PCMA

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O.D. ≠ M.C.O.D

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The Program on Conflict Management Alternatives
at The University of Michigan

THE PROGRAM ON CONFLICT MANAGEMENT ALTERNATIVES

The Program on Conflict Management Alternatives was established in January, 1986 by a grant from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and additional funds from the University of Michigan. These basic grants were renewed in July, 1988 and again in July, 1991. The Program supports an agenda of research, application, and theory development. PCMA also establishes links among other university research and teaching efforts relevant to conflict management alternatives, and maintains liaison and collaboration with similar efforts in other Universities and Practitioner agencies. The Program staffers own work focuses explicitly on the relationship between social justice and social conflict, specifically: (a) the use of innovative settlement procedures and roles for disputants and third parties; (b) the institutionalization of innovative mechanisms and the adoption of organizational and community structures that permanently alter the way conflicts are managed; and (c) the fundamental differences and inequalities between parties that often create conflict and threaten its stable resolution.

We examine these issues primarily in United States' settings, in conflicts arising within and between families, organizations and communities, and between different racial, gender, and economic constituencies. These specific efforts are supported by a variety of research and action grants/contracts with governmental agencies, foundations, and private and public organizations/agencies.

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O.D. ≠ M.C.O.D.*

Organizational Development is a broad term describing a wide variety of practices. Generally coming into common language in the 1970s, it was a natural outgrowth of the emerging field of industrial psychology and the human relations school of individual change applied to large scale systems. Pioneered by applied social scientists and professional change agents often linked to the philosophy and tactics of the National Training Laboratories, it quickly became an important element in the liberal community's arsenal of change strategies and the corporate community's efforts to improve the fit between the human and technical facets of organizational operations. More recently, some practitioners have begun to apply the philosophy and tactics of OD to social systems dealing with issues of diversity and/or social justice, and to work toward MCOD - MultiCultural Organizational Development. In this piece I contend that traditional forms of OD and the new forms of MCOD are not happy partners, and that the differences between them are major and crucial.

What is OD?

OD is a broad and diverse field, and since it has been rooted partly in the academy, many texts, anthologies and review articles have been written that espouse its primary assumptions, principles and tactics of change-making (Burke & Goodstein, 1980; French, Bell & Zawicki, 1989; Friedlander & Brown, 1974; Sashkin & Burke, 1987; Sikes, Drexler & Gant, 1989). Its principal goals generally have included the simultaneous increase of

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organizational profitability or efficiency and the full utilization of human resources, as well as the satisfaction of organizational members. In the pursuit of this agenda, it generally is assumed that individual goals, and diverse individuals' goals, and organizational goals can be met with minimal conflict. Organizational conflict generally is not seen as inevitable or inherent, but as the result of faulty communication, bureacratic malfunctioning and the distortions created by divisions of power and task or unit specialization.

The key principles of OD have been summarized rather succintly as follows (Goodstein & Cooke, 1984; Pfieffer & Jones, 1978; Sherwood, 1983):

-it is a long range effort to introduce planned change
-it is based on a diagnosis that is shared by the members of an   organization
-it involves the entire organization or a coherent system or part thereof
-it has the goal of increasing organizational effectiveness and enhancing organizational choice and self-renewal
-it utilizes various strategies to intervene into ongoing activities of the organization in order to facilitate learning and to make choices about alternative ways to proceed

The major tactics utilized by organizational development specialists and organizational managers to achieve these goals include:

-training and coaching
-goal setting and planning
-process consultation
-survey (or other data) feedback
-intergroup problem solving
-technostructural intervention
-team-building
-crisis intervention
-quality of work life programs
-quality circles
-total quality management programs

For the most part, these principles and tactics are consistent with a <u>consensus model</u> of organizations (Crowfoot & Chesler, 1982), and with what Bolman & Deal (1984) label the human relations or (techno)structural perspective. They reflect the rational-empirical and especially the normative-reeducative models of change originally suggested by Chin & Benne (1969), the attitude change strategy articulated by Walton (1965), and the professional-technical perspective suggested by Crowfoot & Chesler (1974).

