

## **The Complacent Acceptance of Diversity: Human Resource Development in a Culturally Diverse Environment**

Judith D. Bernier  
Florida International University, USA

**Abstract:** This paper examines the inability of work organizations to achieve racial balance and use training and development, organization development, and multicultural organizational development principles to manage and enable diversity initiatives. The paper proposes a conceptual framework for a micro and macro model as an approach to diversity initiatives.

Call it trendy, but having a diversity program seems to be taking off as a politically correct measure for most corporations. However, despite the prevalence of diversity initiatives at corporations, most companies have failed to achieve racial balance in their organizational structure. The problems arising from today's workforce diversity initiatives are caused not by the changing composition of the workforce itself but by the inability of work organizations to integrate and use a heterogeneous workforce at all levels of the organization (Cox, 1991). According to Cox (2001), this inability to integrate the workforce at all levels follows directly from the failure to diagnose the problem accurately. He states that typically, the problem diagnosis is limited to "insufficient diversity," and the solution consequently focuses on changing the input into the system.

This change in the input involves such actions as creating multifunctional and cross level work teams, placing foreign nationals on the board, and recruiting more women and racial-minority men (Cox, 2001). There is no question that this change in the composition of human input is an important step toward changing the culture, especially if the changes include positions of high decision-making authority. However, the approach of new inputs has usually not been accompanied by corresponding changes in the other elements of the system and that result is a predictable suboptimization or even outright failure of the change effort (Cox, 2001).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the implicit and explicit power of diversity initiatives within the organization, the critical content and impact of a micro and macro model, and the problematic issues relating to diversity initiatives within the organization. This paper conceptualizes workforce diversity initiatives in terms of a micro and a macro model. The micro model focuses on diversity initiatives that only affect individual employees within the organization. The macro model focuses on diversity initiatives that affect the entire organization. Such a framework leads to diversity initiatives that include three different perspectives: the individual, the interpersonal, and the organizational (Chesler, 1994). This conceptual framework provides an alternative way for Adult education and Human Resource Development (AE/HRD) practitioners and their organizations to understand the diverse concerns of racial-minority workers.

The paper examines the following four key areas respectively: (a) the implicit and explicit power of diversity initiatives within the organization, (b) training and development in the context of a micro model, (c) organizational development and multicultural organizational development in the context of a macro model, and (d) the problematic issues relating to diversity initiatives within the organization.

### **Implicit and Explicit Power of Diversity Initiatives within the Organizations**

As society becomes more dependent on knowledge power, HRD professionals involved in research and practice invariably assume greater responsibility, and logically, should be more accountable for their actions (Hatcher & Aragon, 2000). It is also important that HRD practitioners understand the dynamics of diversity initiatives within the organization: who the players are, their needs and how they exercise power to fulfill those needs. One of many barriers affecting minorities is the cultural mismatch between the learning environment and their cultural history (Guy, 1999). All too often, adult educators do not understand the importance of the role that culture plays in shaping the educational and learning process with the organization.

The overall characterization of AE/HRD practitioners within the organization should be that of a business partner to address more systemic issues and to be involved long enough to ensure real change. Ruona (2000) found that HRD should approach problems with a system point of view- an understanding of the system and how the target of intervention is related to the other parts of the organization. One participant stressed that in system intervention, an HRD professional must tend to the dynamics of the system rather than to a specific individual. This emphasis concurs with the macro model to diversity initiatives and the use of organizational/multicultural development principles to address change within the organization.

### **Training and Development in the Context of a Micro Model**

#### *Training and Development*

Many adult educators and HRD practitioners who are involved in diversity initiatives typically deliver awareness programs that are superficial and neatly packaged in modules and practice guidelines. Schien (1992) proposes three levels of culture when evaluating awareness programs: the *artifacts* of that society (e.g. language, dress, fashion, art etc), the *values* (e.g. might is right etc.) and the *assumptions*, the lowest and most complex level, which are difficult to state. Current cultural awareness training still use various media to address, mainly the artifact level with superimposed perception/ "guesses" as to the meaning attributed to the lower levels based on third-party reports (Schien, 1992).

Wheeler (1995) believes that many companies have established diversity value statements, missions, and objectives, but have much of the real work is yet to be done. Thomas (1991) believes that managing diversity deals with the way organizations are managing, the way managers do their jobs. It is grounded in a very specific definition of "managing": creating an environment that allows the people being managed to reach their full potential. At its best, it means getting from employees not only everything you have a right to expect, but everything they have to offer. It is important to note that if diversity initiatives were rescued from the current backlash of affirmative action, fault assumptions, and stereotypes, it might be used as a vehicle for AE/HRD practitioners to truly understand and practice adult learning and development (Thomas, 1991).

#### *Soft programs*

Many organizations engaged in diversity efforts focus on the "soft" programs, such as awareness training, mentoring, or other human resources initiatives (Butaine, 1994). These programs may help organizations make important gains involving increased recruitment, support, and advancement for women, and people of color and reeducation of white managers and elites (Chesler, 1994). But they do not tackle issues of domination and oppression (Chesler, 1994),

especially the role that cultural domination plays in privileging some and subordinating others (Guy, 1999).

