A *praxis* and research agenda for multicultural human services organizations

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Human services organizations in the United States are currently faced with the problems of a diminishing and shifting resource base coupled with increasing demands for services. In addition, national demographic changes with increasing social diversity, and a rise in racial, ethnic, gender and other group-based tensions have posed special challenges for human service organizations. By tracing the history of social work approaches to working with ethnic minorities, this paper argues that responses to environmental flux have in fact been inadequate in addressing issues of social inequalities and injustices. We articulate a vision of socially just and diverse human services organizations that are both empowering and empowered. We call these Multicultural Human Services Organizations (MHSO). We spell out *praxis* and research agendas that continue the social justice-social diversity mission that is central to our vision.

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Introduction

Human services organizations in the United States are currently faced with the problems of a diminishing and shifting resource base coupled with increasing demands for services (Adams & Perlmutter, 1995). National demographic changes with increasing social diversity, contrasted with a "stasis in race relations, an intractability of gender hierarchy" (Williams, 1995: 16), and a rise in other group-based tensions, have posed special challenges for the social work profession (Gutiérrez, 1992; Strawn, 1994). Patricia Williams, in *The Rooster's Egg* (1995), writes about the continued "scarlet-lettering" of those on welfare, Black single teenage mothers, and "white trash." Such stigmatization serves to question and delegitimize the rights of underprivileged populations to government entitlements. Already, programs geared toward single mothers, the poor, and minorities are threatened with funding cutbacks or extinction. In combination, these forces have the potential to result in the provision of fewer services for people who find themselves at greater risk for a diminished quality of life. This "less for more" syndrome also has dramatic implications for human services organizations (HSOs). It fuels a survival instinct among HSOs that may result in competition over scarce resources, streamlining staff and services, specialization to serve a specific clientele or "problem population," alignment with dominant cultural ideologies to secure funding, or a complete social neglect of people and issues. "As public funding has dried up, [social service] organizations have turned to fund-raising strategies that make them look more like businesses operating as autonomous firms, and less like coordinating agencies subordinated to a larger community" (Adams & Perlmutter, 1995: 254). These issues take on crisis proportions for non-profit organizations, particularly public non-profits, whose funding base is already tenuous. The preoccupation with survival issues has led to a paucity of visions to meet the new challenges.

In this article, we briefly examine the history of social work's response to social diversity, particularly the development of ethnic sensitive practice. The history of social work in the United States contains important lessons in understanding the possibilities of organizational change in the context of great environmental flux. Noting that these practices have fallen short in addressing social change goals, we propose that HSOs can substantially impact the social conditions of their disadvantaged clientele by infusing a social justice mission throughout the organization. Lessons from multicultural organization development,

ethnic, empowerment-oriented, and feminist social movement agencies inform our vision of Multicultural Human Services Organizations. The *praxis* and research agendas provide some principles and ways of thinking about multicultural organizational change and research for HSOs.

Social work approaches to social diversity and oppression

Historically, social work's approach to diversity has focused on ethnic diversity. The *ethno-centric practice* – with its goal for clients to adapt and conform to dominant values, beliefs and behaviors – characterized the traditional mode of social work practice. Such practice aimed to assimilate people of color into the dominant system by demeaning and derogating ethnic and culturally based values and lifestyles (Chau, 1991). Examples include such deculturation practices as the child welfare and boarding school legacies endured by Native American populations (Horejsi, Craig & Pablo, 1992; Herring, 1989) and "Americanization" programs for new immigrants entering the United States (Carpenter, 1980; Iglehart & Bacerra, 1995; Jenkins, 1983).

The late sixties and early seventies mark an important turning point. The Civil Rights movement, coupled with anti-racist organizing within and outside of the profession, spurred change efforts to improve social work's relationship with people of color. The Council on Social Work Education passed a mandate requiring all schools of social work to include materials of racial and ethnic diversity in their curriculum (CSWE, 1973). In response, organizations aimed to become more accessible to minority clientele by tailoring interventions to fit clients' cultural value systems, reaching out to minority communities, and hiring staff from these communities. Practice changed from traditional monocultural, ethno-centric practice to *ethnic sensitive practice* – sensitive to the unique needs, values, and choices of different racial/ethnic groups (Chau, 1991; Devore & Schlesinger, 1981). Whereas in the former practice clients were subject to pity, ethnic sensitive social workers projected more feelings of tolerance, acceptance, and support (Gutiérrez, 1992). Other efforts link agencies to ethnic groups through outreach and hiring staff from the local communities (Fong & Gibbs, 1995; Gutiérrez, 1992).