To be sure, there are competing tendencies within this field, and some practitioners and theorists have advanced a view and practice of OD that is more tuned to a <u>conflict model</u> of organizations (Bowen, 1977; Burke & Hornstein, 1972; Crowfoot & Chesler, 1982; Espinosa & Zimbalist, 1978; Friedlander & Brown, 1974; Holvino, 1993; Patten, 1979; Ross, 1971; Thomas, 1976). These authors have suggested a political approach to understanding and managing organizations (Bolman & Deal, 1984), one that emphasizes a political model of change (Chin & Benne, 1969; Crowfoot & Chesler, 1974), or a "power strategy" (Walton, 1965), and the relevance of power, conflict and status hierarchies. Theorists and practitioners operating from this vantage point often see conflict as an inherent aspect of all organizations, starting with the difficulty of creating a harmonious fit between individuals' needs and organizational priorities. They are likely to focus on using or surfacing structural conflict among different organizational units, among people of different social (or racial or gender) categories or statuses, and between workers or workers' labor unions and management cadres or owners: the goal of such work is to clarify and then negotiate different parties' interests and positions. But this latter approach, and practical applications based upon it, is confined largely to union activists or to academic rhetoric; it is a quite minor theme in orchestrated OD efforts at change-making.

The distinctions between consensus-oriented and conflict-oriented models of OD occur on a continuum, and not as a clear bifurcation; mixed models clearly are being utilized in practice.

<u>What is MCOD?</u>

Scholars and practitioners advancing the language and approach of MCOD developed much of their view and craft from the additional legacy of the civil rights and feminist movements. Prior to the arrival of systematic works on MCOD (e.g., Cox, 1991; Jackson & Holvino, 1988; Katz, 1988), and despite a few pioneering studies of race and gender relations in organizations (Alderfer et al., 1980; Alvarez & Lutterman, 1979;

Fernandez, 1981; Kanter, 1977; Sargent, 1976), several reviewers pointed out that "many major works on OD do not emphasize issues related to race and minorities (Jennings & Wells, 1989, p. 107)." The field of organizational behavior also has been faulted for the "absence of research reports of the effects of race and ethnicity (Cox, 1990, p. 6)." If issues of race and gender were given little attention in the OD literature, discussions of class issues were, if anything, even rarer (Holvino, 1993).

In practical work in the field, moreover, Jackson & Holvino argue that "Traditional organizational development (OD) efforts have not made the kind of impact on social oppression in the workplace that its founders had hoped (1988, p.1)." In particular, individual consciousness raising about prejudice and discrimination was judged to have had limited success in creating lasting organizational change (Jackson & Holvino, 1988), and training interventions in the 1970s generally were not seen as having led to comprehensive efforts to alter organizational power and culture (Katz, 1988). Beyond training, relatively few research or practice efforts were undertaken that went beyond equal opportunity and affirmative action programs; innovations ocurred primarily around the recruitment and hiring of people of color and women. Indeed, Fine et al. (1990, p. 305) argue that, "Early work on diversity in the workplace assumed that difference should be eliminated, that everyone, regardless of color or gender, should strive to be alike". Those few efforts that did address organizational racism (or sexism) focused on policies aimed at controlling or reducing the most overt forms of prejudice and discrimination. These are important gains, to be sure; but they were quite limited. By and large, these change efforts were concentrated at the margins and at lower levels of organizations, and avoided challenges to or changes in organizational (mono)cultures and raced/gendered power relations.

Authors concerned with MCOD begin with the problem of social diversity, variously stated. There are, to be sure, differences among the major writers and practitioners in this subfield: some focus on diversity and the effort to understand and accomodate differences, while others focus on achieving equality and social justice. The difference is similar to the

difference between consensus and conflict views of OD in general, of race and gender relations in our society and organizations, and between change that is driven by good will and enlightenment or by power. The distinction between the assumptions underlying consensus-oriented MCOD and conflict-oriented MCOD, like similar distinctions among OD variants, also occur on a continuum rather than a duality. They are depicted visually in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1

ORIENTATIONS AND ASSUMPTIONS OF DIFFERENT APPROACHES
TO ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE.

