

CENTER FOR GENDER IN ORGANIZATIONS

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**THE POLITICS AND PRACTICE OF
INSTITUTIONALIZING GENDER EQUITY
IN A POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA**

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The challenges around institutional change processes in South Africa are sharply revealing of race, gender, and class complexities as organizations struggle to move from a legacy of race and sex discrimination to the related goals of equity and organizational effectiveness. This paper discusses some of those challenges and provides a series of vignettes based on actual change processes to highlight the complexity of organizational change within the transition environment of South Africa. The paper presents a snapshot of an ongoing process of national and institutional change and is intended to provide a background and discussion through which to foreground local organizational change challenges.

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A Note on Spelling:

We have used the U.S. form of spelling throughout the paper, unless the word was part of the official name of an organization or group.

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I. INTRODUCTION: KEY ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

A. MAINLINING RACE, CLASS, AND GENDER IN ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE PROCESSES

There are several challenges that influence organizational change processes in South Africa. Key among these relates to the complexity of mainlining race, class, and gender within organizational change processes where gender and race appear to compete for primacy in change processes. Many organizations appear to find race a more palatable organizational concern, and so tend to “evaporate” gender and class from organizational change processes. In a de-racialized capitalist South Africa where race and gender have become the new social and democratic focus, class is increasingly accepted as a given. Meer (August 2000: 4) argues persuasively that “the ANC’s shift to neo-liberalism and the embracing of the Washington consensus leads to favorable outcomes for a few . . . and largely continue to favor the historically privileged.” The consequence of this in the workplace is an acceptance of a hierarchical class structure concomitant with hierarchies of “difference” (race, gender, and class) reproduced within institutional arrangements. Ball (1994: 124) asserts “the market provides a mechanism for the reinvention and legitimation of hierarchy and differentiation via the ideology of diversity, competition and choice.” The typical hierarchy in South Africa still confirms, to a very large extent, the race/gendered legacy of apartheid. So although there is a partial collapse of race and gender divisions because of affirmative action policies, the segmentation of race and gender, encased by class, still persists and gets translated into “specific micro-practices internal to organizations” (Holvino, 2000: 2). These “micro-practices” are particularly apparent in the gender and race distribution of Black and white women and men in the workplace. Much of the existing hierarchy still reflects what was “the real world” of apartheid. Far from being separate social categories, race, class, and gender intersect and are mutually constituted within institutions (Acker, 1999: 139-158); but within the South African context, the categories tend to be played out as “competing oppressions.” Gender, then, is complicated by race and class in ways that profoundly influence organizational change processes, with often-negative consequences for equity and organizational effectiveness.

B. WORKING WITH “DIFFERENCE”

Institutional transformation and change management efforts necessarily have to be implemented within and through existing organizations, many of which have given tacit, or de facto, complicity with successive white supremacist governments. Organizational change strategies literally have to give birth to the new in the womb of the old, and this has consequences for change processes. The pervasive influence of the ideology of apartheid has been one of the major stumbling blocks in institutional transformation processes. The ideology appears to re-shape itself according to new conditions and has been the hardest to shift. The resilience of the ideology is evidenced in the way that the power of past privilege continues to perpetuate existing inequalities and imbalances. For example, many organizations have changed their staff composition dramatically by recruiting more Black women and men. These organizations all claim to have transformed and point to increasing numbers of Black staff as “proof” of that transformation. However, it is becoming more apparent that providing access and increasing representation are not sufficient to ensure that the institutional culture will change. Black

students, who now outnumber white students by 53% at a previously white university, still refer to the institution as a “white university” (Marks, forthcoming). And yet the understanding that many of the Affirmative Action (AA) staff places on the meaning of AA is contained within a very narrow focus, which could be described as “once the staff composition approximates the national demographics we would have achieved our objectives.” If the “ideal worker” (Fletcher, 1999) remains based on the profile of past privilege, then transformation claims will continue to ring hollow. The “Network” example (discussed in this paper) underscores this point: the organization shifted its demographics, without shifting the attitudes, ethics, structure or behavior, and so remains animated by its institutional history and profile, accompanied by a male mindset that is arrogantly complacent and impervious to the relationship between practical equity, institutional culture, and institutional arrangements.

