

Workplace Diversity: A Social–Ecological Framework and Policy Implications

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The diversification of the global workforce brings both challenges and opportunities. We focus on diversity defined by membership in traditionally underrepresented groups. To harness the power of diversity, organizations must: increase representation of diverse individuals throughout the organizational hierarchy, attend to the social processes that emerge once diversity is present, and foster an organizational climate that supports the full inclusion of diverse individuals. We review dynamics at multiple levels of analysis that affect organizations in these three realms. Policy recommendations are grounded in the following ecological principles: (1) organizational issues are nested within multiple levels of context, (2) any organizational event can have reverberating effects throughout the system, (3) people’s experiences of events shape their reactions and the impact of practices on varied groups shapes organizational consequences, and (4) people are continually adapting to one another and to organizational resources and requirements.

Over the last 50 years, the demographic composition of many workplaces has changed dramatically. Evolving workforce demographics have been particularly well documented for the United States (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012), but similar changes are occurring in workplaces around the world (Mor Barak, 2011). This growing workplace diversity presents a wide range of challenges. However, many researchers and organizational leaders have also argued that workplace diversity provides unique opportunities for individuals, teams, and organizations as a whole. In this article, we examine factors that influence organizations’ ability to

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harness the benefits of a diverse workforce. Our goals are to (1) discuss psychological and systems dynamics relevant to the full integration of various minority groups within work settings and (2) distill both organizational and public policy implications.

Researchers have investigated the impact of various dimensions of diversity on organizationally relevant variables. Studies have looked at diversity with respect to readily detectable demographic characteristics (e.g., sex, race, and age), on task-related dimensions (e.g., organizational tenure, educational background, and functional background), as well as psychological dimensions (e.g., attitudes, values, and personality). The effects of diversity on group and organizational dynamics differ based upon whether the dimension is demographic, experiential, task-relevant, value-related, personality, or visible versus invisible (Beatty & Kirby, 2006; Harrison, Price, Gavin, & Florey, 2002). Even within a particular dimension, the impact of diversity often depends upon other aspects of the context.

In this review, we focus on diversity as defined by social identities that carry with them a history of differential access to resources and influence within society. The issues that emerge for such sociodemographic groups may vary (e.g., sex is easily visible whereas sexual orientation is not, and the specific content of stereotypes differs for each). However, many dynamics revolve around common themes that bring with them particularly difficult challenges for organizations (Ely & Roberts, 2008; Fassinger, 2008). Differences that reflect histories of prejudice and discrimination are more likely to be accompanied by current disadvantage than are differences that result from personal style or area of expertise (Prasad, Pringle, & Konrad, 2006).

Thus, our focus requires us to be mindful of power differentials when considering implications for organizations. In addition, as expressions of prejudice have become more subtle, there is a risk of ignoring important workplace challenges if issues of historically accumulated privilege are left out of the conversation.

Determining which specific sociodemographic dimensions are most relevant in an organization is highly dependent upon the broader community and national contexts. For example, in the United States, the dimensions of diversity that historically coincide with differential access to resources include gender, race, ethnicity, culture, disability status, and sexual orientation. Alternatively, caste or religion may be most salient in organizations based in India (Jonsen, Maznevski, & Schneider, 2011). Much of the research available focuses on Western societies, with a preponderance done in the United States, thus the dimensions most studied are race, ethnicity, and gender (Jonsen et al., 2011). While the literature summarized here reflects this tendency, we argue that many of the dynamics discussed will translate to other sociodemographic groups to the extent that they share a marginalized status. We, nonetheless, caution that not all dynamics run in parallel for varied groups and that because not all disenfranchised groups have received the same level of research attention, less may be known about some than others.

Our focus on sociodemographic dimensions of diversity is driven by several additional factors. First, global demographic changes are rendering demographic diversity a fact of organizational life that cannot be ignored (Mor Barak, 2011). The labor force is becoming increasingly ethnically diverse and includes more women than in past decades, both in the United States (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2012) and internationally (Mor Barak, 2011). While lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgendered (LGBT); religious; and disability statuses are often invisible, evidence suggests these dimensions of diversity are also becoming more prevalent in today's global workforce (Catalyst, 2012a). Second, economic trends amplify the importance of attending to sociocultural and demographically based diversity. For example, growth of global organizations, multinational strategic alliances, and growth in the service sector all increase the relevance of hiring workers who can bridge important divides, i.e., among organizational units and between providers and clients. Third, there are legal incentives for attending to these dimensions of diversity. Global legislative developments are increasingly prohibiting employment practices that discriminate on the basis of gender, race, color, religion, national origin, and disability status (Mor Barak, 2011). And, while there is no current federal U.S. law protecting LGBT individuals, 21 states and the District of Columbia have adopted legal protections (Catalyst, 2012b), and 52 other countries prohibit employment discrimination based on LGBT status (Itaborahy, 2012).

Many previous reviews have provided important insights into barriers for specific groups in the workplace (e.g., Fassinger, 2008). Our goal is to build upon and extend previous work by looking closely at the crosscutting dynamics that affect organizations' ability to harness the positive promise of workplace diversity and address potential problem areas. We argue that to do so, organizations must pay attention to the processes that create barriers to entry and promotion as well as to the interpersonal,¹ team, and organizational dynamics that are likely to emerge once diverse people are working together.

Nature of the Challenge

Although attention to diversity has become a widely accepted organizational imperative, it is useful to anchor our discussion in an overview of the impact of diversity in the workplace. The picture is not simple; diversity can lead to both positive and negative outcomes within organizations (Jackson, Joshi, & Erhardt,

¹ Some researchers use the term "interpersonal" to refer to situations where people interact as individuals rather than as members of different groups and "intergroup" to describe exchanges between people of different social identities. We argue, however, that multiple intersecting social identities of participants affect every exchange. Moreover, interactions within organizations are typically between individuals who may differ on some dimensions while being similar to one another on other dimensions. Thus, we use the term "interpersonal" to describe social exchanges in general and the term "intergroup" when discussing research that singles out a particular dimension of difference.

2003; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). At the individual worker level, there is evidence that women (Stoh, Langlands, & Simpson, 2004); ethnic minorities (Cokley, Dreher, & Stockdale, 2004); LGBT individuals (Lubensky, Holland, Wiethoff, & Crosby, 2004); low-income workers (Bullock, 2004); and people with disabilities (Bell, McLaughlin, & Sequeira, 2004) all experience a range of benefits when their organizations successfully address diversity. Benefits include: relief from discrimination and harassment, greater opportunities for growth and increased job satisfaction (Mor Barak & Levin, 2002), and better mental and physical health (Sagrestano, 2004). Members of majority groups (e.g., heterosexuals, Whites, and males) have also reported benefits such as increased job satisfaction when harassment of others is reduced (Bond, Punnett, Pyle, Cazeca, & Cooperman, 2004; Lubensky et al., 2004).

In addition to looking at the experiences of individual employees, it is critical to consider the effect of reducing bias and increasing understanding on the functioning of teams and on the organization as a whole. Overall, the results regarding the impact of diversity on team functioning and organizational performance are mixed, with some research indicating positive, some negative, and some null results. Documented organizational benefits include reduced absenteeism and turnover as well as increased productivity and commitment to the organization (Triana, García, & Colella, 2010; see also Page, 2007). Some negative effects include increased interpersonal or relational conflict (e.g., Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999), decreased communication (e.g., Mackie, Worth, & Asuncion, 1990), and decreased cooperation (Chatman & Flynn, 2001). (For reviews, see Bell, Villado, Lukasik, Belau, & Briggs, 2011; Jackson et al., 2003; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007.)

