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# **Organizational Change Rationales: Exploring Reasons for Multicultural Development in Human Service Agencies**

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*This article examines how rationales for organizational change shape the subsequent change effort. The change process in question is multicultural development in nonprofit human service agencies. Analysis is based on interviews with consultants and practitioners experienced in multicultural development. To further illustrate connections between rationales and outcomes, three case studies are presented. Results indicate that how the organizational change is framed in part determines the degree of change that occurs.*

**KEYWORDS** *human service agencies, multicultural development, organizational change, organizational diversity, qualitative research*

## INTRODUCTION

Organizational change is undertaken for many reasons: responsiveness to consumers, concerns of staff, a crisis situation, or leadership setting a new strategic course. Why change is undertaken can be a key determinant in the degree of success or depth of change experienced (Fernandez & Rainey, 2006; Greve & Taylor, 2000; Homan, Devane & Cody, 2007; Jaskyte & Dressler, 2005; Schein, 2004; Schmid, 2010). This article examines rationales for a particular form of organizational change—multicultural development in human service organizations—in order to understand why such change is initiated and how these rationales frame subsequent transformation efforts. This exploration is based on interviews with practitioners

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and consultants engaged in multicultural development initiatives in nonprofit human service agencies and on case studies of three human service agencies that provided different reasons for and pursued different forms of multicultural development.

## RATIONALES FOR ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE

There is general consensus in the organizational change literature that the rationale for change influences the trajectory and success of the change effort (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Burke, 2011; Cameron & Quinn, 2006; Homan et al., 2007; Schein, 2004). An effective rationale frames the change effort in such a way that the intended participants understand (1) why the change is needed, (2) what the scope of the change is, (3) what the steps will be, (4) what level of involvement will be needed, and (5) what outcomes are expected (Bolman & Deal, 2008; Chreim, 2006). The rationale sets the parameters for engagement and success.

When change rationales are the focus of research inquiry, they usually are subsumed in discussions on how environmental dynamics demand organizational action. An organization engages in a change initiative to counter environmental threats or exploit environmental opportunities; specifically, external crises compel an organization to change in order to survive. Organizational leaders or change agents must recognize the crisis, transmit the threat to organizational members, and convert the crisis into an opportunity for growth and development through the articulation of a vision and accompanying strategic plan (Barnett & Pratt, 2000; Dyck, 1996; Lawrence, Dyck, Maitlis, & Mauws, 2006; Nutt & Backoff, 1997). An organizational culture that promotes and facilitates cognitive and social learning by members greatly facilitates positive change outcomes (Berson, Nemanich, Waldman, Galvin & Keller, 2006; Keegan & Den Hartog, 2004; Lipshitz & Popper, 2000; Schein, 2004; Schmid, 2010).

Understanding and responding to environmental crises is particularly important for human service agencies. The human service sector is marked by considerable environmental turbulence, largely due to funding competition, government regulation, multiple stakeholder demands, and shifting legitimacy (Bloom & Farragher, 2011; Brodtkin, 2010; Hasenfeld, 2010; Martin, 2000; Perlmutter, 2000; Smith, 2010). Moreover, human service agencies are generally considered to be risk-averse, lacking in innovation, or resistant to change (Cohen, 1999; Schmid, 2010; Perlmutter, 2000). This is attributed to the unique characteristics of these organizations (e.g., altruistic missions, multiple and ambiguous goals, democratic impulses, moral rationales for work, personalized worksites) that make long-term planning and implementation difficult (Hasenfeld, 2010; Menefee, 2000). Consequently, human service agencies may have a more difficult time

responding to environmental challenges than other organizations. When successful, the change effort is often a bottom-up and participatory initiative that emphasizes organizational learning, yet does not threaten professional autonomy (Schmid, 2010; Cohen, 1999).

## OVERVIEW OF MULTICULTURAL DEVELOPMENT IN ORGANIZATIONS

Multicultural development (MD) is a long-term, complex, second-order organizational change process (Bartunek & Moch, 1987) that “does not simply accept or celebrate differences, but aims at a reduction in the patterns of racism and sexism [and other oppressions] that prevail in most U.S. institutions and organizations” through a fundamental transformation of an organization’s culture (Chesler, 1994:14; see also Hyde, 2003, 2004; Gonzalez, 2010; Gutierrez & Nagda, 1996; Jackson & Holvino, 1988). Change strategies flow from an assessment of the organization’s level of multicultural development (from monocultural to multicultural) (Jackson & Holvino, 1988). MD is broad in scope and encompasses a range of intervention models: legal compliance (e.g., affirmative action), prejudice reduction, intercultural awareness and education, managing diversity, valuing differences, and anti-racism (Chesler, 1994; Cox, 2001; Jackson & Holvino, 1988; Thomas, 2006; Weiss, 2004). These models vary in the degree of organizational change achieved, and yet each is appropriate for an organization depending on its stage of multicultural development. Many MD efforts begin with first-order, incremental changes that become building blocks for more fundamental transformation (Hyde, 2003, 2004; Cox, 2001; Gonzalez, 2010; Gutierrez & Nagda, 1996).

