

Speaking through the Void: An Introduction to the *Tamara Journal* Special Issue on the Capacity of Organization Development Diversity Consulting to Foster Systemic Change for Social Justice

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**Setting the Context**

This special issue of *Tamara* considers the question: “To what degree has organization development diversity consulting<sup>1</sup> (ODDC) contributed to systemic change for social justice<sup>2</sup>?” Some might see this question as superfluous—seeing social justice as a radical political ideology inappropriate to apply to the essential work of corporations and non-profit

organizations and ODDC as a means to help organizations and work teams function more effectively. Others might place social justice at the heart of the mission of ODDC, and yet not have a systemic scope in mind when they think about social justice infusion in organizations. Still others might place systemic change for social justice at the heart of their work in ODDC but have little experience seeing the systemic change they seek. While taking those perspectives into consideration, we believe that it is indeed the right time in the history of ODDC, the United States, and the world to assess the impact of ODDC on the systemic change of organizations toward greater social justice.

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<sup>1</sup> By organization development diversity consulting, we mean the practice of organization development that is focused on diversity issues and the practice of diversity consulting within organizations.

<sup>2</sup> By systemic change for social justice, we mean the creation of equitable ecologies within organizations in which individuals are encouraged to do their best work and be their best selves and groups of people are treated equitably across and within social identities such as race/ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, physical embodiment, etc.

The candidacy of United States Senator Barack Obama for the Presidency of the United States brought hope to many liberals in the United States and progressives within and outside of the country for a post-racial, inclusive, socially just new world order. The campaign, which drew upon grassroots organizing—particularly among groups historically disillusioned with electoral politics such as youth and people of color—called forth people around the world to believe in a sea change in the way the United States government, one of the most powerful organizations in the world, would operate. It would be terribly naïve to believe the fact that Barack Obama would be the country's first president—publicly identified<sup>3</sup> as having an ethnicity other than European-American when elected—had nothing to do with that belief.

Many people, perhaps too many, believed that that a new world order would begin to materialize with the election of this man, born of an African father and a European-American mother, to the chief executive office of the world's most powerful, public—

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<sup>3</sup> There are existing narratives about United States Presidents before Barack Obama who have been from mixed ethnic backgrounds. For more on these narratives see: <http://diversityinc.com/content/1757/article/1461/> or *The Five Negro Presidents* by J. A. Rogers.

arguably non-profit—organization. Now, almost half way through the first term of his Presidency, we see the rise of a racialized, populist movement likening itself to the Boston Tea Party direct action of the pre-revolutionary war period; referenda in multiple states limiting the civil rights of homosexuals, bisexuals, pansexuals, and polysexuals; enacted state law in Arizona giving police officers the mandate to stop any person who *looks as though* they are an illegal immigrant and compel them to produce proof of legal status; and the appointment of more women and people of color to the federal bench than in any other time in the history of the nation.

In comparing the hard felt emotions and upheaval associated with these occurrences—for one group or another—with the promises, fears and hopes many affixed to the Obama candidacy, one might ask those who were hoping for change and now frustrated by recent events, “Did you think change would come easily?” Sarah Palin’s sarcastic, post-campaign stump speech question seems to have some relevance and appropriateness as well, “How’s that hopey changey thing working for ya’?”

Any consultant or activist who has worked on a diversity or social justice change effort can testify to the

complexity of the emotional matrix created when such efforts are implemented, or merely even proposed. Everyone begins to ask themselves, “How will these changes affect me and my people?” People wonder about the success and sustainability of the change. Some are suspicious about the methods used to achieve the goals. They have intensified perceptions of apparent setbacks and advances. The consultant or activist has to manage these expectations and perceptions while facilitating change. In fact, they have to manage these expectations and perceptions as a part of the facilitation of change. While a client system may have their definitions of what is success, the consultant carries with her/him a picture of what success looks like in each contracted relationship and over the course of her/his career in the field.

We sought, in this special issue, to take a wider view than just a consultant, project, or organization. We wanted to look at the field of ODDC and to ask our question about the contribution the field has made to systemic change for social justice. We did this at a time when change is being questioned, not just in the United States but on a larger scale around the world in places like Venezuela (e.g., Has populist leadership translated to a

populist governmental agenda?); Haiti (e.g., Has democracy brought about self-sufficiency and self-determination?); the Gaza Strip (e.g., Has radical grassroots resistance turned formal government been able to govern effectively while under external pressure?); and South Africa (e.g., Has the end of apartheid meant the beginning of equal access and opportunity?). These more contemporary examples raise the same questions that historic examples did, such as in the case of the end of European colonialism and the beginning of European neocolonialism around the world and the May 1968 revolt in France that ushered in post-structuralism: Is change, systemic change, for social justice possible? And if so, how and why?

ODDC has had decades to provide us with the evidence we need to answer our questions. Applied behavioral sciences, diversity trainings, and cultural competence interventions have been implemented in organizations—big and small; non-profit, public, and for-profit—all over the United States, as well as in other parts of the world. So much so that it would be an interesting and arguable thesis to propose that the nearly ubiquitous exposure of the United States workforce

to ODDC contributed to the change in the electorate that made it possible for Barack Obama to have won the election. There has been a lot of ODDC implemented and we wanted to know what social justice advances we have to show for all these efforts.