These inconsistent results may stem in part from the competing research traditions dominating the workplace diversity literature (Christian, Porter, & Moffitt, 2006; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). One approach suggests that diversity yields benefits by introducing task-related diversity, i.e., a wide range of perspectives, knowledge, and skills can increase a group's creativity and problem-solving capacity (e.g., Cox & Blake, 1991). The other approach builds on social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) and suggests that perceived dissimilarities within a group can intensify problems with cohesion as well as introduce bias, misunderstanding, and mistrust. While some have concluded that task-related diversity is responsible for positive effects while sociodemographic diversity is responsible for null or negative effects (e.g., Bell et al., 2011; Joshi & Roh, 2009; Tsui, Egan, & O'Reilly, 1992), a recent meta-analysis suggests this explanation is too simplistic (van Dijk, van Engen, & van Knippenberg, 2012). To the extent that sociodemographic diversity brings with it multiple perspectives, diversity has the potential to produce optimal decision-making outcomes. The caveat is that the negative intergroup processes likely to accompany sociodemographic diversity

must be quelled in order to harness the power of multiple perspectives (Page, 2007).

A promising approach to understanding these divergent results is to identify potential “third variables” or moderators (Christian et al., 2006; van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). Relevant moderating variables explored thus far include the role of interdependence among group members (e.g., Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000), cooperative and collectivist norms (e.g., Chatman & Spataro, 2005; Jehn & Bezrukova, 2004), and team learning behavior (e.g., Van der Vegt & Bunderson, 2005). Some have argued that the essential ingredient—or missing “third variable”—required to promote the successful integration of diverse individuals is the organization’s diversity philosophy or the specific way in which leaders approach diversity issues (e.g., Ely & Thomas, 2001; Kochan et al., 2003).

What becomes clear from research on the impact of workplace diversity is the need to look at a multitude of contributing factors in relation to one another. Researchers agree on the need for complex, systemic frameworks that incorporate interactions among personal and contextual factors. There is little consensus, however, about the best paradigm to pull the varied findings together.

The Social–Ecological Framework

This review will be guided by a social–ecological framework (Kelly, 1968; 2006; Trickett, Kelly, & Todd, 1972). Social–ecological principles challenge traditional psychological theories that locate explanations for human behavior primarily within individuals. Simply put, people’s behavior can only be understood when viewed in context. The ecological perspective is grounded both in a multileveled analysis and in general systemic principles. Employing multileveled analyses recognizes that individual capacities are shaped by team dynamics, team functioning is influenced by organizational processes, organizational dynamics are affected by local and national cultural contexts, and dynamics at all of these levels are further influenced by broader social, economic, and policy trends (Rappaport, 1977). In other words, the types of behaviors and interpersonal interactions that get expressed at any particular time depends on what these various layers of the environment offer in terms of supports and constraints.

The ecological perspective is also grounded in systems principles regarding the ways in which the arrangement of the environment and the distribution of resources—including power differentials and structural inequalities—exert powerful effects on human behavior. It incorporates recognition of the interdependence among all organization members, such that every action within an organization has effects that radiate out to other elements of the system. It also incorporates principles about how social systems like organizations function over time, i.e., that people continually adapt to their organizational environment while, simultaneously, organizations change over time in response to the individuals who people

them. The perspective draws upon principles that resonate with Kurt Lewin's work and his classic thesis that behavior is a function of person and environment. Particularly complementary is Lewin's theory that forces within the current as well as the historical context influence the expression of social problems and either promote or constrain potential solutions (Lewin, 1935).

Relevant Research

An abundance of research literature informs the challenges and opportunities organizations encounter in the effective management of diversity, and this work emerges from multiple disciplines. The challenge of this article is to summarize and integrate these varied perspectives to inform organizational and public policy aimed at improving organizations' ability to make the most of diversity, while mitigating its potentially negative consequences. The addition of a social-ecological lens compels us to consider processes at multiple levels of analysis that affect both who is allowed to enter an organization and how diverse people interact once there. We have organized the following research summary in terms of three aspects of the workplace diversity challenge: (1) increasing access and representation, (2) promoting interactional and team dynamics, and (3) developing supportive organizational climates (cf., Bond & Pyle, 1998b). Dynamics at multiple levels of analysis interact to affect issues in each of these three realms.

Access: Representation of Diverse Groups

An important starting place is to examine the processes that impact the degree to which diverse individuals have access to all levels of organizations; you simply cannot harness diversity that you do not have. A quick snapshot of the existing U.S. workforce reveals that many organizations have had difficulty cultivating diversity among workers, particularly at higher levels of the organizational hierarchy. For example, despite women comprising 46.6% of the U.S. labor market in 2011, only 14.1% held executive officer positions in Fortune 500 companies. The percentage of the White workforce in managerial positions is 37.9% in the United States, compared to 29.1% of the African American and 18.9% of the Latino labor forces (US Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011). "The glass ceiling" is a term often invoked to capture the invisible, systemic, and impenetrable barriers women and people of color face as they attempt to ascend the organizational hierarchy (US Bureau of National Affairs, 1995). Relatedly, there is also a "sticky floor" (Harlan & Berheide, 1994), which refers to the disproportionately high representation of members of historically marginalized groups clustered into low status, low paying jobs at entry levels. Individuals in these positions encounter barriers that stagnate upward mobility, thereby reinforcing occupational segregation and low wages for women and people of color.

In search of evidence to account for the glass ceiling and the sticky floor, many have documented the role of stereotyping, prejudice, and discrimination. Social psychological theories suggest that people are quick to classify others into social categories on the basis of salient and readily identifiable features (e.g., sex, race, and age). This categorization process is nearly instantaneous, often outside of conscious awareness, and may yield a number of assumptions about and reactions to members of particular groups (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990).

Skill-related evaluative biases. Discrimination in employment decisions can often be traced back to biased work-related evaluations. The expectations that stereotypes yield are one mechanism responsible for such biases. When assessing an individual for selection or promotion, evaluators often compare the requirements of a job to a person's perceived attributes, ultimately producing some expectation of the likelihood of success. One of the pernicious effects of stereotypes lies in the extent to which an individual, by virtue of his or her membership in a particular social group, is assumed to possess stereotypical attributes that are ill fitted to the requirements of successful job performance (Eagly & Karau, 2002; Heilman, 2001). For example, the dearth of women in top management roles has been explained by the lack of fit between the female stereotype of communality (kind, warm, and passive) and the agentic attributes (assertiveness, decisiveness, and dominant) perceived to be required for success in those positions (e.g., Koenig, Eagly, Mitchell, & Ristikari, 2011). Similarly, the existence of the sticky floor for women is thought to be perpetuated by the presumed match between feminine attributes and those required of low-status, low-wage jobs such as home health workers or "administrative" staff. More generally, the content of stereotypes in the United States about African Americans, Hispanics, and Asian Americans are also incongruent with perceived requirements for occupational success, e.g., too aggressive, lazy, not assertive enough (Madon et al., 2001). While the specific content of stereotypes may differ across groups and international boundaries, there is evidence that suggests that social status within a particular society universally predicts social stereotypes (Cuddy et al., 2009). Specifically, high-status individuals are generally conceptualized as more competent than low-status individuals (Fiske, Cuddy, Glick, & Xu, 2002).

Stereotype-based expectations are consequential because they become a lens through which information is interpreted, particularly when there is ambiguity regarding qualifications or the quality of a work outcome (see Olson, Roese, & Zanna, 1996, for review). For example, identical resumes are often evaluated less favorably when they are ascribed a female as opposed to a male name (see Davison & Burke, 2000, meta-analysis). Similarly, identical resumes with stereotypical Black names (as compared to White names) are significantly less likely to elicit employer callbacks (e.g., Bertrand & Mullainathan, 2002). Ambiguity about individual contribution can also perpetuate the expression of stereotype-based

expectations. For example, when men and women work together, men receive more credit for successful team outcomes than women (Heilman & Haynes, 2005), whereas women receive more blame for unsuccessful team outcomes than men (Haynes & Lawrence, 2012).

