

# Call for Papers: Understanding Diversity Dynamics in Systems: Social Equality as an Organization Change Issue

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It's been 70 years since Kurt Lewin began examining the social dynamics underlying discrimination and 50 years since the passage of the Civil Rights Act in the United States. Fifty years ago also marks the inception of National Training Laboratories (NTL) and *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science (JABS)*. NTL's mission is "to advance Applied Behavioral Science in the service of social justice, oppression-free societies, and healthy individuals, groups and organizations in the world" ([www.ntl.org](http://www.ntl.org)) and *JABS* supports NTL's mission through serving as a publication outlet for the exploration of group dynamics, organization development, and social change ([www.jab.sagepub.com](http://www.jab.sagepub.com)).

Thus, it is fitting for *JABS* to house a special issue on Social Equality as it furthers NTL's, and by extension, *JABS's*, commitment to civil rights and continuing the work of Lewin on creating a more socially just society.

While much has changed in terms of workplace equality in the past 50 years, with increases in numbers of women and people of color gaining access to places of power where they had formerly been excluded, much remains the same. Despite the election of Barack Obama as the first African American President of the United States, there are still very few women and minorities in senior leadership positions in organizations that hold power (political, government, corporations). For example, in 2014 men held 94.8% of Fortune 500 CEO positions, whereas women held only 5.2% (Catalyst, 2014). In addition, in 2014 Whites held 95% of Fortune 500 CEO positions, whereas people of color (Black, Asian, and Latino) held only 5% (Diversity Inc., 2014). Moreover, when women and people of color are in positions of authority, racial and gender dynamics often undermine leadership and derail organizational initiatives.

There has been a great deal of research on understanding the causes of this persistent social inequality in organizational settings. Some of these studies focus on examining individual differences among various social identity groups (e.g., gender differences in

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leadership), and how these differences may situate groups differently for various positions in organizations (e.g., Eagly, Johannesen-Schmidt, & van Engen, 2003). Other research has focused on examining the stereotypes held by organizational decision makers and how these stereotypes influence their decisions about access to employment opportunities and leadership positions (e.g., Heilman, 2012). As a result of this scholarship, much has been learned about the individual processes (both individual differences of employees and stereotypes held by those in power) that contribute to these disparities in workplace outcomes. Based on this research, the types of interventions that are usually offered for achieving social equality in the workplace focus at the individual level, be it knowledge and skills training for women and people of color or bias awareness training or multicultural competence training for managers (Roberson, Kulik, & Tan, 2013). In fact, corporations spend hundreds of millions of dollars annually on these types of diversity training programs (Rainey, 2010), yet research has demonstrated that these types of interventions have a negligible effect on changing the racial and gender composition of senior leadership in corporations, and thus are not effective in diminishing these disparities in workplace outcomes (Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006).

Often ignored in these types of interventions is the role of the organizational context or system where these persistent inequalities occur. Far less is understood about the systemic factors that contribute to this situation of inequality in organizations. In fact, these structural relations that represent differences in power and status among gender and racial groups in organizations is a systemic factor that influences the perpetuation of these inequalities in the workplace by differentially limiting access to networks, mentorship opportunities, and ultimately advancement opportunities (Alderfer & Smith, 1982; Ibarra, Ely, & Kolb, 2013; Roberson & Block, 2001). Organizational scholars are beginning to examine diversity and inclusion efforts from a systems perspective and we believe this is a critical contribution (e.g., Church, Rotolo, Shull, & Tuller, 2014; Ferdman, 2014; Gonzalez, 2010; Ibarra et al., 2013). A systemic organization change frame may be particularly useful in understanding why this issue of inclusion is so “sticky” and so resistant to change. What have we learned about organization and systemic change that we can use to help with the sticky problem of inequality in organizations? What are the forces that need to be unfrozen? How do we work with resistance around diversity issues? What can diversity scholars and practitioners learn from thinking about diversity as an organization change issue? What can organization change scholars and practitioners incorporate into their work in order to engage all employees in an organization to contribute to their maximum potential? What do we know about systems and system change that can help us change systems to be more inclusive?

