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Too Soon for Diversity and Inclusion Practice Standards? Organization Development Practice as an Interim Solution

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Given the political, legal, organizational, and workforce implications associated with diversity and inclusion (D & I) practice, we agree with Hays-Thomas and Bendick (2013) that professional standards are necessary. However, we believe setting professional standards should be delayed until the D & I research literature ''catches up'' with the still evolving global, holistic, and multidimensional approach now being viewed as the most mature conceptual model for D & I in organizations (e.g., Citkin & Spielman, 2012; Tapia, 2013). Before we can establish uniform standards for implementing D & I initiatives or definitively identify the competencies required of D & I practitioners, the many separate strands of research, including those dealing with group and individual identity, bias and discrimination, acculturation and assimilation, global cross-cultural models, and linkages between D & I initiatives and organizational outcomes, need to be revisited and empirically evaluated in the new, expanded context of D & I that encompasses the workforce, workplace, and worldwide marketplace.

In the interim, we recommend that guidelines relevant to organization development (OD) be used to identify applicable change processes and practitioner competencies for D & I initiatives. To support our position, we present two models of OD and change that are congruent with an integrated approach to D & I initiatives, along with examples of how they can be effectively applied in the D & I context, and highlight similarities between the basic competencies for OD and D & I practitioners. We conclude by making several suggestions regarding areas

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of research that could inform our future ability to create D & I practice standards that are truly reflective of the evolution occurring in the D & I field.

Models of OD and Change

The field of OD has a long and rich history of managing organizational change based on scientifically rigorous and practically relevant principles. This scientist-practitioner approach has resulted in multiple models of OD and change, but we focus on two models that contain practice guidelines applicable to D & I. The first model describes the general process for conducting planned change within an organization. As shown in Figure 1, OD follows a general four-stage process that begins by entering and contracting with the client organization or group, diagnosing the issues, planning and implementing the change initiative, and then evaluating and institutionalizing the change (Cummings & Worley, 2009). Each stage in the model is further defined by specific actions that guide the change management process. Importantly, each of the stages is essential if the desired change is to be achieved and sustained.

Although this model of change is specific to OD, it is relevant to all types of organizational interventions, including those focused on D & I. Whether the D & I intervention involves changing critical talent management processes, such as identification of high potentials; leadership development; career pathing and succession planning; or management practices related to market segmentation, product design, customer service, or marketing and sales approaches; the change process and related activities presented in the model are the foundation of any D & I effort.

Techniques and approaches to D & I work are still evolving for each stage in the model, with the greatest challenges arising, many would agree, in the *evaluating and institutionalizing* stage. Without the ability to define appropriate measures of progress, organizations have continued to encounter a loss of momentum and difficulty in sustaining D & I change. It is our observation that the ability to create effective measures of progress is predicated on personal engagement of the organization's leadership in the change process through their involvement at all stages but especially in defining the vision and strategy for D & I and how they believe progress should be measured and tied back to the organization's needs, goals, and performance. This includes understanding and acting upon their role as change agents—something that is often neglected when D & I initiatives are assigned to, and led by, human resources and consultants and not the leadership of the business.

Implementing D & I within any organization is a major change affecting the entire workplace and workforce (e.g., Holvino, Ferdman, & Merrill-Sands, 2004). Although a good basis for conducting D & I efforts, the model presented in Figure 1 must be supplemented with additional information about implementing D & I that accounts for the systemic nature of organizations. In our experience, D & I is implemented within complex, interdependent organizational systems and never exists independently of these systems. Despite differences in how the systems are organized, we tend to find the same general components underlying how our client organizations operate, which in turn influence our D & I approach. Figure 2 highlights these organizational components, which represent the transformational (i.e., mission and strategy, leadership, organizational culture) and transactional variables (i.e., management practices, structure, systems, work unit climate, task, and individual skills, motivation, individual needs and values) that interact in reciprocal feedback loops to drive both individual and organizational performance and change (Burke & Litwin, 1992).