Prejudicial attitudes have also been implicated in the expression of evaluative biases. Much of the current literature focuses on the more subtle expressions of prejudicial attitudes. For example, the theory of aversive racism asserts that as overt displays of prejudice and discrimination have become more taboo, these processes have become more covert and express themselves in subtler ways (Gaertner & Dovidio, 1986). Aversive racism can be an unconscious attitude an individual may hold, despite their explicit endorsement of egalitarian values. It is most likely to manifest itself when attributions other than race can be invoked for differential treatment (Dovidio, Gaertner, Kawakami, & Hodson, 2002). The consequences of such attitudes manifest themselves in ways similar to stereotype-based expectations. For example, Dovidio and Gaertner (2000) found that Whites are significantly more likely to evaluate a White candidate more positively than an equivalent Black candidate when there was ambiguity regarding qualifications. There is evidence that these dynamics extend to other groups as well (see Hodson, Dovidio, & Gaertner, 2004, for review). These consequences are intensified given that organizational decision-making roles tend to be dominated by majority group members.

There is also a growing body of literature that suggests that the criteria used to evaluate individual capacities differ for varied sociodemographic groups thereby contributing to evaluative biases. The shifting standards model argues that individuals are often evaluated in the context of their group membership (see Biernat, 2003, for review). Group members who are thought to be deficient on a particular attribute (e.g., women are low on competence) are held to lower minimum standards (e.g., she is competent . . . for a woman); however the confirmatory standards for that same attribute are much higher. In other words, it takes more evidence for a woman to be seen as competent than for a man (Biernat & Fuegen, 2001), more evidence for a man to be seen as incompetent than for a woman (Biernat, Fuegen, & Kobrynowicz, 2010), and more evidence for Blacks to be seen as competent than for Whites (Biernat & Kobrynowicz, 2007). These findings are also consistent with Foschi's work on the double standards with which individuals of low-status groups must often contend (see Foschi, 2000, for review). The implications of this research underscore the difficulty diverse individuals often encounter when being compared to members of the dominant group in both hiring and promotion decisions.

Social biases. When individuals are able to overcome these evaluative biases and excel in untraditional domains, these individuals often suffer social penalties. The derogation of interpersonal attributes is the result of "prescriptive stereotype

violation.” For example, while *descriptive* gender stereotypes denote “how women are,” *prescriptive* gender stereotypes denote “how women should be” (Burgess & Borgida, 1999; Prentice & Carranza, 2002). Thus women are not only thought to be “warm,” but they are also expected to be. Simply by virtue of demonstrating competence in an untraditional role, an individual may be presumed by an evaluator to have violated the prescriptive stereotype and become characterized as its antithesis. For example, women who succeed in traditionally male roles are seen as “pushy” and “abrasive” (Heilman, Wallen, Fuchs & Tamkins, 2004); whereas men who are successful in feminine roles are seen as “wimpy” and “undeserving of respect” (Heilman & Wallen, 2010). Complementary work by Rudman and colleagues has documented the “backlash effect” where people who act in ways that violate gender- or race-based prescriptions incur social and economic penalties (Phelan & Rudman, 2010; Rudman, 1998). Studies from these various streams of research frame a double bind that results from stereotype-based dynamics. To the extent that descriptive stereotypes are incongruent with work-related abilities, women and ethnic minority members face challenges in gaining access to, and moving up in, an organization. And yet, if they “disconfirm” these stereotypes, they are apt to incur other social costs that may also hinder organizational access.

Preference for similar others. Schneider’s (1987) attraction–selection–attrition (ASA) model (see also Byrne, 1971) furthers our understanding of the challenges related to hiring and sustaining a diverse workforce. The ASA model suggests that organizations are a product of a cyclical pattern of interactions between people and their work environment. Organizations are likely to attract individuals similar to those who are already there, and these similar others are more likely to be selected to become members. Dissimilar members are more likely to leave the organization. The end result is a more homogeneous organization that is difficult to penetrate, and remain in, for people dissimilar to the dominant culture. While Schneider’s original ASA model focused on psychological dimensions (attitudes, values, and beliefs) as a basis for similarity, demographic characteristics can also trigger the ASA cycle (Jackson et al., 1991). Relatedly, organizations may provide subtle cues about the types of people they are seeking, which may reinforce homogeneity without direct expression of exclusionary biases. For example, Gaucher, Friesen, and Kay (2011) investigated the degree of “gendered” language in a sample of over 4,000 job advertisements and found that masculine-themed words (leader, competitive, and dominant) tended to prevail in ads for male-dominated occupations. Furthermore, women found masculine-themed job ads less appealing, not because of their perceptions of their abilities, but because of their perception of being less likely to belong within the organization.

Summary. The literature we reviewed above is clearly not exhaustive, but rather represents a sample of the processes that can interfere with increasing the

representation of diverse individuals within an organization. Skill-related evaluative biases, social biases, and preferences for similarity impact the staffing judgments of organizational decision makers—namely who gets hired and promoted and who does not. Congruent with the social–ecological framework, many of the processes that affect access to jobs (representation) also affect social exchanges. For example, stereotyping and prejudicial processes not only hinder the hiring and promotion of diverse individuals, but also influence the extent to which diverse individuals feel welcome once they enter an organization. Similarly, the ASA model argues that perceptions of similarity are, at least in part, responsible for both who joins an organization and who is likely to feel a sense of belonging and thus stay. Organizations must find ways to mitigate these deleterious processes if they wish to increase the representation of diverse individuals and to benefit from the value this diversity may bring. Furthermore, the degree to which organizations can break down barriers that hinder the full integration of diverse individuals will inevitably change the organizational context and potentially have positive rippling effects on other organizational dynamics.

Interactional Dynamics

Once sociodemographic diversity is introduced, a number of relevant interpersonal and group dynamics emerge. In this section, we focus on how diversity influences dyadic and team dynamics through subtle expressions of exclusion and prejudice, as well as through the processes of group identification and intergroup biases.

Subtle biases. As the overt expression of prejudice has become less tolerated in contemporary society, the importance of attending to more subtle manifestations is ever more critical. These subtle expressions, often termed microaggressions (Sue et al., 2007) or microinequities (Hinton, 2004; Rowe, 1990), are brief commonplace acts of mistreatment or invalidation. Microaggressions can take numerous forms including being overlooked and devalued due to sociodemographic group membership; subtle snubs, dismissive looks, gestures, and tones; the invalidation of prejudice or discriminatory experiences; and comments disguised as innocuous (saying to an Asian American, “where are you really from?”) or even veiled as complimentary (“You speak English so well”) (see Sue et al., 2007, for full discussion). Microaggressions are committed against people of color, women (Sue, 2010), LGBT individuals (Nadal et al., 2011), individuals with disabilities (Keller & Galgay, 2010), and religious minorities (Nadal et al., 2012). The unifying theme underlying these expressions is precisely what makes them so damaging and resistant to change: they are subtle, potentially ambiguous, difficult to prove, and yet pervasive (Crocker & Major, 1989; Deitch et al., 2003; Rowe, 1990; Sue, 2010). In addition, microaggressions are more likely to be launched by high status, dominant

group members, whose high status gives them the power to dismiss the impact on members of historically disadvantaged groups (Sue, Capodilupo, Nadal, & Torino, 2008).

