Theory and Conceptual Article

The Psychology of Diversity Resistance and Integration

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Abstract

Diversity resistance is the dynamic interplay of individual and collective behaviors, with individual resistance rooted in unconscious motivation and organizational resistance rooted in the collective behavior of individuals. The purpose of this article is to enrich understanding of the forms of diversity resistance and introduce literature which may help move individuals and organizations to more equitable and integrative norms. We present a continuum of diversity resistance and integration in organizations to help human resource development (HRD) researchers and professionals consider how resistance to diversity can be reduced in leading to the full integration of employees. The continuum consists of (a) Resistance, (b) Discrimination Prevention, (c) Access and Legitimacy, (d) Inclusion, and (e) Integration and Learning. A psychological perspective is presented on resistance for HRD professionals helping leaders to facilitate diversity-related change.

With openly xenophobic, bullying, misogynist, and intolerant beliefs openly espoused and disseminated daily in mainstream media reports, 65% of U.S. voters believe that hate and prejudice have increased since the November 2016 election (Quinnipiac University, 2017). This coincides with a drastic spike in hate—marked by a 20% increase in the United States of hate crimes occurring in cities in 2017 alone (Center

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for the Study of Hate & Extremism, 2017) and a 17% increase in hate groups between 2014 and 2016 (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2017). Crimes against Muslims were up nearly 40% in 2016, and rates have surpassed the previous record set in 2001 after the 9/11 attacks (Kishi, 2017).

Meanwhile, 60% of women and 88% of Blacks say that societal change is needed to achieve equality (Horowitz, Parker, & Stepler, 2017; Parker, Horowitz, & Maul, 2016). Women lag 17% behind men in earnings, and 42% report facing gender-related discrimination in the workplace. More than half of Blacks report being unfairly treated because of race in the last 30 days (DiJulio, Norton, Jackson, & Brodie, 2015). In cases of workplace bullying, women are disproportionately targeted by men, and African Americans and Hispanics are more often targets than Whites (Namie, 2017). Enforcement of U.S. federal laws and regulations protecting several groups have been "rolled back" (Huseman & Waldman, 2017; Zillman, 2017). Understandably, perceptions of workplace climate have declined (Namie, 2017).

Given the ongoing pervasiveness of bias in the workplace, it is almost certain that most human resource development (HRD) professionals will continue encountering inequitable norms that inhibit organizational vitality, innovation, and competitiveness. However, unlike other change initiatives, diversity change has an added psychological component "that may challenge or threaten participants by addressing deeply held beliefs, values, social identities, or ways of interacting with others" (Chrobot-Mason, Hays-Thomas, & Wishik, 2008, p. 24). An evolving body of research from the field of social psychology suggests that discrimination, or bias in favor of one's own group to the detriment of others, is a cognitive and motivational phenomenon that, when challenged, is met with psychological resistance (Bartlett, 2009).

Unfortunately, research on diversity resistance in HRD is sparse (Hill, 2009), and techniques for managing it are lacking. What tools we do have "are designed to deal with the resistance of employees in the middle and lower ranks of the hierarchy, rather than the resistance of those in power" (Agocs, 1997, p. 924). HRD professionals are in a unique position to create and apply techniques to overcome diversity resistance at the individual and organizational levels because of the positioning to influence diversity approaches and co-construct the space for diversity-related issues to be explored (Chrobot-Mason & Thomas, 2002). Therefore, strategies and perspectives capable of moving individuals and organizations to more productive and equitable norms deserve our consideration.

We view diversity resistance as the dynamic interplay of individual and collective behaviors, with individual resistance rooted in unconscious motivation and organizational resistance rooted in the collective behavior of individuals. The purpose of this article is to enrich our understanding of the forms of diversity resistance and review literature which may help move individuals and organizations to more equitable and integrative norms.

Managing Diversity

Diversity encompasses a considerable range of meaning—from the visible dimensions of difference that are articulated in the law to the full spectrum of human difference

from culture to personality to work styles (Mor Barak, 2011). In this article, diversity is considered as an array of identities that "have a perceived commonality within a given cultural or national context" provided the identity distinction may "impact potentially harmful or beneficial employment outcomes such as job opportunities, treatment in the workplace, and promotion prospects" (Mor Barak, 2005, p. 132).

In many organizations, diversity management applies to the administration of policies and programs affecting recruitment, mentoring, and career development, among others (Prasad, Prasad, & Mir, 2011). The most common diversity-related activity is training (Dobbin, Kalev, & Kelly, 2007), with organizations like Google spending US$150 million on diversity in a single year (Luckerson, 2015), or all organizations in the United States collectively spending estimated US$8 billion per year on programs with goals ranging from compliance to succeeding in a growingly competitive and diverse marketplace (Ferdman & Brody, 1996; Hansen, 2003).

