abstract: This article addresses workplace culture in academic libraries as an aspect of organizational success in achieving on-the-job diversity. It introduces a conceptual framework in the form of selected indicators as measurements of cultural integration in the workplace. Characteristics of organizational cultural health are also identified in order to direct an organization toward greater inclusiveness. The emphasis is on academic libraries, but the concept and content are applicable to information centers and libraries of all types.

Introduction

As a key action area under its governing principles and strategic plans, the American Library Association has long recognized diversity to be “a fundamental value and long-term goal of the profession, a commitment demonstrated through recruiting people of color and people with disabilities, and the promotion and development of collections and services that fully represent the American public.”\(^1\) Academic libraries have espoused a strong commitment to diversity as well, and leadership development initiatives—such as “Spectrum Scholars” and library residency programs—have begun to address the recruitment issue with encouraging results.

Nevertheless, the number of African-American and Latino librarians employed in academic libraries between 1990 and 2000 actually fell 13.6 percent and 44.7 percent, respectively.\(^2\) During the same period, “the number of racial and ethnic minorities receiving accredited
MLIS degrees grew 4 percent up to about 13 percent in 2000 from 9 percent in 1990.\(^3\) Together with more recent data, this trend strongly suggests that academic libraries have been less successful than other sectors of the profession in attracting racial and ethnic minority librarians.\(^4\) At lower salary levels, however, academic libraries do a much better job, employing three times as many Latinos and twice as many African Americans in library assistant and clerical positions as in higher status professional roles.\(^5\)

Although there may be many reasons why MLIS-degreed minorities seek employment “outside the academe” or elect to leave,\(^6\) the organizational culture of academic libraries and their approach to diversity bears scrutiny. In Thomas Weissinger’s view, “the cultural diversity and recruitment practices in academic libraries are limited by the profession’s worldview.”\(^7\)

Minority internship and sensitivity training programs do not necessarily transform the underlying norms and values accepted by library staff. Therefore, such programs offer no guarantee that a library’s permanent staff will eventually become more diverse. … The multiple communities to which librarians belong imply norms and values that may compete with or repress the norms and values of others in the workplace or among one’s clientele.\(^8\)

Thus, with traditional recruitment and retention strategies failing to produce results consistent with stated goals and changing demographics, academic libraries would do well to re-evaluate their own policies, procedures, and practices for any perceived or actual barriers to achieving a more inclusive work environment, one that truly nurtures and promotes diversity at all levels.

This article addresses workplace culture in academic libraries as an aspect of organizational success in achieving on-the-job diversity. It introduces a conceptual framework in the form of selected indicators as measurements of cultural integration in the workplace. Characteristics of organizational cultural health are also identified in order to direct an organization toward greater inclusiveness. The emphasis is on academic libraries, but the concept and content are applicable to information centers and libraries of all types.

**Why Organizational Culture Matters**

Organizational culture matters for several reasons. With a greater emphasis by the library profession on diversity, the importance of understanding the implications of adding “difference” to the work environment shifts and grows. Since the typical library consists of small work environments with close interactions, an introduction of “difference” is notable and can have an impact on the workplace culture.\(^9\) Organizations that apply “diversity in a box” solutions miss the breadth and depth by which diversity affects the work setting.\(^10\) Michàlle Mor Barak describes these solutions as a “one-size-fits-all approach” and stresses that “understanding organizational characteristics related to diversity [is] an important step in designing organization specific interventions.”\(^11\)

Equally important is an understanding of the composition and underlying expectations of the library work environment. The goal of an inclusive workplace requires a broad worldview and acceptance of pluralism. In their article “Organizational Devel-

The assessment of an organization’s culture can uncover psychological contracts. These are the unwritten (and often unspoken) understandings held by individuals about expectations, privilege, power, obligations, rewards, and the like. However, psychological contracts create powerful organizational mandates that may be inconsistent with the formally articulated mission and practices.12

By creating diversity in the workplace, organizations must become skilled at accommodating multiple perspectives and expanded worldviews. Yet, as Samuel Betances and Laura Souder indicate, “The study of hidden rules in organizations and the normal way of doing business in the past may reveal patterns that will not suffice for creating the organizational culture useful in responding to the challenge of change.”13

An organization’s culture consists of the values and norms established by the institution as well as personal attitudes, behaviors, and experiences that employees themselves bring to the job. In order to sustain and maximize the benefits of a diverse workforce, evaluation of the work environment for barriers to access and full participation in the life of the institution must be an integral part of the institution’s overall strategic plan. To achieve diversity in substance as well as in form, libraries have to open their arms to all perspectives and experiences. That requires competency in matters of cultural pluralism that are not intuitive and must be learned, like any other essential skill.

