

Prevailing questions of diversity A biographical perspective

By George Simons

Diversity began for me in the 1960s. In graduate school we started interracial home visits, facilitating meetings of black and white neighbors to reduce tensions. *Diversity demanded justice, fairness and community. It needed legislation to level the playing field.*

Working in mixed neighborhoods, teaching and counseling on campus, I sought strategies for facilitation and peacemaking, particularly as Vietnam imposed inequities on gender, class and race. We created a center to help men respond to diversity at a time when white men were “the problem.” *Diversity was about inclusion.*

1975-1992 I created a small company to deliver organizational diversity services. *The challenge—moving from compliance to commitment.* Our DIVERSOPHY® training tools dealt with race, ethnicity, gender, differently-abled, sexual orientation, (now over 50 tools). *The question was how to help people find knowledge and skills to carry out identified diversity values.*

Our *Working Together, Men & Women, Partners at Work, Sexual Orientation in the Workplace*, and later *Making Diversity Work* were a mainstay of many US organizational training programs. We produced video diversity programs for the Canadian Defence Department. *Diversity became the expected condition of life and work.*

Mid-1990s, diversity went global. I worked from the Netherlands, Germany, France, and in over 40 countries. Walt Hopkins and I created a video program, *Not My Type* for the UK. Clearly though US models might help, our book, *EuroDiversity* argued that cultures need their own relevant models, even when this meant resisting models in US-dominated environments. *Diversity needed broader definition, more flexibility.*

Now internal US diversity gains are threatened by our fear, fundamentalism, and aggression since 9/11. Externally much of the world now sees the US as a major violator of human rights, arrogantly, hypocritically imposing its “brand” of diversity and democracy by economic and military force. *How do we keep diversity from dying?*

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