Selected Readings on Diversity Issues: Part I

Raquel J. Gabriel**

Ms. Gabriel highlights selected readings on culture, diversity, organizational culture, leadership, conflict management, and racial microaggressions that can help create a framework in which to discuss diversity and diversity issues.

Introduction

¶1 Much of my writing for this column has been influenced by my own experiences and observations. Having worked in a variety of library settings as a student and as a professional librarian, many of the reflections I have shared were born from those experiences. But I would be remiss if I did not say that what I have written about also developed out of my own curiosity as to how diversity and issues surrounding it have affected my career, and the options—or restrictions—I may have faced. My interest has also stemmed from my belief that diversity questions affect society as a whole. Law librarianship is no different from a multitude of other professional careers such as law, education, or librarianship more generally, where stereotypical roles based on gender, culture, or race have led to a profession that struggles with diversity issues. But personal experience based on years of observation is different from scholarly research. Scholars in a multitude of fields have examined diversity objectively, discussing the pros and cons of changing cultural and societal stereotypes. Their work can be valuable in understanding more about what issues affect diversity in a variety of situations.

¶2 For this column, I have gathered some of the more interesting sources that have helped me focus and organize my thoughts. My goal is to share a selection of readings that may be helpful to anyone wanting to learn more about diversity and how it relates to our profession.1 The readings are meant to provoke thought and

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1. The range of readings that one could include surrounding issues of diversity recruitment, retention, or management in many fields is beyond the scope of this column. The selections offered here are meant to help stimulate thought and introduce readers to some of the concepts others have commented on in relation to diversity, management, organizational culture, or librarianship. Part II, scheduled for the Fall 2013 issue, will focus more specifically on issues of diversity in libraries and law librarianship.
reflection about what an organization is, how leadership is viewed, and how we experience culture and identity in our work lives. Many of the readings articulate what a reader may have merely labeled “personal observations” in the way I did before finding some of the literature, and it is fascinating to me that there are social scientists and other scholars who are studying human behavior in such a concerted way, trying to find better ways for us to increase our workplace effectiveness or increase diversity. At the most basic level, they investigate how we can ultimately interact in a more positive way with one another as human beings.

There can be little doubt that the struggle of discussing diversity and how to achieve it in all facets of society is a multilayered issue that is not easily resolved. Issues surrounding diversity touch upon factors that do not exist solely within the realm of a particular library setting, but can be carried into one and can escalate into discord if not properly identified, and if affirmative steps are not taken to understand the source of conflict. I hope the readings set out here can help readers understand some of the complexity that is at play when considering how to address diversity issues.

Culture, Organizational Culture, and Diversity

Narrowing down the readings that discuss culture and diversity generally is a difficult challenge given the enormous amount of scholarship across fields. The idea that each workplace has a distinct culture one must acclimate to was discussed in an earlier column. However, some of the following readings are intended to help one focus quickly on some of the overarching issues surrounding culture and diversity. Others focus specifically on organizational culture as it exists within libraries, and the particular challenges that face them. Readers are encouraged to peruse the following works keeping a specific law library setting in mind—doing so may trigger some interesting observations about the nature of cultural competency in an organization.


The Center for Creative Leadership specializes in education for leadership development. The Ideas into Action Guidebook series has provided several titles that may be of interest to librarians moving into new organizations or management, and a concrete advantage is their brevity. This particular title discusses cultural adaptability, and how assessing one’s ability to adapt to different cultural situations can help the individual interact more effectively with colleagues. In this book, Deal and Prince provide a cultural adaptability worksheet and succinctly lay out how one can develop cultural adaptability: examine your cultural foundations, expect to encounter cultural differences, educate yourself about different cultures, experience cross-cultural interactions and learn from them (p.12). One useful feature is their charts explaining “cultural dimensions.” In them, the authors set out a cultural characteristic and illustrate two extremes at each end. They then ask readers to identify where they may fall along that continuum to get a sense of how they may perceive themselves or others.