Therefore, we used the contributions we received—from colleagues who responded to our call for articles—to learn about our field and answer our underlying question. Before we tell you what we learned, let's discuss who we are and what guiding frameworks existed among us as we entered the guest co-editing of this special issue.

### **Who We Are**

The three of us came together to guest co-edit this special issue out of our own individual needs to think about our field. We brought to the editorial work the lessons from our training, experiences, and ongoing professional development. If one's point of view or orientation affects and informs one's perspective, then it is important that we show you who we are, our orientations, as part of our introduction to a discussion of what we see in this special issue and how we view the field of ODDC.

### **H. SHARIF WILLIAMS**

I have a PhD in human and organizational systems. I have a PhD in human and organizational systems and a concentration in transformative learning for social justice. I have a PhD in human and organizational systems, a concentration in transformative learning for social justice, and the capacity to diagnose organizational dysfunction and structural inequality. And I am a big, angry Black man. At least, that's the archetype, operating below the surface of everyday, polite, professional engagement, which potential clients, clients, and colleagues may access when I am engaged in the work of organization development and diversity consulting for systemic change in social justice. This archetype can be and is accessed at the mere hint of something in a gesture, a look of the eyes, the intonation of a word, or the erection of a posture on my part.

At least as early as D. W. Griffith's film *Birth of a Nation* in 1915, the big, angry Black man archetype has been a vibrant and virulent cultural trope in the United States; the impact of which can be felt in criminal law, public policy, pop culture, and social convention. Bogle (2001) discusses the significance of this film for "its wide-ranging influence" (p.13) as well as its effective

use of artistic devices to connect with, represent, and foster the fears of European-Americans toward a big, angry Black man. Bogle (2001) discusses this archetype as one “out to raise havoc” (p. 13). Havoc is what systemic change for social justice looks like in systems of structural inequality to those who benefit from the structural inequality.

Fear, therefore, and hostility are common reactions to such systemic change work. Freudian psychology tells us that the ego, in circumstances of anxiety, has mechanisms, defense mechanisms it deploys to address the anxiety. Projection is one such ego defense mechanism. Projection is the placing of the ego’s reality onto someone else—a projecting of one’s reality onto another. Consequently, when I am engaged in the work of organization development and diversity consulting for systemic change for social justice, I am—rather I can become in the eyes of those who benefit from the structural inequality within organizations—the big, angry Black man while also having a PhD in human and organizational systems, a concentration in transformative learning for social justice, and the capacity to diagnose organizational dysfunction and structural inequality.

Even in reading these words, you as a reader have already constructed an image of who I am emotionally and physically without even having met me. Ask yourself from where those images have come. Then consider that if they are there—within you—how they inform your decision-making on a daily basis as you interact with Black men. The more conservative among you might argue that you’ve experienced or witnessed big, angry Black men previously and therefore your images of me are reflections and recollections of those examples. My point is not that you haven’t experienced or witnessed Black men being angry previously. My point is that you’ve learned to construct a character, the big, angry Black man, in your consciousness and that archetype informs how you view the actions, competencies, and character of Black men such that you don’t really see us whether we are angry or big. You see the archetype even when we are angry.

Because of this reality, I make certain decisions and confront certain challenges. Ninety-five percent of my consulting contracts have been as a subcontractor. Part of the client development process is making a client feel comfortable with you as a consultant. They are investing money,

time, and their reputation in a process that could have significant outcomes, negative or positive. No consultant can guarantee a successful outcome. Therefore, potential clients look for reassurances such as previous experience working with a similar organization on a similar project, professional reputation, planned approach, and other forms of evidence to help them make a decision on hiring a particular consultant. The relationship, however, between the consultant and the potential client is an organizing frame that filters the reception and interpretation of all of these forms of reassuring evidence—does the consultant make us feel comfortable. There are few organizations in the United States, outside of the Prison Industrial Complex<sup>4</sup>, that feel comfortable welcoming a big, angry Black man into their system.

When working within a client system, I am hypervigilant in my self-presentation because I know I experience hypervisibility in these environments in that I am scrutinized very differently than men of other ethnicities and women. I wear Western-styled business attire even though they

are very uncomfortable to me and I consider the requirement of such dress in the workplace cultural hegemonic—i.e., the imposition of ethnocentric cultural norms in multi-ethnic work environments to maintain the cultural supremacy of one group over all others. I do so because that is the cultural expectation; and at least a slight consideration of my expertise happens because I am wearing a suit than would happen if I wore something that is more comfortable to me.

I work to put people at ease with my demeanor while calling their attention to the ways their systems structurally traumatizes women, people of color, queer folks and sexual minorities, the differently-abled, etc. I do this while appearing warm, welcoming, non-judgmental, and emotionally removed—in a depersonalized way—from the trauma that people who look like me experience in the organizations in which they work for their livelihoods. It is important for the success of the transformative nature of my work within client systems that no one feels personally threatened in reaction to my words or movements, especially when I am challenging people on their white supremacy, sexism, heterosexism, ableism, classism, etc.

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<sup>4</sup> See:  
<http://www.colorlines.com/article.php?ID=309>

In this work, I have relied upon colleagues with professional access to bring me into consulting contracts that they have already established. Deborah Howard is one of those colleagues and a guest co-editor of this special issue of Tamara. Since we first met on consulting project with a large food cooperative in New York City, Deborah and I spent time together questioning the systemic and long-term impact of organization development and diversity consulting particularly in the form of systemic change for social justice. Finding ourselves conscientious, principled, and thoughtful practitioners of the craft who have never seen what we would define as systemic change for social justice evolve in an organization as a result of a project, we have been curious about where it has happened and how.

