

# FROM THEIR MOUTHS:

## THE LIVED EXPERIENCES OF CHIEF DIVERSITY OFFICERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

*Revealing National Research on CDO Attitudes, Workplace Perceptions and Skill Applications*



**COOPLEW**

Leading The Next Paradigm for Transformative Diversity Leadership.

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary .....	3
Highlights .....	5
The Changing Landscape for CDOs .....	6
Close the Gap <i>before</i> You Leave: Who's Coming, Who's Going? .....	10
Redefinition: The New Paradigm of Rules for Diversity Leadership .....	13
“Top-Down” or Down from The Top? .....	15
How Do Faculty Fare with the CDO? .....	17
Does Advising Students of Color Identify the Primary Expectation of CDOs?....	19
Is the CDO a Partner or Pawn to Presidents? .....	21
How the Scale Tilts Regarding CDOs and Equality .....	23
From Their Mouths... 31 Times .....	25
Conclusions .....	28

# Executive Summary

Understanding expectations of diversity leadership in higher education has remained an elusive task for both new and seasoned diversity officers. While sixty-eight percent of Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs) confess to having less than seven years on the job, nearly as many admit that they were either first to take the helm or have little history to follow.

The slippery grip on comprehensive understanding of CDO work exists in part because the lifespan for CDO professionalization is barely 20 years old. However, and perhaps far more impacting, is the perspective held by CDOs that they are silenced by a myriad of workplace circumstances when it comes to sharing their experiences under pressure to meet the political, psychological, cultural, physical and financial needs of an increasingly demanding campus constituency. CDOs have long awaited research that could speak on their behalf as well as advocate for more infrastructure and fewer conundrums. To-date, no flag has been raised to alert new and aspiring CDOs about lived experiences in the workplace, nor has the difficult president-CDO conversation been summoned out from under the table for long-overdue discovery and accurate accounts of everyday, strategic, and conflicting drivers of this transformative work.

The CoopLew Study – *From Their Mouths: The Lived Experiences of Chief Diversity Officers in Higher Education* – was conducted in Fall 2016. The study was groundbreaking national research conducted to bring forward credible and personal sentiments from CDOs about their attitudes, workplace perceptions, and skill applications from the perspectives of current and previous positions. With nearly 300 overall respondents actively serving in higher education, CoopLew presents the results from one of the largest studies about CDOs on record. The results are a clear summons for a national conversation about CDO executive functionality and emergence, training urgencies, competency standardization, and yes, about what CDOs are saying about their relationships with presidents and senior peers.

Target areas of the CoopLew Study were:

- General work context – Working with clear directions; being heard and respected.
- Organizational values and behaviors – Consensus on expectations; How one was treated.
- Utilization of skill sets – Degrees to which certain skills could be used or were rejected.
- Personal reflections – Beliefs about whether schools were truly inclusive, valued equity and diversity.

This segment also focused on subcategories to reveal what CDOs thought about workplace matters such as:

- Skills for the 21st century
- Resources to do the job
- Job satisfaction stemming from personal treatment and respect
- Expectations of the job from top-down and peer perspectives
- Job satisfaction stemming from personal treatment and respect
- Expectations of the job from top-down and peer perspectives
- Imperatives for building strategic relationships
- Personal perceptions about what an inclusive campus behaves like
- Relationships with students, staff, faculty and senior administrators

Qualitative efforts were completed by conducting 31 post-survey interviews. Participants were self-selected via response to an invitation to take part in an exclusive, confidential interview related to the research subject matter. Access to interviews was granted upon notice provided by respondents to CoopLew that the option to be personally interviewed was chosen.

It was clear that CDOs are struggling to meet demands placed on them from nearly every possible direction. More prevalent was the finding that the majority of CDOs feel marginalized while performing their work. As a result, CDOs across the country are looking for a voice to tell their stories about their encounters while crusading for diversity, equity, and justice amid traditions, politics, inequities and in-your-face isms that change the rules seemingly each time genuine structural change is at bay.

Other studies pertaining to CDOs, such as those completed by the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE) and a recent work by Witt/Kieffer, have done a great service by providing information about the context and elements of CDOs' work, such as years of service, position levels, institution types, etc. Notwithstanding, the CoopLew study reveals the heart of the professional – the person – in a way that sheds light onto common, shared daily experiences. It found CDOs' desire and need for a genuinely supportive institutional culture is challenged by resistance, coined by CoopLew as the “shadow culture” – unwritten rules that surface after hiring that confound and otherwise thwart CDOs' progress toward peace and tranquility among all constituents. The CoopLew data was exclusive and its high response rate told a story about how CDOs' daily experiences unfold. The data also painted a landscape for new paradigms in diversity expertise and administration.



# Highlights



## AVERAGE CDO TIME IN OFFICE

is only 3 years with a clear majority set to retire in 10 -15 years.



## CDO CONFIDENCE ABOUT PARTNERSHIP WITH PRESIDENTS

or provosts decreases as they move from one job to the next.



## GEN X'ERS AND MILLENNIALS ARE ONLY 29%

The looming gap must be filled with adequate training to ensure a pipeline for 21st century diversity talent.



## 75% OF CDOS BELIEVE

that students are referred to them for advice during racial crises because of their race, not their expertise.



## ROLE MODELING INSTITUTIONAL DIVERSITY

behavior is delegated, not demonstrated. 73% of CDOs agree.



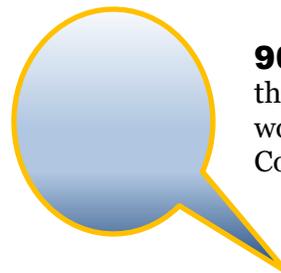
## ONLY 59% OF CDOS AGREE

that their senior team members consider them as equals.



## CDOS FEEL RESPECTED BY FACULTY

as individuals, but not as equals among administrators within their institutions.