Employees who are targets of microaggressions suffer a host of serious negative repercussions including anxiety, isolation, and mistrust (Sue, 2010). Furthermore, while no direct empirical evidence documents the impact of microaggressions on diverse teams, there is reason to believe that they would be corrosive to team functioning. Foldy, Rivard, and Buckley (2009) have argued that the manifestation of power inequities in racially diverse teams leaves nonmajority individuals with few appealing options: withdrawal, confrontation, and assimilation are all likely to impair team functioning. This echoes the dilemma that Sue and colleagues detail when a target must decide what to do when a microaggression has occurred; both ignoring and confronting are likely to have negative reverberations (Sue et al., 2008). To the extent that microaggressions serve as a reminder to diverse individuals of their nondominant status, they are likely to hinder social exchanges between dominant and nondominant group members.

Social categorization. The social identity perspective (Tajfel & Turner, 1986) forms the backbone for much of the research on problematic processes likely to emerge in diverse groups (e.g., Christian et al., 2006; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998). Social identity theory asserts that individuals often categorize themselves (and others) on the basis of readily detectable features (e.g., race, sex). Moreover, an individual's self-concept is tied to his/her membership in specific groups. This sorting process yields the distinction between in-groups ("us") and out-groups ("them"), and people preserve a positive view of the self via maintaining favorable views of in-group members. This, in turn, may carry a host of repercussions within the workplace when individuals from different groups interact.

One of the most debilitating dynamics that emerges is intergroup bias, namely attitudes about and behavior toward in-group members are generally more favorable than toward out-group members (e.g., Brewer, 1979). Individuals tend to like, trust, and cooperate with in-group members more than with out-group members (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). Some scholars have made the compelling case that intergroup biases are arguably the factors most likely to hinder the exchange of task-related information, which is key to promoting the positive effects of diversity within work groups (e.g., van Knippenberg, De Dreu, & Homan, 2004). In other words, you cannot benefit from the diversity of perspectives within a heterogeneous group if group members do not share information with one another.

Researchers who have documented the negative effects of demographic diversity on group processes often assume social categorization is at work, without testing this proposition directly (van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007). van Knippenberg et al. (2004) argue that researchers employing a social categorization framework often presume intergroup bias to be an inevitable byproduct of

increased diversity (or dissimilarity) despite empirical literature to suggest otherwise. Therefore, it is unclear whether these disruptive processes are indeed a function of social categorization processes. Yet it is fair to conclude that intergroup bias—a potential but not inevitable result of social categorization (Brown & Gaertner, 2001)—can be a serious hindrance to harnessing the positive potential of diversity.

Moderating variables. Research on subtle biases and social categorization leads to the question: what are the factors that are most likely to promote and/or mitigate this bias? Numerical representation is one such factor. When individuals occupy solo status (or are few in number), the salience of their group membership is likely to be emphasized (Kanter, 1977). Simply put, solo status is more likely to signal that an individual is different and does not belong. This increased salience can then intensify the extent to which she or he is perceived stereotypically (e.g., Taylor, 1981). Randel (2002) found that work group conflict was also heightened by numerical distinctiveness. Moreover, high-status group members appear to demonstrate more in-group favoritism than low-status group members (see Bettencourt, Dorr, Charlton, & Hume, 2001, for meta-analysis), which can compound the amount of bias experienced by the few members of historically disadvantaged groups who are able to overcome the obstacles and enter nontraditional job domains.

When dimensions of diversity converge to create “diversity faultlines” (e.g., group membership aligns with multiple characteristics like younger women vs. older men), subgroup categorization processes are likely to be intensified. Strong diversity faultlines are associated with highly disruptive intergroup processes, such as decreased cooperation, decreased communication, and increased interpersonal tensions (e.g., Lau & Murnighan, 2005; Li & Hambrick, 2005). While diversity faultlines need not always produce negative effects (Homan, van Knippenberg, Van Kleef, & de Dreu, 2007), in the absence of prodiversity beliefs, faultlines can be particularly problematic.

Time is another important moderator of intergroup bias. The negative relational effects associated with sociodemographic diversity within work teams can be tempered if individuals realize they share similar psychological values and attitudes (e.g., Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998). Over time, individuals may re-categorize themselves on the basis of shared psychological attributes that cut across demographic characteristics, which is congruent with the notion that positive intergroup contact may ultimately decrease prejudice (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

Jones, Lynch, Tenglund, and Gaertner (2000) argued that the reduction of intergroup bias is achievable under a particular set of conditions. Encouraging individuals to identify with multiple categories, including both their own cultural identity and a superordinate identity, is key (Jones et al., 2000). Rather than

an “us” versus “them” distinction, there is also a more inclusive superordinate category of “we” to which all group members belong. Crucially, membership in the superordinate category of “we” must include the ability to maintain one’s cultural identity and have it be valued rather than the two identities being seen as in conflict with one another. This line of reasoning is complementary to Brewer’s theory of optimal distinctiveness (Brewer, 1991). Brewer has argued that individuals are motivated to maintain a balance between belongingness (congruent with a superordinate category) and uniqueness (congruent with maintaining one’s cultural identity). To the extent that cross categorization in multiple groups achieves this balance of valuing differences while appreciating commonalities, it is likely to promote more harmonious intergroup contact (Jones et al., 2000). Bond and Keys (2000) suggest that what is important for positive work group functioning is not necessarily an equal appreciation of similarities and differences but rather an appreciation for diversity within a broader context of commonalities, i.e., a shared mission can become the reason for coming together, and then, with that as a foundation, the validation of differences can enhance group effectiveness.

Summary. It is clear that subtle expressions of prejudice can hinder positive intergroup relationships and can also compound the difficulties that members of minority groups are likely to encounter. Moreover, the social identity perspective highlights the many factors that are likely to complicate intergroup relations. Fortunately, this literature also suggests that troubled interpersonal relations between diverse individuals are not inevitable, and factors such as time, increased representation, and shared superordinate goals can temper the negativity. Furthermore, when differences are valued, diversity can introduce a host of positive effects.

Organizational Supports

Thus far, we have summarized research regarding some of the processes that affect who is invited into and promoted within organizations as well as group processes that are likely to affect how diverse individuals interact once in the organization. Yet it is clear throughout this literature that many of these dynamics are also shaped by aspects of the broader organizational context. Particularly relevant to this review is variation among organizations regarding the extent to which they incorporate a value for diversity, address diversity concerns, and adopt diversity-related policies and procedures (Cox, 2001; Ely & Thomas, 2001; Kochan et al., 2003).

Beliefs about diversity. Many diversity scholars have focused on which diversity philosophy best manages the tension between focusing on similarities versus differences, i.e., color blindness, multiculturalism, and polyculturalism. Color blindness ideology suggests that emphasizing similarities will diminish the

salience of group membership, thereby inhibiting social categorization and resultant intergroup biases. Although it is referred to as color blindness, it goes beyond blindness to “color” (i.e., race) and extends to ignoring all social identity-related differences. The emphasis is on a single, common in-group identity; in its most extreme form, this approach tends to incorporate an assimilationist ideology. The implicit message is that people from diverse backgrounds should adapt to the dominant mainstream culture. However, the color blind philosophy has been associated with negative consequences for minority group members (e.g., Plaut, Thomas, & Goren, 2009). Moreover, many have argued that downplaying differences not only ignores the persistent discrimination of marginalized group members, but also may unwittingly perpetuate it by promoting silence about the biases nondominant group members must often contend with (Zirkel, 2008).