	Consensus ⟵————————⟶ Conflict	
Organizational Development	Common values Mutual organizational interests Harmonious workplace Person-organization fit Authority is trustable Coordinate via collaboration	Disparate values Competing org'l interests Contest and struggle in workplace Authority is exploiter Coordinate via control

MultiCultural Organizational Development	Racial harmony near
	Gender bias treatable
	Prejudice is the problem
	Diversity is the issue
		Racial hostility here
		Gender bias deep
		Organizational oppression
		  is the problem
		Societal oppression
		  supports the organization
		Dominance/oppression
		  is the issue

Among those MCODers who advocate a social justice agenda, there generally is agreement on several important propositions.

-Racial (and gender and class, etc.) differences have powerful impact on people and organizations. This social diversity embodies differences in attitudes, behavioral styles, ways of thinking, culture, and the like.
-In a society that constantly translates differences into ranking systems, some of the characteristic styles of diverse groups are seen as better than others. Thus, when diverse -and diversely valued - styles encounter one another in an organization, white and male styles dominate those of people of color and

women. People of color and women (among others) have been systematically oppressed in the larger society, and thus in most organizations as well. In turn, white males are systematically privileged, empowered and preferenced. -When the oppressed resist their oppression, overt interest group conflict (racial, gender and class conflict) naturally ensues. This conflict is not primarily the result of poor communication, inadequate managerial structures, poor coordination of task roles, or poor fit between person and organization; it is primarily the result of systems of oppression and monopolies of racial and gender power in society and organizations.

MultiCultural Organizational Development specialists generally articulate an approach to organizational change that is frankly anti-racist and anti-sexist. The multiculturalism that is sought is not simply an acceptance of differences, nor a celebrative affirmation of the value of differences, but reduction in the patterns of racial and gender oppression (racism and sexism) that predominate in most U. S. institutions and organizations. As one example, Cross (1991) makes it clear that her approach to "managing diversity" includes the amelioration of oppression, and necessarily surfaces intergroup conflict.

A consensus-oriented approach to MCOD stresses the possibility of reform in organizational racism and sexism, etc. It is reflected in programs of "understanding differences" and "valuing diversity". These programs may help organizations make important gains involving increased recruitment, support and advance for women and people of color, and re-education of white managers and elites. But they do not tackle issues of domination and oppression. Thus, in my view, OD, and even OD that includes racism and sexism awareness programs, does not equal MCOD.

How is MCOD to be done? What are the tactics utilized by MCODers? The tactics are as varied as the tactics of OD specialists. But, they generally include the necessity of challenging the culture and structure of white male oppression. Such challenge can be mounted via (Jackson & Holvino, 1988; Katz, 1988):

-educational tactics to inform and enlighten white male managerial cadres through awareness or bias-reduction training
-development and mobilization of leadership among employees/managers of color and women, and the formation of interest groups, cadres and caucuses whereby members of oppressed groups can support one another in their efforts to change themselves and the organization of which they are a part.

-change in human resource and personnel policies and programs in order to meet diverse populations' needs
-creation of new organizational mission statements, symbols and myths, and norms, and the alteration of reward systems so as to punish or reward managers for behavior on issues of racism and sexism
-creation of coalitions across race, gender and status divisions
-negotiated decision-making and interest-based bargaining as ways of utilizing conflict productively
-generation of the power with which to influence, threaten or coerce the change process, and the use of pressure and threat, including whistle blowing, protests and external agents
-multi-cultural forms of conflict resolution and dispute settlement

Power, including racial and gender power, seldom is "shared" or given away - absent challenge and pressure. When power changes, it generally is "taken", and therefore the development of new sources of power among formerly oppressed and disempowered organizational members is vital to this approach.