**90% of CDOs shared** their perspectives about work exclusively with CoopLew

# The Changing Landscape for CDOs

*“Previous works to define and frame CDO work (Williams, Williams & Wade-Golden, 2013) set stages for introductory form and function, but the evolution of diversity as a term, a social paradigm or an imperative for excellence has made the role like a palimpsest – written over, scratched out and highlighted for the sake of improving visionary and specific competencies and principles.”*

*-Anonymous CDO*

# Introduction

The profession of Chief Diversity Officer (CDO), born from the advances of affirmative action, has run a hard and slow path to recognition as a separate function, paradigm, and job description within colleges and universities. Social and corporate movements toward new meanings of “workplace” have helped to influence higher education, still notions about doing the “right thing” or tapping into diverse markets have remained self-paced at best resulting in incremental steps towards the profession’s emergence. For many institutions, compliance-based interventions were not enough to make diversity valued institution-wide. As a result, pressures for diversity infrastructures and focused leadership began to mount. As conversations increased, so did the uncovering of traditionalist and mono-cultural approaches to core components of diversity such as collaboration, shared governance, equity, and inclusion. Demands for more inclusive approaches gave rationale for institutions to create CDO positions despite seen and unseen oppositions.

Today, CDO positions can be found at nearly every type of institution. More CDO positions have been created since 2010 than in the previous 20 years. With every addition, each CDO must grapple with not only what has been uncovered to date, but also contend with increasingly savvy and systemic mechanisms used to disguise injustice and partisanship in direct opposition of 50+ years of civil rights

progress. With the profession still very young and far from reaching its pinnacle as a mainstay in higher education, literature supporting the onset and responsibility of CDOs continues to grow in spite of unseen barriers to advanced competencies on diversity administration. Initiatives that advance diversity research and literature within the academy are critical if cross-cultural understanding and increased institutional capacity to serve a 21st century society are to be achieved.

CDOs have evolved thus far to the forefront for championing and catalyzing opportunities for policy, climate, teaching, research and service transformations. Data compilations which show continuous evolution in this regard are fast becoming support for centralizing university diversity leadership along with increasing policy-making authority. As the graphic below suggests, a myriad of new and complex challenges associated with faculty, staff, students and community is looming as well. These challenges are political in nature and demand savvy at lobbying, bargaining, jockeying, negotiating for limited human and financial resources, and vying for transformative power and authority.

CDOs must navigate land mines – rugged terrains of uneven support, hostility, and apathy – more so now than years ago due to an increased complexity in institutional systems. It takes increasing and sustainable skills to walk this “tightrope” of challenges.

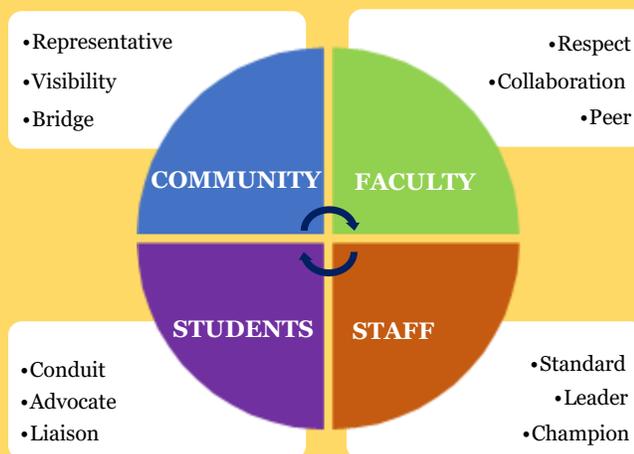
The onset of CDOs in higher education brought about novice but timely history in institutional leadership. Surges in CDO executive-level hiring make it critical to consider what institutions are affording to those who sit at the table representing such an intimidating and transformative paradigm as diversity.

Few studies, current or past, have focused explicitly on CDOs' attitudes, workplace perceptions and skill applications (Leon, 2010; Jaschik, 2011; Nixon, 2017; Pittard, 2010). Most diversity research and literature has focused on: what a CDO should know, folio construction, social theory, best practices for diversity leadership, and other components of the CDOs' preparation and development (Williams & Wade-Golden, 2007, 2008, 2013; Worthington, Stanley, & Lewis, 2014). Still, few have simply asked, "How are you doing?" after being exposed to years of traditionalism and systemic isms. And even though national conferences provide havens for CDOs to share nuances of their professional and personal developments, insight into the lived-experiences of CDOs has not been available broadly to those in higher education. Now, these experiences are being echoed on a national level.

To get an answer to the simple yet telling question, "How are you doing?" A CoopLew initiative to compile data for use in constructing conversations about CDO experiences was put into motion. The study, sponsored by Insight into Diversity Magazine (INSIGHT), sought to glean CDOs' perspectives of their general work, known assisters and resisters, and the impact sustained from routine responsibilities. This initiative ultimately sought to improve understanding between the president and the CDO and to make delivery

of optimal support for the CDO a subject of national conversation. The data collected are presented in text, quotes, and graphs in this report. They provide real and recent insight into political, environmental and functional components of the CDO landscape. Finally, the data provide empirical evidence of CDOs' "tongue-held" confessions for use in national conversations, at conferences, in classrooms, boardrooms and communities. Moreover, this study sheds a light on perspectives held by university CDOs' perceptions of how they are viewed by university presidents and other senior officers with whom the CDO is expected to develop strategic partnerships.

The daily predicament of CDOs is well known among CDOs, but not among those who have never sat in their seats. CoopLew data reveal an average tenure in office at any institution at only 3 years. This study sheds light on why some succeed at holding longer tenures while most opt for greener pastures after this benchmark tenure.



## Methodology

The CoopLew survey instrument was developed and themed around four major segments of CDO work responsibilities. The segments were chosen from recent literature and similar surveys and were as follows: General Work Context, Organizational Behaviors & Values, Skills & Applications and Personal Reflections. The multiple-choice and Likert scale instrument was vetted to national diversity organizations for review and support before CoopLew chose INSIGHT magazine, a non-partisan, national outreach and data storage organization, to distribute the survey to CDOs in higher education via electronic solicitation and preserve the integrity of data from over two hundred seventy respondents. In addition, confidential phone conversations were conducted with 31 study participants who elected to contact CoopLew for additional participation. An introductory article was printed in INSIGHT prior to a question and answer session conducted during a national preview presentation of CoopLew survey results. All data was combined and analyzed for purposes such as this report.

Prior to the time research for this study began, CoopLew inquired with NADOHE to obtain an estimate of the number of CDOs in higher education. We were informed that while there is no national census on concise CDO representation, NADOHE had nearly 600 individual and institutional members. CoopLew surveys were distributed to more than 5000 members of the INSIGHT database, regardless of CDO designation. The survey specifically asked for respondents who were “chief diversity officers throughout U.S. colleges and universities.” Thus, the sample size of the CoopLew study potentially represents near 50% of CDOs in active role responsibility.

