

ARE WE USING THE MASTER'S TOOLS?

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Abstract

This article examines whether organization development and diversity consulting have the capacity to foster and sustain systemic change for social justice in organizations in the United States. In a number of her speeches and essays, Audre Lorde made the powerful statement that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house.” My premise is that systemic racism and oppression in organizations (the “master’s house”) was built with and continues to be maintained by the ideologies of materialism and white supremacy. My conclusion is that to achieve sustained systemic change for social justice we need to replace these ideologies and return to pre-existing belief systems of spirituality and interdependence so as to bring about true justice and equity.

Keywords: Organization development, Consulting, Diversity, Diversity consulting, Systemic change, Race, Racism, Systemic racism, Oppression, Materialism, White supremacy, Prejudice, Stereotype, Healing, Connection, Transformation, Social justice, Social change, Equity, Spirituality, Interdependence.

The Master’s House

Since a young age, I have looked for ways to work for social and racial justice. First, I wanted to become a civil rights lawyer. Becoming disillusioned with the legal system, I left the practice of law. I spent a number of years doing diversity training. However, I entered that field without an understanding of the nature of systemic racism and oppression. At that time, I saw increased awareness at the

individual level as the path to social change. After going back to school to study organization development (OD), I began to understand the need for work at the systemic and group level, as well as the individual level. For years, I read books, continued my own personal development through attending trainings, workshops and conferences, and worked with different colleagues in the belief that I could engage in OD and diversity work that would effectively bring about

sustained systemic change for social justice. I've been disappointed, however, at not having experienced bringing about this kind of systemic change in my work. I've come to believe that deeply rooted ideologies in the U.S. create a daunting task for OD and diversity consultants, making sustained systemic change an enormous challenge.

In a number of her speeches and essays, Audre Lorde made the powerful statement that “the master’s tools will never dismantle the master’s house” (Lorde, 1984, p. 112 and p. 123). She also pointed out that systemic oppression cannot be eradicated “in a society where the good is defined in terms of profit rather than in terms of human need.” She goes on to write that in such a society “there must always be some group of people who, through systematized oppression, can be made to feel surplus, to occupy the place of the dehumanized inferior” (Lorde, 1984, p. 144, emphasis added).

In looking at whether OD and diversity consulting have the capacity to foster sustained systemic change for social justice in organizations in the United States, the question that comes to mind for me is: Are we using tools that are capable of dismantling the “master’s house?”

I am defining “the master’s house” as the systemic racism and oppression that exists and is embedded in organizations in the United States. My premise is that systemic racism and oppression was built with and continues to be maintained by the ideologies of materialism and white supremacy. My conclusion is that to achieve sustained systemic change for social justice we need to replace these ideologies and return to pre-existing belief systems of spirituality and interdependence so as to bring about true justice and equity.

Historic Context

Having an historical context can help us understand how European colonists built the “master’s house” so as to better determine what is necessary to dismantle it and/or build a new “community home.” Looking at the history of the United States, we can see that the two ideologies described below brought about and help maintain systemic racism and oppression in the United States:

- (1) Materialism: The prioritization of profit and possession over people and relationships; a belief in the importance of material (extrinsic) value over spiritual (intrinsic) value, and

(2) White Supremacy: A hierarchical belief system based on race.

Materialism

When Europeans first came to this country, they brought with them their belief in the importance of material value over spiritual value (Ani, 1994). Starting with Columbus, who came in search of gold and spices, they came for the sole purpose of exploiting the resources of the “New World.”

Their desire for material gain at all costs led to the theft of land from and genocide of the Native Americans as well as the enslavement of Africans (Zinn, 1999). This materialism also led to the creation of a unique manifestation of slavery based on economics. As Joyce DeGruy Leary (2005) points out:

Before the European slave trade began in 1440, most people who became slaves became so as the result of war. Two societies went to war and the winners enslaved the losers. ... Europeans, however, systematically turned the capturing, shipping and selling of other human beings into a business, a business that would develop into the backbone of an entire economy, providing the

foundation for the world’s wealthiest nation” (p. 49).

White Supremacy

The ideology of materialism and the existence of slavery alone would not have led to the systemic racism and oppression that continue today without the additional ideology of white supremacy. The establishment of slavery was accompanied and rationalized by the belief in the superiority of white people. This idea was used to legitimize both the dehumanization of Africans and African Americans and the massacres of Native Americans. In comparing slavery in Africa with slavery in the United States, Howard Zinn points out the role of both materialism and white supremacy in the American system of slavery:

African slavery lacked two elements that made American slavery the most cruel form of slavery in history: the frenzy for limitless profit that comes from capitalistic agriculture; the reduction of the slave to less than human status by the use of racial hatred, with that relentless clarity based on color, where white was master, black was slave (Zinn, 1999, p. 28, emphasis added).

In the 1600's, white indentured servants and black indentured servants and slaves in Virginia were not antagonistic towards each other. In fact, they worked together, married each other and sometimes ran away together. To keep this from continuing, the ruling class created laws that prohibited fraternization and intermarriage between whites and blacks (Zinn, 1999, pp. 30-31). During the 1700's, slaves engaged in resistance and rebellion. And because white indentured servants were often treated as badly as slaves, in some instances white indentured servants joined in these efforts to gain their freedom. The ruling class feared what could happen if black slaves and discontented whites joined together in resistance. In response, therefore, they put a variety of laws into place, to create and maintain a division between white and black laborers to deter this cooperation and solidarity. In combination with the promulgation of the belief in white supremacy, the ruling class gave white laborers certain economic and other benefits that were denied to them before that (e.g., at their end of their indenture, white servants were given corn, money and a gun) (Zinn, 1999, pp. 36-38). White laborers were, therefore, given economic benefits and social status in place of economic or political power. The ruling class thus used the ideology of

white supremacy intentionally to keep the white working class from joining forces with black slaves. They manufactured differences based on color to create the "surplus" people to which Lorde refers (Lorde, 1984, p. 144).

***Ideological Foundation
Either/Or Mentality: Dichotomization
and Oppositional Relationships***

The ideologies of materialism and white supremacy became culturally embedded in the United States as a result of certain deep-seated elements of European cultural thought. Ani (1994) writes about the European thought process of "dichotomization" in which:

[A]ll realities are split into two parts. This begins with the separation of self from "other," and is followed by the separation of the self into various dichotomies (reason/emotion, mind/body, intellect/nature). The process continues until the universe is composed of disparate entities (p. 105).

She elaborates on this to describe the way these split parts are viewed as polar opposites and assigned different values¹⁴:

¹⁴ This is in contrast to African cultural thought, also known as "diunital logic" in which "a thing can be both A and not A at the same time" (Ani,

The mind is trained from birth to think in terms of dichotomies or “splits.” The splits become irreconcilable, antagonistic opposites. ... First the dichotomy is presented, then the process of valuation occurs in which one term is valued and the other is devalued. One is considered “good,” positive, superior; the other is considered “bad,” negative, inferior. And, unlike the Eastern (Zen) conception of Yin and Yang or the African principle of “twinness” ... these contrasting terms are not conceived as complementary and necessary parts of a whole. They are, instead, conflicting and “threatening” to one another (p.33).

Thus, once the social construct of race was developed, individuals considered to be white became valued and superior and all others became devalued and inferior.