Despite the popularity of diversity training, "programs are becoming less effective in promoting gender and intercultural sensitivity" (Henderson & Provo, 2006, p. 275). Two thirds of diversity programs convey the wrong message about diversity by focusing on the legal and financial consequences of discrimination (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016) rather than increases in creativity, learning, and innovation that may result from establishing more equitable norms. Training programs designed to "manage diversity" are generally considered to have no effect or a negative effect (Dobbin & Kalev, 2016; Rynes & Rosen, 1995). Although research has identified training characteristics associated with disappointing outcomes, such as the lack of attention to (a) skill building and transfer, (b) visible leadership and financial support, (c) front-end needs assessment, and (d) long-term evaluation (Hite & McDonald, 2006; Rynes & Rosen, 1995), techniques used in effective training programs are understudied (Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006).

Another criticism of diversity programs is that they tend to ignore inequality in organizational outcomes and leave unearned privilege intact (Agocs, 1997). Some initiatives concentrate on "the merits of employing and admitting different identity groups into the organizational fold" without addressing "the legal, political, and institutional dynamics of exclusion" (Prasad, 2001, p. 57). Others gesture compliance "without necessarily inducing any change in the underlying behavior" (Sturm, 2001, p. 461). Even well-intentioned programs can create negative emotions (Nemetz & Christensen, 1996), including making majority participants feel ashamed or that they are being unfairly blamed for societal injustices they did not create (Chrobot-Mason et al., 2008). These feelings can lead to divisiveness, increased bias, and even backlash (Hill, 2009; Hite & McDonald, 2006; Holladay, Knight, Paige, & Quiñones, 2003; Von Bergen, Soper, & Foster, 2002). On the contrary, focusing too narrowly on one disenfranchised group to the exclusion of others can lead to resistance from members of excluded group(s) (Holladay et al., 2003). Programs that are effective in increasing diversity awareness may leave participants without the skills to transfer learning to the job which can breed misunderstanding and even more conflict (Hite & McDonald, 2006). Overall, research suggests that the most popular tools for diversity change have been ineffective in leveling the organizational the playing field, with some approaches making conditions worse.

More promising diversity practices have included diversity task forces and mentoring initiatives (Dobbin & Kalev, 2013). Both have been associated with increasing the diversity of managers in organizations.

Two Levels of Diversity Resistance

Resistance to change is "any conduct that serves to maintain the status quo in face of pressure to alter the status quo" (Zaltman & Duncan, 1977). Maurer (1996) described resistance as occurring in a continuum, starting with mild resistance relating to a lack of education, skills, or understanding of a change idea; moving to emotional and psychological fears such as being abandoned or losing power; and ending with distrust for those initiating the change. It may occur in individuals at virtually any level within an organization and can be camouflaged by a variety of behaviors that seem neutral on the surface but ultimately undermine a change effort (Foster, 2010). This may include the making of persistent demands for additional information, overwhelming the change agent with data, and even by citing a lack of time or other resources necessary for change (Block, 2010).

Diversity Resistance in Individuals

Hite and McDonald (2006) argued that individual diversity resistance is unique from resistance to most other organizational change initiatives because the proposed change extends beyond an organization's way of doing things to touch an individual's deepest held values and motivations. Expressions of diversity resistance include silence, inaction in the face of discrimination or harassment, hostility, and even workplace violence (Probst, Estrada, & Brown, 2008; K. M. Thomas & Plaut, 2008). We argue that most diversity resistance can be characterized as stereotyping as a cognitive process or backlash as outward action.

Stereotyping. Social cognition theory is useful in understanding the distinction between other proposed change initiatives and diversity-related change. It suggests that people construct categories to sort and retrieve information to make sense of the world (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007). These categories enable the mind to assign people to groups based on common traits such as age, race, class, or gender (Augoustinos, Walker, & Donaghue, 2006). As a result, people may associate certain notable characteristics that only a few members of a group possess with an entire category of people and filter out any contradictory information that does not match their perception.

Likewise, people tend to identify with a single social category, or ingroup, and maintain a more positive image of this group relative to others to enhance their own self-esteem (Turner, 2010). Cox (1993) argued that there is a "pervasive tendency for ingroup members to be favored over outgroup members . . . [that combines] to make dominance-subordinations and other equal opportunity issues prominent aspects of diversity work in organizations" (pp. 11-12). Such preferential treatment may include

giving ingroup members increased respect, empathy, compassion, resources, and opportunities (Awbrey, 2007; Krieger, 1995; D. A. Thomas & Alderfer, 1989). Meanwhile, negative information about the outgroup that conforms to stereotypes is retained and outgroup behavior is judged more critically (Combs & Griffith, 2007). In times of perceived threat or increased insecurity, this theory suggests will "increase ingroup favoritism and outgroup disparagement, as people seek to shore up their sense of well-being and worth. Threats of all varieties have been associated with intolerance, especially threats to self-esteem" (Bartlett, 2009, p. 1915).