A breakdown of CDO respondents by institution type is provided below in Table 1.

**Table 1**  
**CoopLew Survey Respondents by Institution Type**

Institution Type	Responses	Percentages
Community College	31	11.70%
Public University	134	50.57%
Private University	75	28.30%
Professional School	29	10.94%
University System	9	3.40%
2-Year University	2	0.75%
Other Institutions	6	2.23%
<b>Total Respondents: 265</b>		

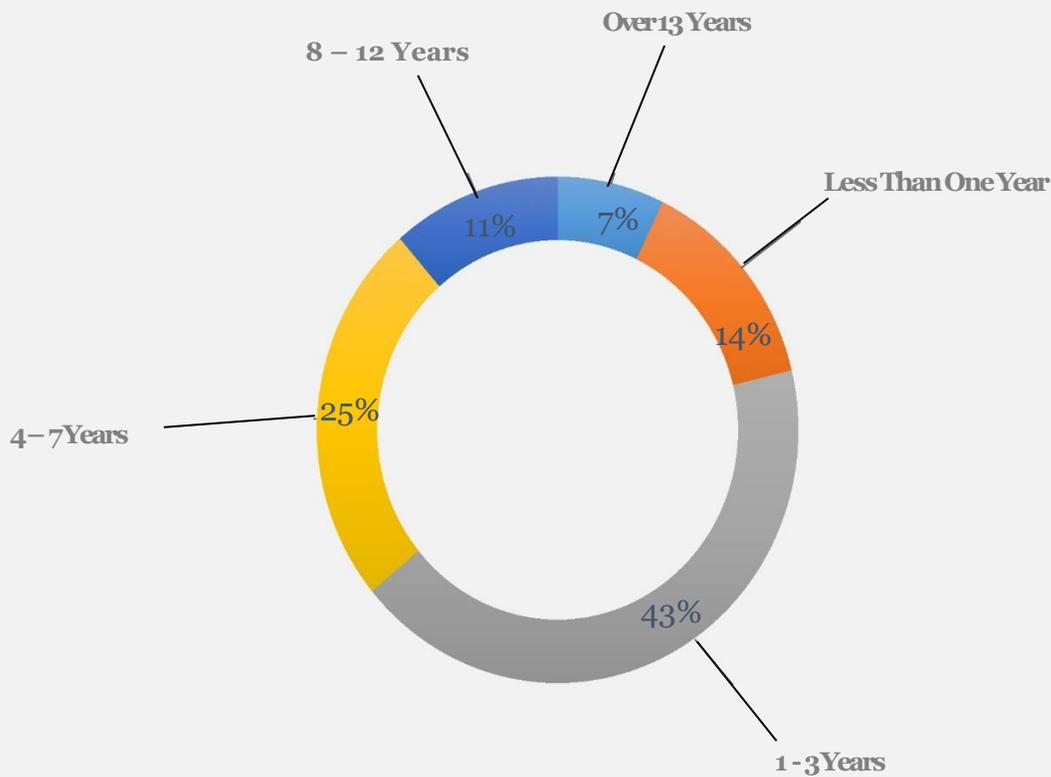
# Close the Gap *before* You Leave:

*Who's Coming, Who's Going?*



The results of the CoopLew survey indicate that forty-three percent of all CDOs have only been on the job for three years or less. **(See Figure 1)** Also, the survey indicates that the presence of millennial-age professionals is lacking. Also, the CoopLew survey indicates that nearly 50% of all survey respondents served at cabinet and senior levels. However, Baby Boomers made up 63 percent of the respondent pool. **(See Figure 2)** Women represented 45% of cabinet-level respondents while men represented 44% of senior-level respondents. Without appropriate training and development, there will be a dearth in the availability of competent future CDOs. Thus, a talent gap could be imminent.

**Figure 1**  
CDO Time in Office by Years



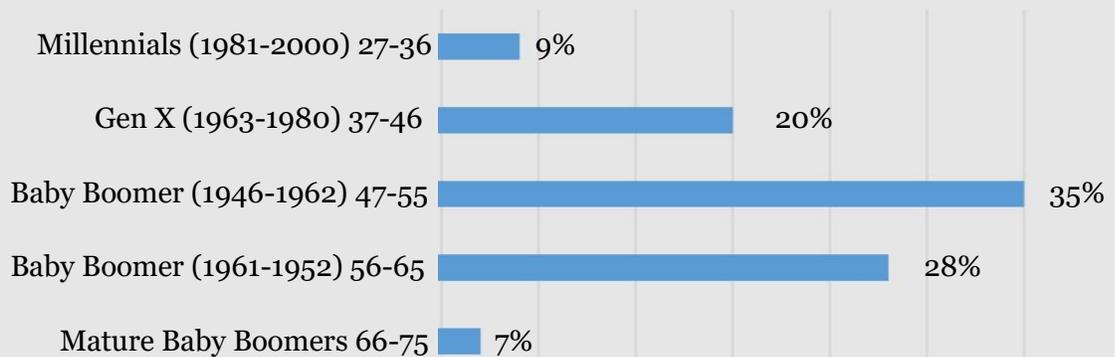
With retirement lurking in less than 20 years for almost all Baby Boomers and only 29 percent of the CDO workforce being Gen X'ers or Millennials, the talent pipeline gap will soon impact universities and colleges alike. The aftermath could mean an elongated delay in the placement of personnel in in CDO positions who are trained, practice new industry standards and/or at best, are competent enough to “push the line” of diversity progress until more astute talent and experience are acquired.

These circumstances are problematic for CDO advancement and field development because the absence of bona fide expertise in the CDO chair will likely serve to weaken the survival of the position as a catalyst for transformation. Further, a prolonged talent gap could more likely position the CDO role as a pawn to preserve the status quo rather than as a catalyst for eradication of exclusive systems. The CoopLew research illuminates this threat to CDOs’ authenticity and furthers understanding about how some senior positions in higher education, like student affairs and finance, survive via empowerment and acceptance, while others rely on formidable networks and sustainable pipelines to affect change.