Adoption of values for multiculturalism has been suggested as a valuable alternative (e.g., Fowers & Richardson, 1996). Multiculturalism is a pluralistic ideology that emphasizes the importance of attending to and celebrating group differences. Being knowledgeable about varied cultures is thought to reduce prejudice (Zirkel, 2008). In comparing the two orientations, multiculturalism has been associated with more positive intergroup attitudes (e.g., Plaut et al., 2009), including lower in-group bias, lower ethnocentrism, greater willingness to engage in contact with other groups, prodiversity views about affirmative action (AA), and improved self-esteem for members of marginalized groups (see Rosenthal & Levy, 2010, for review).

A promising third orientation is polyculturalism (Prashad, 2003), where the emphasis is on the degree to which all ethnic and racial groups are connected and have mutually influenced one another throughout history. Like multiculturalism, polyculturalism endorses the notion that there are important differences among cultural groups. But rather than seeing these as clear distinctions or static qualities (as is more true for multiculturalism), polyculturalism focuses attention on the ongoing mutual influence among groups. Moreover, polyculturalism rejects the notion of a superordinate identity, thereby challenging social hierarchies among groups. While the least empirically studied of the three orientations, studies indicate that individuals who endorse polyculturalism tend to have an appreciation for and comfort with diversity, generally positive intergroup attitudes, less sexist attitudes, as well as less prejudice toward LGBT individuals. These findings hold true for members of both dominant and marginalized groups (see Rosenthal & Levy, 2012, for review).

Organizational values for diversity. Research on the varied diversity philosophies looks at individual beliefs, often using a measure that aggregates assessments of individual beliefs as a proxy for organizational climate. Other scholars have emphasized the ways that organizational characteristics that communicate particular values for diversity can moderate a range of work-related outcomes (e.g.,

Cox, 1993). One relevant line of research investigates the organizational factors that influence diverse individuals' sense of safety from stereotype-based biases. Research suggests that the prospect or "threat" of confirming a stereotype can have a detrimental impact on one's performance (see Steele, Spencer, & Aronson, 2002, for a review of research on stereotype threat). A person does not have to directly experience bias or even be directly reminded about stereotypic expectations; rather, qualities of settings have the power to signal whether or not someone can anticipate that their social identity will place them at risk of differential treatment (Purdie-Vaughns, Steele, Davies, Ditlmann, & Crosby, 2008). People look for environmental cues, like organizational values for diversity and the availability of coworkers who share one's social identity, to assess whether or not they will be safe (Purdie-Vaughns & Walton, 2011).

Perceptions of organizational values for diversity vary according to the extent and specific type of diversity within the group as well with other aspects of the broader organizational context (Plaut et al., 2009; Ryan, Casas, Kelly-Vance, Ryalls, & Nero, 2010; Zarate & Shaw, 2010). Some of our work, for example, has been with organizations where "diversity" largely revolves around employees from immigrant backgrounds. Triana et al. (2010) found that perceptions of organizational efforts to support diversity could mitigate the negative impact of discrimination in some scenarios (i.e., in samples of Whites and Hispanics) but not others (i.e., in a sample of African Americans). They speculated that when discrimination occurs in spite of organizational efforts to support diversity, it may engender cynicism and disappointment, thereby negatively affecting commitment. This may be particularly true for member of groups that have a long history of intense discrimination like African Americans in the United States.

Several field-based studies argue that the *depth* of an organization's value for diversity is the essential factor in determining whether diversity is an asset for an organization. Ely and Thomas (2001) found that diversity-related outcomes are largely dependent upon the specific ways in which organizations express their value for diversity. They distinguished among three perspectives: (1) discrimination-and-fairness, (2) access-and-legitimacy, and (3) integration-and-learning. They found that all three perspectives could encourage managers to hire more diverse staff, but only the integrated approach yielded sustained benefits for the organization. Employing a discrimination-and-fairness paradigm, which attends to recruitment and fair treatment of diverse employees, enabled organizations to successfully broaden demographic diversity, but it did not translate into creating a positive climate that supported full involvement for all groups once hired or promoted. Access-and-legitimacy efforts created positive niches within the organization where diversity-related expertise was valued, but diverse individuals did not receive the same level of acceptance in other parts of the organization. In the integration-and-learning approach, the organization views the skills, insights, and perspectives of diverse members as integral to the organizational mission, i.e.,

diversity among employees is viewed as a resource for learning and organizational adaptation. This final approach yielded the most positive effects, and organization members reported feeling more valued, having better intergroup relations, and feeling more successful in their work.

Kochan et al. (2003) extended these findings through a 5-year longitudinal study. Analysis of four U.S.-based case studies conducted by separate pairs of researchers revealed that diversity had the most positive impact when organizations fostered cultures of “learning from diversity” (p. 17) through promoting managerial strategies, human resource policies, and employee attitudes that actively value diversity among workers. They also found that competitive organizational cultures exacerbated the negative effects of racial diversity. These findings are consistent with studies that document the positive impact of interdependence and collectivist contexts on relations among diverse groups (Chatman & Spataro, 2005; Gaertner & Dovidio, 2000; Jehn & Bezrukova, 2004).

Organizational practices. Organizations have adopted a range of practices for fostering climates that integrate a value for diversity. Interventions have been aimed at addressing a variety of problematic dynamics that have been identified in the research literature, like stereotyping, in-group–out-group biases among coworkers, managerial biases, and the isolation of members of minority groups. The most common approach is to establish training programs. In addition, organizations around the world have adopted policies for addressing harassment and discrimination (Mor Barak, 2011; Wentling & Palma-Rivas, 2000). Many efforts focus on procedures for increasing the hiring and promotion of diverse individuals. Others prohibit discrimination and/or delineate complaint mechanisms and compliance strategies. In general, organizations that have clear diversity-related policies experience fewer problems than those that do not (Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand, & Magley, 1997; Kalev, Dobbin, & Kelly, 2006). However, not all policies are equally effective. Leadership support emerges as an essential ingredient (Chrobot-Mason & Ruderman, 2004); there are more problems with harassment when leaders are seen as indifferent, passive, or even encouraging of sexist or racist behavior (e.g., Fitzgerald et al., 1997).

In our own work, we articulate the qualities of organizational settings that support the integration of diverse workers and the practices that promote those qualities. We have found that organizations that adopt practices that emphasize commonalities and connectedness, while also valuing differences and challenging marginalizing practices, have the best opportunity to attract and benefit from diversity (Bond, 2007; Bond, Haynes, & Toof, 2013). Through multiple case studies, we identify four kinds of organizational practices that promote the inclusion of diverse groups. Two emphasize connection, i.e., an “ethos of connection” and “contextualized understanding.” *Ethos of connection* refers to organizational practices that remind workers that they are dependent upon one another to achieve

their organizational goals (e.g., frequent reminders of the organizational mission, actively acknowledging how each individual/team contributes to the mission). Practices that embody the spirit of *contextualized understanding* include personnel approaches that incorporate the impact of individuals' culture and context into responses to work-related behaviors (e.g., when problems emerge, seeking understanding vs. finding blame, making accommodations based on individual circumstances). Two other qualities emphasize differences, i.e., "validation of multiple realities" and "holding people accountable for impact." Practices that forward the *validation of multiple realities* incorporate recognition that social identities influence how people experience the workplace (e.g., articulating hiring for diversity as a strategic priority, establishing supportive opportunities to address differences). Practices that *hold workers accountable for their impact* on others call attention to privilege dynamics by emphasizing the impact of actions on promoting inclusion rather than by examining intentions (e.g., promoting 360 supervisory evaluations, conducting regular employee satisfaction surveys, and regularly reporting progress on diversity-related goals). We characterize the combination of these four qualities as "connected disruption," to convey the combination of practices focused on connection and empathy with those focused on disrupting patterns that downplay or dismiss differences (Bond, 2007).