Multicultural development typically is undertaken in order to address the dynamics and maximize the potential of an increasingly heterogeneous workforce (Aries, 2004; Bell, 2006; Cox, 2001; Mor Borak, 2011; Thiederman, 2008; Thomas, 2006). Efforts, at least in the corporate sector where most MD has been done, often are tied to the “bottom line” of the organization; vague, simplistic, or altruistic rationales are not as effective. Optimal workforce performance (hence greater profitability) means that members need to work well with each other regardless of cultural group membership (Herring, 2009). Emphasis is on leadership’s role in guiding the MD effort, and the change plan is often conceptualized as a top-down one (Harvey & Allard, 2008; Ng, 2008; Yang & Konrad, 2011). Full integration of the MD initiative into broader organizational functions and activities is essential, since this facilitates a cultural shift in the organization (Hyde, 2003, 2004; Cameron & Quinn, 2006; Cox, 2001; Gonzales, 2010; Weiss, 2004).

Increased staff diversity also is cited as one important reason for multicultural development in human services (Chow & Austin, 2008; Hyde,

2003, 2004; Iglehart, 2000; Menefee, 2000). Yet the primary factor for MD in human service agencies is to better serve clients. Growth in populations of color, the elderly, and people with disabilities, as well as the continued devolution of the public welfare sector and the widening gap between rich and poor, place considerable demands on nonprofit human services to serve vulnerable and disenfranchised client groups (Bloom & Farragher, 2011; Brodtkin, 2010; Iglehart, 2000; Smith, 2010; Williams, 2006). Multicultural development is undertaken to design new programs and prepare staff to meet these workforce and client challenges.

In the ideal, MD results in an organization that embraces full social and cultural representation on all levels; elimination of sexism, racism, and other forms of oppression; full inclusion and valuing of differences; and redistribution of power and influence among all stakeholders (Jackson & Holvino, 1988). If successful, MD generates a unified organizational culture, not one fragmented along race, gender, age, or other dimensions (Cox, 2001; Gonzalez, 2010). Chen and Eastman (1997) refer to this as a civic culture that emphasizes integration and differentiation, rather than the extremes of balkanization or homogeneity. Civic culture recognizes that employees may have strong group identity ties and that the key is to harmonize these intergroup relations in order to create an organizational culture that balances mutual respect and accommodation and encourages full participation.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This examination of reasons for organizational change is drawn from a larger exploratory qualitative study on multicultural development in human service agencies. Data were obtained from two sources: (1) 40 in-depth interviews with consultants and practitioners experienced in multicultural development and (2) case studies of seven organizations in which some of the practitioners were employed. The interview respondents and the case studies were located in a northeastern metropolitan area; for purposes of confidentiality, pseudonyms are used.

The interview sample was constructed using both reputational (or expertise) and purposive (insured inclusion of certain traits) techniques (Miles & Huberman, 1994). The primary consideration was that respondents had knowledge of and experience with multicultural development in nonprofit human service agencies. The author, in consultation with colleagues, selected an initial group of eight from her own professional networks. This group recommended the rest of the sample.

Of the practitioners, there were 13 women and seven men: three Latinas, five Blacks, nine whites, and three Asians. They worked in nonprofit agencies that provided job training, health care, housing, family preservation, substance abuse recovery, elderly support, and community development. All

but two held management positions. Their organizations ranged in size from three to 40 paid staff, and most relied on volunteers. These practitioners had experience initiating or overseeing MD efforts. Most of their agencies were predominantly white and had been engaged in some form of MD for at least two years at the time of the interviews.

Of the consultants interviewed, there were 11 women and nine men: four Latinos, seven Blacks, eight whites and one Asian. All had a master's or doctoral degree. Their experiences were mostly with social service, educational, and community-based agencies; some also worked with businesses. For the most part, these consultants did not work with the agencies represented by the sample's practitioners. Consultants are often critical actors in multicultural initiatives as they might assist with strategic planning, provide feedback and accountability, and facilitate learning sessions (e.g., cultural trainings) (Fowler, 2006; Gutierrez, Kruzich, Jones, & Coronado 2000). Consequently, consultants are important sources of information on multicultural development. In addition to reflecting on their own practices, they are able to comment on MD processes in various agencies.

