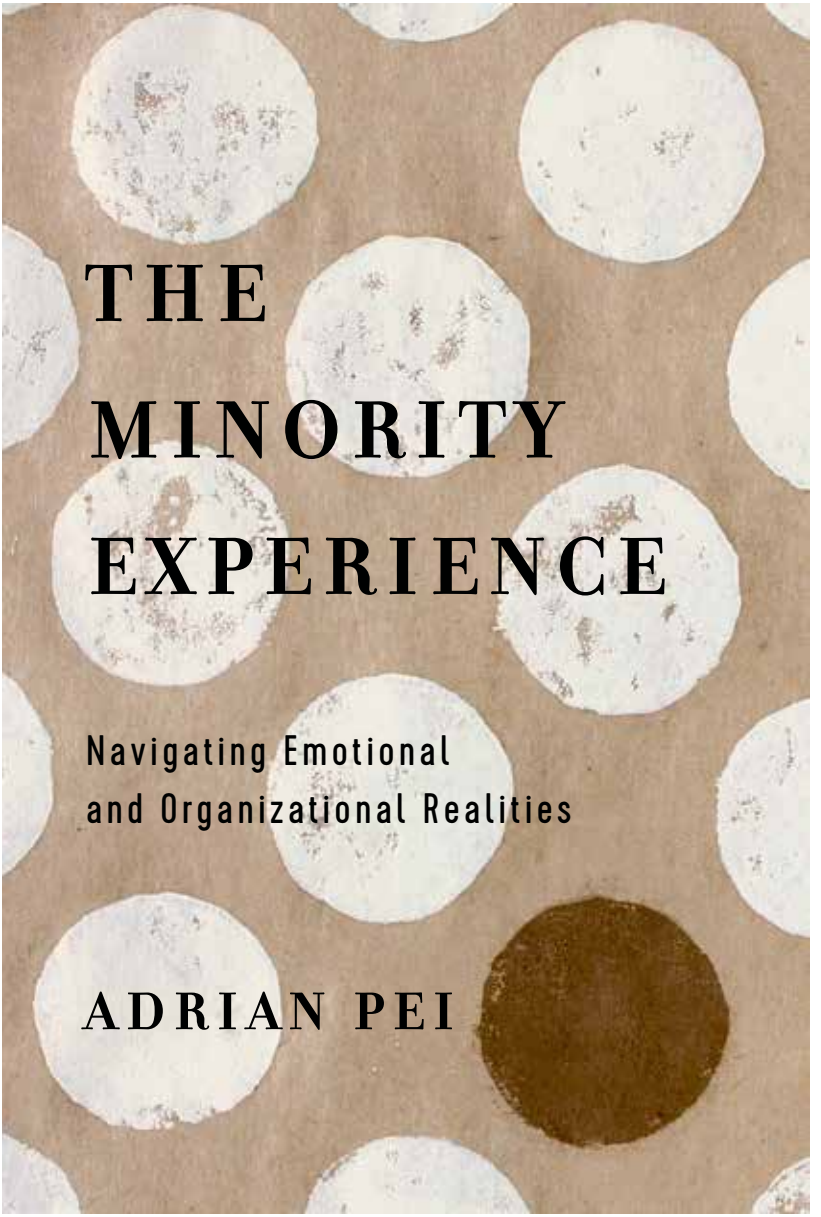
Diversifying Your Organization



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CHALLENGES IN ORGANIZATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

How to Diversify Your Organization

Let's summarize what we've covered so far.

Understanding the minority experience is not so much about demographics or cultural competence as it is about grasping the realities of pain, power, and the past. The impact of pain shows in minorities' psychological sense of self-doubt, while the impact of power can be seen in the rejection minorities experience from a history of white domestication. Finally, the impact of the past can be understood as we grasp the weariness that comes as minorities have had to battle and endure faceless, systemic barriers and injustices.

Most of these realities are heavy and sobering, and I've learned the importance of sitting in the discomfort and pain of this rather than immediately seeking resolution and answers. If your

main takeaway is simply the need to better understand pain, power, and the past, I consider that a success.

However, I also believe that the minority experience is not a death sentence or a punishment, but an incredible gift that can benefit those from both the majority and minority cultures.

After all, as I thought about the themes of pain, power, and the past, I realized this:

Leaders who are in touch with *pain* . . . can see and serve people with *compassion*.

Leaders who are in touch with *power* . . . can become incredible *advocates* for the most vulnerable in society.

Leaders who are in touch with *the past* . . . can teach and guide others with great humility and *wisdom*.

In another way of putting it:

Pain builds compassion.

Power builds advocacy.