Accountability mechanisms also emerge as essential in work by Kalev et al. (2006). They analyzed the success of three approaches to hiring and promoting members of diverse groups in over 700 organizations. Efforts to establish clear organizational structures and functional units responsible for tracking and achieving diverse representation (i.e., AA plans, diversity committees, and diversity staff positions) were more effective than training or networking/mentoring. Although this study looked at representational issues, evidence suggests clarity about policies is essential to establishing an organizational climate that is welcoming of diverse individuals (Fitzgerald et al., 1997). While it is unclear whether policies improve organizational culture or whether organizational values for equity inspire policy implementation, there is general consensus that the two are interconnected.

Summary. Studies generally support the notion that organizational-level variables play an essential role in whether or not diverse groups are fully integrated into an organization. Some research looks at how individual philosophies about diversity, aggregated to reflect organizational values, affect group and organizational relations. Ignoring differences neither makes them disappear nor renders them irrelevant; philosophies that recognize and value differences tend to have more positive effects on reducing bias and other barriers to the inclusion of diverse group members. Other studies extend our understanding by considering organizational practices and how collective values for diversity are communicated. Organizations can promote the full inclusion of diverse members, and mitigate the potential negative repercussion that may accompany diversity, in a wide range of ways—by

signaling acceptance/safety for members of minority groups; by increasing the sense that the organization considers diversity an asset; by disrupting the negative consequences of social categorization; by communicating clearly that discriminatory behavior is not acceptable; and/or by establishing practices that communicate the importance of both a shared mission and a collective value for the contributions of diverse others. Various research threads employ different methods to address the questions at hand, but many of the results converge. All essentially support the view that the benefits of diversity are directly shaped by the organizational context and are most likely realized when the value for diversity is integrated throughout organizational practices.

Research Summary

Individual differences along sociodemographic dimensions affect both entry into and experiences within the workplace. Intergroup dynamics shape processes relevant to inclusion and exclusion thereby impacting the functioning of diverse groups. Furthermore, qualities of organizational settings moderate individual and interpersonal dynamics as well as directly impact the inclusion of diverse individuals. The specific ways in which diversity dynamics will play out in a particular organization are shaped by additional contextual factors ranging from unique organizational histories to dynamics of occupational segregation to local and national cultural contexts. If there is one loud and clear message from the research literature on workplace diversity, it is that multiple, interacting, nested levels of context matter—a message perfectly in sync with a social–ecological perspective.

Policy Implications through an Ecological Lens

Reviewing the workplace diversity research literature through an ecological lens helps to frame important policy issues. Several ecological principles emerge as particularly relevant (Bond, 2007; Bond & Pyle, 1998a; Kelly, Azelton, Burzette, & Mock, 1994; Kingry-Westergaard & Kelly, 1990; Trickett, 1996) including: (1) principle of multiple levels—organizational issues are best understood as nested within multiple levels of context, (2) principle of interdependence—any event, interaction, or intervention—observable or subtle—within an organization can have reverberating effects throughout the entire system, (3) principle of phenomenology-based impact—people’s *experiences* of events shape reactions and the impact of practices as perceived by varied groups shapes organizational consequences, and (4) principle of person–environment adaptation—people and groups within organizations are continually adapting to not only one another but also to organizational resources and requirements. Interpreting the research literature with these principles in mind highlights dilemmas for the development of organizational as well as public policies around workplace diversity.

Several specific policy recommendations emerge. We start with what is perhaps the most obvious: strong legal protections for many groups are still needed. Laws designed to ensure equality and fair treatment for members of various sociodemographic groups exist in countries all over the world. However, members of those groups protected by law still face considerable discrimination, and some groups have yet to be covered by equal employment policies (for example, LGBT status is often neglected). As long as inequalities still exist, there is a need to establish and enforce basic equal opportunity protections.

Below, we pose four thorny challenges for policy development and suggest specific recommendations for addressing them. Some are aimed at achieving equitable representation throughout organizational hierarchies; others aim to address the conditions of work after diverse people have entered the organization's doors. Some emphasize ways to maximize the positive impact that diversity can have on groups and organizations; others are aimed at preventing or minimizing the potential negative effects. The recommendations—and the ecological principles that frame them—clearly overlap and intersect as we seek a way forward.

Challenge #1: Addressing Multiple Levels of Analysis

The importance of attending to multiple levels of analysis is nowhere more clear than when considering the full range of workplace diversity goals that policies need to address: increasing diverse representation throughout the hierarchy, combating discrimination and enhancing positive interpersonal and team functioning, and promoting inclusive organizational values and practices. While access to jobs is only one of many challenges, it is the factor that has received the most public policy attention. This is, at least in part, because discrimination against many sociodemographic groups still exists in hiring and promotion. It is also because the many challenges around full inclusion are necessarily predicated on having diverse group members present within organizations. However, one theme that emerges from the research is that access for diverse groups is important but not enough. In fact, research does not even support the notion that increased numbers of minority group members necessarily render an organization a more welcoming place for diverse groups (Kossek, Markel, & McHugh, 2003). Quality of organizational life is at least as important as representation in creating a workplace that can fully support and benefit from diverse employees.

In order to address ongoing discrimination and marginalization, the value for diversity must become deeply embedded in organizational cultures. Whether it is called “integration-and-learning” (Ely & Thomas, 2001), “learning from diversity” (Kochan et al., 2003), “polyculturalism” (Prashad, 2003), or “connected disruption” (Bond, 2007), the policy implication is that we need to improve support for diversity within the group and organization into which people are hired. Advice about how organizations can increase sensitivity to diversity is abundant, and the

most commonly adopted approach is training (Esen, 2005; Kulik & Roberson, 2008). However, there is little empirical evidence that training alone leads to any sustained changes in individual attitudes or behavior, and there is even less evidence that it can affect hiring practices or organizational culture (Bezrukova, Jehn, & Spell, 2012).

Organizational efforts with some promise are multileveled and emphasize combining training, team building, and leadership development with changes in policies such as establishing diversity-related performance criteria, enhancing grievance procedures, and adopting work-family policies and domestic partner benefits (e.g., Cox, 1993, 2001; Holvino, Ferdman, & Merrill-Sands, 2004). Yet another caveat is that once biases become embedded in accepted practices, they are rarely revisited. Thus, mechanisms that encourage the periodic reevaluation of policies as well as accountability for diversity goals are essential (Kulik & Roberson, 2008). In fact, the organizational practice that has been identified as most critical to diversity is clarity about what person or unit is ultimately responsible for tracking and monitoring. When organizations establish clear compliance structures, it seems to not only increase numerical representation of minority groups, but it also seems to improve the impact of training and mentoring programs (Kalev et al., 2006).

Interestingly, more organizations are pushed into diversity-related change efforts by external forces than by strategic priorities (Kulik & Roberson, 2008; Langevoort, 2004). The threat of a lawsuit is a powerful incentive for diversity initiatives, and thus the role of oversight agencies and court systems is important. Part of what makes this tricky is that there is more negative push back within an organization when a diversity intervention is perceived as coercive, and mandated accommodations are often resented (Colella, 2001; Stone & Colella, 1996). Efforts by courts, organizations, workers, lawyers, and mediating organizations can be combined to support organizational change strategies (Sturm, 2001). Efforts that bring these diverse stakeholders together to craft and advocate for diversity policies can potentially reduce backlash and promote adoption.

In addition, more can be done to advocate for enhanced legislative and public policy attention to organizational climates that are experienced as hostile by members of diverse groups. The legal definition of sexual harassment provides an exemplar, i.e., includes a prohibition against organizational climates that are "hostile" to women. The criteria for establishing exactly what is considered hostile is of some debate, and a "reasonable woman standard" has been invoked to clarify that the law does not cover situations that might be idiosyncratic or where one particular woman has become alienated from her work group. Even though organizational values, climate, and/or culture are notoriously difficult to measure, we suggest that parallel efforts to establish a definition of what constitutes environments that are "hostile" toward other groups would be a worthwhile policy endeavor.