Over the last two decades there has been a propagation of knowledge on ethnic sensitive practice. Despite such accumulation and dissemination of ethnic sensitive practice models, many gaps remain in providing services and changing the life conditions of people of color and other disenfranchised groups (Lord & Kennedy, 1992). While there has been change in individual approaches to practice with people of color, little has been done to either build on the strengths of communities of color or to affect the social conditions, pressures, and challenges that these communities endure. In a provocative article, "Is social work racist?" McMahon and Allen-Meares (1992) summarize the shortcomings:

> Being culturally aware is only a first step in addressing racism. ... Minorities live with the realities of poverty, a lack of resources, and racism that individual adaptation and social worker sensitivity alone cannot address. ... Social work, by adopting [an] individualistic approach, tends to blame the victim while ignoring the ecological perspective and person-in-environment configuration. It gives lip service to fighting conditions of poverty, institutional practices that perpetuate racism, and other conditions external to the individual. (p. 537)

In addition to the preoccupation with individual change and a lack of power analysis, ethnic sensitive practice equates ethnicity to culture with the danger of stereotyping and typifying clients (Green, 1982; Jayasuriya, 1992; Longres, 1991), prescribes practices that are more suited for working with refugees than with ethnic minorities who have been in the United States for more generations (Longres, 1991), and lacks a social development agenda (Midgley, 1991). These criticisms focus on the inattention of social workers to issues of social justice and social equality; practice has fallen short in substantially impacting the larger socio-econo-political environment.

What are the driving forces for such limited practice? Changes in practice can be seen as one way in which organizations alter their technologies to respond to the environment. In the case of social work, these changes are focused at the client-organization interface. Organizational theory contends that agencies will advocate practices that are in line with the institutional environment to best garner legitimacy and resources (Hasenfeld, 1992; Hyde, 1992). Although direct practice may in fact be one of the core activities of the human services organization, the question remains how can such organizations respond to the prevailing societal changes in more comprehensive and effective ways – ways that can affect social change as well as promote client and organizational sustainability?

Toward a multicultural human services organization

Development of an empowerment perspective in social work creates an environment in which clients can have an impact on personal, interpersonal and socio-political levels (Gutiérrez, 1989; Simon, 1994; Solomon, 1976). This form of practice is motivated by a social justice goal through individual and social

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participation, involvement, and action (Simon, 1994). Combining ethnic sensitive practice with an empowerment perspective leads to an *ethno-conscious approach* which celebrates the extant strengths and potential in communities of color (Gutiérrez, 1992; Simpson, 1990; Solomon, 1976). Its core concern is to actively involve individuals, groups, families, organizations, and communities in confronting social injustices and power inequalities (Gutiérrez & Nagda, 1996). The challenge is to create an organizational context for ethno-conscious services. Such organizations would be committed to working with members of oppressed and disenfranchised groups to provide empowering and socially just services, and to impact the socio-political environment in which the organizations and their clientele exist. Such organizations can be thought of as *empowering*, and also *empowered* in the fullest sense (personal-interpersonal-political). Empowering organizations are those that provide a context for empowerment practice for both clients and workers, whereas empowered organizations are active and resourceful in the socio-political sphere (Gutiérrez & Lewis, 1999; Zimmerman, 1990). We call these Multicultural Human Services Organizations (MHSO).

We contend that practice with ethnic minorities and other disenfranchised populations must be interlinked with organizational development. Table 1 provides one such framework. Previous (micro level) approaches to practice with ethnic minority clientele such as tailoring interventions, increasing access to services, or modifying services (Fong & Gibbs, 1995; Gutiérrez, 1992) have resulted in minimal, first-order, developmental changes in the organizational context (Porras & Roberston, 1992). Changes in practice and organizational permeability at this level do not require fundamental alterations in the organizational structure or value system; changes are made at the periphery without affecting the core. It is possible that such inconsequent changes in practice, those that do not impact the organizational structure, are themselves likely to change with personnel turnover or funding pressures.