C. THE EMERGENCE OF NEW ALLIANCES

Irrespective of the adoption of an equity policy, the legacy of apartheid remains reflected within existing race and gender institutional stratification patterns. These patterns point up the complexity of the intersection of race and gender, particularly in the way alliances are formed between different groups. Organizations appear to choose between the social categories of race, class, and gender in ways that result in the maintenance of privilege for traditionally dominant groups. For example, one of the alliances that is particularly strong is that between senior Black and white men. In a deeply patriarchal society such as South Africa, the ideology of male superiority preserves the alliance between men and cuts across race to preserve male privilege within organizations. The alliance between Black and white women is far more tenuous and more likely to occur on the basis of institutional “(middle) class issues” of career advancement and fairer reward systems. Collins (1991) has argued that white women may be penalized by gender, but privileged by race. There is certainly evidence of this in current management recruitment patterns—white women are more likely to advance within companies than Black women. Moreover, the context of intimacy within which gender oppression occurs makes it complex to address and is further complicated by the history of apartheid-separation (January-Bardill, quoted in Marks et al., 2000).

D. WORK AND PERSONAL LIFE ISSUES

An agenda that seeks to be responsive to the related goals of gender justice and personal life issues will have to take into account how race and class intersect and complicate a change agenda. The goal of ensuring work-family compatibility so that there is a humane balance in the life of every employee is complicated by the diverse life experiences of Black and white men and women and the way in which culture encases those experiences. Seeking compatibility needs to be animated by an understanding of how life experience in South Africa shaped identities for Black and white and how these identities are interpreted and/or privileged in the workplace. The impact of work is profoundly different for Black or white men and women. What constitutes the family, the relationship to community, and the kinship pattern roles and responsibility differ widely for both groups. The gendered responsibilities within that socially constitutive terrain are also different for Black and white women and men. The strategy, then, requires a change intervention that recognizes diverse life experiences and the way in which culture and ethnicity encase those experiences. The strategy would also have to recognize the extent to which equity

policy affects socially constructed notions of identity and how these identities are contested and unhinged by equity policies. Mercer argues that “if dislocations unhinges stable identities, it also opens up the possibility of new articulations: the construction of new identities and the production of different social subjects” (Mercer, 1991: 2).

We cannot assume that a transformation process will include an assessment of the impact of personal life issues on work issues. Indeed, the experience of change processes shows that gender keeps slipping off the transformation agenda and may not even be part of the terms of reference for the change agenda (see Trees and Land Department in Vignette Three). The attitudes of many organizations to work-family issues suggests that not only do they regard race as more important than gender, but also that the relationship between work and family life is not part of the “business” of organizations.

E. BUILDING NATIONALLY DERIVED THEORY

Organizations have embarked on internal equity change processes within a context where no appropriate equity framework exists to provide guidance for implementation. Many of the imported organizational change models from the West have a limited usefulness in a context where race, class, and gender differences had been formally institutionalized through the legal sanction of apartheid. Many of the gender frameworks and models in vogue—two examples are The Harvard Analytical Framework and the Women’s Equality and Empowerment Framework (cited in *OXFAM Gender Training Manual*, 1994)—do not allow sufficiently for an exploration of the intersections between race, class, and gender. Organizational theory also lacks rigorous analyses of the relationship between race, gender, and class in organizational interaction (Acker, 1990). As a result of this, most gender change agents have settled for “creatively appropriating” theories and frameworks at the expense of developing locally derived theory based on the race, class, and gender dynamics within and outside of institutions.

The post-apartheid moment allows change agents in organizations to work with and through “difference” in ways that can contribute to the development of a nationally derived change management theory. This theory has to be based, first, on the social and historical dynamics of race, class, and gender. Second, it has to draw lessons from current change strategies and allow for micro experimentation in organizations so that best-practice guidelines can be formulated. The 1994-2000 phases of organizational change processes have yielded rich data that offers useful pointers for the development of such theory and practice. We are just beginning the process of developing such guidelines. It is hoped that this paper will contribute to the development of new ways of seeing and doing organizational change in South Africa¹.