Because I am an academic as well as a practitioner, I decided to approach Tamara about the idea of a special issue devoted to exploring that curiosity. After receiving a green light from the Tamara editor, I invited Deborah and Placida Gallegos to work with me as guest co-editors on the special issue. Placida and I had met when I was a student-activist at Fielding Graduate University and she was interviewing for a faculty position.

Because of the prominent role of social justice and diversity work in her professional career, I warned Placida that despite the rhetoric of social justice and diversity in the university's self-presentation there were significant failings of the university to live up to those ideals. Placida took the job and the challenge of working in the university. We became close in our work of encouraging the actualization of the university's social justice and diversity ideals. It made sense to have an experienced scholar-practitioner involved in the special issue as a guest co-editor.

### **DEBORAH HOWARD**

When Heru invited me to be a guest co-editor and contributor for this special edition of the Tamara Journal for Organizational Inquiry, I jumped at the chance for a number of reasons. First, Heru is a cherished friend and colleague of mine for whom I have a great deal of respect. Whenever we work together, it brings out the best in my creativity and provides me with a valuable learning experience. So, I don't pass up opportunities to work with him. Second, the subject of the special edition is one we have been struggling with together for years.

I am a white Jewish heterosexual woman who has been working in the organization development field for over ten years. About fifteen years ago, I began to work in the field of diversity consulting. I came to the work with a desire to help create social justice in organizations. However, I became disillusioned with the field of diversity work as I had no experience of observing sustained organizational change for social justice and equity resulting from it.

My earliest diversity work was in the field of law. While working as a law school administrator, I served on various bar association committees working to increase diversity in the legal profession. Year after year, various initiatives were introduced. In the best scenarios, a number of law firms were able to increase the number of associates of color they recruited and hired. Nonetheless, their success at recruitment did not result in success at retention. Firms were more than happy to open their doors wider and extend special invitations. However, once associates of color walked through the door, they did not experience these firms as welcoming. Law firms were at a loss as to why their recruitment successes were not resulting in

retention success, let alone an increase in the number of partners of color.

In an attempt to provide them with an explanation, at the New York State Bar Association Annual Meeting in 1995, that organization's Committee on Minorities in the Profession invited associates of color from the major New York law firms to a forum on "Identifying the Obstacles to the Retention of Minorities Associates." I facilitated and documented the event (Howard, 1995). The associates attending this forum were able to easily identify the elements that would be necessary for them to succeed and thrive. These elements all required changes that would necessitate reflection, increased awareness, and a willingness to institute significant change on the part of law firm leadership. (Examples included the need to examine unconscious assumptions of incompetence on the part of white partners with respect to associates of color, the need to explore the ways that informal networks operated in favor of white male associates, etc.) Nonetheless, despite this clear evidence from the very individuals who were the espoused target of concern, the standard diversity initiative engaged in by law firms involved diversity training. The lack of success from diversity training and other initiatives in law firms

can be seen in recent statistics which show that only slightly more than 6% of partners in the nation's largest law firms are partners of color (NALP 2010).

My experience working with law firms and other corporate industries, ranging from investment banks to pharmaceutical companies doing diversity work as a subcontractor, even in corporations that engaged in multi-year initiatives, similarly netted no sustained systemic change for social justice or equity. While disheartened by the lack of success in for profit organizations, I maintained the hope that results might be different in nonprofit organizations. It was through some work with a nonprofit organization of which I am a member that I met Heru. Heru and I were selected along with three other members to work as a diversity consulting team for this organization (which I discuss in more detail in my article). It was a strange process in that the organization selected us solely because we were members of the organization without regard to whether our respective consulting styles or philosophies were in alignment.

The five of us started the process as strangers. From early on, however, I recognized Heru as a kindred spirit as we both tried to push the boundary of what is considered

“diversity work.” Some of the other consultants and the client viewed diversity work as consisting merely of awareness training and teaching of “techniques” and “tools.” We, on the other hand, viewed it more holistically as involving an assessment of the entire organization and including the need for organizational leadership to engage in self-reflection on their own role in contributing to some of the race-based issues the organization was experiencing.

Since that time, I have brought Heru into various projects I have worked on. I bring him on because I highly respect him and know that my work (and the ultimate service to the client) will be enhanced as a result. We have worked on a wide range of projects together with a diverse group of clients including educational institutions, cultural institutions, and large corporations. A number of these projects have specifically involved diversity work. We have yet to find a client who has been willing to engage in the work that we see as necessary to bring about systemic change for social justice. It was, therefore, with great curiosity that we looked forward to the articles submitted for this edition.

**PLACIDA GALLEGOS**

As a scholar-practitioner for the past 30+ years I have been engaged in social change work from many different philosophical, practical and professional perspectives. The question of how to support meaningful and sustainable change in individuals, groups, and organizations toward creating a more just world has guided me throughout these life experiences. As a product of the late sixties, I grew up in an era of social activism brimming with hope that we could change the world by correcting structural inequities and building an inclusive world order. My first job as an investigator of civil rights complaints for the State of Colorado was a wake up call to the fact that challenging the status quo was neither an easy nor well-supported objective. Within four years, it became clear to me that individual complainants had too few resources to stay engaged in the struggle to wrestle their civil rights from the powers that be and that systems set up to insure those rights were often under-resourced and lacked mechanisms to make lasting change themselves. Each career change and academic experience from then on was centered on the question, "is this the platform that can support change given the level of system it is designed to impact?"