AE/HRD practitioners may use training to manage or support diversity initiatives. However, these initiatives must be injected into the foundation or the roots of the organization in order to influence cultural change. This lends weight to the argument that training and development need to be integrated carefully with other people management activities within the organization in order to achieve evidence of cultural diversity.

Thomas (1991) emphasizes education rather than training. He asserts that education has to do with how we think about things; training involves ways of doing things. Training builds specific skills; education changes mindsets. Bulter (2001) believes that adult educators continually transgress the boundaries between education and training as they redefine themselves as trainers and engage in ever hybridizing, mutating pedagogical practices. Butler (2001) contends that the concept of trainability carries with it an understanding of an actor to be appropriately formed and reformed according to organizational contingencies.

Despite the focus of on learning, the concept of trainability continues to be vigorously promoted, with depoliticized, prepackaged vocationally orientated education that reach all spheres of education and training policy and practice, connecting macro policy/power dynamics with micro practices (Butler, 2001).

### **Organizational Development and Multicultural Organizational Development in the Context of a Macro Model**

#### *Organizational Development*

Organizational development (OD) has said to emerge during the late 1960s and 1970s (French & Bell, 1978). As a discipline, it was seen as a long-range effort to improve an organization's problem-solving and renewal process through collaborative management of organization culture with the assistance of change agents (French & Bell, 1978). OD is a broad and diverse field, and because it has been rooted partly in the academy, many texts, anthologies, and review articles have been written that espouse its primary assumptions, principles, and tactics of change making (Chesler, 1994). OD principles introduce planned change, involve the entire organization, increase organizational effectiveness and enhance organizational choice and self-renewal. Yet, despite these important attributes of OD, AE/HRD practitioners within the organization rarely approach diversity initiatives from a macro model Wheeler (1994) emphasizes that multiple elements are essential in the process of creating an environment that values diversity and that no single approach is sufficient.

The reason for a broad approach to diversity efforts is that the issues or drivers are too complex (Egan, 2001). However, Lewin's (1951) three stages of change--unfreeze, change, refreeze--reflect the essence of change that needed in today's organizations to enable and manage diversity initiatives. The three stages of change also enable organizations to confront fault assumptions and support ongoing change. Most important, the three stages of change reflect a clear goal is identified and cascaded down to the organization's members. This approach is more concerned with the attempt to move the locus of control towards an organizational/macro sense of accountability. Now, the question is, how should AE/HRD practitioners fully utilizing the basic elements of OD to manage and enable diversity initiatives? The answer will be discussed in the following section in the context of multicultural organizational development.

### *Multicultural organizational development*

Organizational development is not the same as multicultural organizational development (MCOOD). The area of organizational diversity is a dynamic one, whose meaning is constantly expanding, most of the existing research has focus on issues related to race, gender, and to a lesser extent, ethnicity (Chesler, 1994). The major tactics by organizational development specialist and organizational managers to achieve their goal of diversity include: Training and coaching, goal setting and planning, process consultation, survey feedback, technostructural intervention, team building, crisis intervention and quality of work-life programs (Chesler, 1994).

Conversely, multicultural organizational development specialists generally articulate an approach to organizational change that is frankly antiracist and antisexist (Chesler, 1994). Multiculturalism that is sought is not simply an acceptance of differences, nor a celebrative affirmation of the value of differences, but a reduction in the patterns of racial and gender oppression (racism and sexism) that predominate in most U.S. institutions and organizations (Chesler, 1994). A consensus-oriented approach to MCOOD stresses the possibility of reform in racism, sexism, etc. However, programs such as understanding differences and valuing diversity, may help organizations make important gains involving increased recruitment, support, and advancement for women and people of color and reeducation of white managers and elites. But they do not tackle issues of domination and oppression. Therefore, organizational development - even organizational development that includes racism and sexism awareness programs does not equal multicultural organizational development (Chesler, 1994).

The tactics utilized by multicultural organizational developers include the necessity of challenging the culture and structure of white male oppression. Such a challenge can be mounted via the following tactics (Chesler, 1994): (a) Informing and updating white, male managerial cadres through awareness or bias-reduction training; (b) Creating new organizational mission statements and changing reward systems to punish or reward managers for their behavior regarding racism and sexism; (c) Changing human resource policies and programs to meet the needs of diverse populations; and (d) Creating an work atmosphere that welcomes change and equity, including whistle blowing, protests, and external agents. It is clear that MCOOD utilizes some of the principles and many of the tactics of OD. However, other traditional OD principles and many other OD tactics are not shared; they even contravene one another (Chesler, 1994).

It is also clear from the literature that diversity initiatives can be implemented from multiple approaches (Chesler, 1994; Cox, 2001; Wheeler, 1994). These approaches can either be categorized as either micro or macro. To date, however, most diversity initiatives made explicit by AE/HRD practitioners tend to be of a micro approach in nature. Practitioners not only suggest a number of "micorremedies" to provide incentives for recruiting, hiring, and promoting minorities, but also insist on "macrosolutions" to realign structural relations within the organizations (Chesler, 1994).