The past builds wisdom.

A lot is broken in the minority experience. But God did not leave us to be stuck there. He interjects us with new life and the ability to redeem the broken aspects of pain, power, and the past. I think again of Deuteronomy 8:11-18, where God reminds the Israelites that their pain was meant to teach them humility and gratitude. He reminds them to not forget the lessons from the past. And then in Deuteronomy 10:19, God admonishes the Israelites: "And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt." He reminds them that God is the defender of the fatherless and widows and loves the

foreigners who live among them. God urges his people to remember that they were once enslaved and oppressed as minorities in Egypt, and now they ought to advocate for the minorities in their midst.

When we absorb the realities of pain, power, and the past, we can be tempted to isolate ourselves, but God encourages us to move toward him and other people. We must shift from a self-absorbed mindset to one that sees pain with eyes of compassion, stewards power with hands of advocacy, and reframes the past with a heart of wisdom. In chapters six, seven, and eight, we will explore what this might look like.

Part two of this book is not about simplistic solutions. Professor Soong-Chan Rah reminds us in his book *Prophetic Lament* that United States history tends to be filled with a sense of "triumphalism," which narrates its many victories in wars, economic successes, and inventions of modern conveniences. This lends to a fixation on seeking answers and solutions—when sometimes there are none. Sometimes we can do harm when we try to act, when what is needed is instead to listen, or to lament the injustices that minorities have experienced. Rah writes, "American culture tends to hide the stories of guilt and shame and seeks to elevate stories of success. American culture gravitates towards narratives of exceptionalism and triumphalism, which results in amnesia about a tainted history."[1]

Thus, the following chapters do not always contain a list of actions, but encouragements about when patience and humility are most required, and when we might need to seek help. Or

sometimes they include a list of principles or values to guide a healthy process, as in this chapter, where we will discuss leading organizational change in diversity.

LEADING CHANGE IN DIVERSITY: SEVEN STEPS

In *Divided by Faith*, sociologists Michael Emerson and Christian Smith explain how many Christians throughout history failed to confront systemic injustices like slavery and segregation because they tried to solve problems only on an individual level. With this mindset, racial problems could be largely attributed to the "bad apples" of society—the radical, hateful, and ignorant individuals. The solution was for each white person to simply do their best to treat the minorities they knew personally with courtesy and fairness. However, Emerson and Smith outline how this individualistic approach actually has made things worse by ignoring and minimizing the root systemic causes of racial problems.[2]

In this chapter, we will address race and diversity on a systemic level—specifically for organizations that are looking to grow and advance in these areas. Beyond educating individuals in our group, how might we possibly go about a broader change process in a way that is open and honoring? As I write this, I think about Cru's ongoing efforts to restructure their organization, as well as many other parachurch, church, nonprofits, and businesses that are seeking to become more diverse.

Of course, a diversity change initiative should be handled with the same amount of care and intentionality, as any

organizational change initiative. As such, I will outline some principles for a change process based on thought leaders in the field of organizational development, interviews with organization leaders, and my own experience in this field.

Step one: Why change or diversify? Before any process is initiated, our motives must be clear. If we're only seeking to diversify for tactical or pragmatic reasons, we won't truly benefit from all that minorities in our organization have to offer. They will simply be a means to an end, and we will treat them in tokenizing ways. Pain, power, and the past are markers for us to assess whether our organization is truly willing to go deeper than "cosmetic diversity."

- Are we willing to listen and absorb stories of *pain* from minorities in our organization?
- Are we willing to confront imbalances and abuses of *power* in our organization?
- Are we willing to explore the impact of *the past* in the United States and in our organization?

Step two: Who will lead our change process? This is the most critical element. Too often, I've seen organizations work on getting the right tactics or strategy in place, without considering that successful change is more about getting the right people to lead the process. Patrick Lencioni, a popular author and expert on organizational health, emphasizes in his books repeatedly that "the single biggest factor determining whether an organization is

going to get healthier—or not—is the genuine commitment and active involvement of the person in charge."[3]

So who are the right people? Edgar Schein describes a few qualities of a change leader:

- She has the capacity to perceive and think about ways of doing things differently from the organization's current assumptions.
- She is able to operate on the margins of the organization, while staying connected enough to its core.
- She is able to listen and to absorb difficult realities and assess implications for the organization and what they will require of people.
- She is able to seek and accept help, and is willing to experiment and even fail.
- She is able to acknowledge complexity, and has the emotional strength to admit uncertainty.
- She is able to build the organization's capacity to learn.[4]

To this list, I would add that an ideal change leader must be patient and have the capacity to tolerate ambiguity, and must be able to take a stand when necessary and not let a few voices sabotage or undermine the process.