In addition, what courts consider acceptable remedies when problems have been identified should be guided by evidence about what interventions are most effective in establishing inclusive organizational climates. While there are many lists that purport to be “best practices,” the efficacy of most diversity-related interventions has not been documented empirically (Kulik & Roberson, 2008; Paluck, 2001). In spite of the lack of evidence, organizational training efforts are still often accepted by the courts as evidence of a “good faith effort” to address discrimination (Bielby, 2008, 2010; Kalev et al., 2006). The existence of diversity goals and grievance structures are also considered evidence of Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) compliance, yet rarely is there attention to the seriousness with which such policies are implemented or whether the policies actually contribute to the type of organizational climate that researchers suggest is most important (i.e., a deep integration of the value for diversity throughout organizational practices). What all of this points to is the importance of requiring comprehensive, multileveled interventions that do not merely put training programs or policies on the books, but rather pay attention to the spirit with which these sorts of initiatives are implemented and actively monitor their impact on the workplace climate for diverse groups.

Policy punch line: In addition to addressing discrimination in hiring and promotion, we recommend organizational and public policies that promote work climates that support equity and that directly address work climates that marginalize members of underrepresented groups.

Challenge #2: Taking into Account the Radiating Impact of all Organizational Behavior

The ecological principle of interdependence emphasizes the ways in which all actions within a system affect other elements within the system. A useful guiding image is a mobile where movement in one piece affects the movement of every other component of the structure. What precipitates movement could as easily be wind through a leaky window as a deliberate swat—but both require time and adjustments to reestablish balance. The ecological implication is that attention needs to be paid to both easily observed *and* more subtle behaviors as both types have an important impact on the quality of organizational life.

The factors that contribute to effective working relationships across differences are often quite subtle and difficult to define in terms of a delimited list of behaviors. In fact, the more subtle dynamics may be the most essential to address, given evidence of the profound negative impact that microaggressions and modern forms of sexism and racism can have on individuals and teams. Yet most policies focus on observable acts of discrimination, perhaps because it is more straightforward to address issues that can be easily seen and counted.

Counterintuitively, many policies pay most attention to the least common barriers to effective workplace diversity.

The more subtle everyday dynamics—including microaggressions, impact of solo status, informal norms, and institutional biases—are tremendously difficult to legislate away but essential to address. Part of the challenge is that policies that address more blatant forms of discrimination, which rely heavily on the courts and governmental bodies, are not adequate for addressing more indirect forms. When exclusion is deeply embedded in decision-making structures, differential access to opportunities, and the distribution of power within an organization, new approaches are required. The rule-oriented policy approaches that are so common are simply not suited to the task of addressing dynamic, multifaceted workplace relationships (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002).

One promising direction is to find ways for polices to address cumulative impact as well as patterns of interaction and to challenge the many current policies where formal redress requires proof that discrimination has resulted from a specific employment practice (e.g., Title VII). Discrimination is often only evident when slights are considered in the aggregate, i.e., summed over time, target, and context. The ecological notion of radiating impact highlights that it is often impossible to definitively link a particular outcome with one discrete precipitant. In fact, most systemic organizational frameworks acknowledge that discrimination is typically the result of a complex mix of structural, cultural, and individual factors. If policies require discrimination be the result of an identifiable employment practice, we are destined to ignore an abundance of problematic situations.

Also highly relevant to this discussion is an observation by Heifetz and Linsky (2002) that a common mistake made by organizations is to attempt to apply ready-made, rule-oriented approaches to dynamic problems that require solutions that can be adapted to new circumstances. Attending to more subtle, cumulative, institutionalized patterns is an adaptive problem, and solutions may not fit neatly into current organizational or public policies. Rather, they require innovative approaches and incentives for establishing new norms about appropriate relations at work. Sturm (2001) suggests that the law can play a role by encouraging organizations to combine legal compliance with proactive efforts to address interpersonal issues, e.g., by providing incentives for developing organizational problem-solving structures and for enhanced capacity to identify and redress exclusion and bias. It also is incumbent upon organizations to adopt policies that work to prevent—not just punish—discriminatory practices.

The ecological lens also focuses attention on how the process of policy implementation affects the day-to-day treatment of minority employees. Reactions to formal policies can reverberate throughout an organization and further affect the climate for diverse groups. The most obvious are the direct retaliation against people who complain and the backlash that policies can trigger. For example, some sexual harassment policy efforts have resulted in more entrenched gender

biases (Tinkler, Li, & Mollborn, 2007), and the fear of being accused can lead men to distance themselves from all female coworkers and thus curtail women's access to important job opportunities (US Merit Systems Board, 1995). Attention to unintended consequences should also include the ways that reporting problems can end up requiring people to "out" themselves. Once a member of an invisible identity group raises a concern, their identity—whether it be sexual orientation or invisible forms of disability status or religious orientation—can never be returned to the "closet" (Clair, Beatty, & MacLean, 2005).

Policies that reinforce firm expectations about appropriate interpersonal treatment can also have unintended negative side effects. For example, the organizational policy of "zero tolerance" can actually reduce the likelihood that people will report sexual harassment (Stockdale, Bisom-Rapp, O'Connor, & Gutek, 2004). If a maximum penalty is the only possibility, people may be reluctant to report less blatantly offensive treatment. Thus, the policy may unwittingly raise people's threshold for what is considered acceptable or tolerable. In an oddly parallel way, employers' fear of sanctions can discourage them from identifying subtle patterns of exclusion since once they are aware of these patterns, they will be legally required to address them. Many, although certainly not all, of these radiating effects can be anticipated. Just as some environmental policies require an "environmental impact statement" before intervening, we suggest instituting a requirement for an "organizational impact analysis" before establishing new practices. Anticipating radiating effects could improve the way we develop and implement workplace diversity policies.

Policy punch line: While policies that address blatant discrimination and harassment are critical in fighting for workplace equity, we recommend enhanced proactive policy focus on the subtle forms of exclusion, the cumulative impact of problematic patterns, and the impact that policy implementation has on the organizational environment.

Challenge #3: Revisiting the Role of Intent versus Impact

The ecological framework underscores the importance of people's experiences of actions, no matter what motivations, biases, or other internalized processes are involved. In the policy arena, this means emphasizing the differential impact of organizational actions based on group membership and understanding that the impact may be the result of numerous factors over time.

Some psychological research has shaped recent court cases that invoke internalized bias and stereotyping processes to more broadly determine an employer's intent to discriminate (Lee, 2005). There is lively debate about whether evidence of such biases should be considered in a court of law (e.g., Bartlett, 2009; Bielby, 2010), and many conclude that trying to establish policy that incorporates what "goes on in people's heads" is a slippery slope (Bielby, 2010, p. 118). At least three

problems emerge with the introduction of internal processes into public policy. The first is that it is extraordinarily difficult to definitively determine what an individual is thinking. Even scholars who study stereotyping and bias acknowledge that we make many assumptions about internal processes in interpreting research results, and, in many studies, our results establish correlations rather than causality. Efforts to determine someone's unconscious motivations or biases are, at best, still guess work. Lawyers have capitalized on this, and defense attorneys are being trained in how to discredit social science research experts by scrutinizing methodologies and interpretations of results (Bielby, 2008). Second, it is not clear what to make of evidence of internalized or unconscious biases even if we could prove that they exist. An Iowa judge refused to buy the implicit bias argument in a recent case because he felt that subjective discretion in decision making is "not a bad thing"; rather, it is a "presumptively reasonable way of doing business" that "should itself raise no inference of discriminatory conduct" (Kadue, Maatman, Riley, & Ross, 2012, p. 1). In essence, he concluded that to challenge internal processes is to challenge individual freedoms. A critique of this reasoning could consume volumes, but suffice it to say that trying to get inside people's heads raises far more complex issues than it solves. Third, invoking cognitive processes can lead to the oversimplification of a complex problem; it can lead policy makers to reduce the multifaceted nature of workplace bias to individual failings. Even if unconscious intentions could be definitively plumed, such determinations distract from trying to establish whether a group has been harmed by particular organizational actions. The exclusionary impact of organizational practices has more import than actors' personal biases or intentions.

