetings, ways to express openness to new ideas, how to show respect for each other. The next, crucial, step was to support group members in taking those actions with each other, right now. They reported greater optimism, capacity, and willingness to persist.

Fourth, a long-term perspective that takes means as ends necessarily prizes process. How fitting then that my life and work align in my role as an organization development [OD] consultant.

Holism and Systems Thinking

Such a background leads me to appreciate holism and systems thinking in diversity work. Rather than see parts of a finite whole, diversity work asserts each part as a whole and the whole as a constellation of parts in dynamic relationship with one another. Change may be accomplished by changing *any* factor, singly or in concert with others, because such change disturbs the equilibrium of the system and requires it to adjust to a new state. It is true that the system will seek to maintain its current state by attempting to "reclaim" or "expel" the changed element(s), for example, the person who is encouraged to assimilate or is fired for being a poor fit. For a new equilibrium to be reached, the changing factors—people, dynamics, and practices—must stay changed long enough to require the system to adjust to them.

In systems, the parts create the whole and the whole is in the parts. Just as genetic testing can use any cell to reveal the truth of the whole person's biological composition and history, each person is a carrier of the larger culture as well as a participant in it.

A holistic diversity perspective demands people to see the system and their role in sustaining it. Moreover, it requires that the system be understood in an even larger context of time and space, that is, history and location. For example, it calls on people in the dominant group, to see themselves with a group identity of dominant, with the historical and cultural accumulation of privations and privileges that accrue to that status. With this awareness, it is less likely that members of dominant groups will see themselves as individuals only, free to act as though they exist without regard to history and location. Similarly, a systems view encourages people in subordinated groups to see how they collude with the system even as they want to change it.

If everything is connected to and reflective of everything else, then the place to start is where there is interest and energy that can be sustained. The Diversity Diamond © (Berthoud & Greene, 2001) displays these ideas graphically (Fig. 10.1). In this conception, diversity, equity, and inclusion work necessarily require attention to multiple facets of self-awareness, interaction, organizational culture, and external relations.

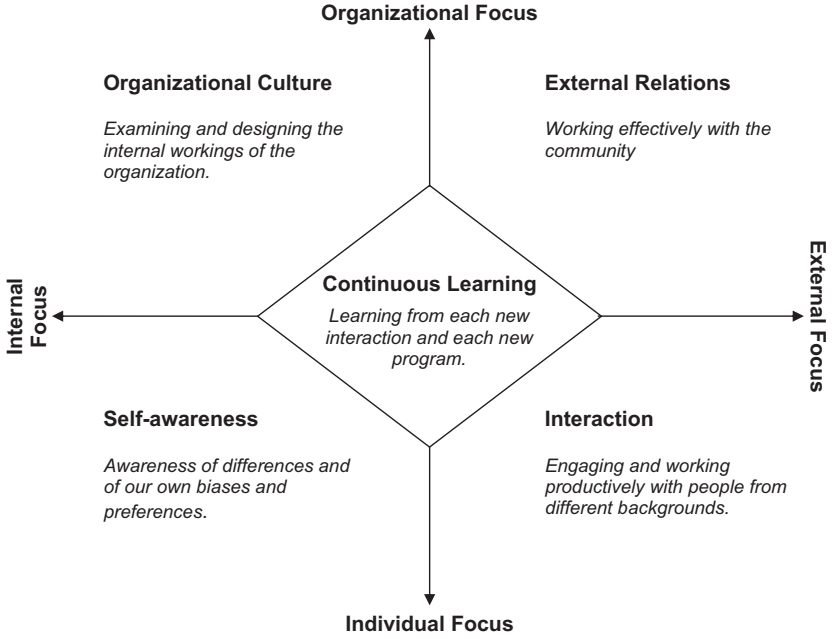

Fig. 10.1 Diversity Diamond

That is, the work is internally and externally focused at the level of individual and organization. Moreover, each facet forms and informs the others through the process of continuous learning. Wherever one starts, there is always connection to everything else. The challenge is not to have the one best place to start but, once started, to stay conscious of the changes and challenges as they unfold and see the long-term potential in sustained small changes.