II. THE MANDATE FOR EQUITY AND ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN POST-APARTHEID SOUTH AFRICA: WHERE IT BEGAN AND WHERE IT IS GOING

Since the first democratic elections took place in South Africa in 1994, a series of dramatic changes have taken place around issues of equality and gender justice. These changes have been particularly notable in the area of gender equality and participation in public life and with the adoption of affirmative action policies to address historical race and gender inequalities. The active involvement of women and men in the national liberation struggle helped to bring about these changes in policy, and the South African constitution reflects one of the world's most progressive rights framework towards the achievement of social justice and gender equality.

Nonetheless, the impact of the transformation process on women and men's representivity in the workplace has been a far slower process. The Breakwater Monitor Report is a national database and information service that monitors the implementation of affirmative action and employment equity at a national level. In their most recent 2000 sample, a total of 161 companies (with 560,000 employees) participated in a millennium edition analyses. The report indicates the following national indicators for staff representation.

- The overall picture for the 161 companies participating in the study is that 69% of employees are Black and 72% male.
- While 49% of the sample is African, African representation decreased by 4% between 1998-2000, while women and Coloured representation has increased by 3% and 4% respectively.
- Management is 80% white (63% white men and 17% white women).
- The vast majority (79%) of managers are men. At the skilled levels, 56% of skilled employees are white and 67% are male.
- African representation in the management and skilled levels has increased by 4% and 6% respectively since 1998. White representation and the number of men in management have shown a corresponding decline. The representation of women has increased in both the management and skilled levels by 5% and 8% respectively for 1998-2000.
- African termination was higher than African recruits, and there has been a net loss of 5%. The same trend is also noticeable for whites, with a net loss of 5%. For men the net loss is 7%, while a gain of 8% is seen for women. Whites account for 82% of all management terminations. The same trend is also seen for men and women where 77% of the terminations are males. Terminations for men in skilled positions are significantly higher (18%) than for women.
- The percentage of employees with disabilities is less than 1% of the total employee population.

The following table illustrates the labor market trends in the sample:

		African	Coloured	Indian	White	Male	Female
1998	Management	6%	4%	4%	86%	84%	16%
	Skilled	16%	8%	5%	71%	75%	25%
	Total staff	54%	10%	4%	32%	75%	25%
1999	Management	7%	4%	4%	85%	82%	18%
	Skilled	21%	9%	7%	63%	71%	29%
	Total staff	53%	10%	5%	32%	76%	24%
2000	Management	10%	5%	5%	80%	79%	21%
	Skilled	23%	13%	8%	56%	67%	33%
	Total staff	49%	14%	6%	31%	72%	28%

(Source: Breakwater Monitor, 2000)

These figures are sharply at odds with the requirement of the Employment Equity Act, an Act that is one of the most significant pieces of legislation to have been passed by the government. The Act has two main objectives: to ensure that all workplaces are free of discrimination based on race and gender; and to ensure that employers take active steps to promote employment equity. Two groups of people are affected by the Act: designated employers and their employees. Designated employers include:

- employers who employ 50 or more employees;
- employers who employ fewer than 50 employees, but whose total annual turnover equals or exceeds the applicable turnover of a small business in terms of Schedule 4 of the Act;
- an employer appointed by collective agreement;
- municipalities; and
- organs of state (except the National Defence Force, the National Intelligence Agency, and the South African Secret Services).

Designated employee groups include:

- Black people (which includes Africans, so-called Coloureds, and Indians);
- women; and
- people with disabilities.

Employers are required to submit annual reports to the Department of Labor that monitor their compliance. Failure to implement these policies can result in fines and public exposure through equity “report cards” published in the media.

The adoption of the Employment Equity Act as a policy instrument has revealed a complexity around race, class, and gender in organizational change processes. The focus of organizational change processes in South Africa is closely linked to the social justice goals of non-racism and non-sexism. Therefore, the expectation around organizational change interventions is linked to a national project that seeks to build and support institutional and societal transformation.

