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The Past, Present, and Future of Diversity and Inclusion in OD

By Judith H. Katz and
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At its very roots diversity and inclusion have been interwoven into the fabric of OD from its beginning. This article explores how those roots have taken hold as we look back to where we have been as a field; examines the current state of OD and diversity and inclusion today; and, poses critical questions about what lies ahead and the implications for OD practitioners.

Looking Back: Where We Have Been

Organization Development as a field and a practice got its start in the 1930's based on the work of Kurt Lewin (Burnes & Cooke, 2012). His three major contributions included: theories of planned change; integration of psychological theories and techniques; and, a radical set of values promoting democratic values and participation to address social issues (Lewin, 1946; Marrow, 1961). A critical component of Lewin's (and others such as Ken Benne, Leland Bradford, and Ronald Lippitt, the founders of National Training Labs aka NTL Institute) work was formed through action research, most importantly the development of T-groups that grew out of the 1946 Interracial Relations Conference, which explored issues of social justice (Freedman, 1999; Marrow, 1969). The essence of these elements have formed and shaped the basis for not only OD but the work of diversity and inclusion over the years, as clearly both have been interwoven in the field from the beginning of its formation.

Fast-forward to 1968, the year the *OD Practitioner* was first published. Affirmative Action programs were disrupting

the “standard.” In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed Executive Order 11246, which prohibited government employers and contractors “from discriminating in employment decisions on the basis of race, color, religion, (sex), or national origin; and it requires them to take affirmative action to ensure that equal opportunity is provided in all aspects of their employment” (U.S. Department of Labor, n.d.). The order was amended to include gender in 1967.

Addressing the disruptive effects of Affirmative Action programs became a concern for several major organizations, among them Polaroid, Connecticut General Life Insurance Company (CG), AT&T, Exxon, and Digital Equipment Corporation (Swanger, 1994). The demand from so many large and well-regarded organizations for assistance in dealing with these unfamiliar workforce issues led to the birth of a generation of diversity-and-inclusion-oriented OD practitioners, consultants, and consultancies.

In 1968, Henry Roberts, then president of CG, attended an NTL Institute T-group (the T is for training) facilitated by noted humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers. Roberts came away believing that when people interact with one another in this kind of group setting—in which they establish a commonality of purpose, develop a sense of trust and safety, and provide open and honest feedback to one another—they can form closer relationships and overcome many of their differences. After his T-group experience, Roberts hired consultant Billie Alban and economist Herb Shepard, who

each had connections to NTL, to assist in changing CG's organizational culture. In 1972, two of CG's employees, Richard Kremer and Frederick A. Miller, facilitated a series of black-white workshops at CG. Kremer and Miller also started a series of woman-man workshops and hired Edith Whitfield Seashore and Kaleel Jamison to help facilitate them. Each had done similar, groundbreaking work with other corporations, Seashore with AT&T, and Jamison with Procter & Gamble. The emphasis on T-group-inspired culture change methods of using small-group dynamics to build

- » **Bailey Jackson**, of the Center for Humanistic Education at the State University of New York at Albany, who received a grant to conduct experiential black-on-black workshops to help address racial inequities in higher education;¹
- » **Dwight Allen**, Dean of the School of Education at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, who introduced issues of racism and sexism into the school's curriculum and worked structurally to change the demographics of the school;

Instead of focusing on minimizing the disruptions caused by the greater diversity produced by Affirmative Action programs, these pioneering scholars and consultants focused on the use of OD methodologies, tools, and techniques to not only increase diversity in organizations but also ensure that their environments, policies, and practices supported the ability of individuals from under-represented (and “one-down”) social identity groups to fully participate in and contribute to the success of their organizations.

bonds of trust, honesty, and teamwork has remained a mainstay of many OD diversity and inclusion efforts.