*“Unlike species surviving due to matters of strength and/or high ranks among the constituency, for the CDO evolutionary survival is based on the diversity in the reproductive and evolutionary process.”*

*--Guthrie, 2016 Diversify or Die*

**Figure 2**  
**CDO Age Ranges/  
 Percentages  
 by Generation**



# Redefinition:

*The New Paradigm of Rules  
for Diversity Leadership*



The gap in the pipeline is just the beginning of the troubles and challenges for emerging and aspiring CDOs. The most prominent issue is the notion that CDOs must lead in a time where social, political and practical expertise are all required simultaneously to gain the first step towards diversifying their institutions.

Within the first year, especially the critical and precedence-setting first 90 days, definitions and expectations stemming from casual reflections of diversity such as “Let’s all get along”, must be met with courage, strategy and resolve to establish inclusive infrastructures for office and support networks. It is during this period that new rules must be established and clear patterns of behavior demonstrated.

CDOs reported that prior to standing for truth in expectations of diversity work, they often find themselves perceived via things they can’t control just as those whom they are expected to serve. Race, ethnicity, political affiliation, perceptions of loyalty, etc. are often assigned even before a CDO can learn the terrain he/she needs to navigate.

Data showed that a clear majority of CDOs were faced with limited or nonexistent history to build upon while attempting to plan a successful strategy under such weighty pressures for assimilation. This left them largely unprotected from old paradigms that shape and demand conscious compliance with political correctness and ultimate cluelessness about diversity rewards and values. Thus, redefining functionality in a short period of time after employment was considered a very difficult but vitally necessary task by CDOs.

Implications from the data support other studies which confirm that diversity imperatives such as the allocation of power, the expansion of responsibility, and the appropriation of authority are resources historically withheld from CDOs early in their tenure.

CDOs struggle with the proliferation of complex institutions in an effort to keep the diversity agenda from becoming a heap of collective endeavors presented for public appeal, accreditation or national awards. To be most effective, they need latitude to set new rules of engagement and productivity early on. They also need a distinct measure of trust and authentic leadership in place that is both public and unwavering. CoopLew data revealed and brought light to the dismal perspectives CDOs harbored about these issues.

**From the Mouths of CDOs:**

*“As a Native American, I have to get past “whiteness” for every decision I make.”*

*“There is a conversation “backstage” for white CDOs to ensure that we understand what ‘us’ and ‘them’ really means.”*

Further, implications from the data suggest that the most difficult on-boarding task for CDOs is matching their personal readiness for challenges, with preexisting ideas about how much they should be supported. Navigation from pre-existing or historical behavior patterns calls for a resolve to address the expectations of their

responsibilities, resources and infrastructures as early as possible. Unfortunately, this task is waiting at the door for CDOs, with “logical” perceptions of normalcy already intact as they take their rightful seat at the leadership table.

Still, CDOs must persist towards new patterns of thought and behavior about the diversity agenda and its reverence as a rudder for institutional transformation. Data supports that CDOs yearn for new rules regarding resource allocation, policy development, campus-wide authority, and infrastructure. The data are also clear about CDOs' need to have support that values the job beyond its mere creation or its capacity to showcase someone from a historically marginalized population.

# Top-down or Down From the Top?

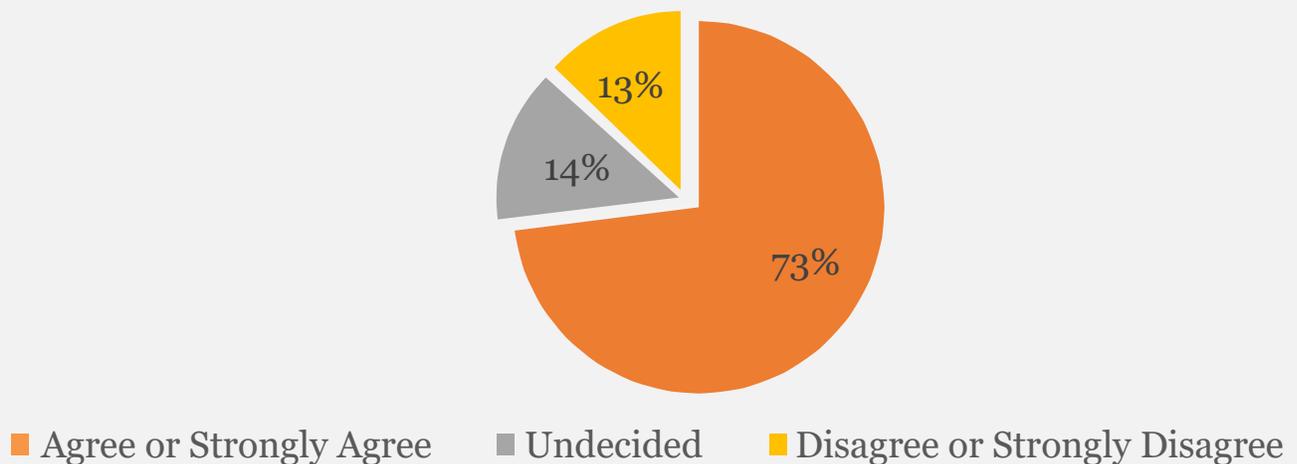


The literature about paradigm shifting suggests that CDOs work diligently to build networks that echo “edgy” rules (pushing the envelope) normalcy, and expansions in thinking that challenge traditions and set new frontiers (Barker, 2013). However, CoopLew data revealed that CDOs’ harbor confusion about who is leading, or should be leading, when it comes to diversity being embedded in university policies, practices and programs. While the political and public expectations for diversity administration are expected to begin with the university’s president, 73 percent of CDOs surveyed believed that accountability for modeling organizational diversity behaviors is expected to begin with them. **(See Figure 3)**

The perception/dysfunction of the term “top-down” seems to cause CDOs to walk a tightrope while balancing role responsibilities. Further, there is likely marked difficulty navigating loopholes which are perceived as pervasive and lurking for purposes of tilting the balance of CDO work in favor of political ideals. CoopLew researchers have coined this CDO perception as the “shadow culture” because it references symbolic, unwritten rules and expectations that serve mostly to privately doom formal authority publicly vested in the CDO.