One of the biggest challenges we face, then, is to develop organizational change projects that are based, both in their theory and practice, on an understanding of “difference” (race, gender, and class) within the South African context. The recognition of “difference” has to be located in an understanding of the intersections of race, class, and gender in order to appreciate how these are mutually constitutive within that context. Recognition of difference and similarities signifies importance consequences for equitable integration. Later in this paper, I will explore this through four sample vignettes of current organizational change processes.

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III. THE PROBLEM WITH “DIFFERENCE”: SOME THEORETICAL ISSUES

*Mirror, mirror, on the wall,
Which is the most oppressive
of them all?²*

Within the difference debate there are scholars who argue that gender alone cannot explain the lived experiences of women and men, and they reject the notion of a shared, universal sisterhood with a common experience of patriarchy (Ang, 1995; Bannerji, 1995; Collins, 1990; Hull et al., 1982; James and Busia, 1993; Maynard, 1996; Mohanty, 1998; Scott, 1986). For example, Ang (1995) maintains that western feminism seems to have decided to do away with the notion of assimilation, of the assumption of sameness, and therefore to acknowledge difference. She critiques the lack of reflexivity of white western feminism as well as its lack of focus and analyses on the construction of whiteness and feminism and the acceptance of the “normality” of white/western feminism. This is a criticism that is shared by many African feminists who have struggled to name the specificity of locally derived feminism within a context where many Black women see feminism as a western construct that has little meaning or resonance with their own lives (McFadden, 1996). Feminism has been described as an alien imposition, hostile to tradition and culture. Irrespective of this, South African feminists argue that many women have been involved in a struggle that can be called feminist (Kemp et al., 1995). Women have enacted their consciousness through struggle and action, so it may be more critical to reflect on the extent that “feminine mass” has translated into “feminist acts” in organizations. Moreover, the new period of democracy and change has opened up opportunities for the re-conceptualization of feminism derived from the South African context that includes all aspects of identity and identity formation.

Bannerji (1995) argues that the growth of identity politics in the 1990s on the basis of an identification of a social category means that acts of renaming, reclaiming, and gaining voice have become politically critical to acknowledge the existence of multiple identities and subjectivities. In this period of political transition, then, engaging in change efforts requires reexamination and a reorganization of our ways of being and doing. For a South African feminism that takes account of difference the understanding of identity needs to be related to the context within which we live and the history and social organization of class, race, and gender. Bannerji (1995) asserts that gender, race and class, far from being separate categories, are enmeshed and intersected with each other. Stanley (1997: 6) argues that “people do not inhabit conveniently separated identities.” Within this understanding, then, we are all simultaneously raced, classed, and gendered, and we need to understand the concrete relations that constitute and map out the intersections.

The broad cornerstones around which the anti-apartheid movement had based its discourse were built around non-racialism and non-sexism and the removal of inequalities that kept the majority of Black people in abject poverty. The assumption held was that difference would disappear with the advent of a new society, because it would be based on equality and social justice for all. Within the progressive women’s movement of the time, the framework for understanding

difference was based on an additive model of triple oppression. This model posited that Black women were oppressed as a gender, as a class, and as a race. White women, on the other hand, privileged by racial-capitalism, were oppressed as a gender only, and as such, shared some aspects of gender oppression, but with considerably more leverage than Black women. De la Rey (1997) argues that this is a limited model that objectifies dimensions of social experience by seeing categories in isolation from each other and apart from the total context. The question that arose, then, was which of these oppressions were more oppressive, and so what should the sequence be for addressing them in practice? Within this framework, gender was separated out from other categories. The prioritization of one identity category above another ignores their social context, content, and dynamism. The uniqueness of “difference” in the South African context is that it had been institutionalized as an organizing principle that combined gender with race and class.

