In many ways, diversity and inclusion help to form the bedrock of Organization Development (OD). The field of OD has always emphasized maximizing human potential at the same time that it has sought to improve the health and functioning of human systems. OD is grounded in values that emphasize humanism and the goodness of people, broad-based participation and voice, self-determination and client-centeredness, and the embeddedness of people, groups, and organizations in larger social, political, and economic environments (Marshak, 2014). At its best, OD supports groups and organizations in engaging with their people—current and potential—so as to benefit both the collective and its individual members, together with others in the larger system within which the collective exists. Doing this well requires the ability to learn and work across differences, to engage in continuous learning, and to attend to multiple needs and perspectives.

From this standpoint, OD values and approaches are very consistent with those of the field of diversity and inclusion (D&I) in organizations. The field of D&I and its practitioners focus on supporting individuals, groups, and organizations to eliminate pernicious biases and discrimination, as well as to work effectively and productively across differences in ways that further equity and social justice, lead to organizational success, and encourage full participation and empowerment across multiple social identities and cultures (Ferdman & Sagiv, 2012). D&I work involves not only increasing or at least managing diversity, but also fostering the conditions that enable individuals and groups to use diversity as a key resource. The practice of inclusion—“creating and embedding organizational, leadership, and interpersonal practices that result in a sense of safety, full belonging, participation, and voice across the range of diversity dimensions, without requiring assimilation or loss of valued identities” (Ferdman, in press)—is a fundamental approach for benefiting from diversity (Ferdman & Deane, 2014). By managing diversity effectively and fostering inclusion, organizations can improve recruitment and retention of key talent, generate more resources and ideas, catalyze innovation, and often improve results (Ferdman, in press).

OD has overlapped greatly with the D&I field. For those who have sought to increase diversity in organizations and to create and sustain inclusive organizational cultures and practices (Ferdman & Deane, 2014; Holvino, Ferdman, & Merrill-Sands, 2004), OD has provided a fundamental set of frameworks, approaches, tools, and skills. And as the field of D&I has grown, its roots and connections in OD values and practices have persisted. Many D&I practitioners have training or grounding in OD, or have gained such knowledge and perspectives along the way. OD publications, including OD Practitioner, often feature work on diversity and inclusion, and D&I practitioners are sometimes prominent in OD conferences and associations.

Given this history, and given OD’s values, it would seem that diversity and inclusion would be more visible and
focal aspects of OD practice. The Organization Development Network highlights respect and inclusion, authenticity, and empowerment as key OD values (Eggers & Church, n.d., http://www.odnetwork.org/?page=PrinciplesOfODPractice). Shull, Church, and Burke (2014), in their focal article, report that core values for current OD practitioners include empowerment, openness, participation, and continuous learning, all critical to D&I work. Despite this, and despite some discussion of the importance of diversity and inclusion in OD by several authors (e.g., Church, Rotolo, Shull, & Tuller, 2014; Jackson, 2014; Marshak, 2014), it is nevertheless not particularly clear or evident that diversity and inclusion—as an integrated set of competencies, concepts, and practices—have become fully and sufficiently infused as core to the field of OD. This is problematic. Given OD’s values and purposes combined with increasing diversity and globalization, I believe that for OD to truly achieve its aims and be true to its values, more deliberate, systematic, and sustained attention to diversity and inclusion is necessary. And this attention should go beyond a general call for respect across differences to incorporation of perspectives, skills, and approaches that will truly embed diversity and inclusion as core OD competencies.