**Figure 3**  
**Percentage of CDOs Who Believe Accountability for Modeling Organizational Diversity Behaviors Begins With Them**

CDO Agreement that they are “Top” for Diversity Accountability



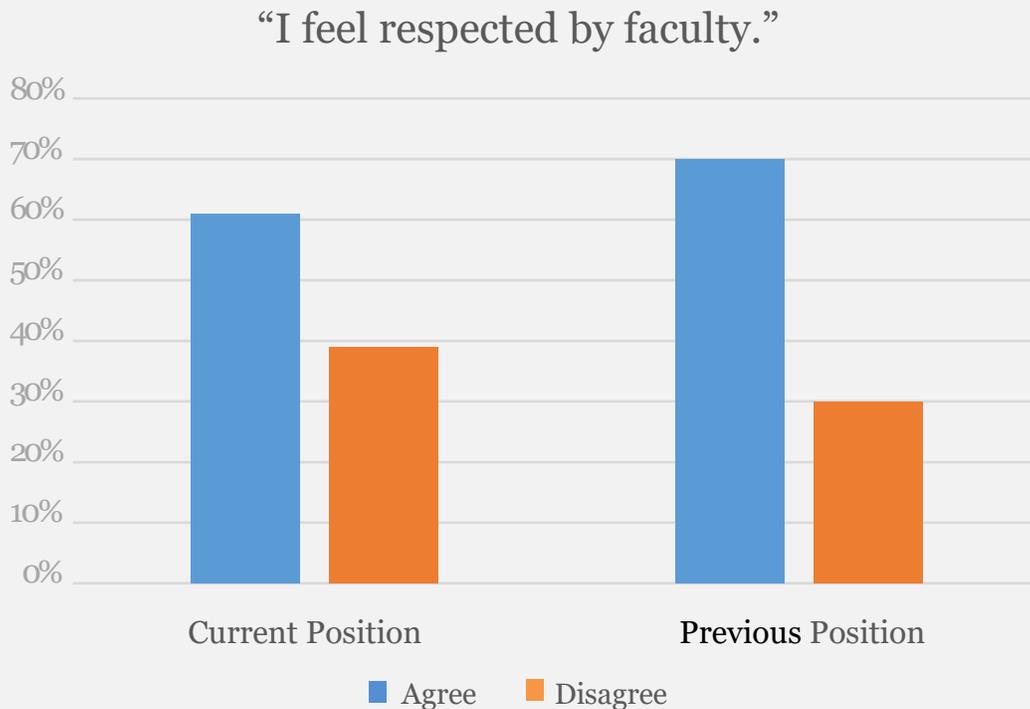
# How Do Faculty Fare With the CDO?



Perceptions about who is leading the diversity agenda can permeate to relationships CDOs need to have with students, faculty and staff; all whom may hold varying perspectives. CoopLew research helped to paint a new picture of the CDOs' relational perspectives by revealing CDO perceptions on intrinsic and extrinsic paradigms. These perspectives represent new functional paradigms because they offer opportunities to refine key interpersonal relationships and to accept skillsets CDOs reveal that they have largely been unable to use. The research essentially serves as a canvas for sketching out new realms of normalcy for diversity leaders in higher education, i.e. who are viewed as an assisters and/or resisters as courses are plotted toward formalizing 21st century diversity administration.

From separate pools of CDO respondents (current-position and previous-position perspectives), over 60 percent from both pools agreed or strongly agreed that they were respected by faculty. Gen X'ers (1963-1980), ages 37 to 54, had significantly higher agreement than other generations from the current-position perspective. (See Figure 4)

**Figure 4**  
**CDO Perception of Respect Conveyed**  
**by Faculty**



From the Mouths of CDOs:

*“Faculty can be great allies, until you ask them to teach you what they don’t know.”*

# Does Advising Students of Color Identify the Primary Expectation of CDOs?

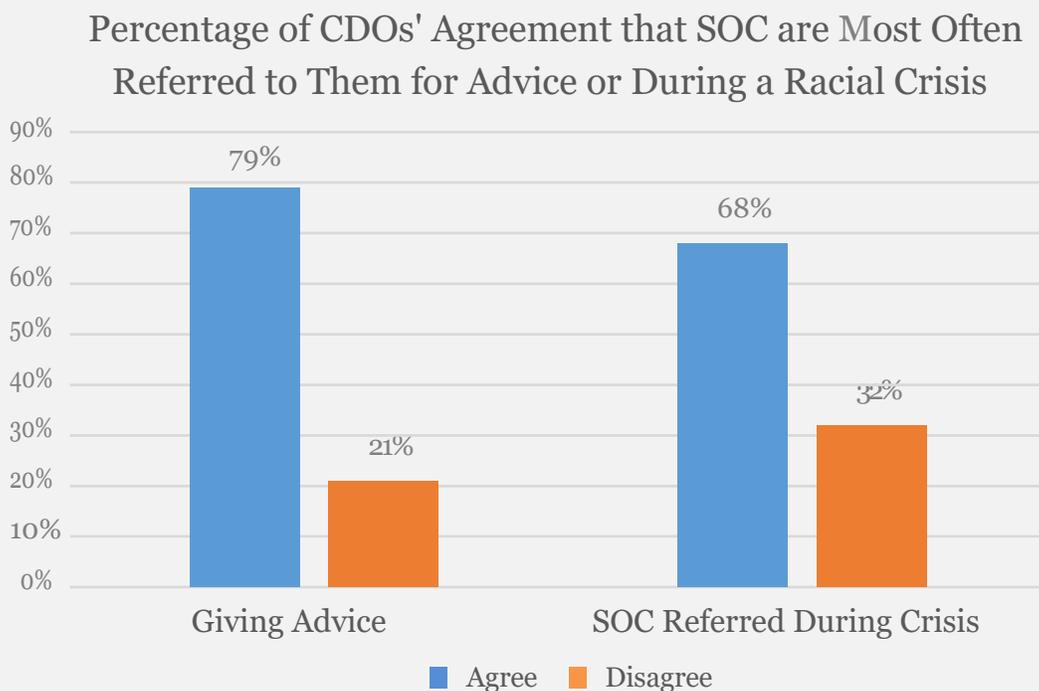


Post-study analyses suggest that CDOs are very concerned about the expectations of their relationships with students. CoopLew’s attention was drawn to many issues CDOs felt helped or hindered their relations with their institutions’ number one constituent - the student. It was clear that the higher CDOs found themselves in administration, the less face time they had with students. However, those with more face-time opportunity perceived that working with same-race students was viewed by others as simply evidence of cultural affinity as opposed to a mechanism to advance students’ success via bona fide assessment skills.