Unstructured schedule interviews (Denzin, 1989), one to two hours in length, were conducted. In such interviews, there is a set list of questions but the approach is flexible with respect to order, phrasing, follow-up, and pursuit of unanticipated ideas or themes. Interviews covered these aspects of multicultural development: personal philosophy; history of their involvement; reasons that organizations give for engaging in this work; challenges or barriers; and examples of successes and failures. Respondents were provided with a definition of MD (Chesler, 1994; Gutierrez & Nagda, 1996; Jackson & Holvino, 1988) and asked to compare it with their practices. The author conducted all interviews, which were taped and transcribed for analysis.

The case studies can be considered explanatory in nature, since they suggest a relational path between two or more constructs (Yin, 2003). The organizations were chosen because they had completed much of their MD initiatives, had kept reasonably good records, and were willing to be examined (which included discussions with various organizational members and review of organizational documents). Of these seven organizations, three were chosen for inclusion in this analysis. These three agencies reflect distinct rationales for engaging in MD and experienced different outcomes. The agencies are Mentoring Our Children, Environmental Job Corps, and Affordable Housing Project. They are described in greater detail below.

Data analysis of interviews and case study materials was done using the constant comparison method (Charmaz, 1983; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Per this method, initial descriptive data coding followed the topics outlined in the interview protocol, though unexpected insights or ideas also were coded. This initial coding began once the first three interviews were completed so that emergent themes could be incorporated into the interview protocol;

this iterative process continued as interviews were completed. Through this descriptive coding process, core themes were identified. As these core themes became more robust, more in-depth categorical and theoretical coding schemes were developed. These codes were grouped into substantive categories, and these categories were compared across all interviews and with the literature to determine areas of common focus and points of divergence within the sample and between the sample and the literature, all of which were recorded in theme memos. Further interviewing was guided by emergent themes and coding conflicts. In this way, codes and categories were continuously examined against newly collected information (Charmaz 2006; Chenitz & Swanson 1986). Analytical categories and themes concerning MD processes were then developed, including the identification of rationales for undertaking such efforts and the effect that these reasons had on the subsequent change effort.

Two persons—the interviewer and a research assistant—coded each interview independently (no software was used). For each interview, they met to discuss coding and emergent themes, identify and (if possible) resolve differences, and determine the need, as well as parameters, for any additional interviewing. The author composed theme memos that captured key points of the interview and linked the findings to those in other interviews. Coding and analysis ended when theme saturation occurred. Theme saturation means that any additional data for a given analytical category would not contribute any new information. A coherent, systematic, and rigorous condensation, as well as an interpretation of the data, supported the integrity of the research in that all possible explanations have been taken into account or were eliminated (Charmaz 2006; Chenitz & Swanson 1986; Strauss & Corbin 1990).

Theme saturation is a primary way in which internal validity is enhanced within the constant comparative method. Also key to this study's internal validity was the use of triangulation (Denzin 1989), specifically through the convergence of different interpreters (coders) and explanations (emergent analysis and existing scholarship). External validity and reliability are more problematic given the exploratory nature of this study. This research has limited generalizability since it used a relatively small, non-random sample located in one geographic area. It also has limited reliability (though "perfect" replication is difficult given the uniqueness of a qualitative study) (Cresswell 1994; Lee 1999).

## RESULTS

### Why Multicultural Development?

Respondents were asked why their human service agencies undertook MD efforts. They offered a variety of rationales for such initiatives, suggesting

that agencies pursued MD for multiple (and not always congruous) reasons. Overall, respondents tended to mention rationales that were externally oriented, meaning that they identified pressures or demands from environmental factors as critical to the initiation of MD. Table 1 provides a summary of the rationales provided by respondents and associated MD interventions.

The most frequently mentioned reasons for multicultural development were to “be responsive to the client base” and because “it is the right thing to do.” Both rationales reflect the unique features of human service organizations, which are client-centered and altruistic orientations. “Being responsive to client base” also captures the demographic pressures placed on human services. Respondents, however, did not necessarily extend this consumer orientation to the community at large; less than half indicated, “to enhance our community legitimacy,” as a reason for MD. While some of the respondents suggested that MD “is the right thing to do” because it is in keeping with professional ethics and responsibilities, others placed this rationale within the larger debates regarding political correctness. That is, they indicated that perhaps they did not really have a choice, so it was the “right thing to do” because of the dictates of the human service sector. Both of these rationales tended to result in redesigning or initiating programs and services that were more culturally sensitive to the client populations and in offering cultural awareness and competency skill trainings for staff. When “community legitimacy” was one of the rationales, the organizations also engaged in outreach and inclusion efforts (i.e., membership on board of directors) with underrepresented groups, usually people of color.