## **Problematic Issues Relating to Diversity Initiatives**

### *Implementation*

Organizations are struggling with diversity management and the programs face resistance from the dominant group in our cultural (Cox, 2001). Cultural norms such as a narrow definition of diversity, affirmative action baggage, unfamiliar approach in managing diversity program, and different beliefs and assumptions about diversity are problematic to the advancement of minorities in any organization. These problematic issues negatively impact the professional and advancement of minorities within the organization.

### *Evaluation*

Evaluation and measurement of diversity efforts are challenging. In order to measure meaningful outcomes associated with diversity, diversity must be linked to performance and performance improvement (Egan, 2001). Egan indicates that using measurement to evaluate the effectiveness of diversity is complicated for the following reasons: diversity and performance are latent constructs, as is the concept of performance improvement related to diversity; these latent constructs have multiple attributes that may be confronted by other attributes such that they are not distinguishable; indicators may connect to multiple attributes; multiple indicators exist for each of the attributes; and, as supported by the definition of diversity, each situation being measured involves a unique combination of attributes. The difficulties involved with these issues along with the relative infancy of diversity efforts in organizations suggest the need for research that builds performance measurement theory and links it to practice.

Wheeler (1995) believes that measurable management objectives might include criteria such as demonstrated commitment to diversity through recruitment, interviewing, job assignments, and mentoring for women and minorities and people with disabilities; modeling of desired behavior; and active involvement in diversity education. However, one of the primary problems with diversity initiatives is that they are not clearly connected to business objectives (Wheeler, 1995).

### *Communication*

Schein (1992) propose that once people have a common system of communication and language, learning can take place. The problem arises from the retardation of understanding and the underdevelopment of robust process of communication. Economic and demographic realities indicate that diversity is a business issue with both positive and negative consequences for the bottom line (Wheeler, 1995). It is evident that organizations need to evaluate diversity initiatives as they would any other item on their profit and loss statements.

### **Conclusion**

The notion of adult education in a culturally diverse environment depends upon real efforts to manage and support diversity. It cannot be based on "quickie" training programs and one-shot solutions to achieving diversity. Diversity initiatives that have awareness training as their sole theme constitute to complacent acceptance of diversity within the organization. Although many organizations continue to use a micro and macro model to diversity independently, a configuration of these two models works together to enhance diversity. A multilevel relationship exists in organizations that have training and development, organizational development, and multicultural organizational development interventions and they often experience a meaningful diversity orientation. These elements represent key areas of adult education and human resource

development. Thus, all these elements must work in concert under the larger umbrella of diversity policy to maximize their effectiveness. This type of relationship evolves from the fact that diversity is a complex phenomenon that needs constant reinforcement (Richard, 2001).

### References

- Butaine, C.S. (1994). Beyond smiling faces. In Cross, E., Miller, A.F., Seashore, W. E., Katz, H., J., *The promise of diversity*: (pp.219-221). New York: Book Press.
- Bulter, E. (2001). The power of discourse: working-related learning in the learning age. In Cervero, R. M. & Wilson, A.L. *Power in practice* (pp.60-82). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Chesler, M.A. (1994). Organizational development is not the same as multicultural organizational development. In Cross, E., Miller, A.F., Seashore, W. E., Katz, H., J., *The promise of diversity* (pp.46-51). New York: Book Press.
- Cox, T. (1991). The multicultural organization. *Academy of Management Executive*, 5, 34-46.
- Cox, T. (2001). *Creating the multicultural organization*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Egan, M. (2001). Challenges in Measuring and Evaluating Diversity Efforts in HRD. AHRD 2001 Conference.
- French, W. & Bell, C. (1978) *Organization development*. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.
- Guy, T. C. (1999). Culture as context for adult education: the need for culturally relevant adult education. In Guy, T.C. *Providing culturally relevant adult education*: (pp.5-18). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers.
- Hatcher, T. & Aragon, S.R. (2000). A code of ethics and integrity for HRD research and practice. *Human Resource Development Quarterly*, 11(2). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Lewin, K. (1951). *Field theory in social sciences*. New York: Harper Collins.
- Richard, O.C. (2001). Racial diversity, business strategy, and firm performance: A resource-based view. *Academy of Management*, 43 (2), 164-177.
- Ruona, W. (2000). Core beliefs in human resource development. In Swanson, R. (Ed.), *Proceedings of the Academy of Human Resource Development Annual Conference* (1-27). Baton Rouge, LA: Academy of Human Resource Development.
- Schien, E.H. (1992). *Organizational culture and leadership, 2<sup>nd</sup>*, San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Thomas, R.R., Jr. (1994). *Beyond race and gender: unleashing the power of your total work force by managing diversity*. New York: AMACOM
- Wheeler, M.L. (1994). Diversity training. (Research Report Number 1083-94RR) p.21. New York: The Conference Board.
- Wheeler, M.L. (1995). Diversity: Business Rationale and Strategies. (Research Report Number 1130-95-RR). New York: The Conference Board.