Eighty-one percent of all respondents identified as non-white. Seventy-nine percent strongly agreed or agreed that compared to other student populations, students of color (SOC) were most heavily referred to them for guidance. The percentage was higher (88 percent) from previous-position respondents.

Similar, but with less agreement, 68 percent overall indicated that SOC were most often referred to them due to ethnic similarity during times of racial crises. Again, this number was higher (75 percent) for previous-position respondents of this study. **(See Figure 5)**

**Figure 5**  
**CDO Perceptions On Giving Advice**  
**and Racial Crisis with Students**



From the Mouths of CDOs:

*“They [administrative partners] never need me until there is a racial crisis.”*

# Is the CDO a Partner or Pawn to Presidents?



CDOs' perceptions regarding networking or “nets” working (traps/snares planned for their demise) within relationships with other senior-most officers was favorable towards networking at near 70% but fell by 8 percentage points after the first experience as a CDO. Respondents in their second CDO role (previous-position) were less positive about their positioning as partner with presidents or provosts in the institution’s administrative storefront.

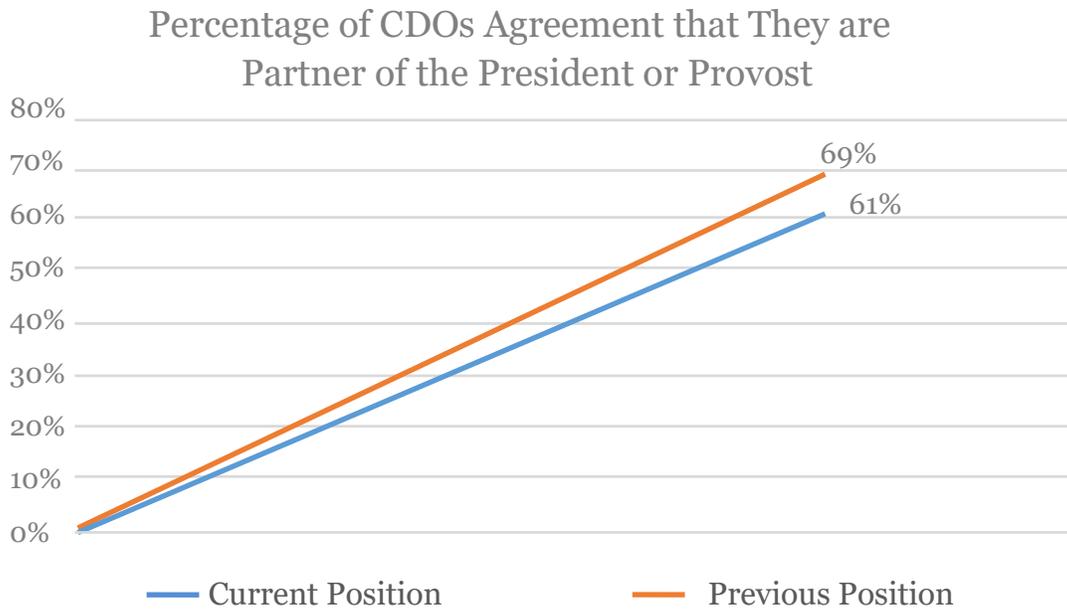
Sixty-nine percent strongly agreed or agreed that they were viewed as a bona fide partner (previous position). This agreement was 61 percent among those responding from the current-position perspective. Baby Boomers responded in agreement at a significantly higher rate than Gen X’ers. **(See Figure 6)**

*“Misalignment between the president and the CDO gives rise to unofficial diversity officers. These are typically persons who have longevity, the ear of the president and/or provost and are perceived as a superstar among his or her colleagues on campus based solely upon personal affiliation.”*

*-Anonymous CDO*

**Figure 6**

**CDO Perception On Partnership with Their President or Provost**



**From the Mouths of CDOs:**

*“It was clear early on that the position was designed for show i.e. needed dark skin visible, not for a competent professional.”*

# How the Scale Tilts Regarding CDOs and Equality

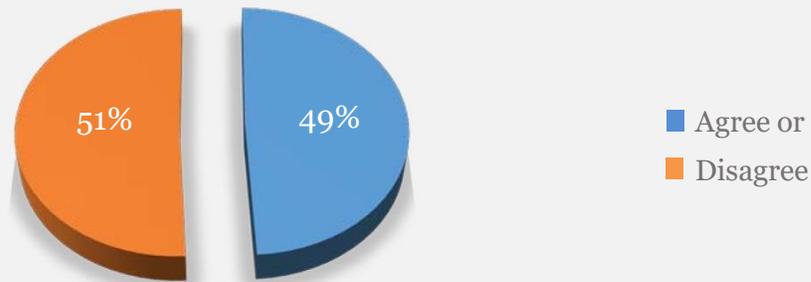


Almost fifty percent of CDOs perceived that they were not regarded as having reciprocal status by their colleagues. Respondents overall were only 49 percent in agreement that their senior team members considered them as equals. Previous-position respondents were lower at 47 percent. Conversely, although CDOs perceived inequity in status among their counterparts, overall agreement about personal respect shown towards them by their counterparts was found to be 83 percent (See Figure 7). Still, 92 percent believed they had to approach diversity work from perspectives of their counterparts as strategy before more effective diversity skills could be employed.

