"Understanding and helping organizations provide for diversity and inclusion is not enough. Because organizations exist in a landscape of social identity groups, power differences among identity groups, and prejudice, social justice must also be addressed."

# Diversity and Social Justice Practices for OD Practitioners

By Michael Brazzel

The words "diversity" and "social justice" are familiar enough to Organization Development (OD) practitioners that most of us know what they mean and how they work. Many of us would say they are part of our OD practice. Yet we can be uncomfortable with diversity issues when they come up in our OD practice and we seek ways to address organizational issues without having to directly take on diversity aspects.

This is true of the OD profession as a whole. A review of the content indexes of current OD textbooks yields few listings for diversity and social justice concepts and dynamics. Bob Marshak comments that, "Given the core values of OD and the increasingly diverse and multicultural organizational settings for its practice, it is clear that all professional practitioners need to fully understand and as appropriate address multicultural and diversity issues and dynamics..." (Marshak, 2006, p. 25.)

This article examines ten diversity and social justice practices that support addressing diversity and social justice issues and dynamics as an integral part of OD practice. They are listed in *Exhibit 1*.

### 1. Understand Diversity and Social Justice Dynamics

Diversity and social justice are interrelated. Fred Miller writes, "Social justice issues must be addressed in order to achieve the potential of diversity." (Miller, 1994, p. xxvi.)

**Diversity**

Diversity includes human differences, aspects of human experience, and elements of culture. These diversity measures apply at individual, group, organization, community, nation, and world levels of human systems. Diversity also involves processes for addressing diversity at different levels of human systems: inclusion, pluralism, multiculturalism, and cultural competency. See *Exhibit 2*.

Diversity is often described in terms of human differences...race, gender, sexual orientation, physical and mental ability, ethnicity, nationality, age, spiritual practice,

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**CONFERENCE CONNECTION**

**Michael Brazzel** is a presenter at the 2007 OD Network Annual Conference in Baltimore at the following session:

**Deep Diversity, Social Justice, and OD**

Monday, October 22
10:15 – 11:45 AM

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Exhibit 1: Diversity and Social Justice Practices

1.  Understand diversity and social justice dynamics
2.  Integrate diversity and social justice into OD practice
3.  Work from dominant and subordinated group identities
4.  Work at multiple levels of system
5.  Do our own diversity and social justice work
6.  Claim and use all of ourselves
7.  Partner with others
8.  Practice small acts of courage, irrepressible hope, and stubborn optimism
9.  Stay alive
10. Create and use a guiding vision of social justice and inclusion

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**Diversity Measures**

» **Human differences:** race, ethnicity, nationality, gender, sexual orientation, spiritual practice, ability, age, class, and other human differences. Human differences apply for multiple levels of human systems.

» **Aspects of human experience:** thinking, doing, feeling, physical sensations, values, and intuitive, spiritual and other knowing. Aspects of human experience apply for multiple levels of human systems.

» **Elements of culture:** authority, leadership, power, status, language, time, space, intimacy and sexuality, style, laws, regulations, rules, norms, standards, structure, values, beliefs, assumptions, ideology and ways of making meaning, individualism and collectivism, rewards and punishments, spirituality and religion, food, dress, humor, rites and rituals, and other elements of culture. Elements of culture apply for multiple levels of human systems.

**Diversity Processes**

» **Inclusion:** including people with many differences in the work of organizations.

» **Pluralism:** incorporating diverse groups of people in organizations, communities, and nations.

» **Multiculturalism:** incorporating the multiple interests, contributions, and values of diverse groups of people in the cultures of pluralistic organizations, communities, and nations.

» **Cultural competency:** individual ability for effective, interpersonal communication with people across cultural differences based in race, gender, sexual orientation, nationality, ethnicity, religion, age, class, and other human differences.

class, and other human differences. Diversity is also expressed in terms of human experience—Ideas, behaviors, physical sensations, feelings, values, and intuitive, spiritual, and other knowing. These aspects of human experience are forms of intelligence and experience which are used to acquire and process information, make meaning, and define reality. Cultural differences are a third way of defining diversity. Elements of culture can include, for example, authority, leadership, power, status, language, time, space, intimacy, laws, regulations, rules, norms, standards, structure, values, beliefs, assumptions, ideology and ways of making meaning, rewards and punishments, and spirituality.

