

**What's Wrong With Diversity Training?**  
**The Need for a New Model**  
**By Caleb Rosado, Ph.D.**

**The Problem:**

Since the 1970s, but increasingly from the mid-1980s, consultants have been addressing the issues of workforce diversity, prejudice, discrimination, sexism, and racism as social cancers eating away at the heart of America and world society, while attempting social surgery.

- It is apparent that all this training in diversity and human relations is not having the much anticipated results for a more inclusive workplace and caring society.
- Rather, one group, threatened by a perceived loss of power, exercises social, economic, political, and religious muscle against the Other to retain privilege by restructuring for social advantage.
- In some settings tensions have been increased instead of lessened.
- World renowned corporations, even after much diversity training, still retain patterns of privilege and practices of discrimination that result in mega lawsuits.
- What's the problem? Why the difficulty in creating ethical, equitable, efficient environments?
- Could conventional diversity training programs be part of the problem, such that the medicine aggravates the disease?
- If so, where lies the solution?

**The Rationale of Biology and Race:**

There is no biological basis for racism. Biologically there are no human racial categories, only variations of one humanity where every person on Earth has only between 30,000 to 40,000 genes, as opposed to the 100,000 that was once believed, and shares 99.99% of the same genetic code with all other people. Ricki Lewis, in *The Scientist* (16[4]:16, Feb. 18, 2002), states: "The Human Genome Project has so far revealed that what people consider racial differences comprise only 0.01% of the body's estimated 35,000 genes." So why do diversity trainers keep focusing on the one-tenth of 1% of biological differences, such as skin color and other forms of physical differences, as if these were the source of the problem. Roger Bastide long ago exposed this fallacy when he declared: "Color is neutral; it is the mind that gives it meaning."

- The reality is that biology affects racism by providing physical markers, which separate us first in our minds.
- Out of these mental constructs come the social constructs that then separate us in society, and are supported by power—the preservation of privilege!
- Both of these constructs, however, are merely *surface* issues, differences in one dimension—the horizontal—all on a flat plane.

**Present Training Models:**

The problem with the usual approaches to diversity training to resolve racial, ethnic, gender, and other forms of conflict, is that they are primarily focused on these horizontal, surface, superficial differences—the human *container* and how it looks (race, skin color, gender, and physiological differences)—rather than on the *contents* of the container, the operative Value Systems within—our paradigms and mindsets—that determine how we “see” the world, think, and act in harmony with that vision.

- Based on this horizontal approach in dealing with human differences, conventional diversity training models spend a great deal of time getting people in small groups to talk about how it “felt” to be “different” from others, whether by color, gender, sexual, physically challenged, class, or cultural differences, such as language, religion, and education, and how all these differences *shape* our values and view of the world.
- Some trainers do “cultural audits” to determine how these differences result in conflict.
- The training then shifts to discussions of what is diversity, prejudice, stereotypes, discrimination, and eventually to racism and sexism, as attitudes and behaviors of genetic superiority.
- The training ends with some “how-to’s” of celebrating, valuing, and managing diversity.

- This model is replicated and implemented a thousand times every day around the globe by diversity gurus and consultants doing “surface analysis.”
- Often, unbeknown and unintended, they leave their audiences, primarily White and male, angry, defensive, and with the impression that they are insensitive, greedy, ethnocentric, and responsible for most of the social evil in the world today.

### **Results of Present Training Models:**

*They seldom work!* This is because deep-level belief and value systems are seldom addressed. Therefore:

- At best, what comes out of this approach is a temporary respite to discrimination, and a “feels good” attitude that “I am now ‘trained’.”
- At worst, it leaves people angry, confused, resentful, defensive, divided, and often more segregated, crying “reverse discrimination,” “unfair,” “preferential treatment,” and pushing legislation that results in more subtle discrimination.

### **The Flaw in the Model:**

There is a basic flaw in traditional diversity training models. The flaw is that these models fail to recognize that racism and other forms of exclusion function on *two dimensions* not just one:

- The Horizontal dimension—focused primarily on the first level of change, altering behaviour and actions.
- The Vertical dimension—focused on the other four levels, getting to the root of the problems.

### **Need for a New Model—Five Strata Levels Deep:**

Here is where a new model is needed, a fresh approach that adds the other critical dimension to diversity training—the Vertical. The Horizontal dimension fails to recognize that systemic change is stratified.