Backlash. Burke and Black (1997) argued that increased diversity and competition for limited resources, such as good jobs, have combined with a lessened advantage to being White or male, and have led to backlash targeted at the very people diversity initiatives and antidiscrimination laws are designed to help. Diversity backlash is a type of resistance that is directed toward programs or policy initiatives that promote the hiring or advancement of underrepresented groups (Hill, 2009). Backlash may be active or passive (Davidson & Proudford, 2008; Hill, 2009). Passive backlash is a refusal to engage in diversity initiatives that can be characterized by inaction or marginal cooperation. Likewise, individuals engaging in active backlash ignore diversity mandates; however, they go several steps further by continuing their discriminatory practices and denigrating target group(s). Individuals exhibiting either form of backlash often feel that such programs discriminate against them, that they are losing out to lesser qualified women or minorities, or that they are viewed unfairly as the enemy (Burke & Black, 1997). Such threats have been exacerbated in the United States with the decline of economic opportunity and decrease in life expectancy for White males without a college degree (Case & Deaton, 2017).

Backlash takes several forms. Among the more overt is "symbolic bias," in which individuals deny that inequality exists and exhibits anger toward those who propose change to remedy it (Awbrey, 2007). "Modern bias" results in individual support of policies that provide a strategic advantage over women or minorities although the bias is not openly expressed (K. M. Thomas & Plaut, 2008). "Ambivalent bias" results when individuals satisfy their egalitarian self-perception by balancing perceived negative traits (i.e., women are less competent) with positive traits (i.e., women are better at cultivating relationships) (Glick & Fiske, 1996). Another example is "aversive racists," who see themselves as egalitarian and may genuinely sympathize with minorities. However, they may experience anxiety when interacting with members of other races (Bartlett, 2009; K. M. Thomas & Plaut, 2008). To shield their ego and satisfy their need to feel equitable and fair, individuals exhibiting either ambivalent or aversive bias may give positive feedback to marginalized group members in employee evaluations and high marks during interviews or while being considered for a promotion. However, when an employment decision comes down to two equally or similarly qualified candidates—one ingroup and one outgroup—the decision is likely to favor a member of the rater's own group. Although rapidly changing in some parts of the world, resistance and backlash targeted at sexual minorities may be more overt due to lack of societal and cultural sanctions against lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer discrimination
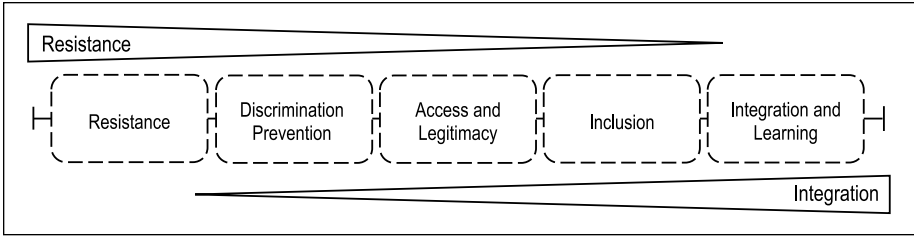
Figure 1. The resistance–integration continuum.

and can include stigmatization, harassment, distancing, adverse employment decisions, and religious intolerance (Hill, 2009; Rocco, Landorf, & Delgado, 2009).

Diversity resistance is not only limited to individuals. Agocs (1997) described diversity resistance as a pattern of organizational behavior utilized by stakeholders "to actively deny, reject, refuse to implement, repress, or even dismantle change proposals and initiatives" (p. 918) as an organization. Agocs added that resistance can be conceived as a refusal by stakeholders "to be influenced or affected by the views, concerns, or evidence presented to them by those who advocate change in established practices, routines, goals or norms within the organization" (p. 918). Because diversity resistance is intricately tied to the behavior of individuals that is manifested in organizations, we will discuss resistance patterns at the organizational level.

Diversity Resistance in Organizations

Building on the work of several authors outlined below, the following section discusses five organizational diversity perspectives: *resistance, discrimination prevention, access and legitimacy, inclusion*, and *integration and learning*. We present each of these along a continuum with decreasing levels of diversity resistance and increasing levels of diversity integration (see Figure 1). Our continuum is built on the premise that diversity resistance is inversely related to integration, and the five perspectives discussed fit along a resistance–integration continuum, beginning with the complete exclusion of individuals from a group characterized by extreme resistance, moving to compliance, multiculturalism, inclusion, and ultimately to complete integration. We developed this continuum to organize and conceptualize the various literature that addresses diversity-related organizational change. The continuum assumes the goal of encouraging full integration and learning among organizational members from diverse backgrounds, which we label "Integration and Learning." On the opposite extreme is "Resistance," which protects the status quo of privilege through resistant behaviors outlined below. The purpose of the continuum is to provide a normative, ordinal organizer for classifying the various approaches to diversity on this resistance–integration continuum. This continuum provides more specificity than seen on other scales.