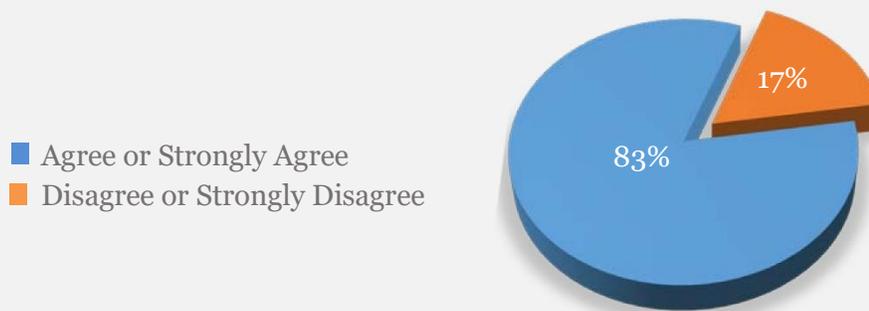
**Figure 7**

**CDO Perception on Partnership with Their Senior Colleagues**

CDOs' Agreement that Senior Colleagues See Them as Equals



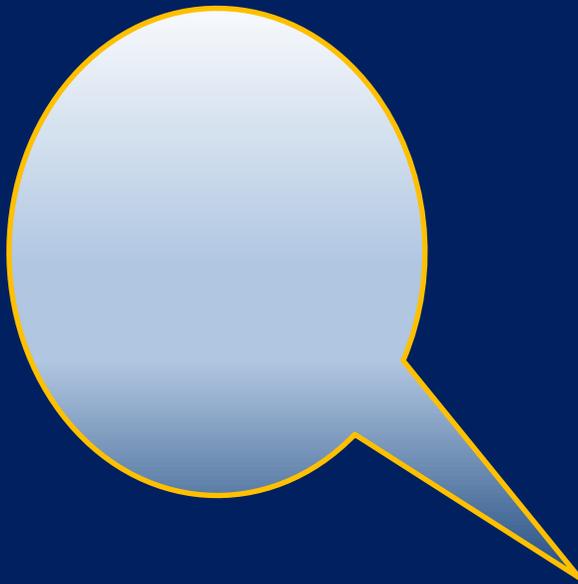
CDOs' Agreement that Personal Respect is Shown to Them by Senior Colleagues



From the Mouths of CDOs:

*“I’ve been kept at arm’s length in every “team” situation.”*

From  
Their  
Mouths...



31 Times

As stated in the Executive Summary, CoopLew conducted 31 post-survey interviews. Participation was both voluntary and random via a self-selection process. Interviews were granted upon notice by respondents to the survey that the option to be personally interviewed was chosen.

Respondent demographics are shown below in Table 2.

**Table 2**  
**Post-survey Respondent Demographics**

Total Respondents: 31	Levels of Service			Institution Type			
	Cabinet	Senior	Middle Management	Research	Comprehensive	Liberal Arts	
<b>Gender</b>							
Female	21	8	11	2	13	5	3
Male	10	6	3	1	4	4	2
<b>Race/Ethnicity</b>							
White	3	3			1	2	
Black	11	4	5	2	6	3	2
Hispanic	2		1	1		2	
American Indian	2		1			1	1
Asian American	3		2	1	3		

Post-survey respondents were asked four questions during 30-minute conversations which were aligned with one of the target areas of focus for the study: General work context, organizational values and behaviors, Utilization of skill sets, and Personal reflections as described above in the Executive Summary. The questions were:

1. *From what vantage point did you respond to the survey--current or previous role as CDO?*
2. *Politically speaking, what have been/were the barriers you've experienced? Describe how you believe these hindered you professionally or personally.*
3. *Do you think you received the necessary support you needed... financial, emotionally, structurally and otherwise to be successful at your responsibility as CDO?*
4. *Did your president and/or supervisor lay ground work for your presence/give you political and social capital for your success as the CDOo? In lay terms, did he/she go before you and recognize you as a expert and part of his/her team? If yes, what is an approximate number of times you learned that your supervisor had spoken highly of you?*

As result of above questions, several observations occurred which were deemed useful for supporting general implications made from the quantitative survey data.

100% of respondents opted to hold their conversations in private quarters away from their office or at their homes.

85% of respondents were first-time CDOs and voiced this fact as a significant barrier. However, first-time CDOs also stated that their most daunting issue was strategizing to find an equitable voice in the decision-making processes. Among cabinet-level CDOs, this theme was consistent across all genders and groups.

74% of all respondents felt there was some support for their role. However, a question of how to navigate “whiteness” was prevalent among respondents from all ethnic groups. Most respondents spoke to this matter as one which “permeates all things that need changing.”

100% of White respondents cited “backstage” conversations as a rite of passage prior to receiving needed support to engage in multicultural activity or build reputable networks.

Only 39% of respondents felt proper groundwork had been laid prior to their arrival with an intent to aid them as CDO.

95% of Black CDO’s felt their ethnicity was in part or in whole a barrier to their success. Repeated references to ethnicity occurred during conversations about financial support, political capitol, and staff development.

Most respondents believed that peer and other related professionals, i.e. multicultural affairs staff, understood the magnitude of CDO responsibility. Some even felt that several people on their campuses could be counted as allies. Those of mention were less likely to be a member of the CDOs staff and in every case, was someone who voluntarily came forward with their support.

In addition to responses to the four questions asked to respondents, many CDO’s spoke to a need for training and resources of both professional and personal natures. There seemed to be lingering and elongated concern for personal welfare, especially after crises occurred, and/or there was a stark contrast between personal values and institutional practices. Training that could foot the bill for a shield-me-from-the-inevitable perspective gained mention over the several hours this part of the study was being conducted.

Moreover, perception of campus inclusion came into play several times as well. Nearly 88% of participants expressed a desire to work and thrive in an inclusive environment that was not characteristic of their workplace (current or previous). Those indicating this circumstance also felt compelled to “speak to the positive” in reference to what their institutions were expected to represent regarding diversity. These compelling feelings brought about references to their own good works and efforts to push their institutions forward. Some even spoke to achievement of diversity awards and striving to exceed the bar such recognition represented.

The respondent pool also gave several mentions to matters of adequacy of resources and network development for purposes of collaboration, and in some cases, just someone to talk to about the many challenges faced every day. Of note was that while some CDOs spoke of recognition for their work, 90% overall felt there were too few resources to get “real” work accomplished. It seemed the desire to accomplish more was another overarching theme as CDO’s expressed gratitude for support and recognition for constituents such as faculty, yet they were considering work elsewhere in effort to pursue new levels of accomplishment and personal esteem.

# Conclusions

**T**he target areas of the CoopLew Study identified experiences within major-work life contexts that CDOs found both exhilarating and troubling. Data revealed that the bona fide talent pipeline could potentially dry out regarding availability of seasoned, highly-trained and credentialed CDOs within the next 10-15 years. This was believed to fuel an urgency for CDO training experiences that delivers both hard and fair advice to new and aspiring CDOs, as well as paradigm-shifting skill sets that empower CDOs to impart measurable change at their institutions.

The need for authentic support, authority and role modeling for CDOs is critical to their success as change agents. However, with most respondents perceiving that they had no role model, the disconnect between CDO supervisors and CDOs regarding diversity values looms and expands to create “tightrope” environments that distract CDOs from accomplishing measurable work and obtaining transformative results.