I subsequently moved through positions in youth and family counseling, psychotherapy, research, university teaching, organizational and diversity consulting. I saw the value of each role and gained valuable knowledge and practice along the way. Since the late 1980's, I have worked as an ODDC consultant across a wide range of organizations including for-profit and non-profit entities. As an external consultant, I have had the experience of entering these organizations with an outsider view, aware of and yet not under the same political and hierarchical concerns of internal consultants and leaders. Frequently the perspective of those inside an organization is that change can be done incrementally and will not require reviewing and modifying the fundamental ways the organization operates. Bringing a perspective that deeper change is required to address the baked-in ways of doing business and truly promote socially just organizational culture and practice, I often found myself at odds with the clients who had invited me into their company. My precarious position in this regard is somewhat common to ODDC practitioners who bring a broader viewpoint and a different vision of progress than the systems who engage them. Fortunately or unfortunately, my

questions about factors that support long-term social change remain unanswered as I approach the later stages of my career.

When invited to co-edit this special edition of the Tamara Journal, I saw the opportunity to take stock in where we collectively find ourselves and how others are viewing their own efforts to drive change. It is important to identify key distinctions and controversy between the organizational consulting and diversity consulting arenas. There has been a historical challenge to “mainstream” organizational consultants to bring social justice concerns more directly into their interventions in profit and not-for-profit organizations. Often these critiques were met with considerable resistance on the part of primarily white consultants in the OD field who saw minimal connection between their work and the interests of social justice advocates. Instead they argued that their emphasis was on creating more high-performing organizations regardless of the diversity of those entities and that attention paid to “minority” concerns would distract them from their larger purpose directed primarily at improving rather than dismantling the existing systems of power.

In the 1980’s, the birth and rapid growth of the field of diversity consulting lead to an emphasis on the perceived need for more inclusive organizational practices that leveled the playing field for traditionally marginalized groups e.g. women, people of color, GLBT communities, people with disabilities and other relevant subgroups. With the accelerated pace of the evolution of this special field came a wide range of intervention strategies with predictably contradictory outcomes and tactics. As diversity consulting has evolved over time, it seems appropriate and necessary to stand back and wonder about the current status of the field and its perceived impact on social justice and meaningful change.

### **Guiding Frameworks**

In our editorial work with the contributors, we consistently requested that they articulate the guiding frameworks and theoretical orientations that inform their understanding of systemic change and social justice. The terms *change* and *social justice* have been so mis/used and applied in the field that it was important for us as editors to understand the way in which each contributor understood these concepts, particularly as it applied to

their appraisal of the impact of their work.

It, therefore, behooves us, the editors, to talk about our guiding frameworks and theoretical orientations in this area as well. Hopefully, this will provide the reader with a context for understanding our editorial choices and the editorial tone of the special issue. At a minimum, we hope this serves as our contribution to the discourse.

Organizations are human systems. Systems contain *parts* with *functions/roles* that put them in *relationship* with each other in *processes*. An example of a part of an organization is an employee, a building, or the organizational mission. An example of a function/role is a manager or organizational griot<sup>5</sup>/historian. An example of a relationship is the dynamics that middle managers experience being between line staff and senior-level managers. An example of a process is hiring new employees or evaluation procedures. Systemic change in an organization, therefore, is change that occurs in process, relationship, function/role, or part such that there is a qualitative difference in overall organizational culture, climate, and performance.

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<sup>5</sup> Griots are keepers of communal wisdom, cultural values, and history that are often retained and transmitted through story.

Using systems theory, ODDC practitioners can assess, evaluate, and facilitate change in an organization. For example, in an overall strategy to engage resistance to such change ODDC practitioners might identify the system process, autopoiesis—i.e., the process of self-organization and maintenance—in an organization, and consider how it may contribute to or inhibit social justice change efforts (Wasserman, Gallegos & Ferdman, 2008). Another example would be ODDC practitioners working with a team of organizational stakeholders to address social justice issues among the members of the team as a holographic microcosm of the organization and using the lessons learned from that work to engage the rest of the organization.

We believe systemic change efforts are manifested in qualitatively different cultures, climates, and performances in organizations. By taking a systemic view and approach to change within an organization, an ODDC practitioner is more likely to consider the system-wide implications and dynamics associated with their work and evaluate the success of their work with this wider, deeper view. Whether the practitioner works with feelings, narratives, decision-making, procedures, or some combination of

them, a systems-conscious practitioner relates work at the intrapersonal, interpersonal, group, organizational, and societal levels to each other in a critically thoughtful and integrative way.

This is particularly important when one's focus is systemic change for social justice within organizations. In one of the few texts on the topic (Lopes & Thomas, 2006), authors Tina Lopes and Barb Thomas offer the following perspective based upon their work in Canada:

Racism, sexism, class, and other forms of discrimination shape both the systems and people who implement them. Embedded in the organizational systems, and in the social identities of people, are disparities in power that affect the life opportunities of individuals, regardless of what they merit based upon their skills, competencies, and hard work.

