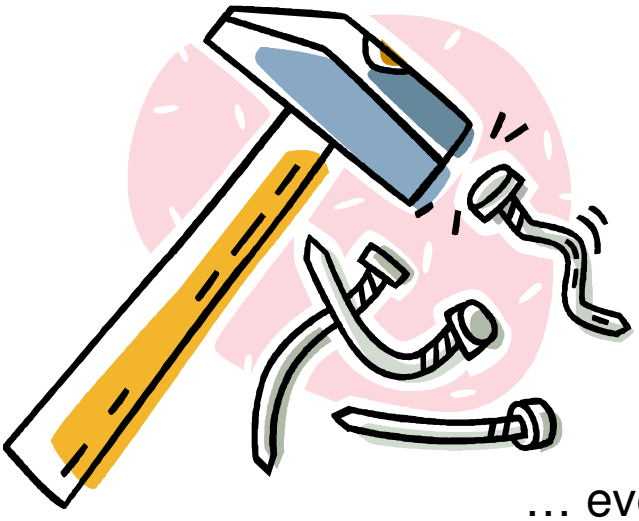
Leveraging Organizational Capabilities to Promote a New Paradigm in Michigan

Barbara J. Grutter
ANCORE, 12/08/06
TAFM Leadership Assembly



If the only tool you have is a hammer, ….



… every problem looks like a nail.

(Maslow)

Michigan
07 November, 2006



Michiganians amended their state constitution to:

BAN AFFIRMATIVE ACTION PROGRAMS THAT GIVE PREFERENTIAL TREATMENT TO GROUPS OR INDIVIDUALS BASED ON THEIR RACE, GENDER, COLOR, ETHNICITY OR NATIONAL ORIGIN FOR PUBLIC EMPLOYMENT, EDUCATION OR CONTRACTING PURPOSES.

Michigan Today



Michigan now stands at a point in time where it must adopt practices that conform to the letter of the law and the spirit of the public decision.

"We will immediately and carefully assess our efforts in ways that will keep faith both with our values and with our commitment to the state and its citizens."

Lou Anna Simon, President, MSU

James David Dickson, a U-M student, recently noted that in his five years at the University he had "never heard more thoughtful, constructive dialogue on the problems which ail minorities than he had in the five days since MCRI passed."

James David Dickson, "Life After Affirmative Action" The Michigan Daily. 14 November 2006.

Defining the Problem

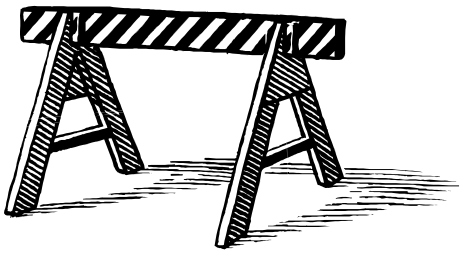
No longer a nail –
In the search for new strategies, first define the problem …



… then fill the toolkit.



…But there are barriers on the way to both properly identifying the problem and to filling the toolkit.



Barriers

- Public & institutional climates hostile or closed to open dialogue and transparent behavior
- Lack of accurate and substantive information
- Established infrastructures
- Established outlooks *or* selective perception

Barriers:
Public & Institutional Climates

- *Public*: Over the past decade, Michiganians repeatedly witnessed the group By Any Means Necessary (BAMN) use **disruption and intimidation tactics** to deny others the opportunity to speak or be heard (**while established leaders and authorities looked the other way**).
- *Public*: A recent piece in the Ann Arbor News quoted an ACLU representative referring to the decision of Michigan voters in terms of a "vicious kick in the gut, " and a product of "**self interest**" and "**willful ignorance**."
- *Institutional*: In the workplace, individuals feel **muzzled** by the belief that their livelihood or professional careers are dependent upon feigned allegiance to a diversity ideology. They report feeling **threatened** by a workplace permeated by the perception that evaluations are based on "**cultural competency**" and the achievement of **organizationally established diversity goals**.

Barriers: *Public Climate*

From a 12/03/06 piece in the Lansing State Journal:

> "Why did Proposal 2, which banned affirmative action, prevail in Michigan?
>
> There appeared to be little public support for it. I saw no lawn signs and few letters to the editor supporting the constitutional amendment. People seemingly **suspected how they might be perceived if they showed public support for Prop 2**.
>
> However, their hidden truths came out via the anonymity of the secret ballot – **all the racial demons that still seem to lurk in the scary part of so many of us** came out of the shadows to dominate this election.
>
> … The mostly white men & women who voted "yes" to ending affirmative action were **anxious; angry that they have lost their power and historic birthrights** to the good jobs that Michigan formerly offered. They picked on the wrong people.
>
> … Sadly, too many voters remained **uneducated and totally misguided** regarding the historical realities of race and racism and allowed those **demons lurking within** to win over.
>
> Sadly, that's why Prop 2 passed."
>
> Suzanne Elms Barclay

Despite practices that blatantly discourage public dialogue, silence is often characterized as evidence of racist "demons lurking within" - ironically by the very same individuals stifling open debate.