The only other reason offered by a majority of respondents was “to smooth hiring and retention processes.” This rationale is embedded in a managing diversity approach in which staff members who demographically represent the client base are brought into the organization. Respondents believed that agencies engaged in MD to enhance the success of such staff changes, usually the integration of people of color. This rationale typically led to value clarification and communication skill trainings for the entire staff and, in some instances, mentoring programs for new staff. Rarely, however, did this rationale serve as the foundation for structural transformations in the organization; even policy or procedural changes were infrequent. Few respondents, for example, suggested that MD efforts were “to dismantle existing white or dominant organizational culture,” though of those that did there was discussion as to the scope and depth of the MD efforts, including initiatives such as organizational diversity assessments, policy changes, team building, mentoring and career ladder programs, and inclusion of underrepresented groups on governance bodies. Yet the more likely route when addressing staffing issues was having activities to assist newcomers (culturally different from incumbent staff) in fitting into and being accepted by the existing agency culture.

**TABLE 1** Frequency of Rationales for Multicultural Development (MD) and Accompanying MD Interventions

Rationale*	Mentioned by % of respondents (n = 40)	Likely MD Intervention
Being responsive to client base	85%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Cultural awareness and competency skills trainings</li> <li>● Develop culturally sensitive programs/services</li> <li>● Inclusion of underrepresented groups on board/advisory committee</li> </ul>
It is the right thing to do	70%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Values clarification workshops</li> <li>● Cultural awareness and competency skills trainings</li> </ul>
Smooth hiring/retention processes	60%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Value clarification and communication skills workshops</li> <li>● Mentoring programs</li> </ul>
Community legitimacy	45%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Targeted outreach usually to groups of color</li> <li>● Develop culturally sensitive programs/services</li> <li>● Inclusion of underrepresented groups on board/advisory committee</li> </ul>
Respond to a crisis	45%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Dependent on nature of the crisis, though usually short-term “quick fixes” such as one-time awareness trainings</li> <li>● Often coupled with “smooth hiring/retention processes”</li> </ul>
Leader initiated	30%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Organizational assessment</li> <li>● Cultural awareness and competency skills training</li> <li>● Often coupled with “being responsive to client base”</li> </ul>
Dismantle white/dominant culture	20%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Organizational assessment</li> <li>● Mentoring and career ladder/opportunity programs</li> <li>● Agency policy/procedural changes</li> <li>● Team building</li> <li>● Inclusion of underrepresented groups on board/advisory committee</li> </ul>
Build on previous work	20%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Dependent on previous work, though usually an extension of culturally sensitive programs/services</li> </ul>
Extension of agency’s mission	15%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Dependent on the particulars of agency mission, though tapped into social change/justice values of organization</li> <li>● Values clarification workshops</li> <li>● Team building</li> </ul>
Part of larger strategic planning	15%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Dependent on strategic planning goals; usually culturally appropriate programming/training integrated into broader plan and/or the strategic plan specifies MD objectives</li> </ul>
Agency competition	10%	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Develop culturally sensitive programs/services with focus on needs of specific population</li> </ul>

Few respondents offered “leader initiated” rationales; indeed, organizational leaders as critical to the change effort were virtually ignored. Respondents who did offer this as a reason for MD, tended to mention it in tandem with “being responsive to client base” and perhaps, not surprisingly, most efforts were cultural awareness or competency skill workshops. And an important additional intervention when the MD effort was leader initiated was that organizations tended to engage in diversity assessments, indicating a link between the leader as change agent and overall transformation planning.

Even fewer respondents noted that current MD efforts were “building on previous diversity work,” suggesting that many initiatives were new or that earlier efforts were not sufficiently robust to serve as springboards for later work. In general, there was a lack of integration of MD rationales into the broader organizational context, as evidenced by the relative absence of such reasons as MD was “an extension of the agency’s mission” or “was part of a larger strategic planning effort.”

There were some interesting differences between practitioners and consultants with respect to MD motivations. For example, all practitioners offered “responsive to client base” as a reason, yet just over two-thirds of the consultants did. In contrast, the consultants were much more likely to suggest that MD was undertaken to “respond to a crisis,” and this rationale was often mentioned with “smooth hiring/retention processes,” such that the crisis usually involved problems within the agency’s workforce. Practitioners, however, were less likely to offer rationales that indicated organizational problems or dysfunctions. Instead, they wanted to convey the belief that agencies were proactive in their pursuit of MD in order to better serve target populations. Consultants, however, took a different tact. They were more likely to suggest that the organization engaged in MD because a crisis point had been reached, or as one consultant stated, “I get brought in to put out the fires.” In the interviews, consultants tended to express more skepticism and cynicism; for example, “the right thing to do” was often reframed as “the correct action given the current crisis or problem.” As will be suggested by the case studies, such variations in change rationales between practitioners and consultants can affect the success of MD efforts.