Diversity in Organizational Culture

Every academic library has an established culture for achieving organizational goals, performance expectations, and methods of communication. Within that culture reside formal and informal rules of interaction, frequently referred to as “values and norms,” that are established by the organization and its workgroups. An organization’s culture influences the behavior of its employees and guides how they view and accept difference in style and opinion.14 Ideally, academic libraries should have work environments that balance varying perspectives, encourage proficiency in cultural interactions and communications, and maximize the talents and skills of its entire workforce.

All too often, however, the emphasis on diversity in librarianship tends to lean toward providing employment opportunities and increased representation without addressing methods for cultural interactions and communications. In fact, “retention” is the other side of the “recruitment” coin. Although beneficial and needed for underrepresented members of the workforce, diversity programs that ignore retentive strategies can also marginalize minority members. Ruth Farmer explains:
Faculty and administrators are located somewhat differently within academic hierarchy; however, people of color, whether faculty or administrators, are commodified in ways that their White counterparts are not. This especially occurs when, through either internal or external pressures, educational institutions are forced to “diversify” their personnel. What often results is the positioning of faculty and administrators so that they have visibility (thus improving the institution’s public image) but very little autonomy or power (and power remains concentrated with the White race). Under these circumstances, people of color, like the scholarship of people of color, are given place but not importance.¹⁵

Many other scholars have echoed a similar refrain as those expressed by Farmer. For example, with specific reference to their experiences as librarians, Sylvia Hu and Demetria Patrick stated that they felt their existence was more about politics rather than an honest attempt to recruit and retain minorities. Although we welcomed the opportunity to participate in some diversity initiatives, we felt that we were often asked to take on tasks not because of our interests or strengths, but merely due to our physical appearances. …A major drawback we encountered as minority residents was being seen as minorities before being seen as qualified librarians.¹⁶

Frederick Miller and Judith Katz, who have written extensively on diversity and inclusiveness in the workplace, likewise contend that “without effective skills for communicating and partnering across differences, organizations tend to marginalize the people who are most different from the dominant group. These people often feel unheard, devalued and ignored.”¹⁷ Mor Barak asserts that “the difference between an inclusive workplace and an organization that merely implements diversity initiatives are [sic] the comprehensive approach to diversity as an overall organizational strategy.”¹⁸

Cultural competency represents a significant component of that “comprehensive approach to diversity” to which Mor Barak alludes above. Cultural competency is “a set of congruent behaviors, attitudes and policies that come together in a system, agency or professional and enable that system, agency or professional to work effectively in cross-cultural situations.”¹⁹ Essentially, 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. This approach helps an organization to leverage the diversity of its workforce and accommodate multiple perspectives by addressing the attitudes, behaviors, and policies that affect the culture of the work environment.

In the essay “Diversity and Cultural Competency,” Ghada Elturk asks, “Can diversity be implemented in the absence of cultural competency?” She indicates that “in the absence of cultural competency, even fair and just implementations of meaningful and authentic inclusiveness are hollow, cannot be achieved, and will lack the intended impact.”²¹ However, developing cultural competency dictates that an organization be aware of its own cultural deficiencies, and knowledge gaps must be identified and assessed. Once the deficiencies are acknowledged, a plan of action can be defined.

The Role of Assessment

Designing an approach to cultural change in an organization should begin with identifying its strengths and weaknesses. Denise Stephens and Keith Russell suggest that
library organizations (manifested as people) must be self-aware and educated with an understanding of the underlying cultures that shape them. They must learn why things are as they are, the way things are done, the unspoken (or misspoken) expectations, and the other informal systems that influence the people in the library.”