Changes at the level of the organization, such as restructuring organizational policies and processes and creating special programs, involve substantial investment of organizational resources. They aim to create a climate that is hospitable to social diversity among workers. They are, however, intra-organizationally directed and fall short in impacting the larger social environment.

Ethno-conscious practice, and other social justice-oriented practice, can support and be supported by a transformation of the organization at the deep structural level. Change at this level is directed not only at the practice (worker-client) level or only at the organizational level, but also at the social structural level. Furthermore, these changes do not occur in isolation from each other, but in concert. We thus need to aim for second-order and third-order levels of organizational change to envision a mutuality of ethno-conscious practice and organization (Bargal & Schmid, 1992; Bartunek & Moch, 1987; Porras & Robertson, 1992).

How do we engage in developing such organizations? The field of Multicultural Organization Development (MCOD) provides a foundation to build multicultural human services organizations. MCOD attempts to address previously ignored or marginalized issues of social justice and oppression in the field of organizational development (OD), and is defined thus:

> MCOD is a systemic, planned change effort that utilizes behavioral science knowledge and technologies for improving organizational effectiveness. MCOD incorporates and extends OD, challenges the status quo, and questions the underlying cultural assumptions and structures of organizations, as opposed to assuming that system change will be accompanied or followed by themes of social justice. Inherent in MCODs adaptation of behavioral-science knowledge and techniques is the commitment to address the underlying racial, gender, disability, class, sexual orientation, and religious issues within an organization. (Pope, 1993: 203)

MCOD is a transformational approach to systems change informed by social justice concerns (Chesler, 1994; Cox, 1993; Jackson & Holvino, 1988; Katz, 1988; McEwen & Roper, 1994; Nagda, 1994; Nixon & Spearmon, 1991; Pope, 1993) as opposed to the developmental, first-order change typical of most OD efforts.

A *praxis* agenda

A review of the MCOD literature reveals two organizational dimensions as centrally important: 1) the level of representation and contributions of diverse social groups in the organizational culture, mission, and products/services; and 2) the extent of efforts to eliminate social injustices and oppression. These dimensions of a multicultural organization include both workplace situations and a focus on the larger social environment (Jackson & Holvino, 1988). The MCOD literature, coupled with human services literature on ethnic (Iglehart & Bacerra, 1995; Jenkins, 1983), empowerment-driven ethno-conscious (Gutiérrez, 1992, Simpson, 1990), and feminist social movement agencies (Hyde, 1992; Riger, 1984), help inform a vision of a MHSO. Below, we articulate this vision and the *praxis* implications for social work organizations (Nagda, 1994):

Table 1. Multicultural Practice and Human Service Organization Development

			MICRO-LEVEL CHANGE		ORGANIZATIONAL-LEVEL CHANGE		ORGANIZATION-PRACTICE TRANSFORMATION
Practice Perspective	Ethno-centric (Monocultural)	Ethnic Sensitive					Ethno-conscious (Multicultural)
Focus of Change	Client	Services and Interventions			Organization development	Specialized program	Practice, Organization and Societal structures
Interventions	Remediation	*Tailoring interventions*	*Access to services*	*Modification of services*	Changes in policies, personnel & procedures	Development of a special program within a host organization	Creation of organization with explicit and dual mission to empower clients and impact their social conditions
	Adjustment	Selecting treatments to fit the culture and reality of client/ group	Hiring bilingual or bicultural staff	Creation of new programs	Commitment & support from all decision makers	Access for administrators of specialized program to central power structure	Empowerment-based perspective
	Cope with situation	Learning about the client culture group	Identifying & working with lay providers for outreach & consultation	Hiring staff from minority communities		Greater structural integration of minority staff on HSO board & professional staff	Political analyses of client, worker, organization and profession
		Evaluating existing services in light of client needs and situation	Involving community leaders in agency programs, esp. outreach	Use of cultural/ traditional customs or rituals in practice		Influence agency-wide change	Horizontal integration with client communities
							Vertical integration with legislative and funding bodies
							Inter-organizational coalitions
							Praxis-oriented, learning organization

- A MHSO is focused both on bringing about social change and providing empowering services to its clientele. Its ideology, goals, and actions are strategically aligned to create socially just conditions for its clients and society at large. It is committed to transformational politics to eliminate all forms of social oppression that discriminate, disempower, and alienate its clientele. It aims to provide services to a wide range of clients who have been socially, politically and economically disenfranchised.