Other qualities may vary depending on the organizational context, but usually this change leader has some history, trust, and authority within the organization.

Once a leader is identified, she should form a team of change agents to support the process. Of course, team members should

possess some of the same qualities as described above. Brenda Salter McNeil, director of the Reconciliation Studies program at Seattle Pacific University, writes in *Roadmap to Reconciliation* that this team should also be diverse itself: "If an organization wants to shift its cultural identity, it is crucial that it have an internal team of diverse leaders who model the diversity change initiative. The leaders thus serve as a microcosm of what is hoped for in the broader community."[5]

Diversity can mean categories like ethnicity, gender, and socioeconomic class—but teams can also benefit from a mix of experienced employees and those who are new to the organization. It is not possible to include a person of every conceivable category; what is more important is that the people on the team are collaborative enough to include a variety of people in their research. As Lencioni points out, inclusivity "should be achieved by ensuring that the members of a leadership team are adequately representing and tapping into the opinions of the people who work for them, not by maximizing the size of the team."[6] An ideal team size is somewhere in the range of four to seven people.[7]

The team leader's job is to align this team with their goal and role, which includes providing ongoing feedback on why new solutions may or may not work, and bringing back concerns they hear to the team.

At this point (and at every following step of the change process), it is also helpful to communicate about the process to the organization: what is being done, who is involved, and why.

It is generally suggested not to call the effort a generic "change process," but to specifically describe the initiative (e.g., diversity and inclusion) and how it is tied to the needs and future of the organization.

Now is also the time to let people in the organization know that the team will be seeking their input and feedback along the way.

Step three: Make an organizational assessment. Before the team does anything, the first step is to assess a couple of things:

What is the current culture of the organization in respect to diversity? What is its history? Schein notes that many change programs are initiated by those who don't have a deep and demonstrated understanding of the existing culture of the organization. As a result, the program does not connect with the needs and language of the organization, and it has difficulty being implemented.[8] The team must take the time to deeply understand why the organization is the way it is, and what kind of history has caused this. Schein provides the well-known categories of (1) artifacts, (2) espoused beliefs and values, and (3) basic underlying assumptions to help in deciphering an organization's culture.[9]

To what extent is the organization motivated or ready to change? It is tempting to think that we possess the power to change with our hard work, strategies, and persuasive methods, but McNeil observes that in her work with organizations, the "most powerful ways we change are often out of our control."[10] She finds that most people and groups need a "catalytic event"

to jump-start a process of change.[11] Schein outlines a whole list of unplanned factors that can create an environment conducive to change, from crises to major changes in technology and personnel.[12]

The important thing to note here is that when we are fully aware of the factors that are within *and* out of our control, we are better able to calibrate our expectations. What will be required of us, and what do other people need to do? How long will this process take? What kinds of barriers and roadblocks might arise along the way?

Also, we are able to make any necessary adjustments in our approach. For instance, Schein describes how most organizations and individuals are inherently resistant to change, because change creates *learning anxiety*—the extra work, insecurity, and ambiguity that inevitably comes with a new reality. To address this, a leader or team must seek to create enough *psychological safety* for the organization that it reduces this learning anxiety.[13]

Ultimately, this step of assessment is valuable not only to understand the organization, but for the group to develop its own identity and learn to work together effectively. A team should ideally be given enough opportunities for reflection, process analysis, and informal activities before diving into total task engagement.[14]

Step four: What is the goal and problem? Too many teams, work groups, and task forces work on answers or solutions without first identifying the real problem. Emerson and Smith describe

the "constant sense of urgency" that drives many organizations that don't end up asking the right questions because they haven't adequately thought through the issues.[15] Lencioni calls it "the adrenaline bias." He writes that leaders are "seemingly hooked on the daily rush of activity and firefighting within their organizations. It's as though they're afraid to slow down and deal with issues that are critical but don't seem particularly urgent."[16]

Instead of rushing into action or solutions prematurely, we must take the time to do careful reflection and proper inquiry. What is the problem, and what is our goal when it comes to diversity? We should spend the majority of our time determining these. Here are a few ideas and guidelines in doing this:

- Gather existing research on diversity. What are the gaps in the organization, qualitatively and qualitatively?
- Interview minorities in the organization, as well as white leaders who have worked under minority leadership. Some examples of questions include:
  - What is most important to them?
  - What are their biggest challenges and barriers?
  - What kind of support and help do they most need?
- Interview people outside the organization, especially those who have thought through diversity quite a bit. Learn from their biggest challenges and best practices. These perspectives will help fill in our natural blind spots, as large organizations tend to lose touch with reality because of a dominant "internal focus."