The partialing of race, class, and gender can be clearly discerned within the institutional terrain of the workplace. For example, within a deracialized capitalist South Africa, the primacy that race takes over gender ignores the way in which affirmative action policies deepen and entrench class and gender distinctions. Current affirmative policy action allows for some fractioning between class and gender divisions and has opened up limited opportunity for Black and white women for upward mobility. However, the current statistics (see examples above) demonstrate that Black men find it easier to fraction traditional white male managerial positions. Black men are more likely to benefit from affirmative action policies, because they are able to form an alliance around their masculinity with white men. This alliance is strengthened further by the way in which patriarchy becomes a resource that both groups can draw from irrespective of their race (Morley, 1999).

Class fractioning within traditional racial divisions also intersects with gender/racial divisions to give rise to a new complexity in the race/gender/class intersection. Within this, middle class white women and middle class Black women are able to form alliances across race and around class in order to preserve economic privilege, and white and Black middle class men are able to bond across race around their masculinity, and around the (norm)alization of heterosexuality in the workplace. Black men can learn the rules of rugby or meet on the golf course; similarly white men can learn the rules of soccer and converse around those traditional socialized areas of masculinity. Ball (1987: 221) notes “. . . in a micro-political analysis, the informal assumes . . . significance . . . [and] social relations are frequently, by default, a vehicle for decision-making, amendments to rules and formal arrangements and information exchange.”

This fractioning between and amongst categories means that Black working class women are even further marginalized, because with race and gender as the new social democratic focus, class is hidden or misspecified. The likelihood of the creation of new class alliances across race is also a real threat to these women. White middle class women and Black middle class women would find more in common with each other on the basis of their shared class interest and can engage in a collusion that cuts across gender around class. This is a collusion that excludes Black working class women, whose subordination is therefore reconstituted, but not substantially reformed.

Black women, on the other hand, are able to form an alliance with working class Black men because of shared class-based interest. This is particularly evidenced in the cohesive way in which Black working women and men fight for economic rights through trade union activism.³ Yet, these alliances are shaped by patriarchal relations based on traditional gender norms and customs.⁴ Black working class women, then, remain trapped in the intersection of race, class, and gender, as well as the way in which traditional culture shapes the kind of alliances possible between working class men and women.

Sexualities are also enacted within organizational interaction, but often in ways that allow “competing oppressions” to emerge. The national rights framework allows gay women and men—often times an “invisible category” before anti-discriminatory policy adoption—to “come out of the closet,” but in ways that often offset the categories against each other. The following incident is a case in point:

Lisa was a white Jewish researcher who was lesbian. She headed the research unit for a large company. Thandi was a black heterosexual woman who was employed as a personal assistant to a department head. One day Lisa heard a comment about homosexuals that Thandi made to a group of colleagues. Lisa immediately confronted Thandi, and after a heated exchange, Lisa walked off and filed a harassment complaint based on sexual orientation to the human resource department. She claimed that the comment was inciting hatred towards homosexuals, and demanded that disciplinary procedures be followed against Thandi. When Thandi heard about this, she made a counter claim against Lisa, and alleged that Lisa was harassing her because she was black. Both were called in for mediation, and both insisted that the other's harassment was based on race or sexual orientation. It was clear that both women felt that their own category of “difference” was more painful and sensitive than the other's. They were unable to relate to each other around their common identity category as women, and felt that their race or sexual orientation was the more important category (adapted from Persaud, 1999).

This complicates gender in the workplace, because the lived experiences of Black and white, working class or middle class, straight or gay, influence the change process dynamic in ways that have profound consequences for change strategies. It influences our understanding of the situational and relational contingencies that allow particular constituencies to form in ways that often derail the change process. Fuss (198: 16) notes that “the politics of experience sometimes takes the form of a tendency amongst both individuals and groups to ‘one down’ each other on the oppression scale.” Luke (1994: 220) argues that “much like inverse cultural capital, identity markers (e.g. colour, lesbian, disabled) can easily become the ontological ground on which to base a ‘superior’ insider knowledge of more ‘authentically’ experienced, ‘real’ embodied oppressions . . .”