Diversity also includes processes of addressing diversity concepts in human systems. Inclusion, the process of including people with many differences, generally is used to describe organizations. Pluralism and multiculturalism are often used as characteristics of organizations,

communities, and nations. Cultural competency describes the ability of individuals for effective, cross-cultural communication with other individuals.

**Social Justice**

Understanding and helping organizations provide for diversity and inclusion is not enough. Because organizations exist in a landscape of social identity groups, power differences among identity groups, and prejudice, social justice must also be addressed. Social justice is the elimination of oppression and development of cultures and systems that provide inclusion, equity, access, and opportunity for all people. Organizations have been unsuccessful in attempts to create a culture of inclusion without first addressing racism, sexism, and other forms of oppression and injustice. (Jackson, 2006, p. 143.) Social justice concepts and processes are listed in *Exhibit 3*.

We live in a world that is racialized,

» **Social justice:** The elimination of oppression and development of cultures and systems that provide inclusion, equity, access, and opportunity for all people.

» **Oppression:** Systems of inequality, privilege, and actions, behaviors, and practices institutionalized in the cultures, policies and practices of groups, organizations, communities, and nations and internalized in individuals. Oppression is based in power and prejudice about human differences. It benefits dominant group members and harms subordinated group members. The "isms" are forms of oppression, that include racism, sexism, heterosexism, classism, xenophobic oppression, colonialism, and other isms.

» **Social identity groups:** A group of people with common characteristics who are defined and set apart by socially-constructed boundaries, such as race, gender, sexual orientation, age, class, spiritual practice, and ability. Individuals have multiple group memberships. Most individuals are members of both dominant and subordinated groups. The concept of dominant and subordinated groups relates to group identity and not individual identity.

» **Dominant groups:** Social identity groups with power in groups, organizations, communities, and nations to use resources and establish sanctions, rules, norms, style, laws, policies, values and expectations. Dominant group members see themselves as normal and often better than subordinated group members, whom they view as abnormal and less-than. Dominant group power, combined with prejudice toward subordinated groups, is used to confer privilege, power, recognition and opportunity to dominant group members and deny those benefits to subordinated group members.

» **Subordinated groups:** Social identity groups who do not hold power and are denied privilege and subjected to harm because of subordinated group identity.

gendered, sexualized, and classed. White people, men, heterosexuals, upper- and middle-class people, and citizens of colonialist and white-settler nations receive benefits and are privileged as a result of their dominant group identities, separate from their accomplishments as individuals. People-of-color, women and transgender people, gays, lesbians and bisexual people, working class people, and citizens of nations-of-color, are disadvantaged and penalized for their group identities, in spite of their accomplishments as individuals. Human differences, dominant and subordinated groups and the forms of oppression that effect them are described in *Table 1*.

## 2. Integrate Diversity and Social Justice into OD Practice

For the most part, the theories and models that OD practitioners use do not consider the existence and implications for organizations of dominant and subordinated identity groups, power differences among groups, prejudice, and institutionalized racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other forms of oppression. The informal assumption in OD is that racism, sexism, heterosexism and other forms of oppression are not always present and they need to be

Table 1: Human Differences, Dominant and Subordinated Groups, and Forms of Oppression