This model and its related practice guidelines are applicable to the D & I field in several ways. First, it provides a basis for D & I practitioners to understand the target of change, what aspects of the organization may be impacted, and how other

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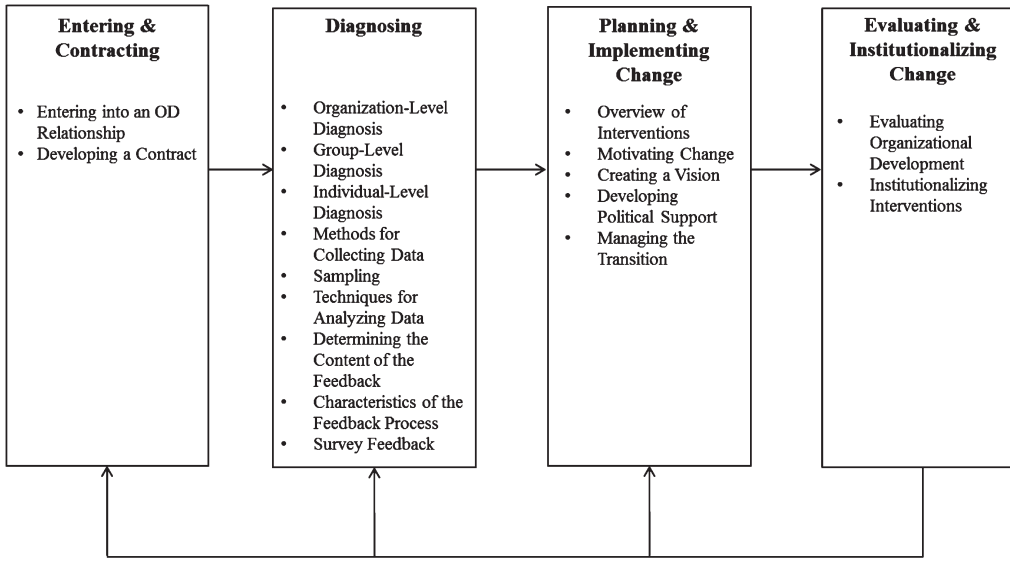


Figure 1. Model of planned organization change. Adapted from Cummings and Worley (2009).

components of the organization play a critical role in the success of implementation outcomes. Second, by highlighting the larger system within which D & I is implemented, it also emphasizes the need to account for other changes that may be required to support the effort that are not directly tied to the original change plans. Third, it supports the integration of D & I considerations into *all* aspects of the organization's functioning and performance, which is essential if D & I interventions are to create inclusive ways of thinking and working that impact bottom-line business results. Fourth, it is aligned with changes in the reconceptualization of D & I from a program to a process of systemic organizational change (e.g., Hubbard, 2012).

The second model also suggests opportunities to link D & I change with other interventions currently underway, for example, efforts to operationalize the organization's values, instituting a stronger focus on customer service, or expanding into new market segments or geographies that require strong cultural competence. Part of the evolution that is taking place in the D & I field is a shift from seeing interventions as separate and apart from the ''real'' work of the organization to recognizing how it can and should be a consideration in everything that the organization, and individual workers, do each day. Finally, this model facilitates the identification, discussion, and response to resistance to change, which can be more emotionally charged for D & I initiatives than for other types of change initiatives (Thomas & Plaut, 2008).