Barriers: *Misinformation*

A lengthy campaign season:

- Short on factual, relevant information
- Full of misinformation, disinformation, and misdirection
- Focused on gender-based opposition to the MCRI, representing a lost opportunity for a productive public conversation on race and ethnicity
- Short on informed reporting and reasoning, remarkable in light of MI's decade-long exposure to the issue and the wealth of information available as a result of the experiences in CA, WA, FL, and TX

Barriers: *Established Infrastructure*

Investment inertia: "sunk costs" can inhibit change - "too much invested to quit" (organizationally, extra-organizationally, & personally)

- Washington State University (land grant institution) VP for Equity & Diversity
  - Annual Budget of $3 Million
  - Full-time staff of 55
- NAS estimates $1300/student/year is spent in support of preference policies

Barriers: *Established Outlooks*

- "It is an experiment that we cannot, and will not, allow to take seed here at Michigan."
- "I am deeply disappointed that the voters of our state … Today, I have directed our General Counsel to consider every legal option available to us. …I will immediately begin exploring legal action concerning this initiative. …It is a cause that will take our full focus and energy as an institution, and I am ready to begin that work right now. We will find ways to overcome the handcuffs that Proposal 2 attempts to place on our reach for greater diversity."



Mary Sue Coleman, President, U-M
11/08/06

Stifling the Conversation

Unanimity was conspicuous at the diversity summit, where five executive officers of the University took turns speaking to the participants about the importance of diversity. **In any normal academic gathering, five speakers addressing the same topic would find some grounds for disagreement or debate.** The convergence of opinion among the speakers at the summit should not have surprised anyone, however, since this particular gathering was obviously not an occasion for critical inquiry. The diversity summit was not a conference or symposium or colloquium or any other recognizable kind of academic event. Indeed, it was not even a summit, which is typically a meeting of rivals or opponents. It was more like a caucus, a gathering of the party faithful—a setting where the emphasis would naturally shift from diversity as a fact to diversity as an ideology.

… I agree with President Coleman that our campus climate is not as it should be, but I disagree with her about what is wrong. We do not need more celebrations of diversity. On the contrary, the University administration has exaggerated the value of diversity, and we need dissenting voices to pull the community back from what threatens to become an unhealthy fixation. **Unfortunately, the U-M administration has discouraged dissent on this subject, and the resulting lack of open discussion is precisely what is wrong with our climate.** The inward turn that President Coleman seems to envision can only exacerbate the problem with yet more administrative proselytizing. **What's needed is critical thinking about diversity** —what it really means, and what it is really worth—as well as more attention to other, more central academic values.

J. David Velleman, Department of Philosophy. "Diversity: Changing the Subject." Faculty Perspectives, The University Record. 08 March 2004



How are TAFM's capabilities relevant today, and how might they be applied as Michigan's institutions adapt to a new legal environment and honor Michigan's quest to progressively affirm equal opportunity for all citizens?

TAFM: *Background*

TAFM was formed early in 2005 as a non-profit educational activity dedicated to:

- Furthering understanding of the equal opportunity issues involved in guaranteeing civil rights for all citizens, and
- Promoting a civil, fair, and open exchange of views on the question of affirmative action preferences.

TAFM: *Objectives*

In the context of a political campaign full of rhetoric and short on substance, TAFM established the following objectives:

1. To facilitate wider citizen engagement by fostering an environment of democratic openness and civility - an environment where open and candid expression was the rule rather than the exception and everyone was accorded their "time in the pulpit."

2. To provide a full opportunity for citizens to consider every side of the issue so they could decide for themselves what the right and just thing to do was in this case.

3. To further public understanding by facilitating open deliberation that would produce the best public decisions and effect long-term changes in public policy in a way that a vote alone can not do.

4. To provide an alternative to political advocacy by creating an honest and comprehensive dialogue, encompassing legal and policy perspectives as well as the foundational principles informing those perspectives.

TAFM: *Activities*

It was apparent that any efforts to achieve these objectives would be unsuccessful unless they took place independent of partisan politics and outside the political arena.

Accordingly, TAFM:

1. Assembled a speakers bureau of experienced professionals – both pro and con – to facilitate statewide conversations. Speakers were recruited on the basis of their expertise in the legal and social history of affirmative action, established commitment to defend or oppose affirmative action preferences, recognition for excellence within their fields, and demonstrated records of civic responsibility. On all occasions, speakers spoke on their own behalf and not on behalf of TAFM.

TAFM: *Activities*

2. Sponsored a series of public forums and invited everyone to deliberate and engage with experts in a fair and civil exchange of views. Utilized multiple delivery mechanisms to ensure access by the widest possible audience, including public debates; audio, video, and text web content; DVD, cable channels and printed material.

TAFM: *Activities*

3. Published resource and reference materials for discussion groups, individual citizens, and the media.

4. Filed an amicus brief in defense of the democratic process, and specifically in support of voting rights and the obligations of government to respect and protect those rights.

TAFM: *Capabilities*



Change agents committed to driving the search for new solutions

Application

- External individuals willing and able to drive change.
- Persons not aligned with legacy approaches, existing loyalties, and not invested in the current infrastructure.