We measure the success of our efforts to bring about organizational change through the positive results experienced by those with the least power within an organization. If we have been successful in the process, people with the least

power will have a healthier work environment, their contributions will be properly assessed and valued, and they will be able to actively transform their organization rather than be assimilated into it. (p. 9)

We agree with Lopes & Thomas (2006). It is in this spirit that we approached the editing of this special issue. Each contribution was evaluated based upon the degree to which it engaged a systemic perspective and contained an analysis of social injustice. In our work with the contributors, we encouraged and challenged them to make these aspects of their work more explicit. We took care with and acknowledged their responses to our challenges. The final versions of their work reflect those conversations.

### **Inside This Issue**

The articles in this journal provide a broad look at whether ODDC has resulted in sustained systemic change for social justice and equity. While the articles encompass a wide variety of arenas (academia, large nonprofit organizations, for profit organizations, etc.), the following are the common themes that run through them:

- Need for a Systemic Approach

- Tension Between Efficiency, Economic Growth and Social Justice
- Finding New Mindsets, Models and Stories
- Leaders and Practitioners Use of Self
- Transformational Learning and Organizational Healing

### ***Need For A System Approach***

Most of the articles we include in this collection recognize the importance of taking a more expansive, inclusive view of organizations as holistic systems though they varied in which level of system they emphasized. For example, while many stress the key role that organizational leaders play in bringing about systemic change, several practitioners mention the need for leaders to be seen as merely one part of a larger system. In *Healing the Wounded Organization: The Role of Leadership in Creating the Path to Social Justice*, Braxton writes that it's important to beware of "[t]he temptation to begin to fix individuals – the leader, his/her management team, or perceived troublemakers – without linking their work to the organizational change process [as this] usually does not work, yielding short-term results, at best." He points out that work must be done at the

systemic level, changing structures and processes, to create desired change. In *Diversity Initiative in a Social Change Organization*, Berthoud and Ray also emphasize the importance of focusing organizational change at the largest level of system so that it can be sustainable and lead to long-term institutional transformation. They discuss the need to utilize a comprehensive change approach that will integrate "diversity awareness and action into all elements of the organization."

Berthoud and Ray go even further to include the systems and history outside of the organization. They point out the need to confront our collective history; the "sometimes centuries of group identity privilege" and "the connection between the present and yesterday."

For diversity training in organizations to lead to systemic change, therefore, it needs to be part of a wide-ranging, across-the-board organizational initiative. Too often, inadequate and short term training solutions are mandated for lower level employees and supervisors to attend while senior leaders are considered knowledgeable enough and exempt from learning or confronting their own unchallenged assumptions or

frameworks. If short-term diversity training is conducted in isolation, it will fail to be integrated into the organizational culture and will typically create more resistance than if no action had been taken at all.

### ***Tension Between Efficiency, Economic Growth, And Social Justice***

Most organizations that engage in diversity initiatives spend time establishing their “business case” or organizational imperative for change. In order to justify the expenditure of organizational resources, it is often required that the initiative’s outcomes be directly connected to the organizational mission and objectives. This also means that initiatives have to demonstrate their value with concrete, measurable outcomes within fairly truncated timeframes.

A number of the articles demonstrate the tension between efficiency, economic growth and social justice. In *Are We Using the Master’s Tools?*, Howard writes about how the ideology of materialism often leads for-profit organizations to seek profit and wealth at all costs. And, she writes about how even nonprofit organizations often place more value on efficiency and production than on creating

environments in which social justice is possible. Similarly, Braxton writes about the pattern that occurs in organizations with a social justice agenda. In the process of growth and expansion, they find themselves straying from their social justice values. Prioritizing efficiency and economic growth can, therefore, be a major obstacle to bringing about systemic change for social justice.

### ***Finding New Mindsets, Models, And Stories***

A number of articles point out the difficulty in bringing about sustainable organizational change without addressing the impact of unconscious and un-surfaced filters through which organizational leaders and members see the world. In her article, *Reclaiming the Outsider-Within Space: An Auto-Ethnography*, Faifua describes this practice of making the unconscious and un-surfaced conscious, even critically conscious, as reflexivity. Faifua writes about the importance of practicing reflexivity (i.e., critical self/social-reflection) as an ODDC practitioner. Writing about her transformation from unconsciousness to critical consciousness of her own identity as a woman of mixed ethnicity and the social consequences of that identity, she

applies Black Feminist thought to describe her experience as an “outsider-within” her workplace, an academic institution. She found herself being used as a “hand-picked hot commodity” to enable the organization to create the illusion of diversity. Rather than allowing others to define her role and her thinking, however, she became determined not to allow her outsider-within status to prevent her from thinking and acting in new ways.

According to these articles, sustained systemic change for social justice and equity cannot take place without surfacing, examining and transforming the filters of the dominant European culture, which serve to maintain the status quo. In the article, *Organization Development: A Catalyst for Change*, Applegate describes mental models as shaping worldviews and personal belief systems and filtering the way individuals understand and perceive the world around them. “Like values,” she writes, “these mental models are influenced by religion, race, age, gender expression, sexual orientation, class and culture.” Similarly, Berthoud and Ray write about the way different historical legacies, such as slavery or the internment of Japanese citizens during World War II,

filter the way individuals and groups perceive the world.