The starting challenge in any engagement is to test the linear frame of mind—where do we start? what is the path? how will we plan and accomplish the task of becoming diverse?—to one of dialectic dynamism, interconnectedness, ongoing learning, and reflection. The more relevant question for clients is *what is the system they are trying to change and how do they locate themselves in it*? They begin by seeing that they are not separate from the thing they are trying to change, thus implicating themselves in the change and making the task initially more interesting and daunting.

Being About My Clients

I work primarily with activist organizations. I love their commitment to creating conditions aligned with aspirations of equality and justice for all. Whether they are working to involve people in politics, shift the way the environment is considered and cared for, address homelessness, ensure the economy works for everyone especially those not already winners, and more—their existence and work is evidence of determination to bring forth a world that does not yet exist. They are heirs to previous generations of imaginers and doers—civil rights, women's rights, settlement workers, and peace protesters. They see what is missing in the dream that is America and set about doing something about it.

They are, usually, better at identifying what is wrong than in aiming for what they want. They excel at analysis and short-term tactics often absent a larger strategic frame. Planning, when done well, is generally for a short period, maybe as long as an election cycle. The current sense—and reality—of constant change allows them to forgo the rigors of comprehensive planning and commitment to ultimate success. Rather, their action orientation means they feel compelled to do *something*, almost anything *now* because the need is urgent. Unfortunately, the need is always urgent and thus always a reason to skip a longer view. Yet the focus on the short term creates the long-term challenge. As Sun Tzu noted, "strategy without tactics is the slowest route to victory. Tactics without strategy is the noise before defeat."

Activist organizations bring the same action orientation to the work of racial justice and other issues of difference and equity. The recent publicization of police killings of and brutality toward Black people has increased an awareness of the systemic nature of racism. My clients are increasingly aware that racism—historical and structural—frames all they do. For example, economic disparities are not merely circumstantial but historically engineered and predictable. That is, it is not that unemployment, for example, *happens to be* higher among African Americans, but given the interlocking policies of housing, education, taxes, and so on, in combination with an abiding narrative about the inferiority of Black people, Black unemployment is *destined* to be higher without explicitly addressing the system that creates the results.

Such systemic changes are not campaigns to be won in a matter of months, or perhaps years. An action orientation alone can leave clients acting in myopic ways without testing their own assumptions about what

it will take to create lasting change. I enter these organizations as a former colleague who became weary of constant crisis as a way to mobilize me and others. In such a short-term orientation, urgency is required to mobilize energy for any advance. They confuse short-term action with long-term building.

The organizational analogue of an action orientation is the insistence on product or program focus more than a culture or process focus. "We should just do x!" As though that proposal is not supported or thwarted by the policies and practices enforced by the same people who are afraid to speak up in meetings or do not see their colleagues of color as worthy of attention or promotion.

At an organization exploring how to overcome the seemingly intractable challenge of expanding their proportion of people of color, we used the Diversity Diamond (Berthoud & Greene, 2001) to analyze the focus of their work so far. Not surprisingly, a quick analysis established that they had been focusing on action and strategy at the expense of culture, attitudes, awareness, individual skill, and collective values. The answer to "why don't they stay?" became "we don't welcome them in ways big and small, and ways we don't see."

In another instance, after a review of background material and a case review, one advocacy group saw that their focus on relatively quick wins meant they did not invest in the long-term development of people who were affected, interested, and typically under-resourced, in their case, Black community leaders. Such short-term focus meant the client contributed to and reinforced existing power and resource structures in the name of challenging them.

Another way to handle the expectation of immediate results is to review a historical timeline of changes clients value—ending slavery, women's suffrage, civil rights, the recent climate talks, or marriage equality. These shifts are generational struggles, not election cycle campaigns. Incremental change happens in the short term, but the deeper enduring change is created over decades of sustained focused effort.