Objectification and Individualism

In combination with this European cultural dichotomous, either/or mentality is the European thought process that

p. 97). And, research conducted by quantum physicists has shown that the either/or way of viewing the world is not supported by data (Zukav).

objectifies the world and places a premium on the individual. Through this objectification, the thinking self becomes the subject and all else that is ‘other’ is objectified....” (Ani, p. 106).¹⁵ This perspective led to a mentality in which nature itself is objectified and the universe is viewed “as material reality only, to be acted upon by [the] superior ‘mind’ ... [resulting] in the illusion of a despiritualized universe.” (Ani, p. 107, emphasis added).¹⁶ Ani attributes this separation of the ‘thinking self’ from everything else as the foundation of the current Western concept and valuing of individualism. She writes: “[individuals are seen] as being responsible only to themselves ... Self-interest [therefore] becomes paramount, and ‘freedom’ is then the ability to pursue this interest” (Ani, p. 341). This objectification of the universe and nature, as well as the value

¹⁵ Unlike the European worldview, the African worldview sees individuals and the group as interdependent. Ani writes:

The person is nothing (spiritually dead) outside of the context of the community because of the emotional, spiritual, and physical necessity for interaction with other human beings: This is necessary for the realization of humanness. The community is created by the spiritual communion or joining of persons (p. 352).

¹⁶ In the African cultural perspective, on the other hand, the universe is “personalized, not objectified” (Ani, p. 97).

placed on individualism and self-interest above the interests of the community, has created the foundation for the exploitation of nature and out-of-control materialism, discussed further below.

The Toxic Legacy

Materialism, which elevates profit and productivity over people, is embedded in the operation of corporations in the United States. A particularly egregious example of this at work is the decades old case of the Ford Motor Company and its decision not to recall the Ford Pinto. Despite Ford's awareness that rear-end collisions could easily rupture the Pinto's fuel system and result in life-threatening gas tank explosions, the company decided to continue to manufacture the vehicle. Ford's decision not to recall the Pinto was based on a cost-benefit analysis weighing the amount of money it would cost to recall the cars against the amount of money they would need to pay to settle lawsuits stemming from gas-tank related accidents. Because they believed the latter amount to be less, they decided not to recall the vehicles. It took the company almost ten years to finally recall the Pinto despite the large number of accidents that had resulted in deaths. (Mother Jones, September/October 1977).

The ideology of materialism, in combination with the American value of individualism, has led to a belief system in which individual success and profit has become more important than a community in which everyone's basic needs are met. Further, the prioritization of profit and possession has developed into a dangerous culture of consumerism in which individuals consume to excess, losing sight of the impact on others as well as the environment. Materialism and consumerism have resulted in significant damage to individuals and economies in other nations as well as devastation of the world's environment. While the earth's resources are dwindling, our drive to consume leads us to purchase more and more things, many of which involve the use of child labor and sweat shops, and cause environmental pollution and destruction. (A perfect recent example of this is, of course, the BP Oil Spill.)

Perkins (2006) described the global imperialism that is the direct result of and continues to be maintained by the belief in acquiring and building wealth at all costs as follows:

[Global imperialism is based on] the idea that all economic growth benefits humankind and that the greater the growth, the more widespread the benefits. ... In

their drive to advance the global empire, corporations, banks, and governments (collectively the corporatocracy) use their financial and political muscle to ensure that our schools, businesses, and media support both the fallacious concept and its corollary (p. xv).

The drive to constantly consume more and more, coupled with the cultural value that places higher worth on individuals than on communities is ripping us apart. We become blind to the extent to which we are all interdependent and also to the enormous and far-reaching impact of systemic racism and oppression. How can we bring about true systemic change for social justice in organizations without examining of the global impact of corporate decisions on individuals, communities and the environment?

On top of all this, the ideology of white supremacy acts like a software program operating in the background that continues to impact the way a computer functions, regardless of the intentions of the computer operator. Even though racism is rarely overtly espoused, it nonetheless continues to function in the form of conscious and unconsciously held negative stereotypes and prejudices about people of color and positive beliefs about white people (Banaji, Bazerman, &

Chugh, 2003). This hierarchical belief system based on race has resulted in systemic racism in this nation's organizations and institutions that take the form of organizational and institutional operations, policies, and procedures that perpetuate discrimination.

Racism is insidious because, since it often operates on an unconscious level, it continues to exist without the need for anyone to consciously practice it. Furthermore, it is largely invisible to white people (like me) unless it takes the form of an overt intentional act. Rather than being able to see a larger context and attending to the impact of our actions at the group and system levels, most white people tend to focus solely on our individual intent. To be able to recognize the existence of systemic racism, however, it is crucial to examine not only the intent behind actions, but the impact as well. A good example of a situation in which racially discriminatory intent may not be present, but the impact is nonetheless racialized, is the current foreclosure crisis that has disproportionately impacted people of color. Wessler (2009) points out that while the financial deregulation that resulted in this crisis did not target people of color, they have nonetheless been most impacted by it. As a result of past housing

discrimination and segregation, while many white people accumulated home equity, most people of color did not. Thus, few people of color had access to traditional 30-year prime loans. Consequently, they were more likely than white people to receive predatory high cost loans and are, therefore, the majority of those currently experiencing home foreclosures (Wessler, 2009).

Similarly, when organizations have significantly few people of color in their management ranks, organizational leaders often focus on their lack of discriminatory intent. They fail to recognize the impact of dynamics and policies in place that constitute barriers to the recruitment, performance and success of people of color. This lack of diversity is, therefore, often seen myopically as due to the lack of hard work or talent on the part of people of color. Individuals are told to “pull themselves up by their bootstraps” even if they don’t have a pair of boots (Howard, 2006). And, just as detrimentally, when one individual person of color succeeds despite the obstacles placed in front of them, they are frequently pointed out as proof that hard work and talent lead to success. We can see this clearly in the belief of much of white America that the United States has become a post-racial society now that we

have a biracial man as President. They focus, at the individual level, on the success of one individual without seeing the impact of the ongoing legacy of racism in the operations, policies and procedures of organizations and institutions at the systemic level.

Organizations that continue to operate from the legacy of materialism treat people as fungible commodities that can be used, depleted, and replaced, and fail to see the toxic impact on organizational members. When they elevate economic growth and profit over people and relationships, organizations can end up with a workforce of debilitated members with low morale and little creativity.

These organizations are analogous to a farmer who continually over-cultivates his land and uses toxic chemicals and pesticides in an effort to obtain as large a harvest as possible. While he may have large harvests in the short-term, in the long-term he destroys the very foundation of his success by depleting the land of its natural resources and nourishment and creating toxic waste that harms the overall ecological balance.

If the farmer were to value the land and the overall ecological system of which it is a part, he would understand the need

to allow land to lie fallow at times so as to ensure it is able to replenish the nutrients it needs to continue to be productive and healthy. And, he would understand that the short-term benefits of larger crops are not worth the creation of toxic waste that poisons the land for years to come.

Psychological and Spiritual Injuries

In addition to the negative impact of racism at the systemic and group levels, it has also created significant injury at the individual psychological and spiritual levels. Joyce DeGruy Leary (2005) has done extensive work examining the psychosocial consequences of slavery on African Americans. She writes about the effects of oppression on the oppressed:

These cycles of oppression leave scars on the victims ... scars that embed themselves in our collective psyches and are passed down through generations, robbing us of our humanity. For who can be fully human under the weight of oppression that condemns them to a life of torment, robs them of a future, and saps their free will? (p. 4).