Taken together, these models of OD and change provide the foundation for implementing multiple types of D & I efforts. They describe the general change management process that is required, as well as the specific aspects of organizations that are affected by D & I and must be accounted for to ensure short- and long-term effectiveness. Moreover, these models represent practice guidelines that have been refined across multiple industries, organizations, occupations, and interventions, thus enhancing their generalizability to D & I efforts. Therefore, until the D & I research and practice base reaches a critical mass that can be used to identify specific practice standards, these models, coupled with specific examples of how they should be implemented in

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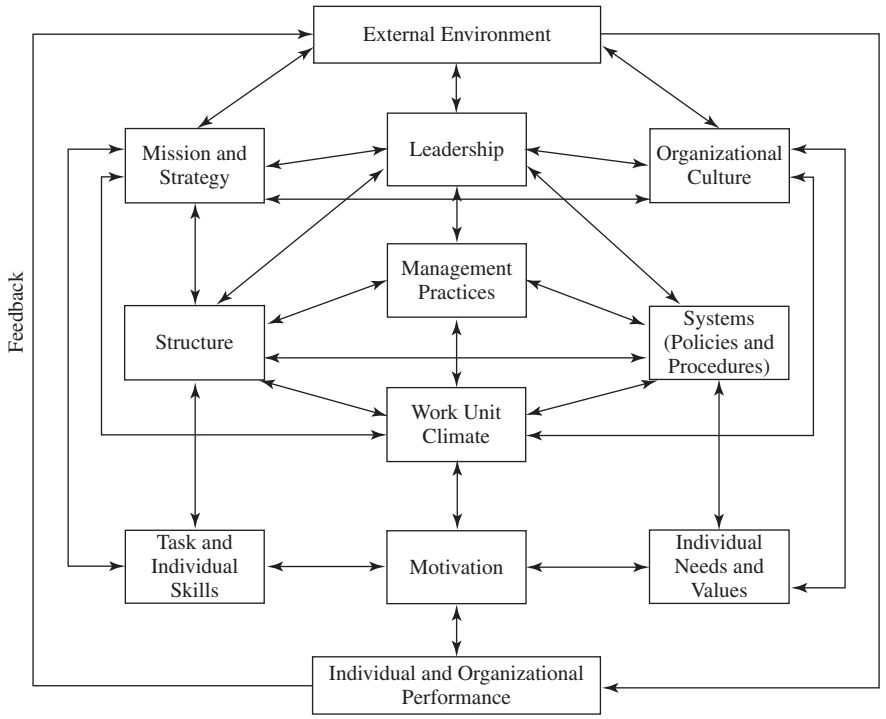


Figure 2. Model of organization performance and change. Adapted from Burke and Litwin (1992).

D & I interventions, represent templates for identifying and establishing interim practice standards for the D & I field.

OD and D & I Practitioner Competencies

Developing competency standards for those engaged in D & I work is necessarily a corollary to creating methodological and practice standards. Both the OD field, which has identified competencies related to successful performance as an OD practitioner (e.g., Worley, Rothwell, & Sullivan, 2005), and the D & I field have contributed efforts that are relevant to establishing practitioner standards. A preliminary competency model for D & I practitioners (e.g., Lahiri, 2008), as well as D & I degrees (e.g., Georgetown University, 2013) and certification programs (e.g., Cornell University, 2013; University of Houston, 2013), are already available as a starting point.

As can be seen in Table 1, the knowledge and skill associated with OD practitioners is very similar to that suggested for D & I practitioners. In fact, with the exception of content specific to the D & I field (e.g., history of race relations, D & I theory, employment law), comparison of these taxonomies suggests that D & I practitioners must have the same understanding of organizations and related change processes as OD practitioners. A more in-depth review of the course descriptions for the D & I degree and certification courses finds references to OD theory and change, data collection and analysis methods, strategic organizational diagnosis, and resistance to organization change. Throughout these courses the content focuses on the broader organization context and its components, with an emphasis on data collection and analysis to diagnose and change diversity-related issues, which further highlights the value of applying OD principles (methodologies *and* competencies) to the D & I

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Table 1. *Comparison of OD and D & I Competencies*

