

## Chapter 11

# From Uni-versity to Poly-versity\* Organizations in Transition to Anti-Racism

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Like other living creatures, organizations use energy to preserve their integrity, or uni-versity. They treat staff, volunteers, and clients who are different in much the same way biological organisms treat viruses and bacteria. Organisms use their resources to isolate or expel intruders, even when the intruders help them respond to serious threats, and, over time, very few organisms survive without adapting to the environment. Similarly, over time, very few organizations are successful without changing in response to internal and external forces. In order to survive and thrive, human service organizations must be able to change their practices. In particular, they must respond and adapt to a workforce, volunteer pool, and client base that are increasingly diverse. In short, they must move from UNI-VERSITY (a monocultural, excluding world-view) to POLY-VERSITY (a genuinely multicultural, including world-view).

In this chapter, I examine the pressures that motivate organizations to change by presenting a six-stage model of anti-racist organization development. The model is based on ideas originally put forward by Bailey Jackson and Rita Hardiman in an unpublished work in 1981 and further developed by Jackson and Evangelina Holvino in 1988. Each stage of the model is described in relation to organizational mission, structure, values, employment practices, availability of services, and ability to deal with differences. Organizations may use the model as a tool to assess the extent to which they are inclusive and as an aid to move towards more equity and access.

I know of many organizations that have carried out activities appropriate to a Stage 5 organization, for example, when their organizations

\* The terms 'Uni-versity' and 'Poly-versity' are copyrighted by Arnold Minors.

are really located in Stage 2. The result has been frustration for employees, increased resistance to change within organizations, and, in fact, a firmer fixing of the organization in its (earlier) stage.

It is natural that people will want to put their best foot forward. It is natural, therefore, that they might want to conclude that their organization is doing better than it is. It is important, however, to face 'what is,' in order to design stage-appropriate activities that will move the organization to 'what it wants to become'; that is, to successfully make the transition to POLY-VERSITY.

#### FROM UNI-VERSITY TO POLY-VERSITY

Canadian organizations are struggling with the idea of POLY-VERSITY. In the past, most have drawn their clients, volunteers, and staff from predominantly white, Christian communities. But the community has changed dramatically. There are increasing numbers of people of colour in the workforce; people with disabilities are demanding equitable treatment; poor people want greater participation in the decisions that affect them; Aboriginal people are increasingly asserting their rights.

Oppression on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, class, ability, and race has traditionally excluded the voices of women, gays, lesbians, and bisexual people, poor people, people with disabilities, people of colour, and Aboriginal peoples. Racism is, in fact, pervasive in our society. It is impossible to live in Canada today without being affected by racist attitudes, actions, policies, structures, and social systems.

Not-for-profit organizations are at various stages in their struggle to become anti-racist. Organizations may show evidence of being anti-racist in one program, non-racist in another, and racist in a third. As they move towards anti-racism, changes reach deeper and deeper levels. At first, individual behaviours change, followed by interpersonal and intergroup behaviours. Gradually, organizational rules and practices, missions, norms, policies, and structures change. Finally, relationships with the community change.

These changes occur along a continuum of growth that sees organizations move from Discrimination (UNI-VERSITY) to Non-Discrimination to Anti-Discrimination (POLY-VERSITY). Discriminatory organizations are composed of Excluding (Stage 1) and Passive Club (Stage 2) members. These organizations promote the dominance of traditional power groups in society. They are monocultural and racist both in the way they are organized and the way they deliver services.