TAFM: *Capabilities*

Practitioners experienced in research, consulting, facilitation, training, communication, and event planning

Application

- Promote an organizational culture open to new ideas or alternate approaches and perspectives – facilitate open, fair, and civil deliberations.
- Facilitate a structured problem solving methodology informed and substantiated by data
- Monitor legal compliance; serve as a public reporting point/legal referral service

TAFM: *Capabilities*

A Network of Experts - subject matter experts (SMEs) in the legal & social history of affirmative action, familiar with current and past practices locally, nationally, and globally

Application

Facilitate:

- The development of fresh strategies, moving beyond limited knowledge and established outlooks

Promote:

- An interdisciplinary approach, relating the insights, methods, and findings of multiple disciplines to the issue

"If you don't know how to ask the right questions, you discover nothing." (Deming)



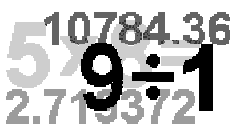
Avoid spinning your wheels; avoid recreating the wheel …design a new wheel!

TAFM: *Capabilities*

A *body of resource and reference material*

Application

- Learn from the experience of others
- Conduct evidence-based analysis
- Evaluate & benchmark results



Requirements for Success

- Open culture
- Guiding principles
- Transparency, including terminology
- Systematic process informed by evidence

Requirements for Success: *Open Culture*

Positive public and institutional cultures embracing participation, freedom of expression and high standards promote innovative change.

Requirements for Success: *Guiding Principles*



Guiding principles should inform all efforts. All work processes and products should be tested to ensure consistency with guiding principles, organizational mission, and primary objectives.

Themes

- Adhere and conform to all legal requirements
- Inclusiveness
- Openness
- Transparency
- Institutional Integrity - consistency in word and deed

Requirements for Success: *Transparency*

How Decisions Are Made (Ontario, Canada Universities)

… Possession of minimum requirements does not guarantee acceptance. Because of space limitations, preference will be given to applicants with the best qualifications. Applications will be considered from candidates whose qualifications do not meet the normal requirements, but such candidates must offer written evidence of exceptional ability, or of extenuating circumstances…. In considering students for admission and scholarships, the University reserves the right to give preference to students whose marks are the result of a single attempt at each course.

Special Consideration

Some students with otherwise excellent academic records are faced with serious personal, health or financial circumstances that negatively affect their academic performance. If the resulting average falls within a few points of the required average for admission and the applicant has provided sufficient supporting information in advance, the Admissions Committee may give special consideration. If you wish to make a case for yourself, the following must be submitted:

- A letter describing your situation and how it directly influenced your grades
- Complete academic documentation
- A letter from a physician if you are citing medical grounds
- Corroborating letter(s) from your guidance counselor/social worker, etc.
- A recent psycho-educational assessment if you have a learning disability

... Although we cannot guarantee admission, we can guarantee that every case will be reviewed on its individual merits.

Requirements for Success: *Transparency* (including terminology)

Terminology Quiz

1. Who said: "It would be unfair and wrong … to review students' applications using two sets of criteria, …"

   (a) Jennifer Gratz, or (b) Mary Sue Coleman

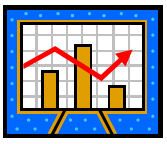
2. Who used the term "level-playing field?"

   (a) MCRI opponents (b) MCRI proponents

3. What does the term "diversity" mean?

Requirements for Success: *Systematic Process informed by Evidence*

Follow a systematic process backed up by evidence



- Problem definition (or objective)
- Performance measures
- Analysis
- Change Management or solution implementation
- Evaluation and performance monitoring

Success Enhancers

1. Focus on (and scale) problems, causes, and solutions over which you have control or influence.
2. Identify discrete, independent problems/objectives and causes specific enough to allow for making effective changes.
3. Focus on root causes rather than symptoms – avoid the tendency to stop at symptoms rather than going on to lower level root causes.
4. Avoid assumptions and logic traps; avoid knee-jerk responses – rely on evidence.
5. Generate effective recommendations in which a problem/cause is directly addressed by recommendations- evaluate thoroughly.
6. Recognize that a process may be iterative, a tool of continuous improvement.

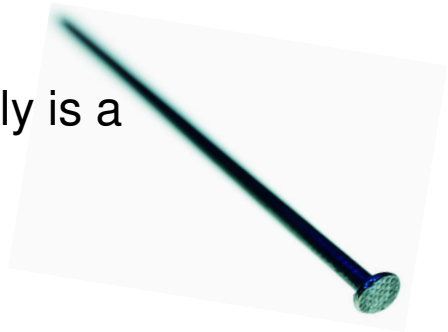
Challenge the System

It may sometimes be possible to make limited changes within the system - in other cases, more drastic measures may be needed. The goal is not always to optimize the existing system.

Be prepared to challenge the system itself:

its assumptions, its rules, its beliefs, its values, its goals, its processes, and its norms of behavior.

Even if a problem really is a



… you've still got to know whether to bang it in or yank it out!

(Wilson's corollary)