Gender issues were a subject of research long before the topic of diversity entered the workplace. In this article, the authors discuss how common stereotypes of gender can operate, and how the library setting, even though dominated by women, is not immune to work-related pressures based on gender role assumptions. There is an examination of how gender roles and an individual’s self-concept may lead to a stronger identification for men with their workplace; women may feel constricted by expectations that they play a more nurturing role in the family. There is also a discussion of how gender stereotypes are “intimately connected” with leadership styles, as well as how those stereotypes “influence the way we interpret and evaluate [leaders’] behaviors” (p.132). Moreover, even though women hold leadership roles in libraries, “supervisors do not necessarily value that style of leadership roles equally for men and women . . . masculine leadership attributes may still hold high value in supervisors’ assessment of performance” (p.133). The authors end with thoughts on how to prevent conflict and minimize the negative impact of gender role stereotypes by outlining several cornerstones for an organization in controlling the work environment: “[E]stablish the organizational culture, be proactive in hiring/recruiting, demand effective leadership, institute effective and on-going training, and demonstrate corrective action when necessary” (p.137).


Howland’s article remains one of the pieces a reader can return to again and again to be reminded of the difficult issues that can arise when working in a diverse environment. While acknowledging “the challenges of working in a multicultural environment are as countless as the varied demographics and dynamics of work environments themselves” (p.109), she nonetheless sets out six topics that merit deeper examination: (1) fluctuating power dynamics, (2) merging a diversity of opinions and approaches, (3) overcoming a perceived lack of empathy, (4) tokenism: reality or perception, (5) holding everyone throughout the organization accountable for achieving a positive multicultural environment, and (6) turning challenges into opportunities. Howland expands each topic, relates it to her own experience, and provides suggestions on how challenges can be confronted and overcome in a library.


The international focus of this article may be of use to those who want to develop an understanding of how diversity is approached outside of the United States. The authors review the literature surrounding diversity management and find it decidedly lacking in the international sphere—dominated by U.S.-focused research. One of their most interesting observations is that in the United States, concerns regarding diversity originally rose out of equal employment opportunity law, where the aim is to “predominantly reduce the negative effects of exclusions, whereas diversity management predominantly promotes the positive effects of inclusion” (p.39). The authors go on to discuss other limitations in the research, including lack of diverse individuals conducting the research and a heavy
emphasis on Western cultural norms. The article ends with a list of heavily cited research articles for further reading. By laying out the historical approach toward diversity research in the United States and other Western nations, and calling it into question while arguing for a more expansive multilayered approach, this article makes for fascinating reading.


If readers are seeking one article to refer to for basic information on organizational diversity, as well as references for further reading, there are few sources better than Kreitz’s article. In addition to providing basic definitions regarding diversity, and explaining organizational frames and the role of human resources, she also lists academic library best practices and discusses how diversity benefits a library and its larger institution. Kreitz provides a selected annotated bibliography, which covers a wealth of topics within organizational diversity and management, along with an extensive additional bibliography.


This article discusses cultural competence and the need for librarians to apply it to interactions with the communities they serve. Although the author focuses on how librarians interact with users, she outlines the theoretical background behind cultural competence and how it has developed in the fields of health, psychology, social work, and education. She maintains that there are commonalities, including that cultural competence requires “abilities of empathy, respect, understanding, patience and nonjudgmental attitudes” (p.189). Furthermore, cultural competence is necessary not only to improve services that a library offers, but “to improve interpersonal relationships among diversity groups” (*id.*). The author then posits a conceptual framework for the library profession to consider: that developing cultural competence is necessary in the library profession in order to “effectively reach those who would benefit the most from library services” (p.200).


Smith distinguishes organizations that aim for diversity from those who take the additional step of becoming “culturally conscious.” The difference is that even if an organization is diverse, it may not be welcoming to those from diverse backgrounds if the organizational culture is repressive, or if the institution does not have structures in place to recognize new or opposing viewpoints. Specifically examining libraries, she notes that to achieve a culturally conscious organization, libraries need to remember that it “requires competency in matters of cultural pluralism that are not intuitive and must be learned, like any other essential skill” (p.143). Furthermore, “cultural competency is distinguished from diversity by methods in which an organization or individual develops skills and policies for effective intercultural interactions in the workplace” (p.144). A particular strength of this article is that it outlines the characteristics of cultural consciousness in an organization and defines four distinct states that an organization may be operating within in relation to cultural consciousness. Smith emphasizes that by failing to understand how cultural competency must be an integral step in
making a library truly diverse, the organization sets itself up for continuing failure at achieving any type of long-term institutional change.