DISCRIMINATORY		NON-DISCRIMINATORY		ANTI-DISCRIMINATORY	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• monocultural</li> <li>• promotes dominance               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- within organization</li> <li>- within society</li> </ul> </li> <li>• racist</li> <li>• excludes differences</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ignores dominance</li> <li>• non-racist</li> <li>• denies differences</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• multicultural</li> <li>• promotes diversity               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- within organization</li> <li>- within society</li> </ul> </li> <li>• anti-racist</li> <li>• includes differences</li> </ul>	
UNI-VERSITY			POLY-VERSITY		
EXCLUDING ORGANIZATION	PASSIVE CLUB	TOKEN ACCEPTANCE	SYMBOLIC EQUITY	SUBSTANTIAL EQUITY	INCLUDING ORGANIZATION
STAGE: 1	2	3	4	5	6

Non-Discriminatory organizations are composed of Token Acceptance (Stage 3) and Symbolic Equity (Stage 4) members. These organizations have begun the work to put themselves in the path towards inclusiveness. They recognize superficial differences among groups, but believe that everyone is basically the same and therefore should be treated the same way. Although these organizations are non-racist, they base their structures, systems, and modes of service delivery on the same set of narrow assumptions that guide Stage 1 and 2 organizations.

Anti-Discriminatory Organizations are composed of Substantial Equity (Stage 5) and Including Organizations (Stage 6). Their anti-racist philosophy and practice recognize and seek to redress the power inequities among individuals and groups. They work with people inside and outside the organization to identify strategies for change at the individual, institutional, and societal levels. They are responsive to, and reflective of, their various constituencies and work actively to eliminate all forms of oppression.

Although organizations may express similar or identical behaviours at more than one stage, the reasons for the behaviour and its impact on the organization will differ. For example, a woman of colour may assume a leadership position in Stages 2, 3, 4, 5, and 6. In Stage 2, she may have been hired because she is 'white enough' or incompetent enough to pose no threat to the status quo. In Stage 4, she may have been hired because she is extremely well qualified and the organization needs a 'multicultural' person to be a token symbol for 'ethnic' clients. In Stage 6, she is

hired because she brings a unique set of skills, knowledge, and experience that is recognized, valued, and supported at all levels of the organization.

In the following pages, I explain the stages of the model and the behaviours that typify them in greater detail.

#### STAGE 1: THE EXCLUDING ORGANIZATION

The Excluding Organization is an inflexible structure *designed* to maintain the dominance of one group over all others. Excluding Organizations only hire staff, recruit volunteers, and serve members from the dominant group. Where such practices are prohibited by law, peer pressure enforces unwritten rules and procedures. For example, senior managers may want to meet all potential employees to ensure they will 'fit in.' By tacit agreement, Aboriginal people and women and men of colour won't fit in. Consequently, they are never referred for interviews. People who try to change these rules are isolated or fired.

The Excluding Organization has similar rules for clients who don't 'fit in.' Long waits and other service inconveniences ensure that people of colour won't return. Inflexible modes of service delivery also hinder outreach. In the view of the Excluding Organization there is no such thing as ineffective counselling; only inappropriate clients. As a result, Aboriginal peoples, people of colour, and others learn either not to expect help or to seek assistance elsewhere.

The Excluding Organization is like fate – it neither changes nor learns. It attempts at all costs to preserve its integrity or 'uni-versity-ness.' The Excluding Organization believes strongly in preserving established interests and works hard to deny the existence of people with different beliefs, histories, or values.

Excluding Organizations are very difficult to change. Only external pressure – for instance, from legislation or the fear of litigation – can drag them, kicking and screaming, into the Passive Club.

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#### WHAT YOU MIGHT HEAR AT STAGE 1

- Find some way to make that Indian woman wait. Forever, if necessary.
  - Those Black people don't belong in here with us. They just don't understand what we're all about.
  - It's important to preserve our Christian values; that's what the Canadian society is based on. If you bring in all those other beliefs, who knows what we'll come to?
  - You have to do things our way; it's the only way.
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STAGE 2: THE PASSIVE CLUB

While organizations in the Passive Club stage do not advocate explicitly on behalf of white people, their policies, procedures, and practices are designed to maintain the privilege reflected in the dominant values of society. People traditionally excluded get very little support from the system. Only a small number of racial minorities, First Nations peoples, and others are hired – and only when they have the ‘correct’ perspective.