US Cultural Context

I do not fault my clients. They exist in a larger US cultural context that prizes doing above all else and has little appetite for deferred gratification. Perhaps it is the birthright of a young country, where old is measured in decades, not centuries as in other parts of the world. Doing is not

questioned in the US cultural context but reflection and being are. Or, if not questioned, at least separated—doing in the world of work, reflection, and being in the world of spirit and religion. A holistic perspective does not separate the two.

How We Do Is the Doing

How clients (and consultants) *are* is the work. Means are ends. Especially in issues of multi-cultural engagement and justice, there is no separation between being and doing. There is a difference in feeling between being greeted by someone who is interested and someone who is not, or worse, sees only one's package (in my case, that of a Black woman) that has been assigned negative cultural value. Years ago, I went to an open meeting of a community and activist organization comprised mainly of White women. As the event was in celebration of the then newly created Martin Luther King Day, I had some hope for connection with group members. I watched as people greeted each other with the warmth of friendship, but no one approached me. Whatever they were *doing* with speeches and programs was belied by *how* they did it—from a distance, unwilling to engage the embodied other in their midst, choosing instead to discuss statistics and programs and policies. Decades later, the organization is still known as one comprised of mainly White women.

In another example, a client struggled with adopting an approach to community work suggested by the people of color in the community but that represented a departure in the work approach for the client. With my support, the client examined who they listened to, who they approached, where they believed expertise resided, and how they acted on those assumptions in who they invited to speak with authority and who they expected to listen, and whether new ideas are accepted or dismissed as coming from the unsophisticated other who has yet to learn our organization's superior ways. In this instance, internalized superiority proved just as pernicious as internalized inferiority.

An action orientation can look like expedience when dealing with issues of justice, including racial justice. My focus to slow clients down is often met with impatience. They want the cake without the baking, yet are not even certain what cake they want. They know mainly that they *do not* want *this* situation. Having analyzed the problem, they want to set about correcting it, without recognizing that the very action orientation can be an impediment to the relationships needed to make a difference. The time

spent in joining, relationship building is often seen as a waste of time, not as an investment.

In one organization, there is some promising movement in a leadership development program based on learning in and about relationship. Those outside of the program like the results of deeper membership and community engagement, higher energy, and innovative policy initiatives. Predictably, they want to turn the results—improved member relations and community partnerships—into a checklist and easy metric, without attending to the quality of the conversations or the reinforcement of racial and class power dynamics that have resulted from such an action and outcome focus and that the new program's approach challenges.

Being Informs Doing: Embodiment

Racial justice requires a shift at a much deeper level than analysis or mechanical action. Actions taken when confident are qualitatively different that those taken in fear or hesitation. This is true whether the action is conducting a job interview or handing someone a piece of paper or initiating a new relationship across differences that have cultural significance, such as race, gender identity, and so on. *Acting* confident is not the same as *being* confident, feeling it deeply and viscerally. Both the actor and the recipient know the difference. I had a recent reminder of this truth. I had two potential client calls for diversity work. In the first instance, I was relaxed and attentive. I was curious, listened deeply, and was even playful. They wanted to work with me, almost immediately. In the second instance, only days later, I was hurried and distracted, impatient, listened critically, and contradicted the would-be client. Not surprisingly, they did not call back. On the surface, I did the same things. I may have even asked the same questions but the clients' divergent responses suggest to me that my own disposition at the time of the calls was at least a factor in the outcome.

Likewise, I slow down clients to even acknowledge their being and how it informs their doing. When a client is afraid, frustrated, impatient, angry, happy, or sad, I encourage them to mine the source of their experience to see how it informs their behavior. A White woman client who is nervous to be seen as overstepping her culturally assigned role as she asserts a perspective on relationships across race in her organization will enter the conversation tentatively, if at all. A Black person afraid to be known as having a view different from the majority of Black people can silence himself. And

on and on. Actions are informed by being. Without attention paid to the underlying assumptions and affective state, the actor is unaware of how thoroughly actions are informed by the unattended inner world.