### A Closer Look at Change Rationales: Three Case Studies

To more fully understand how change rationales shape the transformation effort, three organizations were selected for more in-depth analysis. These three agencies are compared along the following dimensions: reasons for MD, initiator or leader of the effort, types of MD interventions, role of the consultant, type of involvement by members, outcome benefits, and outcome problems (summarized in Table 2).

**TABLE 2** Comparison of Case Studies Along Select Dimensions

	Mentoring Our Children	Environmental Job Corps	Affordable Housing Project
MD rationale	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Respond to client base</li> <li>Right thing to do</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Crisis: main funder threatened loss of funding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Part of larger strategic planning initiative</li> </ul>
Initiator/leader	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Associate director</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Director of development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Strategic planning committee</li> </ul>
Types of intervention	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Educational staff workshops on various cultures</li> <li>Values clarification workshops for staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Reframing of organizational mission and issue analysis</li> <li>Diversity Initiative: specific outreach to and funding for students of color as interns</li> <li>Values clarification workshops for central office staff</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Needs assessment, including staff, board, and stakeholder focus groups</li> <li>Management mentoring for staff of color</li> <li>Outreach and skill sessions</li> <li>Diversity workshops (future)</li> </ul>
Role of consultant	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Multiple consultants who offered educational or values clarification workshops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Researcher</li> <li>Multiple consultants who offered clarification workshops</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Trained planning committee in assessment/evaluation and workshop development</li> <li>Teachers</li> </ul>
Outcome: Benefits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Staff better acquainted with different cultures</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Greater intern diversity</li> <li>Extensive network established</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Comprehensive commitment</li> <li>Mentoring program</li> <li>Skill development</li> </ul>
Outcome: Problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Backlash, due to disinterest by board/director and problems with values sessions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Backlash from central office staff from the trainings</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Long-term nature of change makes progress difficult to see</li> </ul>

### CASE 1 : MENTORING OUR CHILDREN (MOC)

The mission of this organization is “helping girls realize their full potential by providing them with positive mentoring relationships with women.” Programs and services include one-to-one mentoring and community-based groups that focus on girls’ self-esteem, self-confidence, and self-sufficiency. The agency’s staff assesses, screens, and trains mentors; makes mentoring matches; runs groups for girls; and provides ongoing support and crisis intervention. There are 15 paid staff members, over 300 volunteers, and 20 board members. The agency contact was Deb, associate director, who oversaw programming and staff development. She was responsible for multicultural development efforts in the agency, which took place over an 18-month period.

Deb was clear as to why she initiated MD activities: "I started the staff trainings because we had to do a better job of serving our clients, the girls. We have a lot of white women who want to mentor, but the majority of the girls are from minority groups." She added, "The time was right to look at the diversity aspects of our organization." Other staff concurred with these views that MD was undertaken both to better serve their clients and because it was "the right thing to do."

Deb, with permission from the executive director (her direct supervisor), planned a workshop series that would educate her staff on various cultural groups that were represented by the agency's clients. She also arranged to have some values clarification workshops that were intended to help staff reflect on their own beliefs and behaviors with respect to the work they did. There was no single consultant who assisted with the overall design or implementation of this MD effort. Instead, Deb brought in various individuals who were "expert in their cultures," and then one facilitator who ran three values clarification sessions.

Deb assumed sole responsibility; her efforts were not linked to any broader organizational planning process. The executive director and board members, while agreeing with these plans, indicated that they would not participate in the various workshops or consider similar activities for themselves because "it wasn't particularly relevant to the work we do for the agency", according to one board member). While Deb wanted staff to participate in the planning of the workshops, this did not happen primarily because of staff workload issues: "I want the staff involved. I want to do dialogues, workshop, and other multicultural learning activities, but the staff says they are overwhelmed. They say that they need to spend time on their cases." All direct service staff were mandated to attend the educational workshops. It was expected that all staff (except for the executive director) would attend the values clarification workshops.

The quality of the workshops varied considerably, depending on the particular strengths of the consultant. Staff reported that they did gain useful information about various cultural groups, particularly family norms and behaviors. Yet they were unsure as to how to integrate this knowledge into their practice. As Deb noted, "Staff was committed to learning, but just didn't know what to do, and these consultants didn't really help us with that other than to say, incorporate this when you were with such and such folks." These workshops also had no direct bearing on the primary concern of white women mentoring children of color. The eventual outcomes were very concrete, such as redesigned intake forms that incorporated some cultural items and new outreach materials that reflected diverse groups of women and girls.