Resistance (maximum resistance and minimum integration). Dass and Parker (1999) identified *resistance* as an organizational stance that is characterized as the inertia, silence,

defiance, and even manipulation that an organization uses to actively and strategically resist diversity change. The idea that organizations can actively resist diversity is well developed in the literature. Davidson and Proudford (2008) described organizational diversity resistance as behavior that protects the status quo of privilege and inequality. K. M. Thomas and Plaut (2008) suggested that institutions resist diversity by employing "a range of practices and behaviors . . . that interfere, intentionally or unintentionally, with the use of diversity as an opportunity for learning and effectiveness" (p. 5).

A resistant organization may choose to pay legal fees rather than invest in diversity or comply with federal mandates, or maintain a low public profile to avoid possible scrutiny over unfair and discriminatory labor practices (Dass & Parker, 1999). They might also conduct investigations or provide employees with confidential hotlines to report their concerns but do nothing with the information received. In such organizations, diversity or equal opportunity programs often lack financial backing from shareholders who disapprove of potential changes to the power structure or by executives who cite an absence of business necessity as justification for inaction. Finally, resistant organizations may adopt a halfhearted or fragmented diversity strategy that is ineffective because it lacks cohesiveness.

Discrimination prevention (high resistance and low integration). From the *discrimination [prevention] and fairness* perspective, initially developed by D. A. Thomas and Ely (1996), leaders use their influence to promote the equal opportunity for all employees. In addition to complying with equal opportunity and affirmative action mandates to redress injustices of the past, organizations operating under this paradigm may provide diversity training or offer mentoring and career development programs to women and minorities. While the goal of the discrimination prevention and fairness paradigm is equal treatment of all employees, sometimes this leads to color- or gender-neutral approaches that treat everyone as the same, and may suppress individual ideas, values, or perspectives, if difference is not perceived as valued (D. A. Thomas & Ely, 1996; K. M. Thomas, Tran, & Dawson, 2010). Like modern bias, this perspective places the onus on the member of a minority group to assimilate into the dominant culture while also giving majority members a strategic advantage because their culture remains intact.

A second limitation is that compliance with federal mandates, such as affirmative action, may be met with resistance from organizational members who claim these programs present an unfair barrier to advancement and result in the hiring of lesser qualified individuals to satisfy perceived quotas (Dass & Parker, 1999). Consistent with symbolic bias, individuals may claim that discrimination is no longer a problem in society and individuals may vehemently assert objections to these programs or policies based on what they see as principled (and often self-serving) beliefs in meritocracy (Langevoort, 2004).

Access and legitimacy (moderate resistance and moderate integration). In contrast, D. A. Thomas and Ely's (1996) *access and legitimacy* perspective celebrates difference and ties business necessity to legitimacy by matching the demographic composition of the workforce with that of consumer markets (Chrobot-Mason & Thomas, 2002;

D. A. Thomas & Ely, 1996). Under this paradigm, an organization may adopt multi-culturalism as an organizational strategy to capitalize on new consumer or niche markets (D. A. Thomas & Ely, 1996). Such approaches can lead to organizational growth; however, there are some risks as well. A common miscalculation is adopting this strategy too quickly and before fully understanding or appreciating the cultural differences at play. Such a situation can lead to conflict and resistance.

Some research suggests that diversity in work teams can result in decreased productivity or no change in productivity (Ely, 2004). While diverse work teams develop more creative ideas to solve problems, they tend to be less cohesive in the short term after being formed (Ely, 2004; Jackson, Joshi, & Erhardt, 2003; Linnehan & Konrad, 1999). This lack of cohesion may be a result of aversive bias. Such attitudes can cause problems in various work teams, regardless of the organization's level of commitment to access. Based on the evidence regarding lack of cohesion, specific skill building among intact teams may be necessary to avoid the risk of diversity leading to a lack of effective relations among a team.

A second risk is that, by strategically deploying certain identity characteristics to achieve business ends, inclusivity may be limited to job role or function while ingroup favoritism within the hierarchical decision-making structure of the organization remains intact (K. M. Thomas et al., 2010). For example, local employees may be hired to work in a field office or to interface with a specific cultural group; however, those employees' reach is limited to one segment of the organization. This approach can also leave group members feeling their identities are being exploited (Dass & Parker, 1999) and can result in other inequitable norms being left essentially unchanged (D. A. Thomas & Ely, 1996).