Leadership

What understanding the characteristics that make an effective leader can be useful information no matter where you stand in an organization. It can help you determine the stability of the organization and consider the effectiveness of different types of leaders within a specific work environment. Finally, when considering diversity issues, much of the success of an integrated workplace relies heavily upon an organization's leaders, so it is worth knowing what makes a capable one.


Ancona and her colleagues from the MIT Sloan School of Management have laid out an impressive structure in which to think about leadership. The authors believe that there is a concrete difference between an “incomplete” and an “incompetent” leader. The “complete leader” is a myth, given that no one individual can be expected to excel at all the tasks that may be expected of an effective leader, and trying to become a complete leader can often lead to disarray within a company. Instead, drawing upon years of experience and research, the authors state that effective leadership consists of four capabilities: “sensemaking (understanding the context in which a company and people operate), relating (building relationships within and across organizations), visioning (creating a compelling picture of the future), and inventing (developing new ways to achieve the vision)” (p.94). By understanding which of the capabilities they might excel at, leaders can assess how to increase their effectiveness in other areas, or, more likely, hire individuals who excel in their weakest areas. The authors discuss each of the capabilities, give examples of how to cultivate them, and describe how each can improve an organization. There is also a sidebar explaining how to assess whether one is weak in any of the specific capabilities. Perhaps the most intriguing part of the article is that, when read in conjunction with articles that discuss increasing diversity, it can be argued that the four capabilities are also a framework for training a leader to be more open to diversity and cultural competency.


Kreitz’s article echoes the basic premise of the preceding article: that leaders do not have to excel at everything in order to be effective. Through a small study, Kreitz sought to discover whether there were emotional intelligence traits common among library directors and members of their senior management teams, and whether certain characteristics overlapped between the groups. Even with a limited sample, Kreitz was able to determine that library directors often had a vision for the library that they were able to articulate, and they were also politically astute within their workplace, could motivate people, and could marshal outside resources for assistance. On the other hand, senior managers placed a premium on being able to handle other staff members, coordinate consensus building, lead teams, and work as a facilitator for specific teams. Characteristics that both groups shared in common included the ability to listen and delegate,
personal integrity, good interpersonal skills, and the ability to assess their own strengths and weaknesses. While Kreitz maintains that further research is needed, she believes that reviewing the list of characteristics can help librarians examine their own traits and determine which ones they should exhibit if interested in advancing in an organization.


This brief article concerns itself with the results of an AALL survey about leadership. It is illuminating for the differing perspectives of long-term librarians (those with ten or more years of experience) versus emergent ones (those with five years or less). Mackoff’s piece addresses the observations of librarians asked to reflect on their ideas of leadership. Both groups found common ground in what they thought were “deterrents to leadership: position, personality and perception” (p.473). When asked to discuss the traits that would make an effective leader, each group gave numerous responses, leading Mackoff to observe that the “large number of definitions of leadership is linked to a clear overall pattern in both groups—the lack of distinction between the skills and actions of a manager as contrasted with those of a leader” (p.480). However, Mackoff is able to draw several conclusions from the data, one being that it would be helpful to define what it means to be a leader in a law library in a way that would negate the effect of the deterrents to leadership. The author suggests that perhaps future training on leadership “should build on a foundation of management skills and focus on a strengths-based approach” (p.481).

Conflict Management

Understanding how to work within an organization that may have difficulty dealing with diversity issues comes down to whether or not managers understand the issues and are willing to deal with difficult topics directly. Reading about how to manage conflict within an organization, or understanding how to address the problem in a practical way, led to the sources listed here. With law libraries dealing with increasing internal pressures (shrinking budget and staff) as well as external ones (economic factors affecting the organization as a whole), knowing how to categorize conflicts within a workplace may help an employee recognize that there are ways to manage conflict effectively to benefit the organization.


Though this short piece was written more than twenty years ago, much of the practical advice given here is still relevant to today’s librarian. Compared to several more theoretical readings, the authors distill the issues surrounding conflicts in academic libraries and lay them out succinctly, discussing the costs, benefits, and sources of conflicts that may arise within them. They move on to discuss five responses to conflict and end by offering techniques for effective problem solving. While an early piece addressing conflict management in libraries, the article outlines the major tenets still observed by those studying conflict management today.