| HUMAN DIFFERENCES | DOMINANT GROUPS | SUBORDINATED GROUPS | FORMS OF OPPRESSION |
|---|---|---|---|
| RACE | White, Caucasian | Asian descent, Black/ African descent, Latino/ Latina/ Hispanic descent, First Nation/ Native People. Bi- and Multi-Racial People | Racism, Colorism |
| ETHNICITY | White, Western European Heritage | Arab, Filipino, Gypsy/Roma, Haitian, Indian, Jewish, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Turkish, and other ethnicities | Ethnocentrism, Xenophobic Oppression, Xeno-Racism, Colorism, Anti-Semitism |
| NATIONALITY | US, Canada, UK, France, Germany, Austria, Russia, Australia, other European, white dominant and white settler nations | Panama, Afghanistan, Iraq, South Korea, Vietnam, Somalia, Malaysia, Philippines, Kenya, Zimbabwe, Guam, Granada, Puerto Rico, Bangladesh, other nations of color; refugee, legal immigrant/ alien, illegal immigrant/ "alien," stateless | Nativism, Colorism, Nationalism, Xenophobic Oppression, Ethnocentrism, Colonialism |
| GENDER | Men | Women, Transgender | Sexism |
| SEXUAL ORIENTATION | Heterosexual | Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual | Heterosexism |
| SPIRITUAL PRACTICE | Christian | Agnostic, Animist, Atheist, Bahá'í, Buddhist, Confucian, Hindu, Jain, Jewish, Muslim, Pantheist, Shintoist, Sikh, Taoist, Yoruba, Zoroastrian and other spiritual practices | Religious Oppression, Anti-Semitism |
| ABILITY | Able-bodied | People with Disabilities | Ableism |
| AGE | Adults | Children, Elders | Ageism, Child Abuse, Incest, Elder Abuse |
| CLASS | Ruling, Owning, Upper Class; Upper Middle, Professional, Merchant, Middle Class | Lower Middle Class, Working Class, Poor, Homeless | Classism |

addressed only when oppression becomes an issue for the organization. The contrasting perspective is that dominant and subordinated group memberships, power differences, prejudice, and institutionalized oppression are part of the daily experience of organizations and must be attended as an integral part of OD practitioners' work.

Consider a twelve-month experiment: Assume that dominant and subordinated identity groups, power, prejudice, and racism, sexism, heterosexism and other forms of oppression are ever-present in the organizations in which you practice OD. Incorporate the existence of dominant and subordinated identity groups, power, and prejudice into the theories and models you use in your OD practice: change, resistance, and conflict theory, systems theory, action research, use of self, values and ethics, and supplementary and practice theories, such as appreciative inquiry and emotional intelligence. Contract with your organizational clients to support their health and effectiveness, their efforts at inclusion, and their work to mitigate and eliminate racism, sexism, heterosexism and other forms of oppression.

### 3. Work from Dominant and Subordinated Group Identities

OD practitioners are individuals and they also have multiple dominant and subordinated group identities. These group identities affect client organizations and working relationships among OD practitioner teams and client organizations. Knowing, owning, and working from dominant and subordinated group identities opens space for being able to partner across identity groups. Paradoxically, it also reinforces the individual identity of OD practitioners.

Practitioners are more effective in working from dominant and subordinated group identities when they engage regularly in personal development work to understand and own personal bias and prejudice involving race, gender, sexual orientation, and other human differences; areas of internalized privilege, dominance, and subordination; and their

effects on practitioners' actions. Working from dominant and subordinated group identities also helps with understanding and tracking the impacts of practitioner interventions and behavior at both individual and social identity group levels.

### 4. Work at Multiple Levels of System

Being effective in helping organizations address diversity and social justice issues can mean that practitioners have to be prepared to work at multiple levels of

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systems. Racism, sexism, heterosexism and other forms of oppression are interdependent and reinforcing and can show up at varying levels of system. They are manifested as internalized dominance, privilege, and subordinance in the beliefs and actions of individuals and they are institutionalized in the norms, structures, and processes of groups, units, and organizations. Practitioners can get stuck working at the individual level of system on awareness

training, internalized oppression, or interpersonal communication and not support the organization with addressing institutionalized oppression at other systemic levels of the organization. Organization may prefer to stay with, for example, coaching or one-day awareness training. Diversity and social justice work often means joining people/ groups/ organizations where they are and then helping them to explore other levels.

### 5. Do Our Own Diversity and Social Justice Work

As OD practitioners, we can help organizations go only as far in addressing diversity and social justice as we have gone in our own personal development. The less we attend to our own development, the more likely we will be limiting organizations as we are consulting with them. The development process around diversity and social justice is complex because OD practitioners are likely to be members of both dominant and subordinated groups.