Traditionally, cultural climate surveys are the tools used by academic libraries to evaluate their diversity efforts (or lack thereof), establishing baselines for uncovering cultural issues of import to the organization. These methods tend not to reveal discriminatory policies and practices, a problem that a “diversity committee” can help overcome. Although not an assessment tool, per se, the committee structure offers a convenient and non-threatening means by which to gauge the cultural “pulse” of institutional life, especially given the widespread use today of committees. Moreover, these committees are helpful in disseminating, collecting, and analyzing cultural climate surveys.

Typically, these surveys are conducted intermittently and present a snapshot of workplace culture, primarily conveying a “tip-of-the-iceberg” view of organizational conflict and concerns. To that extent, they fail to provide a holistic picture and, instead, focus on issues of exclusion. Although channels for confidential feedback should be established (or maintained) for new and ongoing issues, the suggestion box approach seldom leads to the organic institutional vision of an inclusive environment that is both a starting point and a roadmap for real change. With this in mind, the following conceptual framework provides a basis for developing a more comprehensive assessment tool than those currently in use for assessing an organization’s cultural climate.

Culturally Conscious Organizations: A Conceptual Framework

What follows is a matrix for examining how cultural diversity is integrated into an organization. Rather than measuring an individual’s response to the environment, its use here is to categorize institutions by their cultural health. By defining the characteristics of a culturally (un)healthy work environment, a holistic view of the organizational culture can be envisioned. As a result, organizations can be positioned “to see beyond surface behaviors to understanding the motivations and values influencing people as they organize and manage themselves.”

Although much has been written about cultural diversity in organizations, with a fair amount addressing libraries specifically, the consensus strongly advocates the importance of having a diverse workforce and an organizational climate that initiates, sustains, and evaluates to ensure continuous improvement. What remains in question is how to best approach achieving these goals.

In his landmark article “The Multicultural Organization,” Taylor Cox introduces a model for analyzing cultural integration in business organizations. His model is loosely based on the “work of Milton Gordon, who argued that there are seven indicators along which the integration of persons from different ethnic backgrounds into a host society should be analyzed.”

Cox adapts Gordon’s model and proposes six indicators specifically related to the workplace, each indicator representing one of the essential features of cultural integration. This allows the reader also to understand the “stages of development on [sic] cultural diversity”:
Culturally Conscious Organizations: A Conceptual Framework

1. Acculturation
2. Structural integration
3. Informal integration
4. Cultural bias
5. Organizational identification
6. Inter-group conflict.

Acculturation is the manner in which employees adjust to the cultural environment of the organization. Cox describes these modes of adaptation as falling into three categories.

Assimilation is a unilateral process by which the minority culture adopts the norms and values of the dominant culture. Pluralism is where both minority and majority members adopt some norms of either group. Cultural separatism denotes there is little adaptation on either side.

He concludes this section by stating, “Acculturation is concerned with the cultural (norms of behavior) aspect of integration of diverse groups, as opposed to simply having their physical presence in the same location.”

Structural integration alludes to the cultural profile of the members of the organization and the context in which culture is integrated into the organization’s policies and practices. For instance, if a library exists in a minority community, but its leadership and composition reflect the dominant culture, it may want to review policies and practices for inherent (structural) bias.

Informal integration refers to inclusion in informal networks. This dimension covers social activities, mentoring, and other informal developmental relationships in organizations.

Cultural bias includes personal as well as structural prejudice, discrimination, and stereotyping. An organization or its departments may adhere to policies and practices that restrict alternative viewpoints, limit promotional opportunities, or ban certain informational resources as a result of an institutional cultural bias.

Organizational identification refers to “the extent to which a person personally identifies with, and tends to define himself or herself as a member in the employing organization.” This dimension speaks directly to an employee’s sense of inclusion or exclusion in the workplace. Mor Barak suggests, “Perceptions of inclusion or exclusion are a form of an ongoing personal evaluation and serve as the chief methodology that individuals utilize to assess their position within groups and organizations.”

Inter-group conflict embraces the all-too-familiar tension, clashes, and misunderstandings that can result from ignorance of other cultural values and beliefs, as well as an attempt to gain power and privilege.

Although Cox’s model is instructive, and, indeed, there is some nexus to the library venue, this author believes there are additional elements by which academic libraries ought to be held accountable. To this end, Cox’s model has been adapted to reflect four additional indicators of cultural integration, as follows.