The values clarification workshops proved difficult. First, staff didn't understand what the purpose of these workshops was (to explore diversity), and some felt that it was an insult to their practice: "I've been doing this

job for a lot of years. I know myself and I know what works. Clarifying my values just seemed like a waste of time,” said one outreach worker. Second, the consultant focused on exploring differences, but in a particular way. When one staff member conveyed some personal information but without the “correct language,” the consultant berated her. The result was that several group members became very upset, including one who accused the consultant of “hating white people and making them feel guilty.” Some staff indicated that even though they had reservations, they had looked forward to the workshops in order to foster greater group cohesion. Instead, the group splintered.

Deb reports that she was left to “pick up the pieces,” as the consultant “just walked away after the two days. No follow-up, nothing. It was very irresponsible given what had happened.” She received little support from the executive director, who distanced herself from the importance of and need for this work. Since then, staff has been very reluctant to engage in MD work. They believe that they are serving the clients well, and see no need for further education or development.

#### CASE 2 : ENVIRONMENTAL JOB CORPS (EJC)

This site is one of three regional offices that form a national educational organization designed “to protect and enhance the environment through the development of diverse leaders, the promotion of careers, and the inspiration of individual action.” The agency accomplishes this through internships, career advice (e.g., conferences), career products (e.g., publications), research, and consulting. Nationwide, the organization reaches over 50,000 individuals each year, including 600 paid environmental internships. In this office, which serves as the organizational headquarter, there are 18 paid staff members and a 20-member board. The contact was Matt, director of internship development.

A specific external crisis prompted the EJC multicultural development efforts; its primary funder threatened to withdraw resources unless the organization cultivated greater diversity among its paid interns. Sponsoring internship organizations echoed this sentiment, indicating that they would no longer accept only white interns. Consequently, EJC’s initial efforts, which were guided by Matt and designed by a staff working group, focused on designing a strategic plan to include more students of color into the paid internship program. The agency’s president was public about his complete support for this endeavor. EJC engaged a consultant who conducted a study as to why people of color were not more involved in the environmental movement. They learned that people of color were involved, but not through the “usual” mechanisms. Instead, they focused primarily on urban issues, specifically environmental racism, rather than the dominant approach of wilderness preservation and conservation.

Based on the study's findings, the organization undertook two primary strategies. First was to reframe the organization's mission, specifically how environmentalism was understood: "In order to diversify the field, we had to diversify what we meant by the issues. That was the power of environmental racism. We redefined environmental issues in more expansive ways in order to attract more people of color," reported Matt. Second was to launch the Diversity Initiative, which focused explicitly on outreach to and recruitment of students of color. Conferences, stipend programs, and leadership training institutes were geared specifically to students of color. Prior to this initiative, there had been no such activities. In a five-year period, the number of students of color involved in paid internships went from 6% of total interns to 43%.

With the success of the Diversity Initiative, EJC began to be known as an organization committed to multiculturalism. Increasingly, senior staff felt pressure to examine the internal workings of the organization. Staff was becoming more diverse, however, there had been little attention to the dynamics of organizational diversity.

EJC senior staff decided to undertake a series of staff workshops designed and led by three different consultants, and each emphasized the personal or psychological side of multiculturalism. Yet several problems emerged during this phase of the organization's MD efforts. First, not all staff understood why it was being done; it didn't seem connected to the original impetus and some reported feeling "coerced into doing the trendy diversity thing." Second, there was little to no coordination between the consultants and little involvement by staff (other than to attend); consequently, no coherent program, tailored to the agency, emerged. As Matt stated, "We felt we needed help from the outside. But we fell under the spell of the diversity experts. In the end, we found out that they didn't always know what they were doing and that hurt us."

Through a series of workshops (held over six months), some helpful but most disastrous, the staff tried to address forms of racism and sexism in the agency. There was little attention paid, however, to who had organizational power and how that could be used against various participants. The assumption made by all three consultants was that "everyone could get along, talk about issues, and celebrate differences," Matt said. When tensions and mistrust emerged, no one was prepared to address these dynamics. In interviews, staff talked about trust being "shattered," and many felt that the only result of these workshops was heightened cynicism regarding MD efforts. Furthermore, the structural dynamics, specifically the absence of women and people of color in senior positions, was not adequately addressed because of the personal fallout.

In the end, EJC managed to put into place a highly successful internship program that met the funder's and sponsors' demands as well as authentically cultivating the inclusion of people of color. Yet staff was not able to translate

that success into MD work internally. Instead, suspicion about and backlash against MD emerged with respect to intra-organizational relations.