- Synthesize your learnings, find themes, and then seek to discover the potential root cause. Tools like the fishbone (Ishikawa) diagram can be helpful in digging below the surface to uncover the cause of issues.
- At this point, your team should be able to come up with a clear goal. This goal should address the root cause of the problems related to diversity. Get some feedback from people in the organization, and make any adjustments that are necessary. Communicate with the organization about progress.

Now that we're at the point of discussing tactics, it may be helpful to share an example of a recent change process within Cru that I believe was handled well. It was a complete restructuring of Cru's International Graduate School of Leadership (IGSL) in the Philippines, which involved one hundred administrative staff and faculty serving a body of over three hundred students from countries such as Bhutan, Sri Lanka, Laos, Congo, and Bangladesh. IGSL conducts leadership training in many diverse contexts including some branches of the Philippines government and military, many businesses, and the homes of pastors' wives in rural Thailand and Sri Lanka.[17]

I interviewed Brian Virtue, who helped oversee change at IGSL as Director of Leadership Development and Human Resources, and also as the interim executive director of the school. To provide some background, there were several factors that created an openness to change when Brian first started serving at the school in 2013. First, most of the school's executive team

and half of the faculty were between the ages of 58 and 63, and thus there was a natural urgency to find leadership successors. Second, it had been over a decade since the school's last curriculum revision, and there hadn't been many new faculty from outside the school in a long time, so many felt it was time for new perspectives. Finally, there was a growing sense of leadership problems that the school felt needed to be addressed, including gaps in developing people, holding them accountable, and unrealistic job descriptions.

Over the next few years, there was an influx of ten to twelve staff and faculty from outside the school, and even outside Cru. A task force of five people was created to address the school's biggest needs and gaps. This team was intentionally created with ethnic and gender diversity, as well as diversity of newer and long-tenured staff. Each member of the team had a collaborative mindset and some significant experience in organizational development work.

This team interviewed the faculty at the school, and did research into its biggest gaps, and these came to be known as the school's "Four Cultural Commitments": accountability, development, collaboration, and capacity (overworking of staff).

Step five: Prepare for change. This critical stage involves laying the groundwork for change in the organization. McNeil calls this the "preparation" stage.

Knowing that organizational restructuring was a school goal, the IGSL task force worked to prepare staff for the big changes

to come. They had all staff and faculty take a survey to identify their strengths, personalities, and interests. They also asked half of the faculty to undergo 360-degree feedback surveys. These processes allowed the leadership team to collect a lot of data that they could use in order to help with placement (job assignments) in the case of a restructuring. Having this data on hand allowed them to demonstrate that the process was driven by data as opposed to favoritism.

The preparation stage also involves a lot of trust and relationship building. Since Virtue and his family lived in close quarters with the staff and faculty, it helped that they were accessible. This helped them learn culturally and adjust to living in the Philippines, and it also built mutual trust. This relationship building is not only critical between whites and minorities, but it also helped as Virtue and other members of the task force needed to engage in difficult conversations with people who needed time and space to process the organizational restructuring, and its impact on their jobs and families.

Sometimes this "preparation" stage can take a while. Paul Tokunaga is the author of *Invitation to Lead* and coordinated InterVarsity Christian Fellowship's Asian American Ministries for fourteen years. He told me about a leadership meeting he attended in 2003 where he proposed a minority leadership development program called the Daniel Project with an audacious goal. The vision was that in the next decade, the program would build minority leaders who had the capacity to lead the

organization at the highest levels, including the president of InterVarsity!

The three goals of the program were for minority staff to (1) grow in their ethnic identity, (2) understand the organization better at senior levels, and (3) own and navigate their own career trajectory. Each participant was assigned a mentor (who was paid, and usually an ethnic minority) for at least a year.

Increasingly, organizations are turning to leadership cohorts or "Business Resource Groups" to provide communities of support for ethnic minorities or women. They provide mentors, bring in outside speakers, and allow space for leaders to develop peer relationships with those who share similar realities.[18]

As for Tokunaga's proposal of the Daniel Project, its vision of building diverse leaders who could step up to the highest levels of organizational leadership seemed outrageous at the time. However, after the program's first year, twelve of its fourteen participants were promoted within the organization. Then in 2016, InterVarsity appointed the first nonwhite president in its seventy-five-year history, Taiwanese American Tom Lin![19]

Though this is encouraging change, Tokunaga told me that it took years of building trust to open ears to proposals like this. He had been part of InterVarsity for thirty years, and had many conversations that led to this moment. Preparing the groundwork for change takes patience, and InterVarsity knows there is still work to be done to support other minority leadership cohorts and women of color.

