

Incorporating Diversity and Inclusion as Core Values in Organization Development Practice

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As a scholar-practitioner, I have focused my career on enhancing attention to and understanding of diversity, inclusion, and multiculturalism, and on helping groups and organizations to use their diversity in beneficial ways, while increasing everyone's experience of inclusion and helping to create a more inclusive and just world in which more of us can be fully ourselves and accomplish our individual and collective goals in ways that are effective, productive, and authentic. In my scholarship—rooted in social, organizational, and cross-cultural psychology yet with many interdisciplinary influences—I have explored the links between culture, group membership, and identity; the roles of culture and identity in organizational and psychological processes; and the nature and development of inclusion in groups and organizations. As a practitioner, I have noticed, emphasized, and delighted in the power and passion that people can bring to organizations when we are in tune with our full selves—selves that are also accepted and welcomed by others in the organization. In that context, I have also been sensitive to attending to multiple levels of systems and to

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cross-level influences, particularly to the interplay of cultures, identities, and intergroup relations in interpersonal, group, organizational, and societal dynamics. For me, difference can be a vital source of growth, learning, and mutual enhancement, and so diversity is a fundamental resource for groups, organizations, and societies, particularly when combined with inclusion (Ferdman & Deane, 2014).

Thus, from my perspective, diversity and inclusion are, and should be, at the core of organization development (OD). They help to form the bedrock of OD, and excellent OD practice must always incorporate attention to diversity and inclusion in some way. The field of OD has always emphasized maximizing human potential while simultaneously seeking to improve the health and functioning of human systems. OD is grounded in values that emphasize humanism and the goodness of people, broad-based participation and voice, self-determination and client-centeredness, and the embeddedness of people, groups, and organizations in larger social, political, and economic environments (Marshak, 2014). Jamieson and Gellermann (2014) point to diversity and justice, collaboration and community, and democracy as core value themes throughout the history of OD (combined with humanistic behavior, performance improvement, life and spirituality, human development, and process effectiveness). At its best, OD supports groups and organizations in engaging with their people—current and potential—to benefit both the collective and its individual members, together with others in the larger system within which the collective exists. For me, doing this well requires the ability to learn and work across differences, to engage in continuous learning, and to attend to multiple needs and perspectives.

Although the foundational importance of diversity and inclusion to OD is obvious to me, this is not necessarily the case for others in the field (or in organizations more generally). OD education, practice, and literature are mixed with regard to the degree of overt attention given to diversity and inclusion. Even when explicit attention is given to diversity and inclusion, these terms and concepts are used in a variety of ways or may be employed rather vaguely or generically. Moreover, for some, too much emphasis on diversity may be seen as unfair or inappropriate; difference may be considered and treated as a challenge or problem to be overcome; or organizational needs and imperatives may, in practice, take precedence over other values, such as social justice, even when there is abstract agreement with these values. Thus, in this chapter, my goals are to specify what

is meant by diversity and inclusion—especially as perspectives, practices, and values crucially relevant to OD practice; to make the connections of diversity and inclusion values and practices with OD more explicit; and to suggest some ways in which we can be more intentional and focused in integrating diversity and inclusion as core values in OD practice.

THE VALUE AND PRACTICE OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Diversity and inclusion (often referred to as D&I) can be viewed in various ways. As concepts or ideals, they constitute a set of values. They can also refer to a range of practices or perspectives. Further, they represent a field of scholarship and praxis (see e.g., Ferdman & Deane, 2014; Ferdman & Sagiv, 2012; Mor-Barak, 2017; Plaut, 2010). O'Mara et al. (2016), in presenting a set of global benchmarks for diversity and inclusion in organizations, refer to two overarching goals for diversity and inclusion: “creating a better world” and “improving organizational performance” (p. 3). Broadly speaking, the field of D&I and its practitioners focus on supporting individuals, groups, and organizations to eliminate pernicious biases and discrimination as well as to work effectively and productively across differences in ways that further equity and social justice, lead to organizational success, and encourage full participation and empowerment across multiple social identities and cultures (Ferdman, 2017; Ferdman & Sagiv, 2012).

Valuing diversity can refer to noticing and highlighting the importance of heterogeneity along multiple dimensions for groups, organizations, and societies (e.g., Page, 2007) as well as to making special efforts to incorporate or to increase the amount of diversity in collectives. Diversity and inclusion work involves not only increasing or at least thoughtfully “managing” diversity, but also fostering the conditions that enable reaping the benefits of diversity:

Inclusion is an active process in which individuals, groups, organizations, and societies—rather than seeking to foster homogeneity—view and approach diversity as a valued resource. In an inclusive system, we value ourselves and others because of and not despite our differences (or similarities); everyone—across multiple types of differences—should be empowered as a full participant and contributor who feels and is connected to the larger collective without having to give up individual uniqueness, cherished identities, or vital qualities. (Ferdman, 2017, p. 238)

This active process, the practice of inclusion (Ferdman & Deane, 2014), involves “creating and embedding organizational, leadership, and interpersonal practices that result in a sense of safety, full belonging, participation, and voice across the range of diversity dimensions, without requiring assimilation or loss of valued identities” (Ferdman, 2016). By managing diversity effectively and fostering inclusion, organizations can improve recruitment and retention of key talent, generate more resources and ideas, catalyze innovation, and often improve results (Boehm et al., 2014; Ferdman, 2016; Hunt, Layton, & Prince, 2014; Nielsen & Nielsen, 2013; Phillips, 2014).