Applegate describes a particular mental model, Internalized Racial Superiority, the “complex multi-generational socialization process that teaches white people to believe, accept, and/or live out superior societal definitions of self and to fit into and live out superior societal roles,” as one of most significant dominant mental models at work in the United States. This mental model can also ingrain in subordinated groups their own sense of inferiority that conditions them to define themselves as deserving their negative treatment and paradoxically to cooperate in their own oppression. Likewise, the forces of internalized dominance and internalized subordination relate to each of the prominent dimensions of difference including gender, religion, sexual orientation, age, etc. and work together systematically to perpetuate oppressive ideologies and exclusive organizational practices.

Because mental models operate at an unconscious level, most individuals are unaware that their perceptions of the world around them – their perceptions of “reality” – are not universally shared. They take their view of reality for granted and without

question. Thus, they often view others who see the world differently from themselves as wrong or mistaken. When those with these myopic viewpoints are in significant positions of power, their blindness to relevant intergroup differences becomes embedded in the organizational values and perpetuated in the day-to-day culture of the organization.

Howard describes how the ideology of white supremacy that came to this country with the first Europeans served not only to justify slavery and the genocide of Native Americans, but continues to operate at an unconscious level to maintain racial injustice in organizations and society at large. Because white supremacy operates in the background on an unconscious level, most white people do not see it except in the form of an overt intentional act of racism.

The unconsciously embedded nature of these filters, ideologies and mental models creates a challenge for diversity practitioners. A number of the articles discuss mechanisms for helping to surface these submerged beliefs. In the article, *Learning Diversity and Leadership Skills through Transformative Narratives*, Hyater-Adams discusses how she uses the process of sharing stories to enable

organizational members to surface and examine different perspectives “across their multiple dominant and subordinated group identities.” In this way, silenced populations and members of subordinated social identity groups are able to share their “stories,” which otherwise remain untold and hidden by unexamined mainstream cultural stories. Members of dominant groups are able to examine and reflect on cultural stories that they take for granted or see as “universal.” She also discusses the capacity of particular writing activities as effective vehicles to surface the buried assumptions and mental models that would otherwise remain unchallenged.

Berthoud and Ray discuss using a dialogic process to enable organizational members to “explore their intentions, the impact of their actions, and the multiple realities through which their individual and collective action could be interpreted.”

They also discuss the need to create an environment that facilitates and makes learning central by: “normaliz[ing] common emotions that often crowd out learning.” They write that, “[b]y acknowledging that everyone has something more to learn, people can be freer to acknowledge pain, guilt, shame, resentment, frustration, impatience, vengefulness and other emotions.”

When we understand the need for individuals to engage in deep reflection and examination of their unconscious thoughts and beliefs, it is clear that this process cannot be short or superficial. Sharing stories in the context of engaged learning communities can often circumvent deeply held biases and defensiveness. Sharing examples from lived experiences can transform perspectives far more powerfully than intellectual or rational explanations. Ideally, by gaining insight into the painful consequences of exclusionary practices based on hearing the uncensored stories of their colleagues, individuals can recognize their own complicity and identify structural barriers that can be removed to promote greater inclusion of marginalized groups. It also becomes increasingly difficult to maintain simplistic stereotypes about other groups when faced with direct evidence of the human costs of maintaining systems that privilege certain groups while damaging others.

It is important to note, however, that members of dominant groups are not the only ones within organizations who have to experience transformative learning and modify their worldviews. Subordinated group members also have damaging baggage to surface and

discard, such as negative beliefs and attitudes about their own groups (intra-group), other subordinated groups (intergroup) as well as unquestioned and overly positive perceptions of the dominant group. Systems of oppression require all participants to play their parts in order to sustain the existing power structures. Dominant group members must continue to act out their privilege while subordinated group members need to participate in their own domination. Understanding how this systemic process operates allows greater opportunity and likelihood of success in interrupting its forward movement and breaking its destructive cycle.

These articles help illustrate that ODDC interventions cannot bring about systemic change for social justice unless they are able to bring to the surface the mental models, ideologies and cultural stories that underlie worldviews that are considered universal. Certainly, organizational and societal policies and procedures need to be examined for disparate impact. However, unless current dominant mental models, ideologies and stories are surfaced and challenged, organizations and society will remain restricted by the artificial boundaries and limited vision they create, making

systemic change impossible. Surfacing and challenging these mental models, ideologies, and cultural stories is, therefore, key to bringing about systemic change at both the organizational and societal levels.

### ***Leaders And Practitioners Use Of Self***

The effective use of Self is another theme that runs through the articles. For ODDC work to be effective in bringing about system change, both organizational leaders and practitioners need to be able to effectively use themselves as instruments of change.

#### **Organizational Leaders**

Braxton identifies the crucial role of organizational leadership in creating and sustaining healthy organizations where social justice principles can be practiced. Leaders must, he writes, be able to effectively serve as change agents by engaging in the internal work necessary for them to lead organizational change. It is the role of organizational leaders to support the development of safe environments and hold people accountable for inclusive behavior at all levels. Leaders are key, according to Braxton, because they can either be “a power that can collude with the forces that undermine the system’s

integrity” or “a force that can direct the resources required to spearhead system change and healing.”