This also challenges the notion of a universal South African sisterhood even further and strengthens the ideology of male superiority across race. So although there is a partial collapsing of race/gender divisions, race, class, and gender segmentation persists. The heritage of apartheid still lives within the implicit ideology of South African society, and the experience of difference is deeply embedded within the institutional structures, culture⁵ and norms of our society. A powerful aspect of the apartheid legacy is the particular profile that the ideal worker (Fletcher, 1999) takes in many South African institutions. There exists an implicit, yet all-pervasive

institutional ideology of WHAMM (white, heterosexual, able-bodied, middle-class male) within the structure, culture, and strategy of South African institutions. The institutional standard for performance appears to be based on an ideal worker that fits this model. This institutional standard works against the majority of Black women (and most Black men) irrespective of a national equity policy framework and affirmative action policies. For example, Black women form the majority of those who are employed at the lowest levels of the organizational hierarchy, with the least prospect of advancement because they resemble the profile of WHAMM the least.⁶ On the other hand, white middle class women and Black middle class men stand to benefit the most from affirmative action policies because the ideology works in their favor. White women (because they are white) and Black men (because they are male) have more “WHAMM strikes” in their favor.⁷ WHAMM also shapes the form and content of work-based alliances between groups.

Institutions in South Africa reflect the social cleavages of race, gender, and class within their own institutional arrangements. I will explore this claim by assessing the transformation process and lessons of a sample of four organizations.⁸ These are offered as vignettes that represent snapshots of generic change processes, and so fictitious names will be used.

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IV. SNAPSHOTS OF ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE PROCESSES

A. VIGNETTE ONE: TRANSFORMATION OF STATUTORY BODIES—THE SIZWE BUREAU

The Sizwe Bureau was originally set up by the Apartheid State to provide funding for apartheid structures in the former ethnically based “homelands.” After the first democratic elections, the new government, in an attempt to transform the organization from its original apartheid mandate, redefined the mandate of Sizwe so that it would be in line with the values and goals of the new non-racial, non-sexist South Africa. The transformation mandate was issued as a direct decree from the minister responsible for this parastatal.

Subsequently, the transformation process of the organization looked at the internal institutional transformation challenges. The organization readily acknowledged the influence it gets from the external environment that formed the main driving force of the transformation process. The process of policy review culminated in the formulation and adoption of an affirmative action policy. The process of developing the policy involved all of the stakeholders in the organization through department wide teams. These teams included corporate relations, human resources, finance department, and the operational unit.

The transformation process proceeded in different stages. In 1992 a women’s forum was established with the aim of creating awareness of gender as a transformation issue as part of the process of change and also to lobby for the career advancement of women within the organization. In response to this, management created two positions: a gender coordinator for the Gender Unit and an officer for the Affirmative Action Unit. Both Units formed separate gender and affirmative action committees, and both were tasked with the responsibility of developing, respectively, a gender and affirmative action policy.

A new CEO was appointed in 1995 with a mandate to transform Sizwe, and an interim gender network was created to address gender in the institution. In the final restructuring, the gender officer and the AA officer were tasked to integrate their mandates as far as possible because of a concern that the implementation of affirmative action (dealing only with race) would take precedence over gender issues.

In 1996 a process of correcting discriminatory practices based on race was started. Until this process was started, there existed a common practice, shaped and determined by apartheid policies, to base reward systems on race and not on merit. The intention of this “regstellende aksie” (corrective action) was to ensure that salaries were paid on the basis of merit, and not on race. The gender unit was viewed as a neutral body and was given the task of facilitating the issue. The process was drawn out, management became impatient, and staff became angry as morale declined. In the end, it was found that 47% of the staff was discriminated against in terms of position and salary. More than 50% of those discriminated against were women. The salary disparities were corrected, but the male-dominated institutional hierarchy still remained intact. For example, the fact that only 5 out of 27 Black and white middle managers are women will probably remain because of the tendency for racial equity issues to take precedence over, and to be seen as separate from, gender equity issues. The historical race/gender intersection that

caused these variances seems as if it will be addressed, as the organization has verbally committed itself to formulating “corrective development programmes” that would establish program support for Black women and men.