Last, the inherent risk with a general valuing and equating of all differences is that gradation of difference may get blurred, resulting in a more blended norm (Dass & Parker, 1999), which may be ineffective in addressing the needs of historically marginalized groups (Roberson, 2006). In other words, an access and legitimacy approach can lead to a general normalization of difference, with the end result being assimilation of difference into the dominant norm of the organization (Davis, 1996; Githens, 2012a; Nemetz & Christensen, 1996). The risk in such an approach is a loss of the richness and depth of experience, which can ultimately lead to a situation in which employees simply ignore differences.

Inclusion (low resistance and high integration). Nkomo's (2014) *inclusion* paradigm builds on approaches that celebrate difference. Unlike organizational approaches that encourage assimilation, this approach seeks to eradicate deeply embedded practices that produce and reproduce inequitable conditions by altering tacit and unconscious assumptions. Inclusion concentrates on the removal of assumptions and obstructions that exclude or inhibit equal access and participation in organizational systems and processes (Roberson, 2006).

Schein (1971) viewed inclusion as a functional process occurring in an exclusion–inclusion continuum where individuals either permeate into or filter out of a role, group, hierarchy, or organization. Key indicators of inclusion—heterogeneity in job

retention, access to sensitive information, and influence in decision making—have been inversely correlated with race and gender (Pelled, Ledford, & Mohrman, 1999). On the contrary, individuals in an inclusive environment are not concerned about being shunned or rejected because of their differences (Rocco et al., 2009) and are fully included in formal and informal relationships (Schiller, 2002).

While the inclusion paradigm capitalizes on the financial benefits of greater diversity and inclusion at all levels within an organization, it does not necessarily result in transformation of decision making, power, and influence structures. With this approach, inclusion can result in less than full and complete integration and leave intact the traditional mental models that result in a "business as usual" approach. In addition, organizations utilizing an inclusion paradigm sometimes lack an interest in helping the larger community or society realize the benefits of diversity and inclusion (Rocco et al., 2009), which is often seen as a goal of truly integrative and socially responsible organizations (Bierema & D'Abundo, 2003; Mor Barak, 2011; Raeburn, 2004).

Integration and learning (minimum resistance and maximum integration). The last paradigm, *integration and learning*, transcends compliance, multiculturalism, and inclusion to blend the goals of assimilation with those celebrating difference to allow an organization to grow and learn and build a more creative and effective workforce (Ely & Thomas, 2001). In this paradigm, the tacit assumptions underlying processes and norms are transformed through the full integration and continual learning from various perspectives. This approach involves organizational transformation and a fundamental shift in perspective toward diversity (Kwon & Nicolaides, 2017) Based in part on D. A. Thomas and Ely's (1996) work, this paradigm is rooted in the rational goal model, which suggests that organizations adopting this approach will enjoy greater performance and/or profit from increased innovation, efficiency, employee development, customer satisfaction, and corporate responsibility (Ambwani, Heslop, & Dyke, 2011; Dass & Parker, 1999).

The learning and effectiveness paradigm assumes that rational organizational goals will prevail over biased organizational behavior provided certain preconditions are met: (a) greater leadership understanding, (b) high performance standards, (c) professional development, (d) cultural norms that value workers and openness, (e) clear organizational mission, and (f) reconceptualization of the classic bureaucratic model which is resistant to change (D. A. Thomas & Ely, 1996). Because of the transformation that occurs, resistance to diversity is minimized and a collaborative leadership culture allows for differences to be incorporated into effective decision-making processes. In some ways, this paradigm resembles other types of transformed organizations, as described by authors and theorists such as Senge (2006) and Argyris and Schön (1978). However, organizations in this paradigm also strive to make subtle or overt societal changes, either through internal integration efforts and/or through efforts to make the broader society more integrative of all people (Bierema & D'Abundo, 2003; Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Mor Barak, 2011; Raeburn, 2004; Rocco et al., 2009). Such change can occur through public advocacy, lobbying of politicians

to implement more integrative social policies, and through broad social corporate responsibility efforts.

As reaching integration will require overcoming psychological resistance, HRD practice may benefit from a greater understanding of the approaches used in psychology, where resistance is a critical point of research because the level of resistance is inversely correlated with treatment outcomes (J. Cautilli, Riley-Tillman, Axelrod, & Hineline, 2005; Ritchie, 1986).

The Psychology of Resistance to Change

Throughout this article, we have explained that bias is a psychological phenomenon with social, cognitive, and motivational components. Resistance is a separate psychological phenomenon that is not confronted by our field alone but by many others, including sociology, education, law, and theology. Perhaps the reason resistance is so widely studied is that the ability to influence human growth and bring transformation rests, in part, on the ability to manage people's reaction to change. However, this process can be hindered by the human tendency to avoid uncomfortable or embarrassing feelings associated with change (Balser, 1994).