Because of the centrality of their role, the active engagement and ongoing support of organizational leaders is necessary for the sustained success of any change initiative. Berthoud and Ray identify the leadership role as vital to the success of diversity initiatives. A lack of commitment from or transition of organizational leadership poses a critical obstacle to systemic change. Many examples exist of relatively successful initiatives being derailed when a senior leader who has been the champion of the effort leaves their position. Typically the new leader and his/her executive team bring their own set of priorities and are unwilling to stay the course established by their predecessors. Few leaders or consultants adequately plan for these contingencies to ensure the sustainability of these initiatives. More often, organizational leaders naively assume that their initiatives are sufficiently embedded in the organizational culture to withstand the departure of key supporters or the withdrawal of resources necessary to continue the effort.

### Practitioners

Just as organizational leaders and members need to surface and address the mental models, ideologies and stories that are dominant in society and organizations, practitioners need to be able to do the same with themselves if they are going to be able to be effective change agents. They need to examine their own mental models and be involved in ongoing learning and development to increase their self-awareness and capacity to engage in the effective use of Self. In, *Practitioner Know Thyself!: Reflections on the Importance of Self-Work for Diversity and Social Justice Practitioners*, Hopkins points out that before consultants can enable organizations to take action, they must first work on themselves. This involves “immersion in a rigorous examination of [their] worldviews, [their] own privilege and points of disadvantage in order to connect with the range of diversity within the client organizations [they] serve.”

Similarly, Harkins in *Diversity Consulting and Teaching from a Social Justice Perspective* points out the need for practitioners to “have a strong sense of self and be comfortable with strong emotions, challenge and conflict to be able to handle the defense mechanisms that naturally arise from privileged

groups.” Ray, in the same article, notes that “it is a constant challenge to tolerate my own dilemma and the inevitable psychological discomfort as a model minority I often experience doing diversity work.” In the article, Davis writes about being a “professional rule breaker” who challenges assumptions with her “presence, demeanor, and actions.”

Harkins, Davis and Ray write about the need for consultants to use themselves and “their power to provide space to those traditionally silenced in communities, organizations and society.” They discuss the different ways they, use themselves in their teaching as instruments of learning with their students, based on their status as white and privileged, African American and oppressed, and Asian American and immigrant, respectively. They also discuss their use of Self in terms of their teaching style. They choose not to teach in an “uni-directional way focused on transferring information from expert/teacher to student” without “considering the subjective nature of their own knowledge,” which serves to further silence the voices of the oppressed and marginalized. Rather, they describe intentionally teaching from a “postmodern position” by encouraging their students to question not only terms

and concepts in their course texts, but also the sociopolitical position of the authors and how such concepts and terms can serve to benefit some and oppress others.

In her article, Faifua describes the challenges of being an internal ODDC consultant set up to champion diversity in an organizational climate with other, more pressing, priorities and embedded hostilities and anxieties toward the disruption of status quo structural inequality. Her article demonstrates how the change agent in such a context may undergo radical transformation in ways that do not reach the organization as a system. In such contexts, the best use of Self may be to find more hospitable environments for the engagement of social justice ideas.

It is important to recognize that self-development by practitioners directly relates to their analysis of organizational circumstances and the interventions they recommend to clients. There is an old adage in the OD field that a consultant can only take an organization as far as they themselves have been willing to go. In other words, the more expansive a worldview the consultant can have, the greater likelihood that they can support the client organization in expanding its worldview by including a wider range of

multiple perspectives in its strategic diversity/social justice initiatives. As Hopkins notes, this challenges practitioners to develop their capacity to think systemically and articulate clearly to leaders the blind spots or unquestioned assumptions that may be blocking their change efforts. This, she writes, means that practitioners must stay abreast of diversity literature and engage in ongoing learning and personal development.

There has been a trend over the past ten years in the OD field generally and diversity consulting specifically to focus on competencies required for successful behavior in organizations. This is a move away from simply describing desirable internal knowledge or personal characteristics of individuals toward identifying actual behaviors associated with those expanded mindsets. As it relates to diversity consulting, practitioners are challenged to model the relevant competencies that demonstrate their ability to act in complex situations with sensitivity and a nuanced capacity to engage people around their differences with genuine curiosity and respect. This stance often places the consultant in the position of confronting the organizations' tendency to minimize differences and maximize sameness. In so doing, he/she must be

willing and able to serve as a lightning rod for change, often provoking controversy and supporting engaged conflict in service of organizational learning.

The most competent way for the consultant to stand in the face of assaults that may feel personal and potentially wounding, is to understand the systemic dynamics at play and be able to view these events as reflections of larger systemic factors. Maintaining one's balance, compassion and strategic focus in these moments requires considerable personal and spiritual stamina that can only be the result of long-term effort on the part of the organizational consultant.

### ***Transformative Learning And Organizational Healing***

While many diversity practitioners speak about increased awareness as a necessary element for systemic change, many fail to see the necessary role of healing in bringing about sustained social change and equity. A number of the articles in this edition speak directly to the wounds and injuries resulting from racism and oppression and the need to find different tools to address them. Braxton writes about the wounding experienced in organizations in which individuals feel

excluded, marginalized, or disempowered. Not only are organizational members harmed emotionally, they become more focused on surviving than contributing their efforts fully. Braxton sees it as the role of organizational leaders to "heal the system" because "[s]ocial justice cannot exist where systemic wounding is the norm." He goes on further to emphasize the need for organizational leadership to engage in their own healing as a prerequisite for being able to move the organization toward healing,

Howard writes about the psychological and spiritual injuries that have resulted from white supremacy. She highlights the need to utilize new and different tools, such as poetry, metaphors, stories and narrative, to access unconscious thoughts and feeling, to bring about healing from these injuries. Harkins, Davis and Ray also note the effectiveness of sharing stories and experience. They quote a white male student who describes his personal transformation and understanding of the wide-ranging impact of racism: "My mind and story expanded through understanding the stories and experiences of the minority voice..."