Passive Club members provide services ‘as they always have been provided.’ They make no attempt to adapt and respond to client needs. The underlying intent of Passive Club programs is to ensure that people assimilate into ‘Canadian’ – that is, Western European – society. An English as a Second Language (ESL) program, for example, can be used as a device to encourage people of colour to see and value themselves only to the extent that they ‘act white.’

Passive Club members make few attempts to let in ‘inferior’ people. When people of colour, persons with disabilities, and others with similar disadvantages are hired, they receive very little support. They are also the first to go when budgets are cut. Although they are seen as spokespersons for their entire group, they rarely participate in the decision-making process. Alternatively, the organization hires people of colour known to be incompetent. Such hiring practices draw upon and reinforce negative stereotypes and increase resistance to change.

Again, external pressure is required to move organizations in the Passive Club to Stage 3. This pressure can come in the form of additional demands from an increasingly restive client base, from the threat of litigation or imposed legislation, or from the fear of losing funding.

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WHAT YOU MIGHT HEAR AT STAGE 2

- If they need our services, they’d better learn to speak English!
  - You see, we knew that Indians couldn’t make the grade here.
  - That Paki sure is good. He’s just as good as one of us.
  - We have to have a white president. That’s our funding base.
  - What do Black people think about the Persian Gulf war?
  - You know, you can’t even tell he’s an Indian, unless you look at him.
  - Chinese social worker in ‘mainstream’ agency: ‘Either I get all the crappy assignments or they give me only the Chinese clients.’
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## STAGE 3: TOKEN ACCEPTANCE

In Stage 3, organizations begin to design procedures that will provide access to all qualified people, including Aboriginal people and people of colour, at the bottom of the organization. They advertise themselves as non-discriminatory, with the implicit promise being that anybody can succeed. In practice, however, very little changes.

Organizations at the Token Acceptance stage emphasize the need to preserve the merit principle by getting 'qualified people.' Curiously, these same organizations often support mediocre or incompetent white employees. Only when people of colour are considered for volunteer or paid positions do discussions regarding merit intensify. From time to time, a 'token' person of colour is promoted into management. Those promoted, however, are usually 'team players' with substantially higher qualifications than their colleagues.

In Stage 3, top managers in larger organizations order middle managers to 'fix' the bottom levels. Usually, front-line staff resist because they know that changes in their behaviour will not be supported by the supervisors. This resistance is then used as confirmation that 'the problem is at the bottom.' As a result, managers do little to change the management practices that support and maintain institutionalized racism.

Similar superficial changes occur in service delivery. Organizations may have one or more people able to provide services in a language other than English. Some organizations hire 'multicultural' front-line workers to work with 'their communities.' These staff members, usually people of colour, are frequently marginalized. In some organizations, advertising may occasionally show visible-minority clients doing the same things in the same ways as the previously all-white advertisements. The implicit assumption is that all people are the same.

Pressures to move organizations in Token Acceptance to Stage 4 come from staff (usually senior people who have worked in other organizations), from clients, and from legislation in equity-related areas. Funders may also threaten to withdraw or reduce funding if agencies don't become more reflective of and responsive to their communities.

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 WHAT YOU MIGHT HEAR AT STAGE 3

- We want to hire Aboriginal people (or people of colour) just as long as they're qualified.
- We are an equal-opportunity employer. We do not discriminate on the basis of race.

- We have a very good race-relations program here. Our staff are learning how to deal with *those* people.
  - We don't discriminate around here. Anyone can join this department, provided *he's* qualified.
  - You have to be very good to get a promotion around here. I don't care what anybody says, if you're South Asian, you've gotta be twice as good to get half as far.
  - I guess she got the assignment because she's Japanese; you know they're worth a lot of points around here.
  - Boy, that was a great training program. Now I know why Black people won't look me in the eye when I'm questioning them.
  - We'd like to make a change. But it takes time. And we can't move any faster than the people now here will allow us, you know.
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#### STAGE 4: SYMBOLIC EQUITY

This stage is called Symbolic Equity because changes come in the form of symbols rather than substance. Many organizations assume that equity will be achieved if barriers in employment practices are removed. This assumption ignores the impact of organizational culture on the extent to which people of colour and Aboriginal people feel welcomed as staff, clients, board members, and service volunteers.