Being informs doing, for the consultant as well as the client. Therefore, as a consultant, it is essential to attend to not just one's verbal messages or techniques, but the lived and expressed values, priorities, and theories of change. That is, the consultant must embody and enact the theories and approaches espoused (Nevis, 2005), one must *walk the talk* or at least be seen to be working toward such alignment to be a credible partner.

Some consultants set themselves apart, as people who have solutions to teach. In diversity work, I am leery of such a posture given the vast differences within the human family and any individual's familiarity with only some of them. Rather, I prefer a sense of journeying together on a long trek. I may have knowledge about some parts of the terrain, while clients and other colleagues have overlapping or distinct knowledge. In this way, we can learn together.

Doing Shapes Being: Habit Formation

> We first make our habits, and then our habits make us.
> —John Dryden

For my clients, the idea of creating change through behavior modification is familiar territory. It is the approach of policy change, legislation, and enforcement action. A critical decision to do things differently can lead to new ways of thinking and feeling, create the conditions for change, or at minimum, eliminate egregious offense. In the language of neuroplasticity, "neurons that fire together, wire together." So, the practice of new behavior can create new habit in action and thought (Duhigg, 2012). For example, the practice of using *African American* to describe people previously known as Black, colored, Negro, and worse is one such example. People say "*N*-word" in polite company to indicate their internalized awareness of the negative connotations and their distancing themselves from association with such thoughts.

Still, the client focus on quick results makes the pursuit of embedded habit, let alone mastery, challenging. The idea of sustained deliberate practice can seem like so much time wasted when results are needed now. What is not recognized is that acting for immediate results is itself a doing that shapes a longer-term habit. Clients pursue the immediate at the

expense of the ultimate without seeing the immediate as creating the ultimate. They want long-term results with short-term efforts. While occasionally possible, the greater success that comes from perseverance is often missed.

Yet a developmental approach can be less satisfying for list checkers and productivity measurers. Even if they acknowledge that the work of racial justice in particular, and equity in general, is an ongoing effort, they still bring their doing, short-term approach to the work. Moreover, deliberate effort is difficult to sustain without some indication of progress lest despair sets in. Consequently, I engage clients in identifying the ultimate results that they want. Most often they can say what they do not want—end oppression, stop racial injustice—but are hard pressed to describe in vivid detail the end state that they are working toward. Some even see doing so as a luxury they cannot afford rather that an essential and often implicit driver of their work. To address this challenge, I work with two types of indicators—those identified in advance and those that emerge.

Predetermined indicators The first step is identifying the vision of success—a description of the conditions that will exist when they no longer have a need for this work. Most critical here is an *affirmative* vision—not the absence of racism, the end of prejudice and oppression—but a positively stated, felt expression of an envisioned future reality. We acknowledge that they will not likely see their vision made real any more than early abolitionists who sought full citizenship for slaves lived to see their aspirations realized. Yet clients' ability to identify their true north is essential to directing their daily work. From the vision, the goals and success markers can be identified as substantial contributions toward the vision. In this way, we establish that no matter how long or short the consulting contract, or their own individual and collective effort, they can make a substantial down payment toward their intended outcome.

Emergent indicators At the same time, even those predetermined indicators can feel distant. Their concreteness can also reinforce an action and quantitative orientation that can obscure the equally important qualitative changes needed to achieve the desired results. It is therefore also important to support clients to identify the smallest of indicators, mere glimmers, or perhaps single incidents, moments in conversation that point to potential change. I ask them to look for first shoots in a wide field that we expect to be lush one day. In one organization, early indicators were the

tone and substance of staff participation in a meeting. Previously, they had sat silently. After our work together, they raised thoughtful questions and suggestions. Such behavior could easily have been discounted as too small to make a difference but seen as an essential component and beginning, such an early indicator was cause for optimism. Mindfully observed and cultivated, such indicators help to minimize frustration by helping clients see how they can close the gap between lofty goals and daily reality.