As detailed by Clare Swanger in her *Perspectives on the History of Ameliorating Oppression and Supporting Diversity in United States Organizations (1994)*, other significant early OD interventions that focused on issues of diversity and inclusion in the late 1960s and early 1970s included efforts to respond to conflicts and discrimination in urban communities, public schools, higher education, government agencies, and some of the world's largest corporations and public sector agencies—among them IBM, Procter & Gamble, Cummins Engine Company, Union Carbide, Xerox, the National Education Association, the University of California at Berkeley, the National Institutes of Health, and the U.S. Departments of Agriculture, Labor, and State. OD consultants and academicians involved in these efforts included:

- » **Judith H. Katz**, then a UMass Amherst graduate student, who developed and led a series of seminal white awareness workshops aimed at enabling white people to recognize and take responsibility for their role in perpetuating racism and address racism from institutional, cultural, and personal levels;
- » **Elsie Y. Cross**, who helped introduce the use of OD methodologies and T-group-style educational activities in

¹ Dr. Jackson later did significant work on OD, diversity, and inclusion at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, developing with others the Multicultural OD model (Jackson & Hardiman, 1994; Jackson & Holvino, 1986) that serves as a diagnostic model for identifying where an organization is on the path from being a monocultural “club” to a multicultural organization. Katz and Miller (1994, 1998) built upon that model and have used it as a core part of their OD practice, which has focused on creating more inclusive workplaces through strategic culture change.

- the Pennsylvania State College system to address discriminatory policies and practices, and who later worked with Exxon to address racism and sexism at their refinery in Linden, New Jersey;
- » **Marilyn Loden**, who led a seminal gender awareness training effort at AT&T, and who hired Hal Kellner and Edith Whitfield Seashore to help facilitate training sessions with leaders in the corporation;
- » **Mark Chesler**, of the University of Michigan, who received a Ford Foundation grant to address interracial and intergenerational conflict in urban secondary schools;
- » **Barbara Walker**, who became Digital Equipment Corporation's first Manager of Valuing Differences, and who helped change the company's view of differences as a deficit to differences as a source of added value; and,
- » **Robert Hayles**, who directed and managed research for the Office of Naval Research, and whose research and advocacy in the early 1970s helped support the first significant efforts to promote people of color to senior ranks and expand the role of women in the military.

Other pioneers, not mentioned above, who helped bring issues of diversity and inclusion to the forefront of the practice of OD included Price Cobbs, Pat Bidol, Sybil Evans, John Fernandez, Lee Gardenswartz, Lewis Griggs, Ed Hubbard, Frances Kendall, Patricia Pope, Orien Worden, Alice Sargent, Ann Rowe, Donna Springer, and Roosevelt Thomas (Vaughn, 2007), and countless others who challenged barriers of exclusivity as “firsts” and “onlys” in organizations.

In 1978, the *OD Practitioner* published a seminal article by Kaleel Jamison on the connections of Affirmative Action to OD, diversity, and inclusion entitled *Affirmative Action Program: Springboard for a total organizational change effort*. Kaleel and these other pioneers changed the conversation about Affirmative Action programs from being a disruptive human resources issue primarily relating to increasing numbers of under-represented groups to being

regarded as a bottom-line performance and productivity issue relating to the optimal use of organizational assets—*human* assets. Instead of focusing on minimizing the disruptions caused by the greater diversity produced by Affirmative Action programs, these pioneering scholars and consultants focused on the use of OD methodologies, tools, and techniques to not only increase diversity in organizations but also ensure that their environments, policies, and practices supported the ability of individuals from under-represented (and “one-down”) social identity groups to fully participate in and contribute to the success of their organizations. The transition was from seeing diversity as a deficit and government imposed to seeing diversity as an opportunity to make the organization better that could be unlocked through inclusion (Miller, 1994).

The Challenge of D&I: Are Diversity Change Efforts a Mainstream OD Issue or Not Even Related to OD?

In the 50 years since the first issue of the *OD Practitioner*, the field has gotten much more sophisticated about how to make significant change and has developed a range of large-scale organizational-change methodologies bridging the gap between scholarly research and professional practice (Bunker & Alban, 1992; Bunker, Alban, & Lewicki, 2004; Dannemiller & Jacobs, 1992; Jackson & Holvino, 1986; Katz & Miller, 2001, 2009; Marshak & Bushe, 2013; Miller & Katz, 2002; Weisbord, 1987).