Organizational cultural context demonstrates an organization’s awareness of its cultural context and its relationship to its constituencies. For example, a library may seek
to reduce perceived or actual barriers to access for a community whose first language is not English by producing handouts or signage in an additional language. An organization that is more culturally attuned might ask a community what its needs are, first, and not assume unproven “universal” needs.

Cultural worldview refers to the predominant influence of the organizational culture on the outlook or worldview of its members—a cultural component heavily influenced, in turn, by the dominant group in the organization. This can occur at multiple levels, such as race, ethnicity, gender, or sexual orientation, among other differentiations and contexts. This dimension is particularly influential at the leadership level.

Cultural knowledge integration portrays an organization’s ability to leverage the diversity of its workforce. Miller and Katz define leveraging diversity as “tapping into people’s unique power and potential, thus unleashing the talent that exists.”[^30] This dimension is important for dismantling “assumptions” about how employees themselves feel about their contributions to the organization. Lisa Pillow writes,[^31]

> The profession too often assumes that Black, Hispanic, and Asian librarians have expertise in ethnic studies by virtue of being a minority. This is often a carry over into the assumption that all minorities are likely to share the opinions and rhetoric of political correctness and multiculturalism. This is evidenced in minorities often being appointed to university and library committees that deal only with diversity.[^31]

Formal integration is informed by the organizational hierarchy and access to high profile committee appointments and other professional development. Minority groups are often unaware or locked out of opportunities for advancement due to their lack of access to power and privilege. There may also be a lack of knowledge of access routes that, for many minorities, seems readily available to members of the dominant group.

### Characteristics of Organizational Cultural Consciousness

Organizations vary in their response to the introduction of differences in the workplace. Whereas some are sophisticated and advanced enough to recognize the benefit of a diversified workforce, others struggle to address and accept cultural difference as a de facto component of the 21st century workplace.

Cross explains that “to better understand where one is in the process of becoming more culturally competent, it is useful to think of the possible ways of responding to cultural differences.”[^32] When applying his six-factor framework to describe organizations in terms of development of cultural diversity, Cox suggests three types of organizations: (1) monolithic, (2) plural, and (3) multicultural. The monolithic organization contains little, if any, diversity, resulting in a high amount of cultural bias. The plural organization contains greater diversity and reduces bias across all indicators. Lastly, the multicultural organization values diversity and has the following attributes:

1. Pluralism
2. Full structural integration
3. Full integration of the informal networks
4. An absence of prejudice and discrimination
5. No gap in organizational identification based on cultural identity group
6. Low levels of intergroup conflict[^33]
Despite some obvious overlap, the difference between a corporate environment and an academic workplace is significant vis-à-vis Cox’s topography. First and foremost are the characteristics of the “multicultural” organization. Cox’s definition suggests that there is an end state instead of an ongoing process to sustain the cultural health of an organization. Second, although the model itself has retained its applicability in terms of how culture is integrated into an organization, much of the information associated with the model is dated and requires modification. Third, the following framework presupposes that organizations will exhibit strengths and weaknesses in various components of library operations and that growth is incremental and developmental—not linear.

Accordingly, the author has identified four representations of organizational cultural health that characterize and categorize libraries as unconscious, aware, accepting, or blended, as table 1 indicates.

**The Unconscious Organization**

Similar to Cox’s monolithic organization, the structural integration of these libraries is highly homogeneous, which is reflected in the organization’s cultural worldview being based on the dominant group. This situation poses a dilemma to minority employees who may repress their cultural beliefs and values in favor of assimilation in order to feel included. These circumstances also produce policies, practices, attitudes, and behaviors that have a negative impact on groups outside the norm, effectively marginalizing their contributions and visibility within the institution.

The unconscious organization is conspicuous for its disregard of how cultural context affects the workplace and interpersonal relationships. Library institutions manifest these traits in various ways and locales. Particularly vulnerable are libraries that exist in mono-cultural communities in isolated geographic locations, especially when founded on a specific doctrine or philosophy, and where staffing is not reflective of a community that may have evolved in its cultural composition.