- A MHSO is committed to an empowerment practice perspective that appreciates, celebrates, and values client strengths, resources, needs, and cultural backgrounds. It aims to provide accessible and convenient services that are empowering at individual, interpersonal, organizational, community and political levels. It achieves its empowerment goals by providing a wide range of preventive and curative services – educational, health care, skill building and enrichment, political activism, and cultural activities across the life span. These services are provided in multiple contexts – community, agency, client homes, and schools – and use multiple practice methods – casework, group/family work, community organizing, action research, advocacy, and social action among others.

- A MHSO aims to create workplace conditions that are modeled on its multicultural ideology and goals. It is committed to an equitable and diverse social and cultural representation among its workforce represented not only in numbers but also in the workplace structures, norms, styles, and values. It strives for the workplace to be an endeavor in multicultural learning that is supporting and challenging for the growth of all its members. It recognizes the potential for conflict among its members as a result of identity-based differences in social and political experiences, values, cultures and styles. It surfaces conflicts or uses existing conflicts as learning opportunities for enhancing intergroup understanding, appreciation, and synergy. Its external and internal practices are tightly coupled.

- A MHSO is linked horizontally to client communities through its programs and services as well as its involvement in community networks. It encourages and facilitates client collaboration and partnerships in organizational governance and in program development, implementation and evaluation activities.

- A MHSO is linked vertically to professional, legislative and funding sources. With professional associations, it lobbies for accreditation and educational reform and development of a knowledge base for multicultural practice. With legislative bodies it advocates clients' human and civil rights, pushes for legal and social policy reform that will create more fair and just policies, and aids in bettering the life conditions of its clients and other oppressed groups. With funding sources, it asks for resources in ameliorating and increasing client services.

- A MHSO is linked in other local, national and international networks. It strives to build coalitions with other community groups and social movement organizations. It plays a strong role in encouraging, pressuring and facilitating the multiculturalization of other network and coalition members. It also plays an advocacy and brokering role for its clients with other community organizations.

- A MHSO is a *praxis*-oriented learning organization that is in a dialectical relationship with its internal and external environments; it scans and negotiates with these environments as necessary. It uses environmental threats and crises as opportunities to become a more multicultural and socially just organization. It realizes that times of change will create an organizational transition with stress, conflict, uncertainty, and ambiguity. These conditions will enhance the transformational potential of change, but there should be a consciousness of and concern for client and worker welfare. The MCHSO aims to be a learning organization that is continually reflective about its processes, structures, policies, practices, and membership to create nurturing and sustaining communities within the organization, in the client communities, and in the larger society. Workers are engaged in constant action and reflection about their practices – both internal and external – especially as they occur across social and cultural differences.

How can organizations engage in this process of actualizing the vision and becoming more multicultural? A *praxis* approach – a constant action and reflection process (Freire, 1973) – is a form of double-loop learning (Argyris, 1982) that can facilitate creative and emergent problem solving.

> [*Praxis*] refers to the circular relationship of experience and reflection through which actions evoke new understandings, which then provoke new and more effective actions. ... Involvement generates insight which in turn promotes more knowing participation. (Kieffer, 1984: 26)

In fact, in organizational life today, this process is popularly referred to as organizational learning (Senge, 1990). The strategies outlined below are not recipes, but simply guidelines or principles of change. A *praxis* approach will take the particular organizational context and constellations of relationships and realities into account, and generate local strategies for transformation. Gutiérrez & Nagda (1996) lay out

three broad strategies. First, a tight coupling of ideology, culture and practice is necessary in order to provide coherency to the long-term change process. The overall vision of a MHSO should guide the processes within the organization and its practices with the clientele (Gutiérrez, GlenMaye & Delois, 1995). This strategy is referred to as "MEM" – mission, empower, and measure (Galagan, 1992) or "GEM" – goals, empower, and measure (Mills, 1995). In either case, management and worker actions are not only guided by the vision but evaluated for their overall efficacy in fulfilling the multicultural vision and mission of the organization (Carr, 1994).