Paying attention to diversity dynamics can help us to notice and find leverage for addressing a range of organizational and social issues. As Block and Noumair (2017) point out in the introduction to their special issue of *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* focusing on social equality and organizational change through the lens of diversity dynamics in social systems, “diversity and inclusion work is necessarily about culture change” (p. 151). Conversely, it is unlikely that we can engage in effective culture change without attending to diversity dynamics.

There is a large and growing literature focused on diversity dynamics, inclusion, how they operate in organizations, and how to create positive change. In my own earlier work (Ferdman, 2014), I have presented a multilevel systemic view of inclusion that highlights individual experiences of inclusion while seeing them as both coming from and influencing interpersonal behavior, group norms and practices, leadership assumptions and approaches, organizational policies and practices, and societal values, norms, ideologies, and practices.

INFUSING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION INTO OD

In my view, and that of others (e.g., J. Katz, personal communication, July 2017), diversity and inclusion work when it is at its best, *is* organization development. In other words, truly supporting organizations to value and increase diversity and to foster inclusion is very much OD work. Further, as mentioned earlier, OD’s values and approaches are very consistent with those of the field of diversity and inclusion in organizations.

Indeed, OD has overlapped greatly with the D&I field and with D&I practice. For those who have sought to increase diversity in organizations and to create and sustain inclusive organizational cultures and practices (Ferdman & Deane, 2014; Holvino, Ferdman, & Merrill-Sands, 2004;

Miller & Katz, 2002), OD has provided a fundamental set of frameworks, approaches, tools, and skills. And as the field of D&I has grown, its roots and connections in OD values and practices have persisted (e.g., Katz & Miller, 2014; O'Mara et al. 2016). Many D&I practitioners have training or grounding in OD or have gained such knowledge and perspectives along the way. OD publications, including *OD Practitioner*, frequently feature work on diversity and inclusion (e.g., Brazzel, 2007; Greene & Berthoud, 2015; Holvino, 2014; Katz & Miller, 2016), and D&I practitioners are often prominent in OD conferences and associations.

The other side of this is that responsible OD practice involves knowing about and integrating the perspectives and knowledge provided by work on diversity and inclusion. Greene and Berthoud (2015) forcefully and convincingly argue that a diversity and inclusion lens is at the heart of OD and that it is not possible to do good work in the field without it:

Although we are not proposing that every OD practitioner needs to be a diversity “expert,” we believe it is impossible to implement OD interventions effectively in the 21st century without at least basic awareness and competence in diversity matters. The principles of diversity—broad and meaningful participation by all members of a system in order to maximize available creativity and energy for organizational learning and effectiveness—are fundamental to OD. (p. 37)

Brazzel (2007), citing Marshak’s similar call for all OD practitioners “to fully understand and as appropriate address multicultural and diversity issues and dynamics” (Marshak, 2006, p. 25, quoted by Brazzel, 2007, p. 15), provides a useful overview of many of the diversity and social justice practices required of OD practitioners.

Given this history, OD’s values, and recurring calls for integration such as those cited here, we might expect that diversity and inclusion would be more visible and focal aspects of OD practice. The Organization Development Network highlights “respect and inclusion,” “authenticity,” and “empowerment” as key OD values (Eggers & Church, n.d., <http://www.odnetwork.org/?page=PrinciplesOfODPractice>). Shull, Church, and Burke (2014), in their focal article in the *OD Practitioner* issue (Fall 2014) on the current and future state of OD values, report that core values for current OD practitioners include empowerment, openness, participation, and continuous learning—all critical to D&I work.

Despite this, and despite some discussion of the importance of diversity and inclusion in OD by several authors (e.g., Church, Rotolo, Shull, & Tuller, 2014; Jackson, 2014; Marshak, 2014), beyond those cited earlier, it is nevertheless not particularly clear or evident that diversity and inclusion—as an integrated set of competencies, concepts, and practices—have become fully and sufficiently infused as core to the field of OD, as well as to what OD practitioners do and how we do it. I believe this is problematic. Given OD's values and purposes combined with increasing diversity and globalization, I believe that for OD to truly achieve its aims and be true to its values, more deliberate, systematic, and sustained attention to diversity and inclusion is necessary. And this attention should go beyond a general call for respect across differences to incorporation of perspectives, skills, and approaches that will truly embed diversity and inclusion as core OD competencies.