The inclusion of minority employees in the organizational hierarchy and informal networks is virtually non-existent. The organizational structure will, as is typical of the library profession, show a predominance of white women, who increasingly hold key leadership and administrative positions. Diversity in the unconscious organization is addressed solely from a legislative perspective. If employed at these organizations, minority staff are frequently viewed as unqualified, hired to fulfill a quota, stereotyped, and/or treated with overt hostility. Generally, they occupy lower-paying and lower-status positions frequently dependent on temporary funding, such as project grants. These overall circumstances leave the few minorities who are employed in these libraries disconnected, minimizing their productivity and looking for alternative employment. These effects tend to have an impact on an organization’s bottom line due to the high rate of turnover costs or litigation. As noted by Cox, the upside of this cultural state is that there is minimal intergroup conflict because of the “relative homogeneity of the workforce.”

**The Aware Organization**

A culturally aware library recognizes that it projects a certain culture, although it may not understand its impact on employee relationships and interactions. Limited in their
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organizational Cultural Indicators</th>
<th>Unconscious</th>
<th>Aware</th>
<th>Accepting</th>
<th>Blended</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acculturation</td>
<td>Assimilation</td>
<td>Assimilation</td>
<td>Pluralism</td>
<td>Pluralism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Context</td>
<td>No awareness</td>
<td>Limited awareness</td>
<td>Greater awareness</td>
<td>Fully aware</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Bias</td>
<td>High</td>
<td>Medium-High</td>
<td>Medium-Low</td>
<td>Low</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Worldview</td>
<td>Based on dominant view</td>
<td>Based on dominant view</td>
<td>Includes other perspectives</td>
<td>Includes other perspectives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Knowledge Integration</td>
<td>None – Low</td>
<td>Low - Medium</td>
<td>Medium – High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizational Connectedness</td>
<td>Exclusive</td>
<td>Exclusive</td>
<td>Inclusive</td>
<td>Inclusive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structural Integration</td>
<td>None – Low</td>
<td>Low – Medium</td>
<td>Medium – High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informal Integration</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Low – Medium</td>
<td>Medium – High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Formal Integration</td>
<td>None</td>
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<td>Medium – High</td>
<td>High</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inter-group Conflict</td>
<td>Low</td>
<td>Medium – High</td>
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<td>Low</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Culturally Conscious Organizations: A Conceptual Framework

cultural consciousness, these libraries recognize that their employees represent their own set of cultures that may or may not be in conflict with the organization’s perspectives and worldviews. Although the organization is aware of these diverse perspectives, it expects its employees to adhere to the cultural values and beliefs of the employing institution.

Diversity in the culturally aware organization exists but lives on its periphery. Consequently, diversity initiatives may exist in this library organization but not as an integral part of operations. Organizations continue to rely on the perspective of the dominant culture primarily because their viewpoint is perceived as universally applicable and assumed able to work with equal effectiveness across all cultures. These organizations will emphasize the benefits of cultural differences (such as alternative perspectives or creative solutions) even when their policies and practices may demonstrate otherwise. As a result, cultural bias will still be fairly high.

“Members of diverse groups are actively sought by this type of library, although their skills and talents may not be fully utilized.” Although structurally the organization remains very similar to the unconscious organization, a limited amount of entry-level professional and paraprofessional positions will include underrepresented groups. In contrast, these organizations may begin to develop a partial cultural knowledge base by employing assessment tools to understand where cultural bias and obstacles to minority staff participation may exist. The introduction of “difference” into the composition of the aware organization heightens inter-group conflict as employees adjust to each other’s cultural perspectives and struggle for power.

Although more open to creating a diverse work environment, the aware organization remains closed and exclusive, demonstrated by its worldview and operational practices. Although greater representation of diverse groups is a characteristic of this organization, its closed environment leaves minority employees disconnected from the organization.

The Accepting Organization

In the accepting organization, employees are encouraged to use cultural knowledge and consciousness to envision an inclusive workplace. Disparate diversity initiatives are brought together into a holistic strategy for diversity. Rather than assimilating to be accepted, minorities respond to the organization’s stated goal of pluralism. Officials make visible and consistent efforts to create equitable opportunities to influence workplace culture and operations.

Structurally, the organizational leadership of this type of library is inclusive of difference and welcomes non-traditional perspectives in decision-making, such as via informal networks and professional committee appointments. A concerted effort toward incorporating diversity into all aspects of an organization’s operations and strategic planning is the norm (such as via committee assignments, search committees, collection development, and faculty development support).

