Peace, Security and Democratic Resilience

There is so much talk about the importance of being one's "authentic self." Well, my true, dark confession is that I am a diversity heretic. Despite being an African-American woman with nearly 30 years of experience working as a global diversity practitioner, I have always been an outlier. In the past decade, I have seen a significant deterioration of civility and human decency that has corroded and is eroding our culture. [Richard Dawkins](#) has given the world *The God Delusion*. Perhaps if we are to make greater progress in improving social justice outcomes for all citizens, we need to start exploring the idea of *The Diversity Delusion*.

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Looking particularly at diversity training: what good is it? I've delivered it for years. It is not a strategy; it is an event. We've had some great sessions; learning has taken place about legislation and personal biases. Mountains may have been moved and awakenings had – for some individuals. But there is a large body of research that concludes "diversity training does not work." Why? Because there is a lack of structural and institutional change. Perhaps it can work, but not as a stand-alone activity bearing the brunt of the responsibility for social change.

There is a kind of hypnosis and rhetoric around diversity management. I do not under-value the blood, sweat, and tears diversity practitioners (I started my career as one of them) have put into diversity initiatives; I do not disregard the progress that has been made in improving the social status of traditionally marginalized groups. I would like, however, to see some fundamental macro-shifts in outcomes, real democracy, greater stakeholder engagement in core business and community activities, and a fairer distribution of power.

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Peter Schwartz, in *The Racism of Diversity*, makes a bold statement that the premise behind diversity management is the same premise behind most racist thinking. To an extent, I agree. James Taranto, in the *Wall Street Journal* article "The 'Diversity' Sham," says "whatever its benefits in theory, diversity in practice is often anti-intellectual, replacing reasoned debate with ritualized expressions of phony emotion." Well, the emotions are real, as are historic barriers; let's not take that away from anyone. In addition, we have to consider the rest of his statement, regardless of how uncomfortable it may make us feel.

Diversity training challenges us to move outside of our comfort zones in order to see the world from a different perspective. But it is not enough. The common way in which diversity is understood is bedeviling; this must change. If social justice outcomes are to improve, then we have to question two things: the way we define diversity; and the way we govern organizations, communities and, I dare say, families.

One of the most enormous challenges we face is coming to terms with our very narrow definition of diversity. We have made diversity synonymous with race. In our English language dictionaries the word diversity is, first and foremost, synonymous with "variety." Yet, most conversations – and political, economic and social debates about diversity – are prefaced by, and intertwined with, talk of race, and only race. And, even though it is often not explicit, people are really talking about skin color. I figured there had to be another explanation, a more scientific reason, why diversity is so important. Curiosity led me to the Law of Requisite Variety (LoRV), upon which the science of cybernetics is based.

The LoRV says systems must be flexible and diverse in order to respond effectively to complex, volatile, and changing environments. It provides a scientific foundation on which an argument in favor of diversity becomes virtually irrefutable – unlike prevalent, yet tenuous, political, economic, and social arguments. It opens a door to a systems-thinking approach to diversity-enhancement practices. So, while we may move the concept of diversity forward, we are still left with the challenge of finding more effective ways of defining and of valuing diversity within systems. This is where complexity theory lends a helping hand.

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Complexity theory speaks in terms of achieving greater creativity and innovation by enabling people to express a variety of viewpoints and perspectives. It focuses on people self-organizing rather than fully being managed and controlled in a top-down fashion. **Enter the possibility of achieving greater social justice and cultural equity by designing diversity-enhancing strategies, supported by democratic governance structures that operate according to systems thinking and complexity theory. That's a mouthful, and still much easier said than done. But it is what we need to do.**

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For instance, as June 19th (Juneteenth) approaches, how many people even know it as "Freedom Day," a U.S. federal holiday, and the oldest standing African-American holiday that celebrates the abolition of slavery? How many Vermonters are aware of the fact that, in 1777, Vermont was the first state to abolish slavery? This aspect of Vermont's history attracted me to live in the state.

But, education over time has taught me that slavery was only partially abolished in Vermont in 1777. To this day, it is still permitted under our current Constitution. Organizations, such as Vermont Racial Justice Alliance, continue to work towards the full abolition of slavery in Vermont so that Vermont honestly has something to celebrate on Juneteenth. Look into PR2, the proposed Amendment to the [Vermont] Constitution, and you will see what I mean.

We need civic education that will help us to improve the way we think about many different aspects of cultural diversity and governance. Communities that actually invest the time in doing this will stand out as champions of justice – now and in the future. They should aspire to reap the benefits of peace, security, and democratic resilience.