She points out the connection between negative self-images and undermining

behavior on the part of African Americans and their collective history in this country and coins the term “Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome” (PTSS) to describe it.¹⁷ While the trauma of slavery is deeply embedded in the collective psyche of African Americans, people of color continue to experience trauma on a daily basis as a result of ongoing racism and negative stereotypes.

Bishop Desmond Tutu (1997) also writes about the pernicious harm that results from internalizing negative stereotypes.

¹⁷ DeGruy Leary (2005) writes:

We rarely look to our history to understand how African Americans adapted their behavior over centuries in order to survive the stifling effects of chattel slavery ... [Certain behaviors] are in large part related to trans-generational adaptations associated with the past traumas of slavery and on-going oppression. I have termed this condition ‘Post Traumatic Slave Syndrome,’ or PTSS. ...

The slave experience was one of continual, violent attacks on the slave’s body, mind and spirit. Slave men, women and children were traumatized throughout their lives and the violent attacks during slavery persisted long after emancipation. In the face of these injuries, those traumatized adapted their attitudes and behaviors to simply survive, and these adaptations continue to manifest today (p. 13-14).

The victims often ended up internalizing the definitions the [members of the dominant group] had of them. ... And then the awful demons of self-hate and self-contempt, a hugely negative self-image, [takes] its place in the center of the victim's being, so corrosive of proper self-love and a proper self-assurance, eating away at the very vitals of the victim's being. That is the pernicious source of the destructive internecine strife to be found, for instance, in the African American community. Society has conspired to fill you with self-hate, which you then project outward. You hate yourself and destroy yourself by proxy when you destroy those who are like this self you have been conditioned to hate.

One of the most blasphemous consequences of injustice, especially racist injustice, is that it can make a child of God doubt that he or she is a child of God (p. 197).

In addition to resulting in significant injuries to people of color, racism has resulted in injury to the psyche and spirits of white people as well. In describing the

impact of apartheid on white people, Tutu speaks to the way that racism dehumanizes white people (from Battle, 2007):

Those who were privileged lost out as they became more uncaring, less compassionate, less humane, and therefore less human¹⁸ (p. 196).

Author and professor Joe Feagin (2006) writes at length about the dehumanizing emotional and psychological damage that racism has wrought on white people that have left us

¹⁸ Césaire (1972) describes a similar impact on white colonialists. Colonization, he writes, “works to decivilize the colonizer, to brutalize him in the true sense of the word, to degrade him, to awaken him to buried instincts, to covetousness, violence, race hatred, and moral relativism...” (p. 13, emphasis added).

He goes on to write that. “[C]olonization ... dehumanizes even the most civilized man; that colonial activity, colonial enterprise, colonial conquest, which is based on contempt for the native and justified by that contempt, inevitably tends to change him who undertakes it” (pp. 19-20).

Similarly, Goodman (2001) also describes the spiritual and emotional damage experienced by members of dominant groups. She writes, “[s]ystems of oppression constrain the ability of people from privileged groups to develop their full humanity. Pressures to fit proscribed roles and to limit one's emotional capacity hinder one's self-development. Diminished self-knowledge and fears further thwart healthy psychological growth” (p. 105).

unable to empathize with the oppression of people of color. He and his colleague Herna Vera developed the term “social alexithymia¹⁹” (the collective inability to empathize with the pain of those targeted by oppression) to describe this dehumanization. By losing the capacity to empathize with the pain of those who are oppressed, white people have lost

¹⁹ White supremacist ideology permeates the unconscious of white people in the United States, leaving them dehumanized. This, according to Feagin (2006), is what has enabled and helps perpetuate ongoing racism and oppression. He explains social alexithymia as follows:

Recurring discriminatory action and other oppression targeting Americans of color requires a breakdown of normal human empathy. ... [R]acial oppression not only severely distorts human relationships but also desensitizes the minds of those involved in oppressing others. Racial oppression requires and stimulates in the oppressors a lack of recognition of the full humanity of the exploited and racialized others. Psychiatrists use the term ‘alexithymia’ to describe individuals who are unable to understand the emotions of, and thus empathize with, other people. Herna Vera and I have suggested going beyond this individualistic interpretation to a concept of ‘social alexithymia.’ Essential to being an oppressor in a racist society is a significantly reduced ability, or an inability, to understand or relate to the emotions, such as recurring pain, of those targeted by oppression (pp. 27-28).

This concept of social alexithymia explains how this country’s slaveholders could profess a belief in “liberty and justice for all” while maintaining a system in which people were held as chattel. It also explains how many slave owners could routinely rape female slaves and sell off their own offspring. And, of course, it explains the current incapacity of most white people to empathize with the experiences of people of color.

significant pieces of our humanity and our souls, leaving us in need of spiritual and psychological healing.

Thandeka (1999) also writes about the ways racism damages the souls and spirits of white people. She developed the concept of “white shame” to describe the psychological conflict experienced by white individuals who as children are faced with choosing between standing up for what they inherently feel is morally right and being able to remain in the community of their caretakers and peers. Thandeka speaks of the psychological price paid by white children as they are involuntarily enlisted into the white culture of superiority.²⁰

²⁰ Thandeka (1999) writes: “This induction process of the Euro-American child into whiteness is costly. ... The child must begin to separate itself from its own feelings. This process of ‘self-alienation’ can leave the child with a sense of ‘emptiness, futility, or homelessness,’ which are the hallmarks of psychological child abuse” (p. 19).

Thandeka’s discussion applies to white individuals who were forced by their parents into the “white culture of superiority.” White people, like myself, who were brought up with a belief in social and racial justice, experience a different form of “white shame.” When we come to understand and acknowledge the brutality of slavery and the continuing legacy of white supremacy, we fall prey to intense feelings of shame and guilt over our white identity. This is not only painful, but can result in leaving us paralyzed and unable to take action to counter oppression.

In addition to the term social alexthymia, Feagin (2006) also uses the term “social psychosis²¹” (the inability to

²¹ Feagin (2006) describes social psychosis as follows:

[T]raditionally, individual ‘psychosis’ is defined something like this: ‘A severe mental disorder in which contact with reality is lost or highly distorted.’ While most whites who accept the often wildly stereotyped notions and images of black personality and values ... are likely able to function well in their social lives, at least with other whites, they evidently have lost contact with actual racial realities, at least to some degree. They cannot ‘see’ the everyday realities of the African Americans who may be near or around them. Since so many whites share this racist perspective, we might label it a type of ‘social psychosis’ (pp. 329-330, footnote 53).

Social psychosis accurately describes a psychological defense mechanism (a psychological strategy that enables people to keep from being aware of painful or disturbing thoughts or feelings) implemented by white people as a group. By buying in to the myth of white supremacy and blinding themselves to the reality of the cruelty and brutality of slavery, collectively white people engaged in a form of denial that kept them blind to the impact of slavery on Africans and African Americans. Viewing this from a psychological perspective, white people as a group collectively put defense mechanisms in place that prevented them from recognizing or acknowledging the reality that was in front of their faces. This is what enabled slave owners to deny the reality of the inhumanity they were perpetuating. This collective denial continues to exist today as white people continue to deny the role of racism, genocide and oppression in the formation of the United States and to believe our nation is currently discrimination-free despite significant data to the contrary (i.e., discrimination and disparities in housing, employment, the criminal justice system, just to name a few).