Both OD and MCOD may use a variety of specific organizational change tactics, as suggested earlier. One of the key differences between the conflict and consensus models of change, whether practiced by ODers or MCODers, involves their relative emphasis on communication and trust, or on power and pressure, as tactics. Figure 2 categorizes some common change tactics by their relative congruence with the consensus (olive branch or trust and communication) model or the conflict (two by four or power and pressure) model. Careful choices must be made among these various tactics and tactical approaches. Consensus, or olive branch, tactics may work well in establishing a cooperative context for change, generating racial understanding and creating change in a relatively equal power situation. But they may not work well in situations of great power difference; in fact, then they may easily lead to delay, cooptation, tokenism and agreements to make changes that are not implemented. Conflict, or power and pressure, tactics on the other hand, can bring long-repressed issues to the fore (especially when gulfs among groups are great or calcified), command attention, speed up action, and provide the framework for monitoring implementation efforts. They may not work well if backed by insufficient power; then elites who experience threat may counter-organize and overwhelm a change effort.

FIGURE 2

WAYS OF THINKING ABOUT MAKING ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

	The "OLIVE BRANCH" approach: Trust and communication - Consensus	The "TWO BY FOUR" approach: Power and pressure - conflict
ASSUMPTIONS	Everyone is in this together	Not everyone is in this in the same way or for the same things
	Decision-makers can and do want to improve the situation Lower-level members do not have a lot to say or do about it	Power brokers will not improve the situation on their own Lower-level members can and do have a lot to say and do about it
	Not too much is wrong	A lot is wrong
	Conflict is unnecessary and can be overcome	Conflict is natural and can be a force for change
GENERAL APPROACH	Cooperative problem-solving	Constituency organizing and surfacing conflict
	Appeal to decision-makers with information with needs or concerns with grievances/requests with shared values	Persuade and pressure power brokers with information with pressure with incentives with demands
	Educate and persuade managers with reason with information with incentives with support with new options	Threaten managers with disclosure with embarrassment with disruption with lack of support with a "way out"
WORKING "WITH"	Decision makers and staffs	Others of the constituency or interest group
	Internal informal influentials	Internal cadres External agents/agencies
	Consensus	Coalition

Despite these contrasts, as with Figure 1, this is a bifurcated and therefore simplified presentation. In the reality of organizational life, and in organizational consultations for change, there is a much more complex continuum with many mixed options. For instance, it may take pressure and threats of disruption by people of color and women (conflict strategy) to convince white male managers and executives to re-educate themselves (consensus strategy) regarding racism and sexism, and to take action to counter institutional discrimination. By the same token, it may take sustained pressure to enable these white men to maintain the personal and organizational changes so generated. In my own work, as in the work of most MCOD theorists or practitioners, but to a lesser extent in the work of ODers, moving back and forth across these lines is common.

Does MCOD = OD?

The challenge of justice-oriented MCOD to OD occurs, thus, on several levels. First, there are assumptive and analytic differences. MCOD assumes that on issues of race and gender, power is so embedded in the white male hierarchy that white males have a strong self-interest in maintaining that power and privilege. It is hard to imagine serious change occuring around these issues without serious struggle and conflict. How much "power sharing" will be undertaken by those with most of the power - and the privileges that come with power? Typically, power sharing is rather quickly redefined by managers as democratic or participatory management, and then further redefined in practice (and perhaps redefined right out of existence) as employee involvement. Second, in the face of these differences and conflicts of interest, it is difficult for anyone to ascertain and work on behalf of the interests of the "entire organization". If the organization is conceived as a political system (Bolman & Deal, 1984), the good of the entire system is constantly in negotiation among competing interest groups. Thus, when consensus-oriented ODers or MCODers say they are working for the good of the entire system, in a non-partisan or neutral manner, they usually are working for, and for the good of, the managerial cadre -

those who hire and fire consultants as well as underlings (Bowen, 1974; Ross, 1971). Inasmuch as managerial cadres are disproportionately white and male, this is a difficult stance from which to work for the interests of people of color and women in the organization.