Process Orientation

In a short-term linear mindset focused on action, one assumption I often encounter is that there is a single best way and someone else knows it. The tendency is to bring in an expert to provide the answers. Of course, OD is a process orientation that may contain expert content knowledge but does not rely on it as the engine of change.

An expert orientation assumes knowledge is external, that there is a *right* answer not simply people in relationship adjusting to each other. With such an orientation, people behave as though the correct answer will always be so and just needs to be found. For example, what is the best way to deal with offensive behavior? Such an orientation produces analysis of the problem along with prescriptions for what the solution should be. Yet the very pronouncements create a posture of *righteousness* that can undermine the need for *right relationship*, a dynamic interplay between players who change with and because of each other. For example, terminology about immigrants has changed from *illegal alien* to *undocumented immigrants* and will likely change again. What is right has changed over time as the named come into different relationship with themselves and the larger society.

All answers are temporary. Therefore, orienting toward the process of change and building quality relationship are essential, as relationships and the pursuit of better answers are the foundation on which sustainable action is built.

If there is a right answer, then knowledge is the issue and can be purchased, imported, and consumed, and action can be prescribed. Hence, the calls that request a short training session for a problem that has years, often decades, of history in the organization, and certainly centuries long in the country. Knowledge is important but insufficient as it sits atop attitudes and habits that are deeply rooted and untouched by knowledge.

There may be *preferred* answers but not permanent ones. Rather, in a right relationship, people have the space to explore with each other and to develop the empathy and patience to arrive at answers that work for them, for now, with an intention to sustain relationship even as answers change.

I do not ask clients to relinquish their knowledge orientation. Rather I see it as an entry into the work. Here is an opportunity to frame the work, to create the possibility of perspective shifting, by introducing concepts and frameworks that may broaden our mutual views. I often begin with conceptual grounding that includes my own knowledge, without laying claim to all expertise. By jointly creating a resource list to meet their needs and intentions, clients also bring material to the process, often about issues of diversity and difference experienced in their sector.

The early shared responsibility of developing framing literature allows me to be a partner and learner as we discuss the material together and let it inform our work going forward. At the same time, their research develops their confidence in their own knowing and keeps material relevant and accessible to them. I focus my contribution primarily on how change happens and less so on content and analysis or the description of how racism manifests itself. (As I write this chapter, a client has just sent an article describing the extent and impact of racial and gender discrimination in the temporary employment field. Another has sent a list of books and other resources—evidence of continued interest and ownership.) Once collected, the material is the focus of discussion. What are they learning about the contours and processes of racial injustice? About suggested and promising remedies? Such analysis is familiar territory and appeals to a penchant for cognitive knowing. The next level of questioning introduces the habit of reflection. What have they noticed about how they engaged the readings and each other? In what ways did their own identities show up in their participation? How, just through the act of discussing, have they demonstrated the ideas and values they aspire to and/or critique?

Such questions typically prove more difficult for them to answer. It is often the moment they recognize the work of racial justice implicates and involves them *right now*, even as they work to create change. Additionally, and perhaps more essentially, such questions turn them toward the *process* of engagement and change. They begin to see patterns of participation as individuals and as social categories. They begin to see the impact of their participation and perspective on others. Whether their innocent comment sparked a strong reaction need not make either the speaker or the responder

wrong. They can take the time to discover the process—in the moment and historically—that created the situation. They can also choose how to engage next time *and* how to apply their learning more broadly to their organization.

At a project debriefing, when asked how their identities influenced their action plan implementation, group members named how they overcame their discomfort because of previous conversations. They acknowledged that had they attempted implementation even a few months prior they would have been less assertive and confident. They saw how their confidence created positive effect. Next, they discussed how to build in similar opportunities and structures in other parts of the organization.