### CASE 3 : AFFORDABLE HOUSING PROJECT (AHP)

The mission of this agency is to “build and sustain strong communities where people of all incomes can achieve their full potential,” and it is accomplished through neighborhood revitalization, housing development, human services, property management, and financial and legal services. This research site is the main office that oversees five others nationally. In this office, there is 40 staff. The organization, as a whole, manages 4000 housing units on 40 sites. The contact from this agency is Liz, the human services coordinator.

Liz began the interview by noting the following: “Your questions [about MD] are very timely. We are going through a lot of growth and expansion, and are involved in organizational development strategy. Concerns about diversity, especially among the staff, have emerged as we go through our self-study and strategic planning processes.” Thus, this organization’s MD initiatives flowed from a broader organizational development endeavor. Furthermore, the self-study revealed that diversity was a concern with stakeholder groups.

The driving force behind the MD efforts was a strategic planning committee. This group, comprised of representatives from organizational subgroups and constituencies, conducted the self-study and designed change strategies (including MD activities). There were two consultants who advised the organization during the yearlong process. Liz describes the role of the consultants as “primarily teachers. They helped us acquire the necessary research and assessment skills, how to use all this data in developing our strategies and programs, especially workshop design. They gave us feedback and helped us stay on track.”

Based on recommendations from the strategic planning committee, the initial MD activities focused on three specific areas. First, in order to improve representation of people of color in management positions, a mentoring and training program was established. Second, a subcommittee of the strategic planning group was formed that focused on diversity and human resources, and would track and evaluate organizational progress. Third were “quick-hits”—efforts that primarily targeted the administrative support, residential, and maintenance staff (mostly working class and people of color) by highlighting their contributions to the organization, inviting conversations and information sharing about the broad organizational changes, suggesting career paths within the organization, and offering trainings on such issues as handling domestic violence (a problem in some of the residential sites). At the time of the interview, the strategic planning committee was beginning to conceptualize diversity trainings intended to be ongoing and

tailored to the particular needs and concerns of the various organizational constituencies.

This was a highly integrated effort that fostered representation and participation of organizational members across various positions. Staff reported some “angst” over the process, but little backlash has emerged. Progress has been made in the hiring and retention of people of color in management/management-track positions. Support and residential staff appear to be engaged in the various issue and skill workshops being offered, in large part because they have input into the focus of these sessions and feel included in the large strategic plan. The main drawback, as one staff member said, was “there was no end in sight and I’m worried that all these activities will push out our primary tasks.” While originally designed as a one-year initiative—and the efforts described here have taken 12 months—many organizational members intend to make these efforts ongoing.

## DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

This article reports results from an exploratory study on the rationales for organizational change, specifically multicultural development efforts in human service agencies. Based on interviews with practitioners and consultants, all who had experience in human service multicultural initiatives, a range of rationales was identified. Several of these rationales, and the influence they have on the overall trajectory of the change endeavor, were explored further in three case studies.

This study’s data suggest that there is an array of MD rationales used in human service agencies. Two of the three top reasons (“being responsive to client base” and “to smooth hiring/retention processes”) reflect predominant themes in human service diversity research. There is great concern in responding in culturally appropriate ways to clients and in managing an increasingly diverse workforce (Aries, 2004; Chow & Austin, 2008; Gutierrez & Nagda, 1996; Hyde, 2003, 2004; Iglehart, 2000; Nagda, Harding, & Holley, 1999; Williams, 2006). With these two rationales, there is a sense of purpose, a problem to be corrected, and a goal for improved performance. Yet these are also narrow rationales, considering the overall scope of multicultural development. Agencies in which these are the driving reasons for change tended to do basic educational and communication programs or training, but did not integrate the efforts in ways that would transform the organization’s culture. This was demonstrated by *Mentoring Our Children*, which sought to respond to its client base by making its staff more culturally aware. Yet there was an absence of a larger vision and connection between MD interventions and direct service practice. Changes tended to be very concrete.

The other reason given by the majority of the respondents—“it is the right thing to do”—reflects the altruistic impulse of human services. Yet much

of the multicultural development literature has discounted such motivations as vague and simplistic. Instead, there is a preference for rationales that are tied to the organization's bottom line, in part as a way of demonstrating the seriousness of the undertaking (Cox, 2001; Curtis & Dreachslin, 2008; Harvey & Allard, 2008; Herring, 2009). *Mentoring Our Children* illustrates the problems with an abstract rationale. Staff was suspicious of this motivation as being trendy, and could not see how it was reflected in their practice. To some extent, this implied that they had not been doing the "right thing," which was an affront to their professional integrity and resulted in some resistance (Chreim, 2006; Kidder, Lankau, Chrobot-Mason, Mollica, & Friedman, 2004; Thomas, 2007). This rationale also was subject to two distinct meanings; some respondents felt multicultural development was genuinely "the right thing to do," while others suggested that the need to be "politically correct" made MD efforts "the right thing." This ambiguity results in differing levels of commitment and conflict in MD strategies.