Relationships between CDOs and faculty tend to be more successful than between CDOs and other administrators. This is positive for CDOs who need support and partnership from academics, or simply need a friendly face during the day. However, a CDO’s search for equal worth among administrators in the eyes of faculty was less likely to yield favorable results. This implies that the CDO, while befriended, is still perceived as outside of the institution’s power structure.

Finally, where CDOs function best (or the perception of where) was somewhat indicated by the number of CDOs who took notice when Students of Color (SOC) were brought to their attention. During racial crises, most CDOs of color perceived that SOC were funneled to them more than at any other time. The expectation that “diversity” meant “likeness” loomed stereotypically over CDOs, or at least begged notice given the percentage of CDOs who perceived the channeling of SOC to them as a pattern based upon ethnic identity.

Close to 50 percent of all CDOs in the study served at senior and cabinet level positions. However, more than two-thirds had seven or less years’ experience. Senior-level roles are held largely by women (45%) and most male CDO’s, while serving at senior-levels, are not at the table among end-of-the-line decision-makers. Framing this data, the CoopLew study earmarked serious concerns stemming from CDO responses about general-work perceptions, organizational values, utilization of skill sets and personal reflections.

First, the pipeline for establishing and standardizing the next wave of CDOs in higher education was found basically void. Second, the heavy Baby Boomer pool and average tenure of three years for most CDOs suggests that many CDOs are on the job without prolonged contemporary training and experiences relevant to 21st century students. Third, the CDO millennial talent pool of current or previous-position CDOs was barely one-third of the workforce as the majority of current CDOs marched towards retirement, which suggests that more new roles will be filled with personnel who will be novice regarding CDO lived-experiences.

Finally, concerns about the next paradigm of diversity leadership, i.e., skills needed, standards, competencies, etc., for the 21st century could mount exponentially if not addressed with adequate dialogue, training, and support.

How institutions respond to CDOs, from on-boarding to transformation, seemed confounded throughout multitudes of organizational values and behaviors which mostly resist the CDOs approach to student-centeredness, policy, curriculum and community. CoopLew data indicated that CDOs are expected to build bridges between the institution and the community, serve all students, partner with faculty, and generally function as a necessary and neutral addition to administration. However, data were also clear that shadow cultures within institutions impede the more noble undertakings of the CDOs rather than support them. Furthermore, with CDOs seen as “friends” and not authorities by faculty, transformational impact on curriculum appears very unlikely and may cause faculty-CDO relationships to not rank high in priority.

Irony existed for CDOs in this study because garnering support for 21st century expertise also meant obtaining skills to refute historical patterns of behaviors towards diversity. Most CDOs agreed that navigating this dilemma was a necessary skill to effectively articulate what they represent to the people who hired them. However, implications from the data suggested that this articulation must be done from a less-skilled perspective, as a matter of business, equity, and politics, and in distinction from affirmative action and/or civil rights administration, which confuses and often intimidates unsuspecting colleagues. Still, a high percentage (92 percent) of CDOs indicated that recognizing the contexts, cultures and politics that impact the implementation and management of diversity change efforts is of paramount importance.

Finally, the CoopLew researchers concluded that the toil of CDO work may levy profound professional and moral dilemmas on the psyche of CDOs. Many survey respondents revealed, as a personal reflection, that in fact their campuses were not inclusive. Yet, they felt compelled to recommend their campuses to others seeking employment. Most also agreed that their contributions to their institutions had been recognized, but still indicated that resources to do the job were woefully inadequate. In addition, while respect from faculty was noteworthy, nearly one-third had considered leaving their jobs because they were unhappy. Most CDOs cited that they liked their jobs while nearly half reported that they were not allowed to think outside the box.

The CoopLew Study set multiple stages for on-going research surrounding the lived experiences of CDOs. This and future studies will help explore institutional diversity values, both public and backstage, and further illuminate the distinctive tenacity it takes to navigate arguably the most demanding job in all higher education. Perhaps most importantly, advancing CoopLew research will identify behaviors, conversations, and resources needed to become standard as the industry grows. Without the voice of CDOs, the patterns and practices afforded to diversity administration will likely remain undisclosed and thereby paralyze diversity innovation. As a result, exclusive histories and traditions could continue to permeate shadow cultures, mainstream biases, and unwritten rules which widen the gap between those holding the line and experienced professionals.

Based upon feedback from the 2017 National Conference on Race and Ethnicity (NCORE), new and aspiring CDOs often find themselves without nuggets of wisdom from the potentially declining, although relatively inexperienced, Baby Boomer, senior-level CDOs currently on the job.

In advance of hard and fair advice to be acquired during the upcoming CoopLew Aspiring and Emerging Chief Diversity Officers Boot Camp, (February 21-23, 2018 at the International Civil Rights Center and Museum, Greensboro, NC, [www.cooplew.com](http://www.cooplew.com)), CDOs should anticipate new patterns and rules for sharpening their leadership skills, establishing personal and institutional philosophies about diversity, nurturing horizontal and vertical networks, and leading thought about how CDO infrastructures should be developed. Going forward with the embrace of these daily responsibilities, this report sought to make clear what was most credible to CDOs and critical for the future of diversity administration.

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“Dr. Coop” has excelled rapidly in the fields of diversity education, administration, leadership and identity development. A diversity educator and trainer since 1992, he is a three-time Chief Diversity Officer with service at four institutions and on national boards. He holds numerous diversity credentials and he is a nationally-known leader noted for holding a variety of high-energy and fun activities that fuse personal esteem with education and identity awareness. He is currently engaged in many national endeavors that keep him on the forefront of diversity research, climate assessment and consulting in higher education. Recently he was named Society for Diversity Member of the Year and National Visionary Award by INSIGHT Into Diversity Magazine. His February 2017 webinar: “Clarifying Campus Climate Initiatives” drew more than 350 attendees. He has several articles in print and serves on the INSIGHT Editorial Board.

Dr. Coopwood believes that diversity management is a prerequisite for effective change and that knowledge of people (cultural, psychological, and spiritual) is often absent when structural change is being implemented. He asserts that people are often more interested in their personal perceptions of others as opposed to the personal realities of others. His belief and educational philosophy are expressed by his quote: "In a nation where speculations of money, health, poverty and policy rank supreme in the conscience of the public mind, the most tragic and destructive display of human judgment is still that which conceals the absolute truth of a people."

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