Naturally, they have many more questions. They are learning the value of staying in the question and allowing answers to emerge from and help build relationships through a well-designed process rather than predetermining *any* answer.

Development

As expected, activist groups place a high value on performance. They want to do well and quickly. Despite the enormity of the challenges they take on, they expect to achieve change, to do well, and to "fix" the situations they find. Yet, a focus on performance necessarily blocks a focus on learning and development. (I am grateful to Jonno Hanafin for introducing me cognitively and experientially to this paradox.)

By examining the intentions and the felt sense of performance and learning in turn, clients see how their short-term orientation on production can be an obstacle to their own learning, long-term development, and, therefore, improved performance over the long term.

Experimentation

Key to learning is an attitude of experimentation, play, and discovery where the stakes do not seem too high. In organizational life, such situations seem not to exist, unless we consciously create them. Therefore, it is critical to find opportunities for safe experiments, small actions group members can take without fear of negative consequences, especially if the experiment does not work as intended. Together, we identify options such as how to speak up, who to approach and how, an organizational practice to start or stop. As with any experiment, we analyze the results, determine

the reasons for the outcomes, and determine if it is worth repeating or adjusting the action. Similar to small actions, merely the idea of experimentation relieves some of the performance anxiety people bring to work, especially work related to race.

Do, Reflect, Do, Reflect

I respect my client's need for speed, for getting things done. It is what I love about them and what makes them as effective as they are. I support their greater effectiveness by introducing and adhering to reflection.

A group of labor leaders and community-based groups are discussing the impact of race on their work. The mixed race, gender, and age group has been edging up to the conversation and are now discussing a proposed action by a central labor body. The conversation is lively and respectful even as opinions differ. After the conversation is done enough for now, I ask the group to reflect on *how* they had the conversation. What patterns did they notice? What did they experience in having the conversation?

They noticed a difference in the perspectives between those from community groups, mainly but not only people of color, and those from labor, mainly but not only White. As I did not know them well enough to know the roles they were speaking from, it was important for them to name and own an important dynamic, namely, that community groups and the people of color within them were more appreciative of progress that those from labor. Underlying issues of patience, shame, expectations, perceived opportunities, and potential for working together opened as a result. Moreover, at a subsequent meeting when I was not present, the group employed a similar process to positive effect.

In another example, an organization that was committing itself to addressing racial injustice in its programmatic and internal work reviewed a conversation it had just had about options to realize its intentions. A member of the group noticed that young people were not given the same hearing as the older members of staff. A lively and fruitful conversation about intergenerational knowing and relationship to current issues, and what they had to learn from each other ensued.

In both cases, their reflections were essential. I did not see what they saw. Their own engagement mattered more than the "rightness" of my observations. With their insights and the experience of respectful conversation across difference in pursuit of common vision, they resumed their action orientation with renewed vigor and alignment.

Action learning is another related approach whereby the organization identifies a project that will be the object of examination, of active engagement alternated with rigorous review for the dual purpose of creating change and learning about the change process. Critically, the project is not make-work, but something of value. One organization chose to apply their emerging racial justice framework to their upcoming biennial conference. Another developed member engagement approaches. Another implemented revised Human Resource policies. In all cases, they were going to do the work anyway. They chose to use their projects as opportunities to test emerging or newly adopted approaches to racial justice.

In all cases, the practice of regular reflection in a spirit of experimentation allows groups to step away from a performance focus enough to see what they are learning and what habits they are developing without fear of recrimination.

Consultant Dilemmas

As I do with my clients, I ask myself "how am I contributing to the dynamic I want to change?" I acknowledge the gravitational pull of the forces that result in racial injustice but that are not easily seen and therefore harder to address.