In the organizational change literature, the need for an organization to respond to external threats or crises is cited as a primary reason for undertaking change (Barnett & Pratt, 2000; Dyck, 1996; Lawrence et al. 2006; Schein, 2004). In this study, slightly less than half of the respondents indicated that this was a rationale for MD. Yet the Environmental Job Corps suggests how a crisis can be turned into an opportunity that resulted in success—up to a point. Organizational members were able to rally behind the crisis, and these actions led to the Diversity Initiative that met and perhaps exceeded expectations. Yet this case also illustrates the problems of extending a change effort beyond the original rationale. Recall that some organizational members tried to initiate intra-organizational MD efforts, but the reason for doing so was not apparent. There was not a clear frame, as there had been for the crisis. Because of this lack of clarity, planning was ceded to some consultants that ultimately failed to address what some of the core concerns were, e.g., racism and sexism. The crisis rationale may have been suitable for specific change initiatives, but did not sufficiently resonate with participants to guide long-term (beyond the crisis), sweeping organizational change.

Several of the MD rationales, mentioned by only a minority of respondents, capture central tenets of multicultural change in organizations. One is the import of leadership ("leader initiated"). The leader as essentially responsible for the MD effort is widely discussed; the absence of such a leader has been identified as a significant barrier to success (Cox, 2001; Hyde, 2003, 2004; Thomas, 2006). This can be seen in *Mentoring Our Children*, where the executive director and the board essentially absented themselves from the initiative. In doing so, they sent a message to staff that this was not of central importance to the agency, which in all likelihood fueled some of the backlash. In contrast, both the Environmental Job Corps and Affordable Housing Project had initiatives that were solidly backed by agency leadership.

Another key principle of multicultural development is that it be integrated into the organization's functions and activities (Cox, 2001; Curtis & Dreachslin, 2008; Hyde, 2003, 2004; Thomas, 2006). Few respondents, however, offered as rationales "building on previous work," "an extension of the agency's mission," and "part of larger strategic planning." Yet the strength of this integrative approach is clearly seen in the success of the Affordable Housing Project. The need for multicultural development organically emerged from the concerns of various organizational stakeholders. Because MD efforts were embedded in broader change efforts designed to improve organizational vitality, they were not seen as provocative, as serving "special groups" at the exclusion of others, or as "one shot deals." Also, because the overall strategic plan, as well as the particular MD efforts, was understood as building an organizational learning culture, this agency was able to make more constructive use of the consultants (e.g., skill trainers, coaches) (Fowler, 2006; Gutierrez et al, 2000).

Few respondents, and none from the case studies, identified "dismantle white [dominant] culture" as a motivation for MD; yet in many respects, this is the essence of this work (Chesler, 1994; Gutierrez & Nagda, 1996; Jackson & Holvino, 1988). This may suggest that while human service agency staff is serious about serving clients, integrating their workforce, and enhancing a learning environment, they may not be fully committed to fundamental organizational transformation. An important component in the pursuit of second-order change is a shift in members' values. The experiences in both Mentoring Our Children and the Environmental Jobs Corp suggest that staff resist when value clarification efforts, which begin that process, are introduced (Thomas, 2007). Staff seemed willing to accept educational ventures, but not efforts to alter their beliefs. In addition, the articulation of a vision is essential. Yet even in the most successful of the case studies (Affordable Housing Project) there was little discussion of a vision of a multicultural intra-organizational environment that could capture the ideals of the MD model. Without a vision that can be translated into a clarity of purpose relevant to practice, can inspire participation, and can point to fundamental change, human service agencies are likely to experience problems, failures, and backlash similar to those experienced at Mentoring Our Children and Environmental Job Corps (Kidder et al., 2004; Thomas, 2007).

This exploratory study indicates some more and less effective rationales for multicultural development in human service agencies, with the more promising of these having a balance between concrete results and MD objectives compatible with the organization's goals. In addition, there are managerial practices that facilitate the realization of these rationales, including: incorporating MD plans into broader agency activities or plans; leadership endorsing and participating in MD efforts; and the careful vetting of consultants to ensure compatibility with and respect for agency members. Understanding the need for multicultural development and then framing that

effectively is important, given the increasing need for multicultural agencies that can serve disenfranchised populations. This research also suggests the import of examining change rationales with respect to the overall transformation endeavor. While the success of a change effort, such as multicultural development, cannot be solely attributable to the change rationale, it seems likely that the way in which the effort is framed and then conveyed to organizational participants sets an important foundation for the work that will follow.

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