Payne builds upon the premises put forward by Kathman and Kathman, and starts by using the founders of Google to illustrate how conflict is used in a positive way when it pits teams of engineers against each other to develop ideas. Payne goes on to describe what he argues are four approaches to managing conflict: traditionalist, behaviorist, solutionist, and interactionist.\(^3\) Each approach has its own way of managing conflict, depending on how much a manager chooses to engage conflict head on, with each approach operating from different assumptions. While acknowledging that the solutionist and interactionist approaches can be successful, Payne states that a fifth approach may be developing: “[W]hat appears to be emerging is a belief that managers do not have to actively manipulate inputs in the conflict management framework; instead, this effort can be shifted to employees” (p.10). While ultimately deciding that further research is needed to determine if a fifth approach is truly emerging, Payne ends with the observation that having employees work on dealing with conflict management may free up managers to focus on harnessing conflict to make improvements throughout an organization.


Plocharczyk does a solid job of laying out the literature on organizational conflict. Discussing conflict dynamics, conflict theories, and conflict management styles, she also addresses the benefits of managed conflict and how it interacts with emotional intelligence. Along with a reference list, she includes an annotated bibliography of some of the major literature in the field, with extensive descriptions of each source. This article is highly recommended for those who seek to utilize conflict in a positive way within their organizations.

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### Racial Microaggression

Racial microaggression is defined as “brief and commonplace daily verbal, behavioral and environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory or negative racial slights and insults” toward people of color.\(^4\) Derald Wing Sue, a psychologist who teaches at Columbia University, has studied microaggression as it applies to different groups and has written extensively on the topic. While only two works are included here, readers are encouraged to seek out his other work for more information on how racial microaggressions affect minority groups.

Although the readings listed here do not address the field of librarianship, in the context of understanding what members of minority groups may experience every day, they are strongly recommended for outlining the nuances of repeated interactions that may, over time, have a profound effect on an individual.

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\(^3\) According to Payne, a traditionalist assumes conflict can and should be eliminated; a behaviorist assumes conflict is destructive but cannot be fully eliminated; a solutionist assumes conflict arises naturally but can generate positive changes when properly managed; and an interactionist assumes managers should actively increase functional conflict while decreasing dysfunctional conflict.


Aimed at informing white therapists who deal with minority populations, the article tackles the difficult concept of racism in society, and explores how unintentional inherited or cultural biases of therapists may nonetheless affect the way they may treat minority patients. Microaggressions are “brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group” (p.273). They “are often unconsciously delivered in the form of subtle snubs or dismissive looks, gestures or tones . . . so pervasive and automatic in daily conversations that they are often dismissed as being innocent and innocuous” (*id.*). The authors identify three types of microaggressions: microassault, microinsult, and microinvalidation. Part of the difficulty of addressing these problems has to do with the fact that the “power of racial microaggressions lies in their invisibility to the perpetrator, and oftentimes, the recipient” (p.275) who may be left with the “nagging question of whether it really happened” (*id.*).

One of the most unsettling realizations is that even when microaggressions are unrecognized by either party, there is still enormous potential for long-term harm, especially to a person of color and his or her concept of identity. The authors proceed to outline nine major themes as the basis of microaggressions, and four major psychological dilemmas that may be present for both the perpetrator and the recipient. While the authors examine the issues surrounding racial microaggressions and the implications for clinical practice, this categorization and description of the phenomena of microaggressions is critical reading for understanding the complications that may lie at the heart of the difficulties in achieving true diversity within our profession.


This article focuses on a study dealing with microaggressions in the classroom. It recounts the observations of students, who discussed difficulties in the classroom with other students and instructors and their reactions to them. It would not be far-fetched to imagine that these same reactions from students in the classroom apply to their interactions with reference librarians or other library personnel in a difficult situation. The authors conclude with recommendations on how educators can improve their ability to facilitate difficult conversations in the classroom. Many of these recommendations could apply to librarians as well.

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5. “A microassault is an explicit racial derogation characterized primarily by a verbal or nonverbal attack meant to hurt the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behavior, or purposeful discriminatory actions. . . . A microinsult is characterized by communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person’s racial heritage or identity. . . . Microinvalidations are characterized by communications that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person of color.” *Id.* at 274.