One of the challenges the field has struggled with throughout these 50 years is the centrality of focus on diversity and inclusion (D&I) in OD. Given the function of OD as a professional practice inevitably tied to team and organizational performance and profitability, many still see D&I as a legacy of the Affirmative Action era: an issue unrelated to core business processes that is primarily focused on achieving acceptable levels of demographic representation while complying with workforce regulations and avoiding public relations problems (Katz & Miller, 2016). A similar challenge, however, is

faced by practitioners who adhere to the foundational values of OD, which focus on creating humanistic workplaces that feature participative management, encourage employee engagement, support self-development (Bunker, 2014), and enable all members of the organization to do their best work and be their full selves (Katz & Miller, 2014). Connecting organizational performance to humanistic values can be a problem when authoritarian management styles have been the norm. However, there is growing evidence that organizational interventions that apply the foundational humanistic values of OD can utilize the power of inclusive practices to unleash higher performance and greater profitability (Katz & Miller, 2009, 2017).

In some organizations and industries—most notably the tech industry and other sectors that purport to be meritocracies—issues of D&I are often seen as problems relating to inappropriate attitudes and behavior of individuals rather than systemic characteristics (Alba, 2017). These organizations often limit their intervention efforts to online training sessions that address bias or microaggressions at the individual level rather than in a total systems-change approach as Kaleel Jamison described in 1978. Others want to continue to see the work of D&I as separate from other elements of OD such as strategic planning, change management, or organizational design. Greene and Berthoud (2015) note that, in fact, diversity is present and a performance issue in every organization, and that it is at the heart of the OD field. They lay out how the dimensions of diversity play out at each stage of the OD process.

Dialogic OD (Bushe and Marshak, 2015) builds upon this in that diversity is baked into the elements that are critical to the implementation of any transformational intervention. A core element of the dialogic approach is recognizing that in order to address complex issues you need to change the prevailing conversations and interactions limiting possibilities by fostering inclusion of greater diversity and creating safer environments for people to think and work together in new and innovative ways.

As practitioners, our growing understanding of how to create organizational environments that enable people to do their best work has become a critical element of OD over these past 50 years. In the experience of some OD practitioners, the most effective means to this end have been interventions that leverage the differences all members of the workforce bring so that everyone feels free to make their maximum contributions as individuals, as members of teams, and in partnerships across differences of hierarchy, discipline, and individual background (Katz & Miller, 2009).

The Current State of D&I and OD

Today, given the nature of organizations and life in a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) world (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014), the work of fully engaging all of the creativity and wisdom of all available team members is absolutely critical. Contrary to views that were prevalent in the mid-20th century and still persist as legacy issues in some organizations and as expressions of the myth of meritocracy in others, a continued OD focus on issues of D&I is essential for inspiring, enabling, and receiving the best thinking of the people of the organization. Workplaces that maintain such a focus will have the best opportunities to attract, retain, and develop the deepest pool of talent. Creating a more diverse and inclusive workplace starts with recognizing that the best people for a given organization are not limited to certain elite schools, socio-economic backgrounds, or countries of origin. It grows with understanding that an increasingly complex marketplace of challenges and opportunities requires the broadest possible range of perspectives and skillsets. It becomes the organizational norm when it pays off in improved performance, reduced waste, higher quality, and greater profitability (Katz & Miller, 2017).

We have seen and experienced great change in society and in our approach to our work on D&I in OD in organizations both in the United States and around the world. The field has progressed from bringing new people into organizations and asking them to “fit in,” to changing

the organizations' policies, practices, and cultures so *all* people (including those who were already represented) can fully contribute and do their best work (Miller & Katz, 2002). In addition, we have gained greater understanding of how to transform organizations on a global basis to better leverage cross-cultural differences (Katz & Miller, 2016). However, even with all the work that has been done over these 50 years, we are seeing greater polarization across the globe between groups, nations, religions, races, and partisans of all kinds. While gains toward inclusion have been made, there are growing challenges in how to create the safety needed to achieve the most productive interactions within organizations. A foundation for our work in OD is creating interaction safety (Miller & Katz, 2018) in

in Switzerland—spoke about some of the challenges ahead for us as practitioners. Both identified mega-shifts that are in front of us and the implications that we need to pay attention to.

Specifically identified were the massive changes that are currently taking place and will continue to dramatically change our workplaces and societies throughout the world by digitization, AI, and robotics. AI or Machine Intelligence in particular poses a major challenge to OD practitioners who thought they had successfully addressed overt, systemic discrimination in organizations only to find it being replicated by some machine-learning systems that are incorporating society's biases into their supposedly objective decision-making processes (Miller, Katz, & Gans, 2018).