“see” the realities of everyday racism that people of color experience) to describe the collective denial of white people who remain blind to the numerous ways that people of color experience racism on a daily basis. Thus, today, many racist attitudes are less about intentional maliciousness than about a form of collective mental illness that has been created insidiously through socialization into unconscious racism.

Existing Diversity Models

There are a number of diversity models that have been developed since the Civil Rights legislation of the 1960s prohibited discrimination in the workplace and brought about affirmative action policies and the proliferation of diversity training. These models vary from training workshops that focus simply on individual awareness of differences to major systemic initiatives that involve efforts to change not only individual awareness, but organizational culture and climate as well.

Social psychosis is not, however, the only social defense mechanism employed by white people. When white people (who have historically engaged in genocide, lynching and other acts of barbaric cruelty), view African Americans as savages, clearly ‘social projection’ is at play. Instead of owning the reality of this country’s history and the violence and inequality on which it was founded, and acknowledging the brutality of the lynching that white people have engaged in, many white people project violent characteristics onto people of color, seeing them as dangerous and aggressive.

Some models focus on “managing diversity” (Thomas, 1991), “valuing diversity” (Griggs, 1995) or “leveraging diversity” (Thomas and Ely, 1996) as ways to improve organizational effectiveness and performance. None of these models, however, focus on surfacing and challenging materialism or bringing about racial and social justice.

In fact, in the OD community, consultants bring a wide range of different values to the work they do. Driscoll (1993) describes the two sets of values and assumptions - outlined by Jackson & Holvino (1988) - that “change agents” bring to their work stating, “[o]ne set supports the maintenance and accommodation of a status quo that is perceived to be basically healthy and harmonious. The other promotes the radical transformation of a status quo that is perceived to be exclusive, unhealthy and unjust” (p. 56).

There are diversity models, therefore, that combine organizational change with social justice work. These models do contain tools designed to challenge white supremacy and oppression (Cross & White, 1996). Cross & White (1996), for example, point out that to manage diversity, it is essential to “confront the long legacy of racist and

sexist attitudes and practices in our country,” (p.1) and that:

“the management of diversity requires people to attend to deep-seated and often unacknowledged biases and prejudice [and] requires the organization to do an honest and careful review of how those biases and prejudices have been incorporated into the entire corporate culture and have become systemic racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination” (p. 16).

Nonetheless, these models are not designed to challenge the ideology of materialism.

The materialism ideology remains dominant in organizations today. In fact, when working with for-profit organizations, OD and diversity consultants often define success in terms of increased profit, productivity and/or market competitiveness (Thomas, 1991, Cross & White, 1996, Kirby & Harter, 2002). Because profit and productivity are the primary motivating factors for these clients, they have the client create what is called a “business case” (Kirby and Harter, 2002). In other words, they have the organizational leaders examine the ways that becoming a more diverse,

multicultural and/or just and equitable organization will help them become more productive, profitable and competitive.²² This is practical but problematic in a number of ways. When profit and competitiveness are the criteria for evaluating diversity initiatives, these initiatives can fall prey to being cut during periods of economic downturn or if there is not ongoing evidence of a positive impact on the organizations' bottom line (Vogel, 2009).

A perfect example is a law firm I did some work for a number of years ago with a colleague of mine. This large New York City law firm was interested in having us help them because they were having difficulty retaining associates, particularly female associates and associates of color. The firm's motivation in hiring us was not to create social justice in their firm. In actuality, they had been losing associates of color for a long time prior to retaining us. The firms had put significant effort

into hiring associates of color, and had been somewhat successful in their recruitment efforts, but were not as successful in their retention of these associates.

But, since the economy was booming, not only were they losing associates of color, but they were losing white associates as well and were facing greater competition in hiring new associates of color. They needed to retain associates in general. And they specifically needed to be able to continue to successfully recruit associates of color or their diversity numbers would be compromised. We were brought in to work with the firm's Quality of Life Committee. The Committee's mandate was to find ways to improve the quality of life for the firm's associates so as to better retain them. The individuals on the committee informed us that their goal was to create an environment in which all associates would feel respected.

The Chairman of the firm supported our coming in to work with the firm. In fact, the Chairman wanted us to conduct a firm-wide training for the entire New York City office and made the training mandatory for all attorneys (partners included), legal assistants and senior administrators. He wanted us to conduct workshops that would:

²² This is clearly what Thomas (1991) did when he coined the term "managing diversity" and wrote:

Managers must be clear about this; everything this book has to say about diversity is grounded in this business rationale: to thrive in an increasingly unfriendly marketplace, companies must make it a priority to create the kind of environment that will attract the best new talent and will make it possible for employees to make their fullest contribution (p. 4, emphasis added).

- Create a supportive environment to enable the exploration of how different groups experience the firm's work environment;
- Facilitate a discussion about ways to improve the quality of life at the firm; and
- Provide an opportunity for participants to engage in dialogue and learn about each other's perspectives.

We were excited because we knew that having support and commitment from organizational leadership is vital for being successful in organizational change work.

Prior to designing and facilitating the training sessions, we conducted focus groups and interviewed partners, associates and administrators. It was clear from the data we collected that both partners and senior associates routinely treated others disrespectfully and, in some cases, abusively. Junior associates felt that they were treated like commodities rather than as individual human beings. Among the other issues that surfaced from the data collection were:

- Partners and senior associates had no concern for/were insensitive to the quality of life of junior associates and support staff members;
- There was a dearth of partners, associates, and senior administrators

of color but a large number of support staff members of color;

- There was a "sink or swim" mentality, with little to no mentoring provided to new associates;
- The informal rule was "one strike, you're out" creating a huge fear of making any mistakes; if a new associate made a mistake, he/she was rarely given a second chance and partners would become wary of giving him/her more work;
- Junior associates were afraid to ask questions for fear of being seen as incompetent and/or unprofessional;
- Assumptions about associates' intelligence were made quickly based on first impressions and those assumptions were difficult to overcome;
- There was a strong sense on the part of most of the white partners and some white associates that the firm was a complete "meritocracy;" that ability, not background, was the sole determiner of success. However, from the perspective of many associates, particularly associates of color, there was a strong sense that unintended bias and subjectivity created obstacles to fair judgments about merit. When partners would make negative assumptions about associates of color and the quality of their work, they

would fail to provide them with the work assignments necessary for their growth, thereby leaving them with no opportunities to demonstrate their abilities and creating a self-fulfilling prophecy;

- Associates of color described being expected to “blend in,” to leave their cultural identities at the door, and not discuss race or make it an issue in any way. To do otherwise, would leave them being seen as “not a good fit” for the firm and, thus, not eligible for partnership;
- Race and gender were treated as “taboo” topics not to be acknowledged or discussed; and
- If associates were not able to develop rapport with one or more partners, they would not have the support they needed to obtain partnership.

Because the Chairman of the firm strongly supported the training, we thought the firm partners would be supportive as well. What we discovered, however, was that many partners expressed indifference at best, and contempt at worst, when they attended the training sessions. The few partners who were actually interested in and concerned about improving their communication skills, developing good workplace relationships with associates

and others, and creating a supportive and respectful work environment were the ones who least needed training.