Infusing diversity and inclusion is important to OD not only because doing so is consistent with core OD values, but because the nature and composition of modern organizations and the world in which they operate demands it. In addition to globalization, multilingualism, and work across national and other borders, current trends around the world include increasingly diverse workforces and the need to find and develop talent in new places and in new ways. Successful organizations and effective leaders will increasingly be those that are able to incorporate many types of diversity and to foster inclusion. Indeed, many global organizations and those in multicultural societies are incorporating D&I as fundamental to their leadership development and workforce engagement processes. To the extent that OD does not address these issues and needs, it will not be prepared to achieve its objectives, and it even runs the risk of becoming irrelevant. Can we and are we communicating effectively with stakeholders across different dimensions of diversity? Can we formulate and ask questions (for example during entry, contracting, and/or data collection) in ways that are appropriate and that will get the best information from different people and groups? How are we interpreting data? Whose input and perspectives are we considering in our interpretations? Are we considering diversity and inclusion dimensions and issues (including who is in and who is out) in our analyses and interpretations? Are we taking

Successful organizations and effective leaders will increasingly be those that are able to incorporate many types of diversity and to foster inclusion. Indeed, many global organizations and those in multicultural societies are incorporating D&I as fundamental to their leadership development and workforce engagement processes. To the extent that OD does not address these issues and needs, it will not be prepared to achieve its objectives, and it even runs the risk of becoming irrelevant. It is not possible here to fully expand on the details of what full infusion of D&I would involve. Rather, I provide illustrative examples of questions and perspectives that would lead OD in that direction in a way that would take it beyond surface consideration of respect and inclusion. If D&I were truly incorporated into OD, what would we be doing and/or asking? What would we be considering in our OD work? Here is an initial list:

- How self-aware are we, as OD practitioners, about our multiple identities, our biases, and our cultural influences? How clearly can we communicate about these? How well can we partner with colleagues who vary from us along one or more dimensions of diversity? And can we incorporate attention to these differences and their impact on our analyses and interpretations? How much and how well have we developed our competencies in the various aspects of the field of diversity and inclusion?
- Can we and are we communicating effectively with stakeholders across different dimensions of diversity? Can we formulate and ask questions (for example during entry, contracting, and/or data collection) in ways that are appropriate and that will get the best information from different people and groups?
- Who is in power? How will power be addressed in the change process so as to foster inclusion across multiple dimensions of diversity? What will be the resulting power distribution across these dimensions, with what effects? To what extent is the OD process considering and addressing systems of privilege grounded in social identities, including race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, nationality, social class, and others?
- At each stage of the change process, and in assessing its success, what is the range of voices and perspectives that is included? What is being done to
ensure voice and participation across multiple identities and perspectives? To what extent does this range include diversity in terms of key social identities? Is there an effort to connect this diversity to core aspects of the work of the organization and to the process of change? In promoting ongoing learning in client organizations, how much and what type of attention is there to seeking out and considering alternative and varied voices, representative of a range of diversity dimensions? What is being done to truly bring in new perspectives, especially those that come from stigmatized, marginalized, or under-represented groups, or those that may be outside the norm? What is being done to create dialogue, engagement, and learning across multiple dimensions of diversity?

What topics are considered taboo or off-limits in an engagement? To what extent are we willing to raise these issues or topics, especially when they relate to diversity and inclusion?

How much and what type of attention is given to having and creating skills for difficult conversations, including those related to and/or stemming from diversity dimensions and issues? How prepared are the organization and its members to deal with intergroup relations and challenges, and to address diversity fault lines? To what extent are multicultural and inclusion competencies considered, addressed, and developed in change efforts or leadership development?

What type of attention is given to creating opportunities for different types of people to speak up and show up? To what degree and in what ways does the OD intervention address norms and practices grounded in cultural and social identities, and do so in a way that respects diversity and explicitly addresses it? To what extent are values and ideologies regarding the role and value of differences discussed and addressed?

I hope that this list is stimulating and provokes curiosity and interest in learning more. Jackson (2014), in his model of multicultural organization development, provides a detailed framework and an excellent place to begin. OD and D&I have touched each other throughout their histories. It is time that we explore and deepen this connection, and truly infuse diversity and inclusion in all aspects of OD. This will not only help OD stay relevant and effective, but will also take it back to its roots and its core values.

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