Infusing diversity and inclusion is important to OD not only because doing so is consistent with core OD values but also because the nature and composition of modern organizations and the world in which they operate demands it. In addition to globalization, multilingualism, and work across national and other borders, current trends around the world include increasingly diverse workforces and the need to find and develop talent in new places and in new ways. Successful organizations and effective leaders will increasingly be those able to incorporate many types of diversity and to foster inclusion. Indeed, many global organizations and those in multicultural societies are incorporating diversity and inclusion as fundamental to their leadership development and workforce engagement processes. To the extent that OD does not address these issues and needs, it will not be prepared to achieve its objectives and even runs the risk of becoming irrelevant. In this context, it is notable that the practitioners surveyed by Shull et al. (2014) gave a low rank to promoting diversity and inclusion as an OD value while they viewed developing leaders at the top. But developing leaders for today's and tomorrow's organizations requires focused attention on diversity and inclusion. Similarly, the practitioners who were surveyed indicated that the top reasons for being in the field were to help people and to enhance self-awareness. Certainly, addressing diversity and inclusion should be core aspects of both activities.

What might full infusion of diversity and inclusion look like? What would it involve? Here, I provide illustrative examples of questions and perspectives that can lead OD in that direction, in a way that can take it

beyond surface consideration of respect and inclusion. If diversity and inclusion were truly incorporated into OD, what would we be doing or asking? What would we be considering in our OD work? Here is an initial list:

- How self-aware are we, as OD practitioners, about our multiple identities, our biases, and our cultural influences? How clearly can and do we communicate about these? How well do we partner with colleagues who vary from us along one or more dimensions of diversity? And do we incorporate attention to these differences and their impact on our analyses and interpretations? How much and how well have we developed our competencies in the various aspects of the field of diversity and inclusion?
- Can and do we communicate effectively with stakeholders across different dimensions of diversity? Do we formulate and ask questions (e.g., during entry, contracting, and data collection) in ways that are appropriate and that will get the best information from different people and groups? How are we interpreting data? Whose input and perspectives are we considering in our interpretations? Are we considering diversity and inclusion dimensions and issues (including who is in and who is out) in our analyses and interpretations? Are we taking cultural differences, the cultural context, and intercultural dynamics into account in designing and carrying out the various elements of our work?
- In setting goals for change efforts and designing interventions, whose interests are being considered? What implications are there for different groups, including those not represented in the organization?
- Who is in power? How will power be addressed in the change process to foster inclusion across multiple dimensions of diversity? What will be the resulting power distribution across these dimensions, with what effects? To what extent does the OD process consider and address systems of privilege grounded in social identities, including race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality, social class, and others?
- At each stage of the change process, and in assessing its success, what is the range of voices and perspectives that is included? What is being done to ensure voice and participation across multiple identities and perspectives? To what extent does this range include diversity in

terms of key social identities? Is there an effort to connect this diversity to core aspects of the work of the organization and to the process of change? In promoting ongoing learning in client organizations, how much and what type of attention is given to seeking out and considering alternative and varied voices, representative of a range of diversity dimensions? What is being done to truly bring in new perspectives, especially those that come from stigmatized, marginalized, or underrepresented groups, or those that may be outside the norm? What is being done to create dialogue, engagement, and learning across multiple dimensions of diversity?

- What topics are considered taboo or off-limits in an engagement? To what extent are we willing to raise these issues or topics, especially when they relate to diversity and inclusion?
- How much and what type of attention is given to having and creating skills for difficult conversations, including those related to or stemming from diversity dimensions and issues? How prepared are the organization and its members to deal with intergroup relations and challenges and to address diversity fault lines? To what extent are multicultural and inclusion competencies considered, addressed, and developed in change efforts or in leadership development?
- What type of attention is given to creating opportunities for different types of people to speak up and show up? To what degree and in what ways does the OD intervention address norms and practices grounded in cultural and social identities, and do so in a way that respects diversity and explicitly addresses it? To what extent are values and ideologies regarding the role and value of differences discussed and addressed?

I hope that this list is stimulating and provokes curiosity and interest in learning more. Jackson (2014), in his model of multicultural organization development, provides a detailed framework and an excellent place to begin, and Greene and Berthoud (2015) provide very helpful ideas for action as well. In my own work, on the paradoxes of inclusion (Ferdman, 2017) for example, I provide additional suggestions.

Organization development and diversity and inclusion have connected and combined with each other throughout their histories. It is time that we further explore, strengthen, and deepen this connection and truly infuse diversity and inclusion in all aspects of OD practice. Not only will this help OD stay relevant and effective but it will also take it back to its roots and its core values.

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