Only slightly more than 50% of the partners attended this “mandatory” training. Associates commented on their absence, viewing it as a lack of commitment to the process. The partners’ absence left them feeling cynical rather than optimistic. Of the partners who did attend, a number of them spoke about having learned from the training process. Some stated that it had increased their awareness of the impact of power dynamics among associates and the fear that resulted from them. Others spoke about coming to understand the importance of developing good relationships with associates. Participation by some other partners, however, caused more damage than benefit. These partners made clear that they saw no value in attending the training. Despite the introduction by the firm’s Chairperson discussing his belief in the importance of developing better communication and interpersonal relationships, a number of them expressed that their time would be better spent “working.” In fact, at the end of one of the sessions in which there had been a significant amount of discussion and increased awareness among a number of

partners and senior associates about how their actions impacted junior associates, one white male partner declared to the whole group that it had been “a complete waste of time” for him. He and some other partners saw “working” as including only time spent with clients and/or working on projects that were billable and produced a tangible result; profit. Spending time learning to develop stronger interpersonal skills and learning about the perspectives of associates at the firm, on the other hand, was deemed a “waste of time.”

When the topic of disrespectful treatment of associates was raised, one white male partner asserted definitively that if any partner in the firm were to treat an associate with disrespect, they would be dealt with severely. This was certainly not in line with the data we had collected. Not surprisingly, this statement was met by complete silence, with the exception of some muffled laughter in the room. I asked all the participants how associates were made aware of this fact so that they could feel safe filing a grievance in the event that they were treated disrespectfully. This question was also met by complete silence. Finally, one white male partner meekly stated that the firm sends a memo around to all staff members every year describing the firm’s

policy on “civility.” This statement was met with more silence, additional muffled laughter and a number of raised eyebrows. I then asked for a show of hands of individuals whose supervisor made clear to them that disrespectful behavior towards them would not be tolerated. Only one person raised her hand; a legal associate. When she shared what her supervisor had told her – that she should come to him if anyone ever treated her with disrespect, there were looks of incredulity around the room. Based on this reaction and comments from the interviews we had conducted prior to the workshop, partner mistreatment of associates was clearly tolerated, especially by those partners considered to be “rainmakers.” Associates were treated not as individuals but as fungible, easily replaceable commodities that were less valuable than money or partners who bring in a lot of money.

Racism was in evidence as well. As part of the training, we had participants create small groups, each including one partner. We distributed handouts to these groups that included some anonymous quotes from the data collection process that illustrated the range of different perceptions in the firm. The hope was that in these small groups, the information

in the handouts might provide an opening to a discussion in which associates might feel safe enough to share their diverse perspectives. One of the perceptions listed was that unintended bias had a negative impact on the success of associates of color. After reading this, sitting in the middle of a small circle of associates, one of the white male partners simply, and loudly, dismissed the statement as “completely untrue.”

His unconscious racism²³ and unwillingness to look at impact rather than only intent, led him to believe that whatever he perceived, was “the truth.” In his mind, his reality was the only reality. Since he did not intend or perceive bias toward associates of color, anyone who perceived anything different was simply wrong. This partner’s unconscious racism and the “social psychosis” flowing from it, made it impossible for him to see either his own bias or the reality of the experiences of some people of color. In one fell swoop, he closed himself off to learning about another perspective and silenced the associates in the small group, making any discussion about the issue impossible.

²³ Research done by Mahzarin R. Banaji, Max H. Bazerman, and Dolly Chugh demonstrates that, despite claims of objectivity, human beings hold unconscious biases and make judgments based on unconscious stereotypes. They call this “implicit prejudice.” (2003).

We knew we were facing an uphill battle at this law firm. After this first round of training sessions, we met with the partners and administrators who had retained us to discuss next steps. We explained that further training would not likely be successful if the firm partners saw it as a waste of time. Clearly, the strong support of the firm Chairman alone was not enough. We suggested some strategies for interventions designed to obtain the buy-in of the law firm partners.

Soon after this, the market changed and the firm no longer experienced the same trouble with retention of white associates. They decided not to move forward with any further training or interventions. It may be that if the market had continued to be strong, leaving associates in great demand, the partnership may have come to see relationship building as important. However, once the market changed, there was no longer any motivation to engage in further training or interventions. This firm was not interested in social justice or a culture in which all employees are treated with respect. At most, they wanted to be able to retain the individuals they deemed to be the most talented so as to ensure the firm’s continued prosperity. How can interventions or trainings bring about social justice under circumstances in

which profit is valued over people and unconscious racist beliefs are left unexamined?

Unlike the partners at this law firm, however, a significant number of corporate leaders, including those at Ernst & Young, for example, have come to see managing diversity as an important strategy to gain a competitive edge and remain committed to it even during an economic recession (Ernst & Young, 2009). What is not clear, however, is whether their initiatives are, in fact, resulting in social justice and equity rather than simply serving to “[b]uild teams of people with varying perspectives, backgrounds and skills [that help] provide the best approach for [their] clients here in Canada, and around the world” (Ernst & Young, 2009, para 2). In fact, in reviewing pictures of the Ernst and Young firm “leaders” on the firm’s website, there appeared to be only one person of color represented among the almost thirty members of the Americas Executive Board and not even one person of color among the Global Executive leaders. The firm’s Americas Executive Board is identified as the “top decision-making body of the Americas Area, with accountability for executing strategy, including market leadership and growth, partner and people matters, quality and

risk management,” and the Global Executive is described as the group that “focuses on strategy, execution and operations, so that we deliver on the promise we make to our clients — to deliver seamless, consistent, high-quality client service, worldwide” (Ernst & Young, 2010, paras. 3, 4). So, while firms like Ernst and Young may be committed to hiring employees with diverse perspectives to better serve their global clients, they are not necessarily as committed to ensuring that their leadership body is diverse or that their organization operates in a way that is just and equitable for all employees.

In addition, as Kirby and Harter (2002) have pointed out, using the metaphor of “managing diversity” can result in an emphasis on the interests of managers with the possibility of seeing individuals merely as members of categories, marginalizing their individual needs and interests (pp. 39-41). In this way, employees become yet another “asset” that corporations need to manage effectively. This isn’t likely to lead to treating employees as individuals or seeing the importance of authentic and mutually beneficial work relationships. When profit and productivity are the motives and ultimate focus, diversity initiatives are susceptible to being pushed

to the side if they are not seen as sufficiently contributing to production and profit making activities. How can systemic racism and oppression be eliminated in organizations in which success is measured solely in terms of profit and efficiency rather than in terms of relationships and community well-being?

It is easy to understand how the ideology of materialism can make it difficult to create systemic change for social justice in organizations in which the reason d'être is making a profit. "What about a not-for-profit organization?" you might ask. Not-for-profit organizations do not exist for the sole purpose of making money. In fact, many of them are in existence for the purpose of furthering social justice and equity. Ironically, a number of OD and diversity consultants see working in the public and non-profit sectors as more difficult than in the private sector because there is no "bottom line" to which the work can be connected, and because the reward and decision-making systems are different (Driscoll, 1993). Even nonprofit organizations, whose missions ostensibly involve social justice, rarely devote the time and resources necessary to create justice in their own organizations.