The next two strategies deal with power building, one with clients and the second with other organizations. Through the provision of a variety of programs and services, the agency can meet diverse client and community needs and increase the horizontal power base. A generalist approach to services is especially constructive in times of environmental stress (Schmid, 1992). In relation to other organizations, the agency can adopt a coalitional approach to gain legitimacy and an increased resource base. This strategy is helpful where funding sources exert control on organizational form, mission and services and where this control constrains the possibilities of a multicultural organization.

Using a framework of consciousness-confidence-connection, Gutiérrez & Lewis (1999) provide more specific intra-organizational strategies for long-term planned change. Consciousness-raising involves education efforts about organizational mission, structure, and processes. For MHSOs in particular, this would involve dialogue (Bohm, 1990; Isaacs, 1992) among organizational participants about how structural power, privilege, and oppression operate inside and outside the workplace (see Zúñiga and Nagda, 1993, for application of dialogues to issues of social justice and diversity). An understanding of how organizational policies and procedures perpetuate or challenge societal oppressions is also imperative at this stage. And finally, a self-examination of participant resources and challenges in the process of building a multicultural organization can help identify the facilitative and hindering forces for change.

Confidence building involves increasing personal and professional efficacy through skill-building and professional development. Worker empowerment and involvement in organizational change processes is crucial. Professional development may include training in multiculturally competent practice with clients, and education and skill-building on planned organizational change. Open and constructive communication processes are crucial at this stage since feedback is essential to efficacy. Such communication processes are also required to work through interpersonal and intergroup conflicts inherent in systems of privilege and power; that is, conflicts between workers from different races/ethnicities, genders, classes, sexual orientations, and other social group memberships (Chesler, 1994).

Connection strategies are aimed at increasing collaborative efforts through decision-making teams, small work groups, and cross-department or cross-functional teams. In addition, there is a coordination of change strategies led by administrators and those initiated by direct service workers and clients. On-going process and formative evaluation helps create continuous feedback on the change strategies. Momentum toward change can also be maintained by organizational recognition and reward systems for change participants, and the restructuring of pay and reward systems to reflect involvement in the organizational change efforts.

A research agenda

Many questions arise as practitioners and scholars engage in the *praxis* of creating and understanding multicultural organizations. Two particular issues have the potential to define research and action in this field: the distinction between an "ideal" and a "real" organization; and the dialectic relationship between multicultural practice and a multicultural organization.

"Ideal" and "real" organizations

The vision and praxis implications elaborated above relate to an ideal MHSO. Given the complexity of an organization and its constituencies, such an ideal type may never be realized, or may take multiple forms. In her work on "rethinking of feminist organizations," Martin (1990) proposes an inductive, comparative perspective as opposed to deductive-evaluative, based on assessing organizations against an ideal type. Articulating each dimension in detail is beyond the scope of this paper, and we simply raise some questions that relate to each dimension. These dimensions fall in four distinct but interrelated areas – organizational mission and culture, organizational context, organization-client interface, and organization-environment interface (Martin, 1990; Nagda, 1994).

Organizational mission and culture

1) *Multicultural ideology*. What is the organization's view of power? Does the organization recognize social oppression as inherent in societal and organizational structures? Does the organization explicitly or implicitly espouse its multicultural ideology? What consequences of oppression is the organization concerned with – psychological, physical, and/or

material? What form of oppression does the organization address – internalized, individual, cultural, and/or institutional? Is the ideology a ''focused'' or ''universal'' multiculturalism?

2) *Multicultural values*. Does the organization emphasize values coming out of the experience of marginalized groups? Does it value the centrality of group identity and consciousness in the lives of members from these groups? Does it value social relations, extended kinship networks, personal growth, empowerment? Are worker-client relationships collaborative? Are client strengths and values appreciated? Are workers treated fairly and justly within the organization? Are organizational structures and policies empowering of workers?

3) *Multicultural goals*. Does the organization have an internal and an external action plan that helps members see the oppression of groups? Does the organization have an internal and an external action plan that empowers oppressed groups? Does the organization embrace a political analysis of oppression in its action plans? Does the organization aim its action to eliminate social oppression and raise the quality of life for those affected by the oppression?

4) *Multicultural outcomes*. How are the outcomes experienced by members – clients, workers? Are they empowered – psychologically, spiritually, physically, materially – and personally, interpersonally, organizationally, community-wise, politically? Is there societal transformation as a result of organizational actions? Is the status of its clients significantly changed in other institutions – health, education, economy? How does the organization assess its impact – by number of clients served, change in social conditions of clients, or other?