#### *Five Strata Levels Deep.*

- Beliefs and Behaviors (Level 1), the level where most diversity training programs are focused on and beyond which they seldom go,
- arise from Systems and Structures (Level 2),
- which arise from Mindsets or Ways of Thinking (Level 3),
- which emerge from Genetic and Memetic Codes (Level 4),
- and these arise out of external and internal Life Conditions (Level 5).

#### *Shift in Focus:*

- This vertical approach is one that shifts the focus from surface horizontal differences of race, color, gender, language (Level 1), to below-the-surface vertical layers of Value Systems.
- These are core ways of thinking, believing, and seeing the world and acting toward the same, that emerge as a *spiral* of human development.

### **Spiral Dynamics:**

This new model, called “Spiral Dynamics™”, was developed by Don E. Beck and Christopher C. Cowan of the National Values Center, Inc. in Texas. It derives primarily from the seminal work of Dr. Clare W. Graves, late Professor Emeritus of Psychology at Union College in New York, whose research gave rise to the Theory of Human Levels of Existence, and secondarily, from Oxford biologist Richard Dawkins’ (*The Selfish Gene*, Oxford 1976) concept of “memes” (rhymes with “themes”).

#### *Clare W. Graves’ Levels of Existence Theory:*

- Graves’ research went far beyond that of other scholars to explain why people are different.
- “Human beings exist at different ‘levels of existence,’” Graves declared. “At any given level, an individual exhibits the behavior and values characteristic of people at that level.”
- These levels are open-ended, as there is no “final stage,” nor are they tied to horizontal variations, but are manifested as a dynamic spiral of levels of human development.

#### *Richard Dawkins Theory of Memetics:*

- Dawkins' contribution explored how cultural ideas (memes) impact our social development, much like genes determine our physical development.
- Memes, like genes, self-replicate, but by means of thought-contagion as cultural units of information, that use the human mind as a host, and attach themselves to individuals, organizations, entire cultures, and societies.
- Memetics is the study of memes, just like genetics is the study genes.

*Racism and Memes:*

- Racism and sexism are memes—contagious ideas—that infect individuals, organizations, entire cultures, and societies.
- Like a deadly virus they have contaminated all areas of life. What divides us in society is not our *genes*, however, but our *memes*.
- We look different because of our *genes*; we think and act different because of our *memes*.
- Our genes are only Horizontal differences.
- It is the deep, memetic, magnetic forces on the Vertical axis that attract and repel human beings.

**Implications for Diversity Training—the Fresh Solution to an Old Problem:**

The implications of Spiral Dynamics™ for diversity training are rather simple but profound ones.

- Racism is not a problem, it is a *symptom* of a problem.
- Prejudice, discrimination, sexism, concerns for diversity are not social problems; they are *social symptoms* of a larger problem.

*The Problem?*

- The failure to recognize that intolerance in all its forms emerges from deep cultural values that are at the source of our thinking and behaviour.
- These are the Emergent Value Systems at the deep decision levels within people, which emerge in spiral form in response to the Life Conditions people encounter.
- These Value Systems, or memes, serve as social “magnets” that attract or repel beliefs, behaviors, and bureaucracies—the cultural “stuff”—that give shape, surge, and substance to racism, sexism, and other expressions of exclusion, aligning them with congruent lifestyles or rejecting them if out of sync.
- They are the “invisible forces” within people and systems from which emerges the various “isms” that fail to recognize variance in the human family.
- The result is a mind/brain selective vision that excludes the value of the other, so as to harmonize Conditions Outside (our external world) with Systems Inside (our internal world), our mindset.

*The Solution?*

- It is here at the root sources of Value Systems—Level 5—where diversity training needs to focus.
- Yet, ninety-five percent of all diversity training, workshops for unlearning racism and sexism, conflict resolution, and motivational training for law enforcement, education, corporations, government agencies, religious groups, and social policy planning focus on surface differences—Level 1—the Horizontal dimension.
- Such efforts merely celebrate or seek to understand biocultural differences—skin color, ethnic origins, cultural preferences.
- While these differences may impact one's life conditions, focusing on them does little to resolve group conflicts.
- Of greater importance than the superficiality of biocultural differences are the profound differences in active, deep decision Value Systems and levels of thinking beneath, from which choices emerge that impact what happens at the surface.
- It is at this Vertical dimension of the spiral of awakened thinking systems—memes—where genuine multiculturalism and human relations training can effect change by showing the impact diverse cultural Value Systems have on the development of human societies.