An example is an experience some colleagues and I had with a not-for-

profit member organization that is explicitly committed to "diversity and equality," and whose reason for existence is to provide an alternative to profit-motivated food stores by working cooperatively and avoiding products produced through the exploitation of others. The organization was originally created and run by a handful of volunteers, primarily white, out of a tiny storefront. As the years passed, it became increasingly larger, expanding to a diverse membership of thousands and requiring almost forty full-time paid staff members. In response to this growth, the organization expanded to occupy two large multi-level buildings. It expended a large amount of resources (both financial and human) to obtain the space as well as to design and renovate it. The organization had, therefore, responded to the growth of the membership by investing in a new physical infrastructure.

It had not, however, responded the same way in terms of its human resources infrastructure. Despite the growth in diversity of the organization's membership, the management team was continuing to operate as a small group of individuals from the same racial background. The organization had experienced a number of incidents of conflict between members, between

members and staff, and between staff members that were racially charged. The organizational leadership decided, therefore, to retain a group of consultants to provide diversity training for its staff members. They were willing to retain as consultants only individuals who were members of the organization. In exchange for their services, the consultants would receive work slot credit rather than financial compensation. (All organizational members are required to work about three hours each month as a condition for membership.) A staff Diversity Committee was created and charged with selecting the consultants and coordinating the training process. The Committee interviewed a number of individuals and selected five members (of whom I was one) to serve as the consulting team. The five of us had never met or worked together before and came with a range of different approaches to and philosophies about the work. As a result, we needed to expend a significant number of hours getting to know each other, learning how best to work together and reaching consensus on how to move forward.

We agreed that our first step would be to collect data to obtain input from all staff members and learn more about their specific needs and concerns. Because

we brought different perspectives on data collection, it took a number of lengthy meetings and a series of back and forth emails for us to reach agreement on a proposal to submit to the Diversity Committee, which served as our point of contact with the organization. After a number of meetings with the Committee to discuss our proposal, the Committee submitted it to the leadership team for its approval. It was not until about six months had passed that we were able to initiate a series of focus groups that involved almost all of the staff and members of the management team. Among the issues that surfaced were:

- The organization's management team was predominantly white and male despite the diversity among both line staff and members;
- The increased diversity of line staff and members (e.g., race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, power, values and priorities, different perceptions about what constituted "good work," language, religion, talents and abilities, motivations, etc.) was a source of conflict and challenge;
- Complaints of discriminatory enforcement of certain policies based on racial prejudice/bias;

- A need for more effective communication strategies between and across staff levels;
- The prioritization of speed and efficiency was creating stress and taking a toll on the capacity to develop and maintain good relationships either between line staff or with members; and
- A lack of formal leadership/supervisory training.

Because of the different philosophies members of the consulting team brought to this work, simply agreeing on how to present the findings to the Diversity Committee was enormously time-consuming.²⁴ Again, it took a significant number of meetings and email exchanges for us to reach consensus. Eventually, we provided the Diversity Committee with a report on our findings. We explained that, just as the physical infrastructure of the organization had to undergo significant change in response to the significant organizational growth, so too did the human infrastructure. We provided the Committee with a proposal for a long-term change initiative, targeted at the

²⁴ Some members of the consultant team wanted simply to provide a summary of the data and create recommendations for a training schedule. Others of us felt it was important to present recommendations that would focus on the organizational culture and systemic change necessary to address the issues that had been raised by the data.

individual, group and systemic levels that would involve:

- Discussions about the impact of the organization's rapid growth and change to enable clarification of roles and responsibilities, and an examination of existing systems, processes and organizational structure;
- Strategic planning with and coaching for the organization's management team;
- Leadership training;
- Team-building; and
- On-going training on examining biases/cultural assumptions as well as the dynamics of power and privilege.

We faced challenges from the existing organizational culture from the start. The organization measured success based on the growth of organizational membership and physical facilities rather than the quality of relationships among staff, among members or between staff and members. Our first challenge was finding significant chunks of time that members of the Diversity Committee could/were allowed to meet with us. It was difficult to cover much ground or sustain momentum when meeting times were limited and there were often several weeks in between meetings. Moreover, as is typical when working with a group, we

faced a microcosm of the race and power dynamics experienced in the overall organization within the Diversity Committee itself. The Committee consisted of about six individuals, one of whom was the sole management team representative (a white female and one of only two white individuals on the Committee). While the Committee supposedly made decisions in which all members had an equal vote, the management team representative's vote appeared to hold more weight than those of other Committee members. As we surfaced and processed these dynamics, we encountered resistance from the management team representative. She kept insisting that the Committee was not authorized to engage in "group process work" because the Committee's mandated mission was limited to coordinating training. She expressed strongly her views that the Committee meetings be limited to logistics for and coordination of the training rather than be about "process and emotions." In addition, it became apparent over time that the Committee's authority was limited to making recommendations to the leadership team, not making independent decisions. This made the process enormously time-consuming as all decisions needed to be vetted by the Committee and then reviewed and approved by the leadership

team as well. Before the training had even begun, two of the original consultants on the team had left, leaving only three of us.

Other challenges involved the amount of time that the organization was willing to allocate to the work. We were told that trainings could be no more than three hours in length and could only take place on certain days and times. Eventually, we were able to design and facilitate two complete training series, which almost all staff members attended. The first series of three-hour trainings focused on assumptions and cultural awareness while the second series focused on exploring the issues of power and privilege. Data from these training series supported the data from the focus groups. Staff members were hungry for the opportunity to spend time together reflecting on their work and their relationships. By the time we had completed these two training series, we had been working with the Committee for about two years during which time we received no financial compensation for our time. The progress of the work was slow because of the time it took both for members of the consulting team to meet and reach consensus and for us to meet with the Diversity Committee to reach consensus. The amount of time we consultants spent on

this work was substantial. In some months, we each put in about 15 hours of time for meetings and communication (with each other and the Diversity Committee), workshop design and workshop facilitation. As a result, we had covered our work slots during the year and one half process and banked almost two years of future monthly work slots as well. We, therefore, submitted a proposal requesting that we receive financial compensation for part of our time (actual facilitation time but not meeting, planning, and design work) at a significant discount from our usual fees. As struggling entrepreneurs (and in my case, a single mother with child care issues), we could no longer continue to dedicate such large amounts of uncompensated time.

As with other proposals we submitted, this one resulted in a significantly lengthy time during which negotiations took place – first with the Diversity Committee and then with the leadership team. We did not reach an agreement an additional six months had passed. By this time, the momentum of the training process was gone and we were pressured to conduct a third training series – Part 1 of a two-part series on conflict resolution - as quickly as possible. Unfortunately, we mistakenly compromised our work and did not push back on the demand for presenting the

third series within a short timeframe. As a result we were not able to put in the amount of design and planning time required for us to develop a high quality product as we had been able to do for the first two training series. With limited design time, rather than being able to integrate and seamlessly blend our different approaches, the training ended up feeling like a patchwork of different styles. In addition, coincidentally, at that time, each of the three consultants was undergoing significant personal issues that also negatively impacted the quality of our work.

Unlike the prior two sets of trainings, the third training became the focus of an organizational staff meeting. Perhaps this was because of the combination of our having charged for our work along with having presented a lower quality product. The Diversity Committee provided us with a summary of the minutes of this meeting. It was interesting, however, that despite the fact that the evaluations we received from participants directly after the completion of each workshop were for the most part quite positive, minutes from this meeting consisted almost only of strongly negative reactions to the training. Ironically, while we certainly agreed that the quality of our work was not at our usual level, much of the criticism aimed at

us was the result of systemic and organizational issues. Staff members complained that:

- The workshops were too short, not providing sufficient time to process issues that surfaced or to engage in deep/intensive work;
- There had been too much time between the first set of workshops and this last one; and
- The organization should have hired and paid consultants who were used to working with each other.