Organizational context

5) *Organizational setting*. Is the organization a free-standing agency, part of a network of agencies, or hosted within a larger organization?

6) *Multicultural climate*. What is the demographic make-up of the organization? What is the climate in relation to intergroup relations in the organization? Are there overt or covert intergroup tensions? Is there much contact and cooperation between members of different identity groups? What kind of interactions do workers from different identity groups have with each other? What are the formal and informal networks in the organization? Are they integrated? Are there opportunities for members to have ''home'' groups? Are there ''identity-based'' informal networks? Are there ''identity based'' formal networks? How much organizational support is there for cultural activities of the different identity groups within the organization? What are supervisory-worker relationships like when

they occur across identity groups, e.g. white female supervisor-Asian male worker?

7) *Organizational structure*. ''What are the organization's normative internal arrangements?'' (Martin, 1990: 190) How is the organization hierarchical, flattened, collective, or bureaucratic? How are decisions made in the organization? How are conflicts handled in the organization? Is there structural integration or occupational segregation of members of oppressed groups? How are members rewarded – materially and otherwise? Are there differential rewards for different members?

8) *Members and membership*. ''What are the requirements for membership? What are the characteristics of members (e.g., gender, political views, age, race and ethnicity, social class)? What are the categories of members? How are members recruited, affiliated, and terminated? What is a typical member's career? What status distinctions are made and why?'' (Martin, 1990: 190).

9) *Multicultural learning*. Are there opportunities for multicultural learning, e.g. education about social oppression, intergroup relations and conflicts, intercultural communication, and social action strategies? Does the organization facilitate intra- and intergroup learning and coalition situations?

Organization-client interface

10) *Practices*. How do members pursue their internal and external goals? How are these practices linked to multicultural ideology, values, goals, and normative arrangements – ''tightly coupled'' or ''loosely coupled?'' Is there consistency in internal and external practice? Are the practices geared to service, social change or both? How do they vary? At what times do they vary?

11) *Scope and scale*. Is the organization grass-roots, local, regional, national or international? Is it service, social change, or worker/member oriented? What activities are engaged within each orientation? Which is its primary orientation? What and how many different client groups does the organization serve? How diverse is the clientele? What and how many different services does the organization provide to the clients? What are the practice methods used? At what level – individual, family, group, community, and/or organization – is the intervention? Is the organization ''generalist'' or ''specialist?'' What is the annual budget for the organization?

12) *Internal linkages*. How are clients involved in the organization? What are the clientele alliances in program development, implementation, and evaluation?

Organization-environment interface

13) *Circumstances of birth*. What were the circumstances of origin of the organization? Did it come through political work at a grass-roots level? What other movements (if any) was it connected to at birth?

14) *Circumstances of development and change*. What were the circumstances of organizational change? Where did the impetus for change come from – internal or external agents? Was the change developmental, transformational, evolutionary, or revolutionary? What aspects of organization underwent change? Was the impetus and change connected to any social movements? Was the impetus and change connected to making the organization more multicultural? If so, in what ways? How was the change transmitted throughout the organization?

15) *External relations/linkages*. ''How is the environment conceptualized – as hostile, neutral, friendly? How is the organization linked to its social, cultural, political and economic environments? (a) What is its legal-corporate status vis-à-vis the state? (b) How autonomous is it? (c) Where does it obtain funding (financial resources)? (d) To which external groups and organizations is it linked? What form do these linkages take? Around what issues are linkages made? How are linkages (and non-linkages) conceptualized and enacted? How many links are there? How intense are they?'' (Martin, 1990: 191). What are the collaborative alliances with clientele communities? Is the organization survival- or success-oriented?

Multicultural practice and multicultural organization development

A second area of research is understanding the relationship between multicultural practice and multicultural organization development. For example, how are they mutually influential? How and in what circumstances does one drive the other? In what contexts and under what conditions is it possible to have multicultural practice in a monocultural organization? And vice versa? This area would involve examining the ways in which organizational policies, practices, and people are linked.