For dominant group members, doing one's own work means coming to terms with internalized superiority, dominance, and privilege....the sense of entitlement that grows from embedded values and beliefs that dominant group members are normal and that the others are abnormal and less than fully human. The development process for dominant group members involves:
» Maintaining an ongoing awareness of the existence and impacts of racism, sexism, heterosexism and other forms of oppression on subordinated group members and its benefits for dominant group members,
» Being able to name and track oppression in its various forms,
» Having empathy for subordinated group members, and
» Making a commitment to interrupt oppression whenever and wherever it shows up.

Ongoing awareness is central. (Hanna, Talley, and Guindon, 2000, pp. 437-439.) Dominance functions by limiting the

**Diversity and social justice work involves being imperfect and vulnerable, a willingness to make mistakes and learn from them, and forgiving oneself and others for being imperfect. It means working from both head and heart and being clear about what one stands for; identifying one's own purpose, vision, values. It means taking responsibility for ourselves and our personal and professional development, holding ourselves responsible for intentions and accountable for intended and unintended impacts, and distinguishing between intentions and effects of one-time, isolated events and the cumulative effects of successive and on-going events.**

awareness and empathy of dominant group members.

For subordinated group members, development means coming to terms with internalized subordinance, identification, and collusion with dominant group members. Subordinated group members are aware of the existence, forms, and effects of oppression. Their development process includes

» Validation of their awareness and perception,
» Disidentification with harmful values and beliefs of dominant group members,
» Rightfully attributing the problem of oppression to the dominant group,
» Acknowledging the appropriateness of anger and depression that can result from the harmful effects of oppression,
» Developing self-efficacy, and
» Advocating for subordinated group members. (Hanna, Talley, and Guindon, 2000, pp. 435-437.)

Again awareness is central for liberation of subordinated group members from racism, sexism, heterosexism and other forms of oppression as systems of inequality that support dominant group members and harm subordinated group members.

Personal and professional development work is a journey, not an end result. It is life's work. Support for maintaining awareness and personal and professional development can be found by partnering with other practitioners;

looking to the work of practitioner-elders like Elsie Y. Cross, Jack Gant, and Edie Seashore; and regularly participating in diversity and social justice labs, workshops, and certificate programs, such as NTL's Diversity Practitioner Certificate Program.

**6. Claim and Use All of Ourselves.**

Knowing, being, and using all of ourselves as OD practitioners is an important diversity and social justice practice. Who I am includes human differences, areas of human experience, elements of individual culture, dominant and subordinated group identities, internalized dominance, privilege, and subordination, preferred ways and styles for engaging with individuals, groups, and organizations, dreams, memories, feelings, and other inner life experience, and roles, titles, and responsibilities. Some aspects of self are listed in *Exhibit 4*. Using ourselves involves using all aspects of self, those about which we are proud and sorry. . . Using ourselves, with intention, to impact individuals, groups, and organizations.

Diversity and social justice work involves being imperfect and vulnerable, a willingness to make mistakes and learn from them, and forgiving oneself and others for being imperfect. It means working from both head and heart and being clear about what one stands for; identifying one's own purpose, vision, values. It means taking responsibility for ourselves and our personal and

professional development, holding ourselves responsible for intentions and accountable for intended and unintended impacts, and distinguishing between intentions and effects of one-time, isolated events and the cumulative effects of successive and on-going events. It means reclaiming repressed, disowned, and projected parts of ourselves with information gained through disclosure and feedback and dreams, memories, body sensations, and feelings.

### 7. Partner with Others

Effective diversity and social justice work in organizations depends on the OD practitioner's ability to partner with others by building and using networks and support systems of colleagues and allies. Diversity and social justice work cannot be done alone.

Partnering has many benefits. Partnering both within and across multiple group identities brings different perspectives and experiences to the work. It provides both support and challenge for practitioners and fosters practitioner growth and development. It models working across dominant and subordinated group identities for members of client organizations and systems.