Although HRD professionals do not typically engage in individual coaching or counseling to overcome an individual client's cultural biases, they do face individual bias when working with clients and others within the organization. In addition, they often coach clients (e.g., managers) who may be grappling with how to maximize integration and learning while minimizing resistance to diversity among team members. Many organizational variables can hinder or support change, such as employee attitudes, culture, pressures for diversity, and the specific form of diversity under consideration (Dass & Parker, 1999). Given these variables, it is likely that substantive gains will be made by practitioners who are equipped with a broad range of interpersonal skills and strategies that can be applied across situations. Perhaps the most important tool or technique needed is the ability to reduce resistance. Therefore, we provide an overview of individual-level resistance from the counseling literature and connect it to HRD practice, given the counseling field's major focus on addressing and working through resistance.

In counseling psychology, resistance is described as the patient's inability to engage fully in treatment, and it occurs to varying degrees in virtually all clients (Ritchie, 1986). Resistance is defined as the default emotional reaction that can come from anxiety, guilt, a skill deficit, or a lack of understanding, motivation, expectation of success, or involvement in the change process (Munjack & Oziel, 1978; Ritchie, 1986). It may take many forms, from subtle and unintentional to overt and deliberate, ranging in degrees from mild to severe (Grossman et al., 2007). Conceptually, resistance is a set of covert rules the client has about the nature of seeking and receiving help (Gold, 2008). These rules are particularly important from a diversity perspective because they may apply to characteristics such as age, gender, or race; may reflect a client's comfort level with disclosure; and can affect their willingness to adapt to a new belief system.

As resistance is a natural reaction to change, it should be anticipated, honored, and integrated into the change process (Brazzel, 2014; Gold, 2008; Hill, 2009). Brazzel (2014) built upon Gestalt psychology in concluding that resistance is a "container for energy" (p. 262) that is necessary, healthy, and essential in organizations. Practitioners' inattention to resistance can form a covert alliance with the client in which the integrity of the relationship could be compromised, and the likelihood of successful outcomes reduced (Gold, 2008). Resistance is typically lowest in the beginning of the change process as a practitioner strives to build a relationship with the client, but increases when making recommendations the client is uncomfortable with and as the client becomes fearful of the direction the consultation is going (J. Cautilli et al., 2005; Gold, 2008). It typically diminishes as the client begins to have success with the new skills and processes; however, some clients remain resistant throughout the entire process.

Freud asserted that resistance shields the ego from unacceptable messages about the self (Ritchie, 1986). Similarly, social identity theory suggests that people are motivated by the need to maintain a positive self-image. In issues of diversity, we see this manifested in individuals who internalize an egalitarian self-image, such as aversive racists, but who engage in very subtle discriminatory acts. In addition to protecting the ego and definition of self, Gold (2008) added that resistance may reflect unmet client–practitioner role preferences, or be symptomatic of fear and anxiety relating to the consulting relationship.

J. D. Cautilli and Santilli-Connor (2000) argued that resistance may also be due to a lack of skills necessary to carry out a task and that the client may have had erroneous assumptions about the consulting process. Munjack and Oziel (1978) agreed that resistance may relate to a lack of education or motivation, but added that resistance may also be caused by guilt, such as the shame that could be associated with revealing racist views, or reinforced, such as negative behavior that is encouraged and rewarded in highly patriarchal organizations. J. Cautilli et al. (2005) advised that the practitioner should assess the purpose the resistance is serving to improve client outcomes.

Alford and Lantka (2000) suggested that resistance is often related to task avoidance in two forms: (a) by acting in a way that is rewarding in the short term and dysfunctional in the long term, and (b) by refusing to do the work required for sustained change. The client's thought process typically begins with acceptance of the task, followed by fear, anger, or frustration, and ends with a decision to not carry the task out. In this case, the client's behavior is rewarded because they escape the unpleasant task. The avoided task should become the primary focus of attention rather than the breakdown between the practitioner and client. An HRD professional sees such task avoidance when a client fails to complete mutually agreed upon goals (e.g., not fully addressing a difficult bias issue with a strong employee or difficult work group).

In HRD, the body of literature seems to suggest that a softer approach to diversity is more likely than direct confrontation to bring about diversity change (Githens, 2012a; Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Raeburn, 2004). It appears that the same is true in psychology. Unconditional acceptance allows the client to be more open (J. Cautilli et al., 2005). The practitioner should begin from a position of not knowing and allowing the client to tell his or her story (Gold, 2008). It is important to listen and convey support at

this point to decrease resistance, whereas efforts to confront or teach the client would produce the opposite effect (J. Cautilli, Tillman, Axelrod, Dziewolska, & Hineline, 2006). However, such approaches are shown to reduce resistance; there is a risk in being too accepting and supportive because it may slow an intervention and lead to the client not attaining the desired outcome (J. Cautilli et al., 2005; Schein, 1998).