Research strategies to study multicultural organizations, or those that are in the process of becoming more multicultural, should parallel the principles of multicultural organizations and practice: attention to issues of power, multiple perspectives, collaborative partnership approach, and built-in processes of feedback. In fact, research itself may be considered an organizational strategy or practice. In light of these guiding principles, participatory action research holds much promise (Cohen & Austin, 1994; Finn, 1994; Sarri & Sarri, 1992):

Participatory action research is a form of action research in which professional social researchers operate as full collaborators with members of organizations in studying and transforming those organizations. It is an on-going organizational learning process, a research approach that emphasizes co-learning, participation and organizational transformation. (Greenwood, Whyte & Harkavy, 1993: 177)

This process ensures that the knowledge generated is itself empowering and directly helpful in developing effective social service and change programs. The process is one of discovery along the dimensions and questions elaborated above. Engaging different participants in the action research endeavor can contribute to the on-going change strategies of the consciousness-confidence-connection framework. Since multicultural organizational change is a long-term process, the research provides an important education, feedback and skill-building mechanism.

Other research approaches, such as intra- and inter-organizational network analyses, are also useful in shedding light on the multiple constituencies of the organization and the influence they exert on the organization. A force-field analysis – an analysis of facilitative and hindering factors toward organizational change – is another way to conceptualize the organization networks (Brager & Holloway, 1992).

Research in the field does not exclude survey research methods. Multiple approaches can be mutually beneficial. Survey methods should be geared at linking the multiple contexts of client, worker, management, organizational structures, and processes. A key issue for survey research methodology in these settings will be the establishment of a participatory or partnership research collaboration among scholars, practitioners, agency staff, and clients. Longitudinal and comparative designs may also help elucidate the impact of certain change strategies. Survey feedback has also been a change strategy utilized in organization development efforts (Chesler, 1994; Cox, 1993). Gold & Bogo (1992) articulate a necessary caution:

The challenge of conducting quantitative research within a multicultural context lies in respecting, and responding to, value systems and practices that differ from those of the dominant culture. These differences in values and practices are apparent at all phases of the research process: in problem definition, method, data collection procedure, data analysis, and interpretation. To conduct ethical and valid social work research in a multicultural society requires that the researchers constantly consider their own biases, and the limitations and implications of their world views. (pp. 19–20)

Although targeted toward quantitative methods, this challenge applies to any method of research that has the potential to compromise or take over local knowledge. No one method can claim a monopoly on research on multicultural organizations; understanding their complexities requires a diversity of approaches, viewpoints, and disciplinary backgrounds.

Most social problems are more complex and involve interrelationships among opposites in such a fashion that there is no single solution which "solves" the problem. Consequently, the method of investigation required, because of the very nature of the social problems, is a dialectical one, governed by divergent, rather than convergent reasoning. (Rappaport, 1984: 2)

Conclusion

We acknowledge that the change process, especially transformative change, is not easy. There are several challenges. The development of multicultural human services organizations involves considerable time and effort not only in delivering empowering services that take account of the contextual, cultural and individual aspects of clients, but in similarly structuring organizational climates to the benefit of all workers. The transformation process can involve considerable staff and consultant resources. Moreover, change efforts involving external consultants can turn out to be short-term and end with the departure of these outside agents. Although external consultants can act as agitators and provocateurs in ways that internal change agents may not be able to, they must initiate a partnership-based transformation process that is sustainable beyond their tenure with the organizations. It is precisely for these reasons that local involvement – workers and clients – is seen as a cornerstone for transformational change, and that the change process be conceptualized as a long-term project.

These challenges push us to go beyond "the way things are usually done around here" and engage in creative and empowering problem solving. Also challenging is that the transformation efforts call for a keen consciousness and understanding not only of outcomes gained, but also of the actual and emergent processes involved in this change. *Praxis*-oriented approaches that involve cognitive restructuring – conceptualizing barriers and problems as challenges, building upon local strengths and resources, multi-level analyses, and establishing collaborative inter-group partnerships to affect the challenges (workers-clients, researcher/consultant-worker-client, worker-worker, inter-organizational coalitions, and so on) – can facilitate the transformational efforts.

We have proposed here a vision of a multicultural human services organization with implications for *praxis* and research. Multicultural organization development in the human services should 1) be informed by an understanding of diversity and the multiple dimensions of MHSOs and 2) allow for multiple possibilities to address social justice and social diversity concerns in the diverse environments, communities, and practices that already differentiate human services organizations.

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