When we received this feedback, we realized how we had allowed ourselves to internalize some of the perceived/constructed limitations of the client organization and, as a result, provided only proposals that we thought would be acceptable to the client, rather than what we believed to be the best possible options based on our experience and expertise. This not only left the client without the ability to make informed choices, but also negatively impacted the quality of our work. Because of the organization's purported time and financial constraints, we ended up watering down our recommendations, thereby eliminating the need for the organization to make hard decisions, facing and coming to terms with the interconnected issues of espoused organizational values, resource

allocation and organizational policies and norms. In response to the feedback report and our realization of the role we played in colluding with the organizational limitations, we presented the client with a new proposal in which we recommended that Part 2 of the Conflict Resolution Series consist of a two-day off-site retreat that would involve an integration of role play, analysis of group dynamics and sharing stories of conflict resolution.

Our proposal was rejected. They viewed our request as requiring time and funds that they were not prepared to invest. Even though the organizational leadership had been willing to put significant resources toward its physical infrastructure, it was not willing to do so for its human infrastructure. Thus, even this non-profit, justice-minded organization was caught in the belief system of elevating things of extrinsic value over those of intrinsic value. The mental and emotional needs of staff members, along with the need for more time to develop and build better relationships across difference at all levels of the organization, came second to the drive for growth and productivity. How can OD and diversity work be successful when organizations prioritize physical structures and productivity over human structures, the

needs of individuals and time for relationship building?

Return to Pre-Existing Ideologies

How can we bring about systemic change for social justice without understanding that the ideologies of materialism and white supremacy are toxic for all of us – the wealthy, the poor, white people and people of color? These ideologies result in injustice and inequity as well as significant injury at the psychological and spiritual levels. So how can we bring about systemic change for social justice without replacing these ideologies and healing the damage they have wrought on both organizations and the individuals who comprise them? We need to replace these ideologies and return to pre-existing ideologies such as the African philosophy of ubuntu, which focuses on the interdependence of human beings and the importance of the well-being of all members of the community (Hanks, 2008, Mazubiko, 2006), and the Buddhist belief in the interrelatedness of all beings (Nhat Hanh, 1975).²⁵ In a belief

²⁵ Today's quantum physicists are coming to understand the principles of these pre-existing ideologies. Zukav writes:

[T]he philosophical implication of quantum mechanics is that all of the things in our universe (including us) that appear to exist independently are actually parts of one all-encompassing organic

system based on spirituality and interdependence, there is an understanding that:

- People and relationships must take precedence over profit, possession and efficiency,
- Spiritual (intrinsic) value is more important than material (extrinsic) value;
- We are mutually interdependent. Thus, injustice for any is injustice for all and none of us can have well-being and safety until all of us do;
- We can transcend differences with a both/and rather than an either/or, dichotomous view of the world, understanding that differences exist not as polar opposites but as complementary parts of a whole;
- There are enough resources for all of us; we do not need to compete for scarce resources, but rather need to focus on community and well-being for all -- having all needs met is more important than individuals being able to accumulate possessions and profits;
- The ultimate measure of organizational success is an

pattern, and that no parts of the pattern are ever really separate from it or from each other (p.52).

environment in which all members are valued, respected and treated with true equity as part of a community; and

- To achieve organizational success requires healing of injuries and re-connection.

A belief system based on spirituality and interdependence encompasses the understanding that organizational productivity is important. However, it does not elevate economic growth and profit over people and relationships. It entails a balanced approach in which productivity is desired for the well-being of all organizational and community members, rather than just a select few at the expense of others.

hooks (2000) speaks to the need to change the focus from individual possession to mutual interdependence, stating, “[c]onfronting the endless desire that is at the heart of our individual overconsumption and global excess is the only intervention that can ward off the daily call to consume that bombards us on all sides” (p. 48). She goes on to write:

[T]he culture of consumerism must be critiqued and challenged ... [we all need] to undergo a conversation [to enable us] to center [our] lives around

nonmarket values. ... [I]t would mean that we embrace anew the concept of interdependency and accountability for the collectiveness of all citizens that is the foundation of any truly democratic and just society (p. 129, emphasis added).

An ideology based on spirituality and interdependence would provide the motivation for bringing about systemic change for social justice. If we were to focus on the health, interdependence and spiritual well-being of all individuals, we would see the need to make organizations and the world places in which all are respected, all have equal rights, and all have equal access to organizational and world resources – food, education, housing, etc. We would also come to understand the need for spiritually, mentally, physically and emotionally healthy organizational members and for authentic relationships between and among them. We would realize that just as the farmer has to focus on and pay attention to nurturing his land, so too, do organizations need to nurture the people and relationships that are essential to the collective good of all. A belief system like this would make it possible to dismantle systemic inequity and bring about

sustained systemic change for social justice in organizations.

Applying the New Ideology

Applying the new ideology would require analysis and work at two different levels; the macro level (which includes organizational systems and societal institutions) and the micro or individual level. Neither level can be effectively understood without seeing the ways they intersect and impact each other.

Analysis at the macro level would involve exploring the social and organizational context within which organizational members live and operate to determine how systems and institutions need to function differently so as to benefit and be equitable to all. This would consist of an examination not only of the organizational systems, policies and procedures (such as hiring, retention, job function, etc.) within any one specific organization but also all the societal institutions that impact organizational members.

Applying this ideology would require a significant investment of time, energy, effort and commitment to the development of authentic interactions and relationships within organizations. In many of today's frenzied, multi-tasking

environment, the forty-hour workweek has become a thing of the past.²⁶ It is simply taken for granted that the workweek can spread out to seven days with the workday extending to over twelve hours in length. In work places in which people are working this kind of pace, there is no time for reflection or critical examination of the dynamics of oppression, let alone time to develop genuine relationships of any kind.

When the focus is on the health and well-being of individuals, rather than solely on profit and productivity, however,²⁷ organizational leaders would

²⁶ In most organizations that I work in, particularly now that we are in a recession and employees have been laid off, organizational members are expected to constantly do more with less. One organizational leader told a group I was working with that, "the day of the forty-hour work week is over. You can still have a social life and go out in the evenings, but you may need to come back to your email at midnight to catch up on that time." This is consistent with the Western cultural focus on efficiency and material gain (Ani).

²⁷ There are a number of organizations that realize the importance of maintaining the welfare of their employees. In fact, the nonprofit organization, Winning Workplaces, develops a list of the top twenty small business workplaces each year. What makes many of these companies stand out is the fact that they are values-based businesses (i.e., they are committed to transparent communication, staff empowerment, teamwork, etc.). However, wonderful as these values are, they do not necessarily address the issue of white supremacy, let alone diversity. For example, Patagonia, one of the companies included in the 2010 list of top twenty small businesses, is known for its commitment to environmentalism and providing its employees with freedom and autonomy. Judging

understand that the workday must include time for organizational members to engage in reflection and have authentic interactions and relationships with each other. And, they would also understand that all organizational members must have a reasonable work-life balance, rather than a workplace that requires them to sacrifice family and leisure time.