According to Schein (2002), learning in organizations occurs in one of two ways: (a) when people are forced to learn because they are facing the threat of job loss or loss of another valued resource, and (b) when a safe space is created where anxiety is lessened, and learning is facilitated with support, feedback, and coaching. Many executives prefer force because it is easier and requires less investment than creating a safe psychological environment (Schein, 2002). Schein argued that this is ill-advised because it increases resistance and leaves participants feeling bullied rather than valued. This has direct implications for HRD practitioners engaging in diversity work, both in how they work with their clients and in how they guide their clients to implement sometimes unpopular diversity initiatives.

Grossman et al. (2007) studied the methodologies of teaching clergy, counselors, and teachers to respond to resistance, finding that the approach used in clinical psychology is best. Such an approach utilizes role-play and simulations to allow students to practice and rehearse responses to resistance under the guidance of an expert. In preparing clergy and teachers, Grossman found that training is largely on the job and typically lacks a unified approach grounded in theory. Techniques utilized in clinical psychology focused either on (a) "rolling with resistance," in which resistance is a normal response to therapy and is integrated into the process, and (b) "shifting focus," which allows the psychologist to manage resistance by redirecting discussion to more positive ends. In education, however, the emphasis is largely on preventing resistance through carefully planned exercises and lesson plans.

There are several key takeaways from the psychology of resistance, which may be used to inform HRD practice in fostering diversity integration and learning. When attempting to build more integrated and equitable norms, an HRD practitioner may be faced with prejudiced and bigoted statements (subtle and overt) or behaviors that are offensive or even targeted at the change effort or the HRD practitioner themselves. Just as diversity change may threaten an individual's deeply held beliefs or social identity, outward expressions of diversity resistance, such as racial insults or negative stereotypes, may offend or attack the change agent's character, values, or identity. In such times, it is important not to react in kind and, instead, diagnose the behavior as resistant and a natural and essential part of the change process (Grossman et al., 2007). Rather than challenge or confront the negative attitudes (which can increase resistance and deepen bias), attend to the individual's need and allow them to protect their ego and self-esteem so they do not feel that they are being negatively judged or threatened. This resistance should be anticipated and honored, and support and acceptance should be conveyed to the individual (Ritchie, 1986). To better meet their emotional needs, it may be beneficial to explore client comfort's level discussing diversity-related topics and disclosure of personal beliefs, role preferences for the helping relationship, and assumptions about the change effort. If task avoidance is present, assess the root cause

of the resistance (Alford & Lantka, 2000; J. D. Cautilli & Santilli-Connor, 2000; Gold, 2008). Last, because a lack of involvement in the change process increases resistance (Ritchie, 1986), it is advisable to encourage greater employee participation and engagement in the design, selection, implementation, and evaluation of our intervention, where feasible.

Discussion

Overwhelming evidence suggests that inequity in access and opportunity remains an issue in organizations despite legal mandates and considerable resources invested in diversity initiatives. We assert that many diversity change efforts are not successful because they do not attend to the underlying psychological needs of individuals or resistance that can emerge when diversity change is introduced in organizations. To move individuals and organizations to more integrative norms, strategies that attend the individual needs deserve our consideration, especially because the roots of diversity resistance are deep and personal that this resistance may be distinct from resistance to other types of organizational change, such as resistance to changing an accounting system. Techniques for working with diversity resistance may be particularly valuable when they can be employed at multiple levels within organizations, including with resistant stakeholders and leaders. As HRD professionals, we are privileged to be able to influence the space in which these topics can be explored.

Alternatively, if we fail to consider resistance, we may unintentionally provoke anger, defensiveness, greater resistance, and ultimately inflict harm to individuals, the change effort, and the organization itself. The strategies used in counseling psychology are not distant from Schein's (1998) process which begins by conveying support, acceptance, and willingness to listen, and by treating any potentially unacceptable messages as sources of insight or learning. This approach is particularly important when working with sensitive subjects where an individual may have strong opinions and values. Even if our beliefs do not align with our clients' beliefs, it is important the client feels understood and safe in expressing his or her opinions without the fear of being judged or made to experience feelings of guilt or shame. This will lessen resistance and make the client more receptive to change. This approach is exemplified in the Academy of Human Resource Development's (1999) *Standards on Ethics and Integrity*, which calls on "HRD professionals [to] accord appropriate respect to the fundamental rights, dignity, and worth of all people" (p. 2), while minimizing harm or other adverse effects, and respecting "the rights of others to hold values, attitudes, and opinions that differ from their own" (p. 4).