Step six: Execute change. You may notice that the change process outlined here is intentionally broad in its scope. Too often, diversity initiatives are simplified to training classes or delegated to one department (e.g., Diversity and Inclusion). This approach not only can inhibit organization-wide collaboration, but it risks treating diversity as an optional side project, as opposed to an element that should influence every process and department.

For instance, diversity should impact marketing strategies, recruiting and hiring, onboarding, leader training, performance reviews, leadership selection and promotions. By integrating and embedding the diversity change process throughout the organization, this will give the best chance to shape culture—and build the capacity of the organization to sustain it.

As specific tactics of the change strategy are executed, there are at least four activities that one should be prepared for:

1. *Change-related meetings.* For the IGSL, this meant gathering more experienced leaders in the school for reflection and vision on how to effectively pass their legacy on to the next generation of leaders. It meant facilitating meetings for the staff to talk specifically about how they were processing transition-related matters. For faculty that were stepping out of their positions, the school held meetings for them to share their journey and learnings with others, and to honor and celebrate them.
2. *Change-related side conversations.* In most situations, there will be individuals who will mostly feel free to talk about

their concerns or fears in "side" conversations (i.e., not during official meetings or gatherings). Thus, leadership must be prepared to be involved in responding to any perceived anxieties, and even to proactively check on people individually. This work is some of the most important, though it will often be the most informal in structure and timing.

3. *Change-related communication and feedback.* Again, during the transition process, there needs to be consistent organization-wide communication, and the opportunity for people to provide meaningful feedback. Lencioni believes that when it comes to reinforcing clarity, there is no such thing as too much communication.[20] He points out that too many leaders see communication in a cognitive manner—as the mere transfer of information to an audience, which can seem to become redundant. Instead, Lencioni suggests a more relational, emotional view of communication. This involves connecting with people, reassuring them, and helping them to understand, internalize, and embrace the message. He writes: "The only way for people to embrace a message is to hear it over a period of time, in a variety of different situations, and preferably from different people."[21] Consistent communication is vital.

4. *Capacity building for long-term sustainment.* McNeil writes that when many organizations experience the instability that comes with change, it becomes too painful for them,

so they abandon the process. She encourages organizations to anticipate instability as normal, and urges change agents to work to build structures that support long-term sustainment.[22] In the case of IGSL, they completely restructured the school and redrafted job descriptions for almost every position, and one can imagine the anxiety that could have emerged in this situation! However, the leadership team intentionally structured a period of only three months of uncertainty—after which every staff was placed in a position based on their preferences, organizational needs, team chemistry considerations, and survey and 360 data. The new job descriptions and a newly defined organizational structure provided clarity, and the change team communicated regularly with the staff and faculty. Throughout the process, they provided opportunities for the "old" and "new" guard to provide feedback and input.

Step seven: Internalize change. In the final step of the change process, leaders should continue to communicate to remind people of the original goal so they can internalize the meaning of the changes they are observing. They should also reinforce the values of the process—it's not just pragmatic results—so that the organization sees the intentionality of the means by which things have been done.

As people begin to see and experience these new realities, they will gradually adjust. Some may not, or it may take longer, but if leadership shows care, detail, and intentionality throughout

the process, that's what will make a bigger difference than expecting everybody to like or agree with the changes.

With IGSL, Virtue told me that when change is successful and people begin to see results, they may want to give more permission to the change team to push the boundaries in other areas. One should take care to steward this power and not pursue more change than the organization can handle. Again, this requires the ability to discern the emotional state of the organization, to have the restraint to provide the right amount of psychological safety and the patience to wait for the right timing.

In the end, the IGSL underwent a successful restructuring and change process, which is no small feat given the scope and the cultural factors and traditions of the school. Virtue attributes this to a mix of unplanned factors (which he attributes to the work of God), timing, the right mix of leadership and values, and most importantly the humility and character of the elder leaders of IGSL—who were more committed to the future of the organization than preserving their own positions, titles, or "ways of doing things."

This process is not far from the "Four Disciplines" model that Lencioni outlines in *The Advantage*, which involves four steps:

1. Build a cohesive leadership team (get the right people to lead the process)
2. Create clarity (define the goal and problem)
3. Overcommunicate clarity (communicate change through preparation, meetings, and side conversations)

4. Reinforce clarity (solidify the results by reminders)[23]

In any change process, there are factors in and out of our control. But if we follow some of the principles above, we will have built a collaborative process that relies on the character and capacity of leaders—which is the most important measure of success.