Institutional changes driven by the evolving workforce will motivate the library leadership to carefully analyze the cultural implications central to decision-making and practices. Upper management actively seeks involvement from minority employees or
multicultural communities regarding issues of cultural import and other matters, inviting collaboration and consultation.

Cultural bias and barriers to participation are significantly reduced and replaced by workplaces that begin to exhibit inclusive processes in action and in which minority involvement is encouraged and where divergent views are considered. Diverse groups are more engaged and committed to the organization as they begin to feel their input is valued and “heard” by officials.

The accepting organization promotes expanding the cultural knowledge of the workplace. It supports increased introspection, greater exposure to cultural information, and involvement in activities within and outside of the immediate community. This type of organization also recognizes the discomfort associated with change and growth and urges all employees to be aware of their attitudes and behaviors during intercultural interactions, particularly as they relate to teamwork and productivity. Due to a broader cultural perspective, the accepting organizations can expect a reduced level of inter-group conflict.

The Blended Organization

The blended organization represents the height of a pluralistic community, in which diversity and cultural awareness activities permeate the organization. Methods for integrating and sustaining a cultural conscience into the workplace are defined, documented, and consistently updated, based on cooperative evaluation. An environment of open acceptance of difference is reflected in the policies and practices of the organization, and the environment is continuously reviewed and adapted to changing conditions so as to remain inclusive of all groups. This implies a diversity plan that considers the holistic organization and consists of an achievable vision, measurable goals, and individuals specifically accountable for its implementation.

A blended organization leverages cultural knowledge to develop creative and viable alternatives to problem solving and decision-making. In contrast to the “exclusive work environment where workers are expected to conform to established norms, the blended workplace is based on a dynamic framework that relies on mutual respect and equal contributions of different cultural perspectives to the organization’s values and norms.”

This type of organization encourages continuous growth in cultural competencies, adopting as a standard practice “honest appraisals of its level of functioning with underrepresented and underserved populations.” In order to project an atmosphere attuned to environmental imbalances, the blended organization conducts ongoing cultural audits with mechanisms for feedback from all levels of the library and its broader support network (such as friends organizations, deans, and department heads) and implies a team approach to resolution.

A key characteristic of the blended library is that the “organizations and individuals are capable of recognizing and resolving conflict in healthy ways and managing it productively.” Along with development of proficiencies in cross cultural communication skills, written and verbal, employees will demonstrate proficiency in working within a diverse cultural environment. Affirmation of organizational goals and real progress will
be demonstrated by individuals recognizing harmful behaviors and actions in themselves and others and proposing culturally responsible alternatives as solutions.

Beyond the moral issue, diversity in the workplace is based on the simple and sober recognition that we need each other to grow our libraries, our profession, and our colleges and universities.

In the Absence of Cultural Consciousness

Derald Sue warns that “hiring employees from underrepresented groups without cultural change to the workplace results in misunderstandings, frustrations, and loss of valuable employees.”

At the core of cultural consciousness is organizational change and acquired competence in intercultural interactions and communications. It requires consistent monitoring of the perceptions of barriers within the organizational structure, and leadership at all levels must convey genuine enthusiasm and candor. Diversity consultants Betances and Souder note, “The study of the cultural behavior of an organization must be embraced with vigor and honesty.”

The public generally perceives colleges and universities as pristine citadels of open-minded, liberal thinkers receptive to change and accepting of differences. Many professionals who work within these institutions hold the same lofty opinion of themselves, notwithstanding the often violent and painful journey by which racial and ethnic minorities gained the semblance of equal access to higher education.

Too fresh in the minds of many are the memories of community and campus demonstrations, confrontations with police and National Guardsmen, the picket lines and hecklers, the protracted litigation, the executive orders from a reluctant White House.

All this and more accompanied the struggle to break through the white-only colleges and universities dominating the American educational landscape only a generation ago. In part, this exclusionary legacy remains as an embedded artifact of a dying cultural elitism encumbering life-changes and modernization.