Implications for Practice and Research

HRD professionals need tools and techniques for working with resistance to help move clients and organizations to more integrative norms, which may be accomplished through process facilitation, training, and skill-building exercises. It is crucial to move beyond awareness training and toward specific skill-based interventions with intact

teams, particularly for organizations utilizing the *access and legitimacy, inclusion*, or *integration and learning* approaches (Ely, 2004; Jackson et al., 2003; Linnehan & Konrad, 1999). Interventions with intact teams can look more like an organization development intervention than a diversity training exercise due to the focus on building sustainable norms to apply within an existing group. Such methods benefit from an action-oriented approach (Ellsworth, 1989; Githens, 2012a). Action-oriented approaches help avoid the tendency of some diversity awareness initiatives in which consciously or unconsciously "diverse individuals" are singled out to educate members of the majority (Ellsworth, 1989), which sometimes instill guilt in participants, which does nothing to change real-world conditions (Brown, 1996). On the contrary, organizations can embed diversity work into existing work groups to foster growth and learning while the groups set their own goals, engage in authentic dialogue about group dynamics, and foster collaboration and trust (Choi & Ruona, 2010).

Another action-oriented approach involves the growing body of research and practice advocating for employee-driven and stakeholder-driven changes (e.g., Githens, 2012b; Jacobson, Callahan, & Ghosh, 2015; Meyerson & Scully, 1995; Raeburn, 2004). Such groups include employee networks, affinity groups, employee resource groups, union special interest groups, informal task forces, and informal activist groups within workplaces. Such groups can be conceptualized as (a) emphasizing social change or emphasizing organizational effectiveness and (b) take an emergent/grassroots form to organizing or strive for order and structure (Githens & Aragon, 2009). Although Dobbin and Kalev (2013) found affinity networks do not lead to increased diversity among management ranks, they did not look at other outcomes related to such groups, such as attainment of policy changes and practices, as have been examined by other scholars (e.g., Githens, 2012b; Raeburn, 2004). Based on their comprehensive review, Welbourne, Rolf, and Schlachter (2017) identified outcomes associated with such groups, such as identification with the organization, job satisfaction, and meeting diversity goals. Additional research is needed to understand the interplay of resistance to diversity and the existence and actions of such groups.

Additional key areas of focus for managers and/or employees include understanding the range of diversity resistance behaviors, techniques to identify resistance in individuals, and tools and techniques to identify the purpose resistance serves for the underlying cause(s) to be dealt with. For instance, the techniques used to work with someone who is resistant due to lack of involvement in the diversity change process would almost certainly be different from those that are appropriate in cases where an individual challenges the legitimacy of an affirmative action program. Once a greater understanding of the psychological aspects of diversity resistance is achieved, HRD practitioners can develop and use skills for working with resistant individuals.

Role-play techniques, like those found in the counseling literature, appear promising because they allow practitioners to gain comfort using the techniques in a controlled environment before working with actual clients. This is important given the discomfort which may arise during discussions around controversial topics associated with race or privilege. In addition to preparing HRD professionals to work with diversity resistance, training should be provided to individuals who will be held accountable for

ensuring that diversity goals are met, especially because responsibility for diversity is often delegated to someone with limited power. In cases where the authority to create diversity change is lacking, the ability to influence is essential.

Authors have developed strategies to overcome diversity resistance (e.g., Dass & Parker, 1999; D. A. Thomas & Ely, 1996), and yet we have little empirical evidence to show which approaches are best. Additional research needs to be conducted in examining HRD practitioners' application of such ideas in practice. Minimal research exists on the relationships that HRD professionals undertake with biased clients. The concepts of diversity resistance and client relationships are complicated and require multifaceted approaches. For example, HRD scholar/practitioners could write detailed case studies about these relationships from a first-person perspective. Another approach might be more conventional qualitative or quantitative studies examining the use of these principles in practice. Such research will allow for more well-developed perspectives on the application of social and counseling psychology perspectives to diversity initiatives.

A final area for study would be to confirm whether an inverse relationship between level of resistance and actual organizational change holds in the same way for diversity change as it does in counseling practice. If this link can be established in HRD, it will likely foster reconsideration of the assumptions we use for diversity change in organizations, open new possibilities for progress, and move organizations to more inclusive norms. As discussed earlier, criticisms abound that many diversity promotion efforts increase resistance due to the feelings of guilt, blame, being preached to, and feeling singled out. Considering the approaches to diversity resistance and integration presented in this article, researchers could consider how the principles of addressing diversity resistance hold up in real-life practice, particularly through qualitative investigation of intact groups, teams, and organizations. Using quantitative approaches, researchers could develop an enhanced model of the one presented in this article. Such a model might consider the relationships between type of diversity initiatives used, approaches to diversity and integration, and actual outcomes in organizations or teams. Of interest would be measurement of the manner in which resistance manifests and is successfully managed in organizations using various approaches to diversity resistance and integration.

By applying the concepts presented in this article and moving toward future exploratory research and testing, HRD practitioners and scholars can take a more holistic approach to diversity. Such approaches will help organizations manage resistance and move toward a full integration and learning from all employees.

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