**A New Understanding of Diversity:**

What this new approach of Spiral Dynamics™ enables us to understand is that human diversity at the deep levels of cultural values and thinking systems may be *the greatest, most empowering, diversity of all*, for these determine *how* people think, not just *what* they say, value, or do. It exposes how these Thinking Systems often result in different socioeconomic outcomes between groups.

- The key question for diversity training is: “What kind of *thinking* prompted that kind of behavior?”
- Our struggle, thus, is not with human *types*, but with deep-level cultural Value Systems within, that like migrating social tectonic plates, on colliding, release energy that reverberates to the surface in conflict over group differences and competition for scarce resources.
- The problem is not that we are White or Black, male or female, environmentalist or logger, First World or Third World, atheist or believer. It is the memes within us that are at war.
- Since memes are deep decision systems *in* people, not *types of* people, they transcend race, gender, age, class, culture, and societies.

### **A Danger That Must Not be Overlooked:**

All of that said, there is a danger here that must not be overlooked.

- Some campuses, corporations, and communities are barely beginning to acknowledge, respect, and celebrate the diversity of their constituencies, even though much of this is at the surface level—food, lifestyles, culture, books, art, music, etc.
- Others are not even there yet.
- To come along and say, “Hey, that’s nice, but you’re barking up the wrong tree; focus on the roots—look below the surface to the source of differences,” can cause some trauma.
- It places people in the position of arriving late at the feast of diversity as the lights are about to be put out.
- Both the horizontal and vertical dimensions are important.
- So, while acknowledging the value of differences and what each can bring to the common table, we must move people from an emphasis on the horizontal alone to the real source of the differences, people’s underlying Value Systems from which emerge the choices of life that influence what they say and do.
- The idea is not to discourage those that are barely starting to make an effort to finally get onboard in respecting differences, by telling them “Forget it, that’s not where its at.”
- Such an attitude can result in their returning to the old vomit, and saying, “See, I was right in the first place. All this diversity stuff is hogwash.”
- The idea behind the model presented here is to move people quickly from temporary surface solutions focused on tolerance to more lasting results, based on deep-level analyses of root causes and core memetic ways of thinking, while valuing their efforts at inclusiveness.

### **Living in Flatland:**

Racism and sexism manifest themselves differently depending on the spiral level they are located, resulting in *different futures* up the spiral.

- Failure to understand this results in a Flatlander approach, the approach taken by most diversity trainers.
- Edwin A. Abbott, in his fictional classic, *Flatland: A Romance of Many Dimensions* (1884), describes “Flatlanders” as persons unable to recognize the vertical, spiral structure of human development.
- Rather, they focus on superficial, horizontal differences, rigid categories, simplistic types, and on labels to put on people.
- They put everyone through the same car wash, one-size-fits-all approach, paint only with broad horizontal brush strokes, as “flavor-of-the-month” consultants who project their own values, fears, biases, and prejudices on others, due to a failure to see others dimensions and perspectives.
- The result is an insensitivity to the needs of individuals, organizations, and nations at different levels of existence.

### *The Third Dimension of Diversity:*

- A Flatlander approach misses the third dimension of diversity: *change*.

- To concentrate efforts only along the Horizontal axis, is merely to catalogue biosocial traits and inventory differences.
- To address problems of human relations requires managing both axes.
- However, the solution cannot come from the surface level, the Horizontal, but from the root sources, the Vertical. The question then becomes not one of how to “manage diversity,” but one of how to “awaken the natural flows,” the next level of development within people, organizations, systems, and environments.

*Multiple Futures Ahead:*

- This enables us to understand the *multiple futures* global diversity will take in this new millennium, if we are going to survive as human beings.
- “Human diversity,” declared Rene Dubos, “makes tolerance more than a virtue; it makes it a requirement for survival.”

**Rosado Consulting:**

- This is the new direction for diversity training, leadership, and the management of change in the 21st century.
- It is also the direction of consulting for ROSADO CONSULTING for Change in Human Systems, a firm that specializes in organizational change, global workforce diversity, societal futures, and the alignment of human systems.
- It explains *why what is next is next!*

**Welcome to the Future!**

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