How aware are we, as OD practitioners, of how the use of AI or machine intelligence for personnel and management decision-making may actually be moving some organizations backwards in their efforts to create more inclusive and welcoming environments? Is the use of machine intelligence in hiring and other decision processes actually screening out a more diverse population?

which people can develop the trust needed to openly speak up, engage each other's ideas, and collaborate. But at a time when collaboration across differences of culture, discipline, and perspective is so critical to organizational success, people continue to experience a societal and global context that is quite the contrary.

Questions About What Lies Ahead

Last December (2017), about 125 organization development scholars and practitioners came together for a gathering to look at the field, from our founders to the future. The gathering will convene again in December 2018 and 2019 to continue our discussions and explore where OD is today and the implications for practitioner/scholars for the future. At the 2017 gathering, two futurists—Margaret Regan of The FutureWork Institute, and Jens Ulrik Hansen of Future Associates

These shifts present us with important questions to explore as we continue to shape the field and these shifts shape us. How aware are we, as OD practitioners, of how the use of AI or machine intelligence for personnel and management decision-making may actually be moving some organizations backwards in their efforts to create more inclusive and welcoming environments? Is the use of machine intelligence in hiring and other decision processes actually screening out a more diverse population?

As robots and computers take over more and more of the work that humans once did, and as more humans work alongside robots, how does that change our role as practitioners? How should it impact our interventions? How do we need to frame and address this human-machine interaction/team? As technology and the possibility of creating “enhanced” brains and “enhanced” humans becomes

more of a reality, what needs to be developed or declared now so we don't create a new “one-up/one-down” discrimination dynamic?

As virtual and augmented realities become more accessible, how do we integrate that into our practice? In the coming years as this new human/machine hybrid landscape increases, what does the work of organizational change and creating more inclusive organizations that leverage differences look like?

The challenge for us as OD practitioners as we look to the future is to continue to integrate and be aware of our unique value-added to organizational change and the phenomena of humans working together. Clearly, the work on creating more equitable organizations in which everyone can do their best work is not done. Although we have made great strides over these past 50+ years, there is much that remains to be done on local, national and global levels. The challenge may feel daunting but we must hold onto those values and principles that are the foundation of our practice – to continue to create workplaces that enable people to do their best work – and to enable organizations to be healthy environments that can be sustained and prosper.

Implications for OD practitioners

Looking back and looking forward, we have a few learnings from our journeys we would like to offer as suggestions for your journey ahead:

- 1. Practice self-as-instrument.** We value and celebrate the practice of self-as-instrument, which requires each of us to be lifelong learners, seekers of feedback, open to what is new and next, and constant monitors of how we are managing the level of change in a VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) world.
- 2. Actively embrace the future.** Where are organizations going, and who will be in our organization? How will they need to interact? Which aspects of the human element will be most important for success?

3. **Accept that D&I and OD are inseparable.** Make it the norm to ask in every setting (whether in strategic planning, organizational design, or other change strategies): Are these the right people? Whose voice is missing? What is the impact on different populations? How are we creating greater inclusion?
4. **Create interaction safety for yourself and others.** This is the starting point for inclusion, for empowering contribution, and for enabling collaboration.
5. **Lean into discomfort.** Change is *often* uncomfortable. Be willing to lean into the discomfort of the unknown.
6. **Lead with your voice.** Bring your voice to situations where it will enhance the conversation/interaction, even if it means taking a risk. Now is the time for all of us to speak up...to stand up!
7. **Create a posse.** Surround yourself with allies. Join, find, or create a group of people among whom you can be fully yourself so you don't lose who you are or parts of who you are because the world seems too dangerous a place to be fully you.
8. **Learn, learn, learn.** The world is changing at a very fast pace. As practitioners and people, we must keep up with (and, hopefully, ahead of) the trends and the current thinking so we can join our clients and the newer and younger members of organizations as they suggest the actions that will move organizations into the future.
9. **Take care of yourself.** As Herb Shepard (1985) said, the first rule for change agents is to *stay alive*. How are you taking care of yourself? Are you doing things to make yourself healthier? This is a marathon. Are you training yourself to be a marathon runner in the world of change where we, OD Practitioners, have so much more to give?

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