### 8. Practice Small Acts of Courage, Irrepressible Hope, and Stubborn Optimism

Change does not need to involve one or two big acts that change the entire world. Change can result from one small act after another, an accumulation of acts, by people working together for social justice and inclusion. Telling the truth. Staying true to one's values. Speaking out for diversity and social justice and acting to eliminate oppression in all of its forms.

Oppression can seem insurmountable in the world. Hope, combined with optimism, is the belief that oppression, as a social construct, is not permanent and can be dismantled. Václav Havel speaks of hope as ". . . the certainty that something makes sense, regardless of how it turns out. . . . Hope. . . gives us the strength to

live and continually try new things, even in conditions that seem as hopeless as ours do, here and now." (Havel, 1990, p. 182.)

### 9. Stay Alive

In his well-known article, Herb Shepard's first rule for change agents is "stay alive." (Shepard, 1975.) This is also a good diversity and social justice practice for OD practitioners.

Staying alive means helping organizations have successes, even when they are small. It means being choiceful

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and strategic about when and how to consult in client systems where diversity and social justice work is difficult and may not be a popular direction for the organization. It means choosing not to work in some organizations or leaving an internal position in an organization based on practitioner values and ethics.

Diversity and social justice work in organizations can be taxing, and even toxic. Not surprisingly, being healthy is the highest-priority value in a study of the values of eighty-nine diversity and social justice practitioners. (Brazzel, 2007.) It is important to remember practitioners

who devoted themselves to diversity and social justice work and died too soon. They include Amanda Fouther, Kaleel Jamison, Marjane Jensen, Hal Kellner, Robert B. Moore, Richard Orange, Robert W. Terry, Leroy Wells, Jr. Their legacies remain with us.

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### 10. Create and Use a Guiding Vision of Social Justice and Inclusion

Organizations choose a path of social justice and inclusion, moving from a dominant culture to a culture that integrates the cultures of many different individuals and social identity groups.....or they do not. When organizations do choose to address diversity and social justice issues, they do so because of business and mission-related advantages to the organization, because harmful effects of oppression are not acceptable, because of threatening legal and legislative losses, and because the course of social justice and inclusion is congruent with organizational values and is the morally right thing to do. A vision of social justice and inclusion is needed for guiding organizations on this journey.

OD practitioners support change in organizations by helping them define and be clear about both their present state and their desired future. When OD practitioners have incorporated diversity and social justice in their OD practice, they can help organizations begin to see and track the impacts of dominant and subordinated social identity groups, power differences, prejudice, and institutionalized oppression for their current situation and daily experience. The desired future for organizations is defined with a vision of social justice and inclusion. Bailey Jackson

There are many reasons for OD practitioners to choose not to address diversity and social justice issues. It is hard and often uncomfortable work. The elimination of oppression in the world is unlikely to happen any time soon. The OD field and profession often treat diversity and social justice as a peripheral matter. Organizations often resist addressing diversity and social issues.

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suggests a vision of social justice and inclusion in which,

> The organization "has within its mission, goals, values, and operating system explicit policies and practices that prohibit anyone from being excluded or unjustly treated because of social identity or status....[The organization] not only supports social justice within the organization; it advocates these values in interactions within the local, regional, national, and global communities, with its vendors, customers, and peer organizations. . . . All members of the diverse workforce feel fully included and have every opportunity to contribute to the mission of the organization." (Jackson, 2006, pp. 142-143.)

He reinforces this as a vision of social justice and inclusion for organizations with the observation that no organization has achieved this vision. (Jackson, 2006, p. 146.)

Organizations choose whether or not to address social justice and inclusion issues. . . . and that is true for OD practitioners as well. There are many reasons for OD practitioners to choose not to address diversity and social justice issues. It is hard and often uncomfortable work. The elimination of oppression in the world is unlikely to happen any time soon. The OD field and profession often treat diversity and social justice as a peripheral matter. Organizations often resist addressing diversity and social issues.

Whether OD practitioners choose to make diversity and social justice an integral part of their practice depends on what they stand for in the world: purpose, vision, and values. Creating a personal vision of social justice and inclusion can crystallize an OD practitioner's choice to stand for social justice and inclusion in their practice.

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