<center>IDEAtion in Nonprofit Management</center>

Let's start by defining terms. IDEA is an acronym that stands for inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility. Minal Bopaiah's book, *Equity*, and Vu Le's blog, *Nonprofit AF,* have inspired me to define each of those terms as:

- Inclusion – when people are involved, respected, and cared for – not just for what they can share but for who they are.

- Diversity – the noticeable and less noticeable/unnoticeable differences between people.

- Equity – fairness; the fair distribution of resources, especially money, to create conditions that allow all people to thrive > survive.

- Accessibility – designing goods and services so that people with a range of abilities can participate.

What barriers are keeping nonprofit organizations from embracing inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility?

Nonprofits organizations may not embrace IDEA work because of a lack of motivation (why?), a lack of direction (what?), and a lack of ease (how?). If organizations don't have the drive or pressure to learn about IDEA concepts – why would they? And, even if they are compelled to act and ingest as many books, blog posts, and scholarly articles as possible and attend conferences, workshops, protests, and support groups, what do they do next? Then, once they do decide on a "next" - a sense of direction on what IDEA practices to implement – how easy are those practices to carry out or understand (Bopaiah, 2021, p. 86)? Where's the buy-in?

My thesis is that people don't give a fuck unless they are personally affected by something or can draw a personal connection between the lives of others and their own lives or the people they care about. People are fickle: their attention is fickle, their feelings are fickle, and their bank accounts are fickle. Narratives of "we've come so far" and "rugged individualism" - the belief that a person is fully in charge of their fate – perpetuate fickleness (Bopaiah, 2021, p.

155). The fact that a nonprofit organization may do service work to benefit society does not make it, or the people who work for it, exempt from internalizing these narratives and behaving in fickle ways that prevent IDEA work from occurring (I swear that's the last time I'll write "fickle"). The challenge then becomes, how might we get people to overcome fickleness (ok *that's* the last time) by caring personally?

When speaking about IDEA challenges, it's important to consider that even if a nonprofit "does the work," they may fall into the trap of making assumptions. Touting true phrases like "systemic racism," "white privilege," and "the new Jim Crow," but failing to explain such phrases will lead to situations where a) people may not understand what is being spoken about, which can cause confusion or apathy, or b) the language of the phrases will be divisive or inflammatory enough to create the opposite intended effect and sever any chance of gaining allyship. The assumed understanding of IDEA language and concepts stymies a nonprofit from truly embracing IDEA work. In my opinion, such assumptions are also arrogant and elitist; after all, not everyone was in a social justice book club or got a Master's in Public Service from Marquette University. As Minal Bopaiah wrote in *Equity*, blanket statements "assume a knowledge of the system or privilege that most people don't have. If we want to make such statements, we must first explain the how behind them. How are White people privileged?" (2021, p. 158). It's important to make IDEA concepts accessible, even to the people in your organization. Heck, especially to them.

What strategies will you/have you put in place when you are/have been in a management role?

One of the most unpleasant experiences of my graduate school journey thus far has been spending the summer of 2022 siloed in a cubicle while all the white people in leadership positions convened for meetings – meetings that I was never invited to, not once. As I grow into

new leadership roles, I want to ensure that I not only create more seats at the leadership table and invite diverse perspectives to those seats, but also create bigger tables – different tables – shuffled tables – that spur people to interact with each other in new ways. Board members mixing with constituents? Yes, please. The young with the elderly? Awesome. Enemies with allies? Even better.

Earlier this semester in my documentary filmmaking course, I asked about the industry standard behind compensation for the human subjects of documentaries. My professor's response was essentially that it's not ideal to compensate subjects because it can compromise the integrity of the art by creating a transactional exchange. I think this is bullshi – I mean, unequitable. There is nothing wrong with something including a transactional component. Negating compensation does not make your art purer, it just makes you more of an asshole. According to Vu Le, "equity is about money and whether that money is going to the people most screwed over by our society" (2017). As I continue to craft artful communication and create stories for social change, I plan to ensure that the subjects of the stories I make are fairly compensated and not further "screwed over" when they share their life experiences.

Specific IDEA tools that I plan to utilize when I'm in leadership roles are Spitfire Strategies messaging box and framing. These tools are key for communicating and connecting with others – talking to people, not at them. Spitfire Strategies messaging box has four components (Bopaiah, 2021, p. 163):

- Top Value – Make your audience nod back in agreement.

- Echo Vision – So what? How will the world shift if we move in this direction?

- Barrier Breaker – The response to the audience's "yeah, but..."

- Ask – "What one, specific thing do you want them to do?"

Centering communication around these four components helps to get people invested in a cause and "rally the herd" (throwback!). However, to make a message impactful, it's vital to consider the language used. I mentioned before how assumed IDEA language can be elitist and off-putting, which is why I intend to use words that are more common and evocative - words that I have full confidence using when speaking to 5th graders. This is also where framing comes into play.

"Frames help build public trust" by making "complex ideas more accessible" (Bopaiah, 2021, p. 153). For instance, it can be effective to enlist people to brainstorm collectively on how to solve large societal problems like poverty and homelessness (which are linked), rather than race-specific issues. This is because people can draw connections to shared injustices and rally around common values like "opportunity for all" (Bopaiah, 2021, p. 156). To be clear, I am not advocating for color-blindness but for messaging that builds on shared feelings, cross-racially. Then, once people are hooked, let's address the black elephant in the white room - racism.

Are there barriers or challenges in your own leadership that you will work on? How will you address them?
Like most people, I was raised in hierarchical structures and accepted those structures as unmovable, unshakeable. I was also raised with a deficit-based mindset around money, believing it to be scarce when it is, in fact, invented and bountiful. These "mental models" (another throwback) impacted the ways I moved through the world and the rules I accepted. However, I refuse to accept them now. As I grow as a leader, the challenge now becomes: how might myself and others create our own rules while living in a society that plays by a different, oppressive code of rules?

An ongoing challenge in my leadership to address is the "us versus them" rhetoric and mindset that pervades media, daily interactions, and my subconscious. I think it's important to

reframe "us versus them" as "us versus it" with "it" being whatever "system" we are focusing on. When I lead, I'm now excited to say something along the lines of: "Collectively, let's shit on the system. What would you change? Surely there is something you want to be different. Let's start there. Then let's ask some more questions."

Lastly, I haven't been very mindful of harm reduction and accessibility in all my occupations and projects, at least not in years prior. Thus, I commit to being more intentional. When assessing harm reduction, I'll ask if my words, actions, or choices are: Reinforcing stereotypes or stigma? Generalizing? Reinforcing gender binaries (he/she)? Shaming people? Appropriating cultural terms? Making light of peoples' struggles? Using ableist terms? (Bopaiah, 2021, p. 201). When assessing accessibility, I'll reflect on differences of: "vision, hearing, mobility, cognitive ability, [and] culture" (Bopaiah, 2021, p. 187). I promise to be less ignorant and more awesome.

References

Bopaiah, M. (2021). *Equity: How to Design Organizations Where Everyone Thrives*. Berrett-

    Koehler Publishers.

Le, V. (2017, October 15). *Can we agree on this simple definition of Equity?* Nonprofit AF.

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