The organization in Stage 4 is committed to eliminating discriminatory practices by actively recruiting and promoting women and men of colour and Aboriginal people. Yet, all members of the organization are expected to continue to conform to the norms of the dominant group. The leaders of the organization may, for example, try to avoid real equity by assigning accountability for employment equity to a staff person who has no real power. In such cases, employment-equity staff are programmed to fail because they lack the authority to effect real change. By the same token, no manager is held accountable for achieving results either in employment or service equity.

In Stage 4, organizations begin to ask how they can respond to the needs of their clients. Typically, the 'response' is to reshape existing programs to fit the emerging needs of new clients. The 'problem' is described as a marketing one: given a new market, how can we best serve that market? Organizations at Stage 4 do not yet understand that, in order to make services and employment and volunteer opportunities more equitable, they must change power relations within the organization, and with the community.

Multiculturalism programs, incorporating cross-cultural or intercul-

tural communications and race-relations training, are prevalent at Stages 3 and 4. Organizations at Stage 4 may have a 'token' president or executive-committee member of colour. Often, this individual is not seen as a credible spokesperson by the community.

The pressure for movement to Stage 5 comes from a critical mass of women and men who demand equity at staff, board, and committee levels, and from a momentum for change within the organization.

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#### WHAT YOU MIGHT HEAR AT STAGE 4

- She got the assignment because she really knows how to act like a man.
- We pride ourselves in delivering all our counselling programs in response to cultural sensitivities. Unfortunately, our collective-bargaining agreement doesn't permit us to link our professional staff with community workers.
- If we appoint a visible-minority person to our board, we have to make sure that she isn't a single-issue person.
- Look, if you can't take a joke, you probably shouldn't be a volunteer here. We all had to put up with those kinds of jokes. I had to listen to jokes about limeys, you know. And those WASP jokes ...

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#### STAGE 5: SUBSTANTIAL EQUITY

The organization in the Substantial Equity stage has a flexible, responsive structure. Its leaders review their policies periodically. They may even revise a previously sacred mission statement. The new structure ensures that men and women of colour, Aboriginal peoples, and others previously kept out of the decision-making process help shape and reshape the organization's mission, systems, and modes of service delivery. Some organizations in Stage 5 decide that hierarchies – with their implicit assumption of 'power over' rather than 'powerful with' – are no longer appropriate.

Stage 5 organizations may set up task groups to identify community needs and wants. They also institute monitoring processes to *ensure* that services are delivered in ways that people of colour and Aboriginal people – employees and service recipients – describe as equitable. At this stage, multiracial teams of women and men work together at all levels of the organization to develop strategies and establish short- and long-term action plans.

Based on research and consulting experience in a variety of organizations, it is my opinion that few, if any, Canadian organizations are in



Stage 5, although some may have programs or departments at that stage. Pressure to move to Stage 6 comes from the momentum of change built up in previous stages; leadership from senior management, staff, and communities served; and increasingly clear evidence that service and employment equity contribute to organizational effectiveness.

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#### WHAT YOU MIGHT HEAR AT STAGE 5

- Did you hear about the Working Group? They're going to be working on the Community Service Project. I heard that they're bringing in new volunteers from the communities. They'll be making decisions right along with us. I wonder how it'll go.
  - Allan Young just became President of XYZ agency. He's very good. Knows this agency inside out and is well connected to his community. But I'm still surprised that a Korean has become president, this year. Especially since we have so many visible-minority people on the board.
  - I'm excited about the possibility of a new vision for this agency. Some of us have been talking about this for years and it seemed like nothing was ever gonna happen. It's still amazing to me that our executive director admits in public – on television, yet – that there's racism in the voluntary sector and in our agency.
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#### STAGE 6: THE INCLUDING ORGANIZATION

The Including Organization reflects the contributions and interests of various groups in its mission and operations. Members of the larger community participate at all levels and help make decisions that shape the organization and influence its direction. Indeed, in the Including Organization boundaries between staff, volunteers, and clients may either disappear completely or shift in response to changing conditions.