Some of the major challenges that MCOD poses to traditional OD are summarized in Figure 3.

FIGURE 3

MCOD'S CHALLENGES TO OD

- White males are unlikely to change without significant appeal (including threat) to their self-interest

- Power must be taken to be shared

- Race and gender oppression is the rule; it is a fundamental element in U.S. organizations

- An organization is composed of units and people who differ from one another and are in (overt or covert) conflict with one another in important ways

- Organizational norms (and thus reward systems) reflect the dominance of the white male culture and its power

- People with power who are threatened by struggle will resist change and will counterattack (overtly or covertly)

- The core power for change will come from people of color, women and other oppressed groups

- On some occasions, some white males will vigorously support and join the MCOD effort

So OD ≠ MCOD!

It is clear that MCOD utilizes some of the assumptions and many of the tactics of OD. But other traditional OD assumptions and many other OD tactics are not shared; they are even contravened.

If MCOD is so different from OD, in assumptions about the nature of society and organizations, in analyses of difference and oppression, and in tactics of change, what

happens when OD assumptions, analyses and tactics are employed in a MCOD effort? Can OD be effective in reducing institutional oppression? Not if it follows the basic principles of traditional OD outlined above, and agreed to by many of the major writers and practitioners in the field. Can MCOD be done (and done well) without challenging the centers of monocultural power and norms? Not if it truly seeks socially just and anti-racist/anti-sexist organizations. The degree of challenge, and its relative noise or threat level, may be highly variable, but some challenge -and therefore conflict - is crucial.

When OD, or a consensualist form of MCOD, is utilized in a true MCOD effort, change tactics are utilized that often prematurely seek consensus rather than surface or explore conflict, that celebrate difference rather than challenge dominance or oppression, that help individuals adjust to monocultural norms and power systems rather than alter power structures and cultures themselves, that create individual changes while maintaining organizational structures and cultures of racial and gender power, that mask struggle with a patina of enlightened rhetoric and tokenism, and that maintain if not solidify organizational monoculturalism. Its current popularity, moreover, has led some observers to label diversity and MCOD as the new "race industry" (Mohanty, 1989-90); an industry more interested in its own maintenance and profit than in combatting oppression and attaining social justice.

Realistically speaking, can managers and consultants survive economically and politically by using a MCOD approach that challenges white and male power structures and cultures, that surfaces and utilizes race and gender conflict? The evidence is increasing that some leaders in major organizations in the U.S. society are reading the danger of the current situation of race and gender oppression accurately. Whether prompted by notions of workforce 2000, by economic market necessities, by increasing racial and gender conflict in workplaces and livingplaces, by notions of charity and good will to all, or by commitments to social justice and the "right thing to do", there are major players who understand the assumptions underlying the MCOD approach. Indeed, books on valuing or managing diversity and a diverse workforce are selling apace (Jamieson & O'Mara, 1991;

Johnston & Packer, 1987; Loden & Rosener, 1991; Thomas, 1990), and according to Cox's rather optimistic view, many corporate managers "are already convinced that the multicultural model is the way of the future (1991, p. 40)." Whether they can and will act on that conviction, and how long they will invest in taking the risks and helping to make the changes that flow from this approach, and that hopefully flow from the work of MCOD specialists, remain to be seen.

On the other hand, there also is substantial evidence that major stakeholders in current U. S. organizations resist this approach, and seek to defend their own and others' racial and gender privileges, especially when challenged. Then MCODers have a hard time surviving - as academicians or managers or consultants. But oppressed groups in the United States are also having a hard time surviving right now - with or without MCOD. So the questions are: Whose survival? Survival at what level of economic and moral comfort or security? Eventually, none of us are very likely to survive in a society that is not able to respond proactively and progressively to continuing racial privilege and oppression.

As long as we do not test these possibilities of justice-oriented MCOD work, or confuse traditional OD and MCOD, we fail in our vision and our struggle for a socially just and multicultural future.

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