The purpose of this special issue is to hear from scholars and practitioners who are thinking about inequality, diversity and inclusion systemically. Given that the examination of social inequality systemically risks exposing dynamics related to power and privilege, as a consequence, much remains not seen, not said, and not studied (Block, 2014; Noumair, 2004). If we treat what is not seen and not said as data, what hypotheses would we generate? What studies would we undertake? How would we examine what is below the surface regarding diversity and inclusion? What pain and anxiety

associated with social inequality would be uncovered? To what extent are organizations engaging in diversity and inclusion work as a way to look *as if* they are addressing barriers related to social inequality but instead are preserving the systems they purport to change? In other words, to what extent is the current state of diversity and inclusion work a social defense against the pain and anxiety associated with social inequality (Hirschhorn, 1988; Jaques, 1955)? For example, initiatives around multiculturalism are often employed as a solution to addressing social inequality in the workplace and yet by focusing on individual differences among employees, multiculturalism may serve as a barrier to making explicit the systems that create and maintain social inequalities (DiTomaso, 2010). So, we may think we're doing real diversity and inclusion work, but instead, we are obstructing the real work of taking a systems perspective that would allow change to occur. We believe that addressing the irrational and unconscious forces that underlie work practices may enable organizations to gain more traction in mitigating social inequality and prove to be more sustainable. Toward this end, an organization change frame that includes a systemic examination of both overt and covert processes may be particularly useful in understanding why this issue of inclusion is so sticky and resistant to change.

We come to this work as a diversity scholar whose research on understanding the barriers faced by members of different social identity groups in the workplace revealed the need for a systemic perspective to dismantle these existing power disparities and an organization change scholar whose work on covert processes revealed the need for addressing power and authority relations among social identity groups. As a result, we are coediting this special issue in order to advance work at the intersection of diversity and organization change. Our belief is that to get traction on social inequality in the workplace we would benefit from exploring it as an organization change issue. Given the changing demographics of the workplace, with women and people of color growing in their representation in the workforce, it is essential for organization change leaders to be able to fully engage everyone who they work with, which requires becoming aware of diversity dynamics in systems and how they have an impact on individual and organizational performance.

Possible topics include (but are not limited to):

- Understanding and addressing resistance to diversity and inclusion in organizations: To what extent is it different than other types of resistance to change? What are the implications for organization change that focuses on diversity and inclusion?
- Force field analysis of culturally frozen systems: What are some driving forces that can be leveraged for diversity and inclusion? What are some restraining forces that should be removed to address diversity and inclusion?
- Diversity and change leadership: What do we know and what do we need to know about diversity dynamics to support change leaders to undertake systemic change in creating more inclusive organizations?
- Creating and maintaining social inequality (unwittingly): Myths about meritocracy? Organizational silence about power disparities? Working at the individual

level only? What other forces contribute to creating and maintaining social inequality?

- Addressing social inequality by examining unconscious and irrational aspects of organizational life: How do we make the covert overt in diversity and inclusion work? How do we address social defenses used by organizations as a means for managing the anxiety associated with work on social inequality?
- New models to create social equality in organizations: How can we combine what we know about organization development and what we know about diversity dynamics to create more inclusive systems?
- Employing a multilevel perspective to understand social inequality: What do we know about what works? What do we need to know?
- Costs of maintaining the status quo: What are the costs for individuals and organizations of failing to create inclusive organizations that motivate and engage a wider array of stakeholders?

To be considered for publication, papers should be submitted to Caryn Block (cjb17@tc.columbia.edu) by December 1, 2015. Please contact either Caryn Block (cjb17@tc.columbia.edu) or Debra Noumair (dn28@tc.columbia.edu) with questions regarding the suitability of papers for this special issue. Manuscripts should be prepared according to the guidelines for *The Journal of Applied Behavior Science*. All papers that satisfy initial editorial screening will be reviewed using the conventional *JABS* double-blind review process. This special issue will be published in December 2016.

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