True for any consulting engagement and especially in a racial justice context, how to position oneself is foundational to the impact one will have in the system. Too far away emotionally and clients will not travel their own distance to discovery. Too close and there is nothing to indicate there is any distance to travel. As I navigate the consultant role and marginality to client systems, I have found that as I allow myself to disclose my own story as an immigrant and my wonder, joy, mistakes, and concerns with them in the task at hand, the more they explore and express their own journey as they are in it. They become clearer about the process they are in and how they can change it.

As a consultant, I regularly re-enact the immigrant role as a stranger in a new organization, culturally other again. I can choose to cower as the unwelcome interloper or bring gifts of perspective and ways of doing that could be useful. In one system, I am part of a team that conducts a leadership development program for social justice leaders. When I have questioned (had questioned) my approach, I chose to conform to the way of the team leaders. As I prioritized my own safety, the group prioritized theirs—manifested in questioning, arguing with me, and the material.

They took few risks. Later, I decided to share more of my story, my internal process, and intentions. Rather than assume my difference was unwelcome, I chose to name and use it. Now the participants began to claim their own stories, processes, questions, and dilemmas. I had modeled the way and created the space for them to engage. They appreciated their rich conversations because, as they said, "we had hard conversations and it was OK."

One element of positioning is my felt and expressed cultural resonance. Whether I feel and am seen as "one of the family" influences how I am seen and heard. That I am Black often means I am mistaken for African American, with expectations for shared experiences, perspectives, and cultural anchors. How I introduce the truth of my background can be received along a continuum from not different at all to different within a larger commonality of race and racial dynamics to completely separate. I am aware that my background creates both distance and resonance. At my best, my difference makes space for others to claim their uniqueness. At times, it can mean a painful separation of not "getting" a group and not being "gotten."

In a group in Texas, the participants are roughly one-third each African American, Latino/a, and Anglo. They hug early and often. They reference church and the Bible. I am different here and they make that clear with their comments. So, I claim my difference and ask their patience. They explain themselves to me—and each other. They see differences where they expected sameness. And they see me enough to roast me, using the methods I taught them—a lovely testament to being seen.

Some distance is useful. I can name what I see without the triggers that come with over-identification. I am also able to hold to account all parties in a racial conversation. As one African American woman was discussing in righteous tones the ways her role as Chief Diversity Officer was being challenged and undermined by predictable resistance from the majority White organization and management, I could validate her experience, name the larger dynamic of cultural antibodies defending against change, and note her righteousness as a contributor to the fight she was in. In systems, all players contribute.

At the same time, I wonder whether my cultural distance means I am not enough of a challenge. I see clients that want more people of color but without examination of culture they will get those, like me, who know how to function in White organizations and other cultural spaces. As an often only person of color, I am mindful that others who have a different

cultural presentation are not as welcome. I am aware of the seduction of my perceived specialness as I navigate those spaces, mindful that my work is to widen the possibility for others.

Does my long-term view blind me to felt urgency and the possibility of action now? My clients can see an orientation to process and the long term as a denial of the need for immediate relief from the injustices they experience, witness, and fight to change. It is essential that I demonstrate real awareness of the urgency and locate my long-term orientation as an answer to, not a diversion from, the felt need.

Conclusion

Issues of inclusion, racial justice in particular and diversity in general, reflect deep historical, cultural, organizational, interpersonal, and individual dynamics. Effective change requires seeing the broader systemic dynamics—including how approaches to change can recapitulate and reinforce the very system that is the target of change. It is imperative, therefore, to begin with an understanding of systems in general so that the perseverance needed to change deep structures can be activated. Short-term approaches and the drive for quick results ultimately undermine the intended change. Therefore, it is also essential to be clear about the ultimate desired outcome as well as the indicators that the vision is approaching so that individuals and systems can continuously calibrate themselves toward the justice they seek. Especially for activist organizations, the time taken in reflection is necessary to accelerate *effective* action that reflects the values and vision in its being as an embodied expression of intended results.

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