If you accept the requirement to prove discriminatory intention (as is true for some U.S. frameworks), then introducing unconscious cognitive processes into the policy discussion at least allows for findings of discrimination in situations beyond blatant calculated malevolence. However, we question why any sort of intent or direct causal link—either conscious or unconscious—should be needed to inspire actions to address discrimination. It is noteworthy that elements of these requirements are primarily a U.S. phenomenon, and some argue that the U.S. "intent doctrine" needs a major overhaul (Paterson, Rapp, & Jackson, 2008). Canada, the European Union, and South Africa, among others, have embraced broader understandings and reject intent as a defining element of discrimination (Bartlett, 2009). It is also the case that some U.S. policies already sidestep intention. For example as mentioned above, sexual harassment policies incorporate *experienced* climate in their definition of a "hostile environment," i.e., women's experience of the organization rather than judgments by a presumed impartial observer; no malintent or single identifiable provocation needs to be established. It would be worthwhile to explore how this spirit could be expanded to other aspects of employment-related policies.

Suggesting that public policies should avoid a focus on “what is going on in people’s heads” should not be conflated with suggesting that organizations should ignore cognitive processes. Quite to the contrary, research suggests that organizations would be well served by paying attention to the factors that are likely to mitigate reliance on stereotypes and prejudicial attitudes (even if unconscious) in crafting organizational policies and structures. For example, ambiguity and subjectivity in evaluative processes create the opportunity for stereotype-based expectations to result in bias; therefore creating clear, consistent, and objective evaluation criteria for selection and promotion is critical (see Heilman & Haynes, 2008, for review). Research in social cognition also suggests that evaluators are less likely to rely on stereotypes as a heuristic when there are incentives to form accurate impressions (Fiske & Neuberg, 1990). Making individuals accountable for defending the process and criteria they employ in decision making is likely to curtail the use of stereotypes (see Fiske, 1993, for review).

Policy punch line: We suggest organizational leaders utilize what we know about problematic cognitive processes to institute practices to prevent and curtail bias in daily organizational life. Furthermore, we recommend that both organizational and governmental policies focus on the impact of workplace practices and conditions, without requiring proof of intentions or other individual internalized processes.

Challenge #4: Attention to Historical and Current Differentials in Access to Resources

The ecological notion that people and environments are constantly adapting to one another suggests we consider how the availability of resources shapes organizational relations. Taking power differentials into account in policy initiatives is complicated, yet assumptions about access to resources—both current and historical—are at the core of varied approaches. In designing policies to support effective workplace diversity, it is useful to consider competing paradigms about access to resources and what constitutes “fairness.”

One such analysis is put forth by Ryan (1994) in his discussion of how varied definitions of “equality” shape policy. He frames his discussion around differences between “fair play” and “fair shares” perspectives. Fair play is grounded in many of the same assumptions as the color blind philosophy, i.e., that we can achieve fairness by ignoring differences and that once individuals have initial access to an opportunity, they should all be treated identically. Fair shares, on the other hand, actively recognizes diverse starting points and prescribes approaches that attend to those differences. The measure of equity in a fair shares paradigm is whether people have access to resources that enable them to contribute equally and achieve equal outcomes—more in line with both multicultural and polycultural orientations. One of the main policy challenges that emerges from this analysis is

how to incorporate treatment that is considered “equal” when what enables people from different groups to thrive in organizations may well be “different.”

Similar themes are echoed in the raging debate regarding the philosophical underpinnings of policy approaches to discrimination, such as considering the need for EEO in contrast to AA policies. While the intent of both types of policies is to eliminate discrimination, the approaches to achieving this important goal differ. EEO policies are passive policies that prohibit discrimination on the basis of sociodemographic group membership. Alternatively, AA policies take a more proactive stance about how to actualize the goal of equal opportunity. The main assumption underlying AA is that there are structural barriers that can impede the progress of historically marginalized groups. As such, organizations must actively track discrimination and develop proactive mechanisms to eliminate it (see Crosby, Iyer, & Sincharoen, 2006, for discussion). Specific actions may include monitoring the degree to which there is discrimination within an organization, eliminating barriers that produce discrimination, and employing targeted recruitment strategies. Research from a variety of literatures converges to indicate that individuals from marginalized groups continue to face serious barriers to entry and participation in all organizational functions. Thus, we argue that organizations must take a proactive stance to eliminating the barriers individuals face in the work domain and that AA is a laudable goal.

Organizations that employ AA programs need to clarify the implementation criteria. Research suggests that many individuals misunderstand what AA is, assuming it is the use of quotas or preferential treatment, such that unqualified members of minority groups are hired over more qualified majority group members (despite such approaches being illegal). To the extent that individuals assume that AA is preferential treatment with little regard for qualifications or merit, individuals are less likely to endorse the policy and more likely to perceive beneficiaries of the policy as incompetent (e.g., Haynes, 2012).

The adoption of policies that build upon the recognition that the playing field is not level can be strengthened by an understanding of the importance of procedural justice (Tyler, Boeckmann, Smith, & Huo, 1997). AA and EEO policies are grounded in philosophies about what constitutes fairness on a broad societal scale. When it comes to an individual’s sense of whether she or he was treated fairly, the judgment may depend much more on assessments of whether the process was fair than on the evaluation of the specific outcome. There is an expansive literature on the social psychology of procedural justice that we cannot delve into here. However, we mention it to reinforce the recommendation that the process by which AA, EEO, or any other diversity-related workplace policies are implemented deserves serious attention.

Policy punch line: Stronger support for workforce diversity emerges from policies that incorporate an understanding that there is not yet a level playing field for members of all groups. We recommend that policies incorporate this

understanding and adopt proactive responses to addressing inequities. We also suggest that policy makers—both at the organizational level and at the public policy level—pay serious attention to the process by which policies are implemented.

Conclusion

In this article, we have reviewed the research literature relevant to the effective management of workplace diversity. Our goal has been to highlight processes that cut across varied dimensions of sociodemographic differences. With that in mind, we have tapped literatures that address access to jobs, interpersonal and team dynamics, as well as the organizational factors that foster positive working relations among diverse groups. Guided by the principles of a social–ecological perspective, we have articulated current policy challenges and approaches that can be informed by this literature. Moving forward, additional systematic inquiry that examines the mutual relationships among interpersonal processes, organizational practices, and organizational values would be valuable. Research that would lead to an integrated model would enhance our understanding as well as further guide policies in this arena. Furthermore, we could benefit greatly from research that would yield effective measurement of the qualities of organizational climate and culture that support the full integration of diverse groups.

Our overarching punch line based on the current state of the literature is that policies should pay attention to issues at multiple levels of analysis, consider the radiating impact of all organizational behavior, revisit the role of intent, and incorporate attention to historical and current differentials in access to resources. Policy efforts that are in tune with these principles have the potential to maximize the positive benefits and minimize the potential complications of diversity in groups and organizations. Our hope is that this analysis is useful as readers engage in the ever-challenging task of promoting equity for all people who work together in organizational settings.

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