Hyater-Adams writes specifically about the use of transformative narrative

writing in bringing about positive healing and change. She shares her own process of using reflective writing as a vehicle to move from her head into her “gut” enabling her to connect with her own authenticity and feel healed and transformed as a result. The transformative narrative approach enables individuals to “open [their] hearts, expand [their] views, and provide a container for social justice conversations,” and allows healing to occur.

These articles make clear the need for healing from wounds on a number of levels. There are psychic wounds from socially and culturally embedded white supremacy as well as emotional wounds from trying to survive in dysfunctional organizations. In both cases, to heal the organization and to heal society as a whole, individuals must find ways to heal themselves. These articles demonstrate the complexity of social justice work given that change must occur simultaneously at the individual, organizational and societal levels.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

We now return to our original question that guided this special edition, “To what degree has (ODDC) contributed to systemic change for

social justice?” to consider what this compilation of articles contributes to our understanding. In our reflections as co-editors, we find ourselves with more emergent questions and fewer clear-cut answers than before we began this inquiry. The contributors bring a wealth of experience and integrity to their efforts. We also note what seems to be unspoken in many of their essays.

For example, none of the authors takes the overt stance that they have indeed seen their work lead to long-term, sustainable, systemic change for social justice. We wonder if this is a feature of the work and the field. If that is the case, then those of us who want systemic change for social justice are positioned to ask ourselves, “Why?” Are we confronting an uphill battle in an entrenched, socially unjust dynamic in our efforts to generate any sustainable social justice gains? Are our ODDC tools not up for or appropriate for the task? Do we need a different set of criteria or definition of success? We speculate that there is a lack of consensus across practitioners about what a socially just organization looks like and how to measure movement in that direction. We argue that more engagement is needed within the ODDC field and more candid discussion about what has worked and what has failed

along the way. Given the complexity and multi-dimensionality of social change for social justice, we believe it is important for ODDC consultants to identify specific initial leverage points, nurture the connection these points have to other parts of the system, and develop strategies for the engagement of the leverage points and their connections in the longer term.

We acknowledge the difficult challenges and dilemmas inherent in the work of ODDC practitioners as well as applauding the tenacity and integrity of the contributing authors. Each has taken a unique approach to their consulting including different levels of system, types of organizations and key leverage points for engagement. Consistent with our earlier assumptions about systemic change work, these authors either explicitly or implicitly took into account the system-wide implications and dynamics associated with their work and made efforts to evaluate the success of their work with this wider, deeper view. Some also expressed their frustrations at encountering resistances to change and experienced the limitations of their work. For us, this raises the question about how good are we as a field at sharing our mistakes and failed change efforts? As long as we are stuck in only touting

our successes, how can we learn what actually works? To what extent did all of the authors in this compilation make themselves vulnerable enough to talk about what didn't work, their disappointments, discouragements and difficulties? Perhaps until we are able to have these deeper conversations among ourselves, there is a limit to how far the field can develop and how much we can realistically deliver on our promises.

Surveying the articles in this compendium and from our own experiences in the trenches, there are challenges and lack of alignment related to the use of language in describing social justice work. The conceptual and practical lack of alignment makes it difficult to clearly assess desired outcomes and sustained change. However, talking about social justice and oppression in systems that are unfamiliar with these concepts adds to the challenge facing consultants. How can social change agents raise systemic issues to leaders who often are members of dominant groups with virtually no awareness of their own social location and who bring considerable defensiveness about their own role in maintaining the status quo? When consultants bring more sophisticated analyses about systems of

oppression into the work with organizational partners whose mental models are less complex, communicating in ways that maximize common ground becomes an ongoing dilemma. The issue of speaking truth to power and calibrating the impact on others is not easily resolved, especially considering that those same leaders determine whether consultants will continue to work inside these organizations. How far are ODDC consultants willing to go in advocating change including resigning or risking getting fired by their clients? What criteria do they use to determine where they will work and how long they will stay?

Though implicit in many of the articles, we wonder about the ideal conditions that increase the likelihood for an ODDC practitioner's practice to result in systemic change for social justice. Certainly systems thinking and the capacity for social justice analysis are core elements but are lived experiences with marginalization or activism also key ingredients? Given the nature of the work and the wide range of contexts within which they operate, the capacity to tolerate ambiguity and even provoke conflict seems relevant. We also suggest that compassion, tenacity and courage serve

as foundational elements for ODDC consultants to continue engaging oppressive organizational cultures that are often embedded in deeply rooted systems and structures. Ultimately, as the contributors to this collection so well demonstrate, developing diverse partnerships with colleagues and clients insures that the consultant can gain support, obtain crucial feedback and engage in continuous learning and development. It is with appreciation for the contributions of these authors and acknowledgement of the work yet to be done that we offer this issue.

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