The Including Organization sees itself as part of the broader community. Its members support efforts to eliminate all forms of social oppression and to enhance the worth of all. It actively seeks the views of various communities and designs and refines its structure to reflect and respond to the expressed needs.

The major difference between organizations in Stages 5 and 6 is one of effort versus results. Organizations in Stage 6 maximize the knowledge, skills, and talents of their staff, volunteers, and community members. They are equitable, responsive, and accessible at all levels. Organizations in Stage 5 are in transition. Although they have appropriate structures and systems in place, they have not yet achieved the goals of equity and participation for all.

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**WHAT YOU MIGHT HEAR AT STAGE 6**

- We are pleased to announce that Deputy Chief [of Police] Brenda Larson has accepted an assignment as full-time president of Charity Foundation for a 2-year term. She'll be seconded there, because of her outstanding experience in our various communities. We are delighted at the support received for this secondment from government, the African-Canadian Coalition, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Charity Foundation.
  - It certainly is a treat to be able to be funded to work directly in the Somali communities. We learn so much about how we need to operate. And we're able to help create an actively anti-racist municipality. I've been here – off and on – for 15 years and this is definitely a new place. Of course, the city is getting to be a new place, too.
  - Our latest Task Team on sustaining services to new communities will disband. We want to thank the team members – paid and volunteer staff – for their outstanding contributions in helping us to achieve the goal.
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**A CASE STUDY**

[The names are fictitious.] Roop Singh is a caseworker in a child-welfare agency. He is a part-time worker, hired to relieve the case load in one of the agency's branches in response to the agency's desire to 'increase its multicultural staff.'

Singh applied for one of several openings for full-time caseworkers; he did not get any of the jobs. When he asked why, he was told that his 'experience was too narrow' because his casework dealt only with South Asian clients. Roop met with his supervisor, Anne Smith, to find out what he could do to get broader experience within the agency in order to compete more favourably for full-time positions. The supervisor told him that he was doing an excellent job, and it was her perception that 'as we deal with more and more of your people, we're going to need people like you for full-time positions.' However, she also agreed to begin assigning him a few non-South Asian cases. She stressed, though, that she 'needed him for the cases in his "own community."'

Anne has been an employee of the agency for more than twenty years, and is a strong believer in the dictum that 'our clients are always right.' She sincerely believes that 'multicultural' workers cannot work with a cross-section of clients, though they may be useful working in their own communities.

Roop Singh is the only person of colour in the agency. It is not uncommon for staff to share racial and ethnic jokes and comments, sometimes directed at clients. When he objected, he was told that if he was going to live in Canada he had to learn to 'take a joke'; after all, nobody had

called him a 'Paki.' Another caseworker with whom he was friendly advised him to relax and 'ride with it. Nobody means any harm. And getting aggressive about it just upsets and threatens people.'

In the meantime, Roop has met again with his supervisor, who has now told him that a couple of his new cases have complained about having to deal with a 'Paki' and want to be assigned a 'Canadian' case-worker.

Roop has written to the executive director, a white woman, complaining about a racist environment that prevents people in his situation from having equal access to job opportunities. Roop has sent a copy of his letter to Malcolm Ward, chair of the board's personnel committee, who has been pushing to make the agency 'more responsive to our clients and their needs.' Malcolm is the only person of colour on the board.

*Analysis: Is the Organization in the Case Study at Stage 2?*

If this organization is in Stage 2, there is a strong likelihood that Malcolm Ward was chosen by the board as its token minority member. It would be likely that he was seen as 'one of us' and would not rock the boat. His attempt to push the agency into being more responsive is, most likely, unexpected and not a stance for which he would have been known.

Anne Smith has a strong belief that people should work with 'their own kind.' Her behaviour serves to keep Roop isolated and the agency operating as it always has.