OD competencies: Worley, Rothwell, & Sullivan (2005)	D & I competency model: Lahiri (2008)	D & I degree: Georgetown University (2013)	D & I certificate: Cornell University (2013)	D & I certificate University of Houston (2013)
• Organization Behavior	• Change Management	• Theories of D & I	• The Law of EEOC	• Overview of Office of Diversity Role
• Individual Psychology	• Diversity, Inclusion, & Global Perspective	• Strategic Diagnosis & Planning in D & I	• Fundamentals of Diversity Initiatives	• Diversity ROI Metrics & Analytics
• Group Dynamics	• Business Acumen	• D & I in the International Context	• Strategic Diversity Recruiting	• Retaining & Recruiting from an Increasingly Diverse Candidate Pool
• Management & Organization Theory	• Strategic External Relations	• Creating & Sustaining a Climate of Inclusion	• The Essentials of Developing & Delivering Diversity Training	• Communications
• Research Methods & Statistics	• Integrity	• Analyzing & Addressing Institutional Discrimination	• Strategic Diversity Retention	• Diversity Training
• Comparative Cultural Perspectives	• Visionary & Strategic Leadership		• Training Difficult Issues in Diversity	• Corporate Culture Assessments
• Functional Knowledge of Business	• HR Disciplines		• Developing & Managing an Effective Supplier Diversity Program	• Diversity Support Mechanisms
• System Dynamics			• Effective Affinity Groups	• Managing C-Suite Issues
• Facilitation & Process Consulting			• Effective Diversity Councils	
• Developing Client Capability				
• Evaluating Organization Change				

D & I = diversity and inclusion; EEOC = Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; HR = human resources; OD = organization development; ROI = return on investment.

field. Thus, both the well-established OD competencies and the early work done on D & I competencies can serve as an immediately available foundation for the final standards to be proposed by the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM).

Conclusions

Having offered the above recommendation for an interim approach to D & I standards, we recognize that the team currently supporting the SHRM effort may have already taken a similar approach in the forthcoming standards. Therefore, perhaps the next step is to focus on areas of research that will contribute to the ability to further define D & I-specific standards.

To develop standards for the D & I work itself, we would recommend that researchers explore ways to measure the impact of different D & I interventions on multiple organizational outcomes—helping to define, in a much more scientific way, a set of ''best practices'' for the field, which might also be differentiated based on organization industry, size, existing culture, and other relevant organizational variables. Research done in this area in the past (e.g., Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006) was based on longitudinal data from a much earlier era of D & I—when compliance and risk avoidance were primary drivers for interventions, and the notion of an inclusive work environment spurring competitive advantage was largely unexplored. To fully understand the effectiveness of D & I interventions, more refined research is needed that moves beyond an organization's recognition of differences, which focuses on avoidance of legal risks and internal conflicts, and evaluates its success at including and fully utilizing differences in achieving the organization's mission and business goals.

In addition, further research on cultural competence as an individual and organizational capability would benefit both the development of effective change strategies and the preparation of practitioners in the field. We believe that one of the indicators of organization progress is its development of the ability to respond effectively to its diversity of employees, markets, and external stakeholders—both in its home country and around the globe. In turn, the behaviors inherent in cultural competence—being able to grasp, appreciate, and encourage a wide range of perspectives on any situation—should be modeled by the D & I practitioner. This premise is consistent with observations that self-awareness is related to the success of change efforts (e.g., Tannenbaum, 1995). The D & I practitioner must be able to gain personal credibility in facilitating potentially difficult discussions across differences of world view and approach to human relationships that are rooted in diversity of all kinds—and coach others in developing this ability.

Notably, none of the competencies in either the OD or D & I taxonomies previously discussed deal with the practitioner's need for self-awareness of his/her ability to work across cultures (meaning not only national cultures, but gender, age, socioeconomic group, and other universal differences as well)—or how competency in this area might be measured. Thus, although acquiring the self-knowledge and sensitivity gained through personal experience with the effects of exclusion is an aspect of practitioner preparation that is often overlooked and more difficult to ''standardize,'' it has a critical impact on the effectiveness of individuals working in the D & I field and merits further attention by industrial-organizational (I–O) researchers.

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