Since academic libraries are microcosms of the larger college or university system and of the broader society as well, Jody Warner advises close monitoring of both “market” and personnel. “Until very recently, university culture was predominantly white, male, and middle class. …Knowing our institutions are at heart a web of people and relationships, it is crucial to consider how patrons, and librarians, from various communities feel about their experiences in the library.”

Of the few academic libraries that have attempted to obtain cultural awareness feedback from their constituencies, University of Tennessee libraries reported that “a few employees held a profound fear of retribution for truthful answers or complaints.”

Additionally, they indicated “that even the most well intentioned diversity program
can create an unwanted and unproductive backlash by those who feel threatened or perceive these efforts as fundamentally unfair.”

To forestall such backlashes, Mark Winston advises, “It is difficult to create an environment open to a discussion of race and gender, when the discussion of diversity is not seen as relevant or one is not a member of a minority group or women.” These statements reinforce the importance of assessing the work environment for barriers to inclusion. When properly defined, the cultural climate survey is a barometer of workplace culture, either presenting perceptions of inclusion or exclusion or demonstrating a lack of understanding of the concept of diversity.

Without consistent monitoring for conflict and barriers in the work setting, problems are allowed to fester and grow, jeopardizing productivity and teamwork. The culturally conscious organization strives to develop values and principles that support culturally appropriate behaviors and attitudes. In “Culturally Competent Libraries,” Kikanza Robins writes:

An organization with cultural competence as a goal examines its own culture to understand how, as a cultural entity, it impacts the perception and interaction of those who are different. This means identifying the dynamics of social difference caused by historical distrust and clearly understanding and accepting how others perceive the organization to be.”

Overall, a library that practices cultural competence promotes cultural knowledge and awareness, understands the importance of relationships, encourages diverse ideas, manages conflict positively, and embraces change.

Conclusion

In the pursuit of a diversified workforce, libraries have sought to mirror the public to better target resources and services. Changing the face of librarianship is not enough to accommodate the evolution of its communities and work environments. The end goal must be to create inclusive work environments and collaborative relationships by acknowledging barriers to participation and examining cultural consciousness through objective and ongoing assessments.

At present, the conceptual framework for assessing cultural integration in organizational work settings only provides food for thought. Further work is required to translate the 10 indicators identified above into an assessment tool that effectively measures an organization’s workplace culture. It is the author’s goal to test the cultural consciousness framework as an organizational and professional development tool.

Diversity initiatives in academic libraries currently provide a baseline for building cultural awareness and understanding. In order to leverage these initiatives, organizations need a comprehensive approach that aligns diversity initiatives, intercultural skills, and policies and practices that support cultural diversity. Library professionals are charged with interacting with the public, collecting and maintaining the history and traditions that underlie world cultures, and promoting lifelong learning. These responsibilities underscore the importance of cultural awareness and promote the need for skills in intercultural exchange.

Through evaluation of cultural assets and deficiencies in academic library culture, leadership at every level can strategically address diversity at the individual, interper-
sonal, and operational tiers of the organization. For academic libraries to participate as full and equal partners in a rapidly evolving global educational community, the skills and insights necessary to welcome diversity and pluralism must come to be regarded as indispensable tools of our trade.

Acknowledgement

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Notes

4. Although the number of minorities entering the librarianship profession has increased compared to the population of these groups, the improvement has been modest. For example, ALA reported that “African Americans made up 5 percent of the profession, but 12.3 percent of the population; Latinos represented 2 percent of the profession and 12.5 percent of the population; Native American were less than 15 percent of the profession and 0.9 percent of the population; and Asian Pacific Islanders were 3 percent of the profession and 3.7 percent of the population.” Ibid.
5. Davis and Hall, 14–5.
6. For a good review of the research literature on why African American faculty members and administrators, especially women, voluntarily leave the academy, see: Sheila T. Gregory, Black Women in the Academy: The Secrets to Success and Achievement, rev. ed. (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1999), chapters 4 and 6.
8. Ibid., 37.
21. Ibid.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid.
28. Ibid., 36.
32. Cross, 14.
33. Cox, 37.
34. Ibid., 38.
35. Cross, 14.
38. Ibid., 275.
41. Betances and Souder, 3.
42. Farmer, “Place But Not Importance,” 200.
43. Warner, 169.
45. Ibid.
47. Robins, 9.