The new ideology recognizes the importance of people and developing authentic relationships, which leads to a genuine desire for justice and healing. As part of developing authentic interactions and relationships, individuals need to be able to engage in conversations across their differences so as to understand our similarities and common humanity. For OD and diversity consultants to be able to facilitate these kinds of conversations, clients would need to:

- Be committed to doing what is necessary for individual and organizational healing, which is possible when individuals see the value to their souls and spirits in doing the work;
- Be open to learning -- to bring an open heart and an open mind;
- Listen with a desire to understand, rather than to be right;

from its web site, however, it has few, if any, employees of color (Patagonia, 2010).

- Be willing to bring and share their authentic selves and emotions;
- Be willing to bear witness to the experiences and perspectives of others;
- Be open to multiple “realities” and multiple “truths;” and
- Be willing to “sit in the fire”²⁸-- to continue the work even when it becomes hard and painful.

In addition to the above, OD and diversity consultants need to be able to:

- Create learning environments that are as safe as possible. When deep hurt and emotions are involved, it is impossible to create an entirely safe environment. However, it is essential to ensure that compassion takes the place of blame, shame, and guilt;
- Be honest about what is required in terms of time, commitment and effort;
- Bring a systemic lens and be able to provide an historical and social context;
- Engage in what hooks (1994) calls “engaged pedagogy.” In engaged

²⁸ The term “sit in the fire” comes from the book *Sitting in the Fire: Large Group Transformation Using Conflict and Diversity*, in which Arnold Mindell uses the term to refer to fearlessly engaging in the process work necessary to bring about positive transformation rather than avoiding conflict (p. 12).

pedagogy, consultants (as teachers) “believe that there is an aspect of [their] vocation that is sacred; who believe that [their] work is not merely to share information but to share in the intellectual and spiritual growth of [their] students” (p. 13). This means that consultants need to see our own learning and self-actualization as an ongoing process and be willing to be vulnerable, sharing our own narratives and taking risks along with participants; and

- Utilize learning methodologies that are experiential as well as didactic.

The Tools

Learning and engaging in deep self-reflection are critical elements in the work of developing authentic relationships. For this to be possible requires the use of methodologies that foster deep learning and enable individuals to access their unconscious and open themselves up to understand and empathize with the experiences of others, resulting in personal transformation and authentic relationships.

While it is important to bring data and knowledge in the form of historical and social context in a didactic manner, that alone is not sufficient. Similarly, while logic and reasoning have their place, they

do little to bring about deep self-awareness and internal change. It is essential, therefore, to involve individuals in activities that enable them to access and share their emotions and underlying beliefs and assumptions so as to be able to move beyond psychological defenses and surface thoughts and feelings that would otherwise not be accessible. This moves away from the Western focus on rationality (Ani, 1994) to encompass a more integrated focus that includes emotions and unconscious thoughts and beliefs as well.

The tools that make this possible include such things as stories, poetry, metaphors, films, and theatre. These tools can be particularly powerful and insight provoking because they provide a context that makes it possible to understand the complexity of and interplay between individual experiences and their social and political context. They appeal to all parts of an individual, not just to their reasoning faculties, enabling them to develop empathy and compassion both for themselves and others (Taylor, 1996).²⁹ All these methodologies are

²⁹ In European scientific thought, the linear/rational thought process is seen as in opposition and superior to nonlinear, emotional ways of knowing (Ani). However, brain scientists have come to understand that for the brain to function at high levels, there must be an integration between the left

effective in helping people understand other perspectives and “realities” (Mirriam-Goldberg, 2007).

Stories, poetry and metaphors, etc. enable individuals to be in touch with all parts of themselves in a more integrated fashion. They are vehicles to access the subconscious as well as inner wisdom and knowing. By being able to be in touch with themselves at that level, individuals can begin to see both how they and others have been harmed by the old ideologies, as well as the ways that they share similar emotions, needs and desires; common humanity. And, sharing stories between organizational members enables them to see “history” from various perspectives and develop empathy for each other’s experiences. When individuals write their own life stories and frame them in a social and political context, they can better understand their role in systemic oppression and help disrupt power dynamics and systems of oppression (Vermilya, 2007, p. 65).

brain mode of processing, which is linear, logical, and language-based) and the right brain mode of processing (which is nonlinear and holistic) (Siegel and Hartzell). This scientific understanding is similar to “principles expressed [in] African cosmology in which we have the fundamental ‘twinness’ of the universe; the complementary functions of opposites that cooperate to form the proper working of the whole” (Ani, p. 77)

I had the privilege recently of working with a client that embodies what I see as the hope for bringing about systemic change for social justice. This organization, a small foundation, is dedicated to transforming the criminal justice system and empowering individuals who were formerly incarcerated. What makes this organization unique is that in addition to having an externally focused social justice mission, it is also committed to social justice and equity within its own structure. It has done this by creating a true partnership between individual donors and grass-roots community organizers.³⁰ This commitment involves creating a decision-making body in which the donors (who currently are all white) and activists (who currently are predominantly people of color) share power and make all funding decisions by consensus, thereby empowering the organizers. By eliminating the hierarchy and power differentials present in most organizations, they make possible relationships built on power with (working together as equals and peers) rather than power over (working within a hierarchy in which some individuals have power over other

³⁰ These organizers are individuals who work in the criminal justice field who either have been formerly incarcerated or do work with organizations that promote the leadership of people who were formerly incarcerated.

individuals). The decision-making body consists of about twelve individuals who see the importance of taking the time to develop authentic relationships among themselves as part of the “work” that they are doing. They engage in deeply emotional (and sometimes difficult, provocative and painful) discussions with each other that involve sharing stories and talking openly about the impact of white supremacy, racism, unearned privileges, systemic oppression, etc. They are committed to both the funding work they do as well as to taking the time to enable their own internal spiritual growth and relationship-building. This organization can serve as a model for other organizations that are truly committed to bringing about systemic change for social justice.

It is not clear if this organization can maintain its focus on interpersonal relationships if it grows larger, however. The very size of most organizations creates a significant challenge to organizations being able to maintain their values and their interpersonal relationships. Perhaps, therefore, systemic change for social justice will come not from large-scale OD and diversity initiatives in large organizations, but through increased numbers of small organizations comprised of individuals

who are committed to alternative ways of being and doing so as to achieve social justice and equity. Understanding that growth in understanding and spirituality is the goal, rather than growth in size, it may be that we need to focus on building a movement to develop and support these kinds of small yet powerful and empowering organizations dedicated to social justice and equity.

Conclusion

This article examined whether OD and diversity consulting have the capacity to foster sustained systemic change for social justice in organizations in the United States. My premise is that systemic racism and oppression was built with and continues to be maintained by the ideologies of materialism and white supremacy. My conclusion is that to achieve sustained systemic change for social justice we need to replace these ideologies and return to pre-existing belief systems of spirituality and interdependence so as to bring about true justice and equity.

The ideology of spirituality and interdependence recognizes the importance of people and developing authentic relationships, which leads to a genuine desire for justice and healing. Applying this ideology requires certain

commitments on the part of both clients and consultants as well as the use of tools and methodologies that foster deep learning and enable individuals to access their unconscious and open themselves up to understand and empathize with the experiences of others, resulting in personal transformation and authentic relationships.

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