The organization could point to its hiring of a minority worker as evidence that it is not, in fact, racist, and insist that it will continue to hire more minorities. In this way, the agency could deflect attention from its hiring and promotion practices.

Similarly, the appointment of Malcolm Ward seems to demonstrate a willingness to choose people of colour for leadership positions. I would expect that there would be considerable pressure on Malcolm – perhaps through subtle offers to assist him in his business, for example – to stop rocking the boat. Alternatively, the screening process for the next board member of colour would be much more careful to exclude 'activists' with a single interest.

*Analysis: Is the Organization in the Case Study at Stage 3?*

The organization has hired a person of colour to work with people from 'his community' – a characteristic Stage 3 behaviour, and a very small

advance over Stage 2 behaviour. Though Malcolm Ward is a person of colour who might begin to influence organizational policies, it is not likely that there will be sufficient support for his efforts. For any real change to occur, there must be a 'critical mass' of people of colour and Aboriginal people on the board.

While there has been a change in organizational policy so that a volunteer and a staff member have been selected from communities of people of colour, there has been no change in the environment that would explicitly support them to challenge behaviours they experience as racist. Indeed, Anne Smith is seen by both board and staff as an exemplary supervisor, in spite of behaviour that is, at the very least, negligent. The almost exclusively white staff does not seem able to adequately serve an increasingly varied population. Though there is no information about the demographic make-up of the volunteers, in a Stage 3 organization they are also likely to be white.

*Analysis: Is the Organization in the Case Study at Stage 4?*

It is unlikely that this organization is in Stage 4, although Roop Singh's branch may be. One person of colour has been hired to work in this branch of the agency and is providing competent services to members of the South Asian community.

There is no indication that data from various communities are used to make decisions about programs. Instead, there seems to be an implicit assumption that programs are delivered as they always have been, though recognition of the need for responsiveness to different communities has begun.

If this organization were in Stage 4, one would see much more active recruiting of staff and volunteers of colour. There would also be plans in place for explicit training and career development for staff and volunteers of colour. In addition, staff would be trained to respond to expressions of racism. There would also be more active support from senior management for the resolution of complaints about racism.

There would also be more active efforts made at desegregation. At the moment, Anne Smith seems to operate under the assumption that South Asians are competent to work only with other South Asians, while white staff are competent to work with anyone.

*Analysis: Is the Organization in the Case Study at Stage 5?*

It is extremely unlikely that this organization is in Stage 5, though it is

possible that a core of board members is at that stage. This would explain the choice of Malcolm Ward as a board member; this core may be using the conditions in the external environment as a way of moving the rest of the organization towards Stage 5.

*Analysis: Is the Organization in the Case Study at Stage 6?*

There is no evidence to support an assertion that any part of this organization is in Stage 6.

## CONCLUSION

The transition to anti-racism, though challenging, is essential. Anti-racism promotes equity in organizations and in society. A considerable and growing body of research and experience also indicates that anti-racism improves organizational effectiveness. It ensures that women and men from diverse racial groups are brought together – in equal power – to combine their considerable resources.

Successful transition to anti-racism requires organizations to

- identify behaviours, practices, or structures that need to, and can realistically, be changed;
- determine necessary sanctions and supports, including training and education;
- plan for and implement changes appropriate to each stage; and
- review, monitor, and institutionalize the changes.

Anti-racism education alone will not make organizations equitable, accessible, and responsive. The move from UNI-VERSITY to POLY-VERSITY requires deeper interventions at all organizational levels and, ultimately, requires organizational interventions in the broader community. Organizations on the path to greater equity and access have to determine accurately at what stage they currently are and chart a course for where they want to be in the future. Ultimately, the only organizations within reach of POLY-VERSITY are those committed, motivated, and prepared to change. Ironically, these organizations are also the first to realize that there is no room for complacency – that change is continuous and the work of creating an anti-racist organization, and indeed an anti-racist society, is never done.