This process took place over a period of two years, and a recent check-in with the organization revealed that the gender committee and women’s forum has since disbanded and a new Secretaries Forum has been established. The forum describes itself as an informal group that meets in order to discuss issues relating to work. All the members are white and female. Upon questioning this with Black female secretaries, I was told that they did not feel “welcome” in the group and that the group is not discussing “real issues” (career advancement, salaries, work timetables, etc.).

The Gender and Equity Office continues to work as two separate structures and has successfully lobbied the organization for an on-site crèche. The Gender Office arranges an annual gender awareness week, but both women and men within the organization poorly attend this. Optional attendance at gender awareness training workshops is also organized twice a year, and these take place over three days during work hours. These also tend to be poorly attended and tend to take place in an atmosphere of distrust (from the men) and an air of tired resignation (from the women).

The Gender Unit Officer made the following comment in conversation recently: “Our organizational transformation process has led to the maintenance of the previous unequal status quo for women. Besides the correction of salaries, very little has changed for us. Now the women and the men seem to be angry with us.”

1. Some lessons learned

The Sizwe case study presents an example of the difficulty of moving the process from transformation-speak to transformation-do. Sizwe followed a number of steps to ensure that gender is institutionalized as part of the transformation process: location for gender and equity was formalized through the appointment of a Affirmative Action/Gender Desk at the senior level; the office was directly involved in the eradication of salary disparities; and women’s groups were encouraged to be active participants in the transformation process.

A number of tensions are apparent in the case study, all of which, to varying degree, relate to the way in which “difference” complicates the change process. A key tension has been how to deal with the complexities of the intersection between race and gender. Gender as part of a transformation agenda of Sizwe kept slipping back, as the issue of race tended to gain primacy over the issue of gender. In this regard, the biggest difficulty was in understanding the interlocking of race, gender, and class within the context of a transformation strategy. For example, the two women employed, respectively, for the Gender Desk and the Affirmative Action Desk, are charged with the responsibility of promoting gender equality in all aspects of its program and project development functions. The Affirmative Action Desk is also charged with the responsibility of ensuring that the Employment Equity Act is adhered to within Sizwe’s programs and projects. Ensuring programmatic coherence and linkages between the two objectives remains a key challenge; and although the staff of both share joint informal ownership

of the issues, the tendency is for Sizwe's constituency to place greater emphasis on issues of race rather than the interlocking of race with gender. This separates the trajectory between race and gender and fails to address the constitute complexity between these categories. Fortunately, Sizwe continues to have strong leaders who are formally willing to work with all aspects of equity, including gender. There is still the challenge, however, to maintain and sustain broad-based commitment to gender within the transformation project of Sizwe. There is also a danger that, since the change process has been continuing for 7 years, change burnout may set in. Change burnout, then, is a very real threat for sustaining and maintaining gender justice goals in Sizwe.

The case study also demonstrates the importance and the dangers of linking gender with reward systems. When addressing gender disparity became associated with monetary gain through salary revision, tensions began to surface around who benefits and who "loses" out on gender. The organization also appears to have "feminized" equity, making women bear the major responsibility for introducing and sustaining change (Morley, 1999). This reinforced the prevailing perception amongst men that women gain through monetary gain and career advancement, while they "lose" out. Finally, the change process took insufficient account of the way in which Sizwe's history and culture impacts and shapes the conditioned stereotypes around race, gender, and class within an institution that had been set up as a project to entrench apartheid practices and policies.

B. VIGNETTE TWO: THE EDUCATION AND TRAINING SECTOR—THE NETWORK

The Network was established in 1952 as a national forum for human resource practitioners. The initial membership was restricted to white women and men only in accordance with membership criteria at the time. The Network's members all tacitly supported the apartheid policies of social and legal exclusion of Black people. There are several anecdotes and case histories about the role that white personnel officers played in assisting the security police to locate so-called "comrades" employed at their factories and companies during worker strikes, often with results such as detention and torture (the Truth and Reconciliation Committee hearings recorded some of these cases; see Krog, 1999). However, since the early 1990s, the organization has made some attempt to recruit a more diverse membership in response to increasing pressure from Black human resource professionals. In order to achieve this, the organization appointed its first Black male president. It was also during his presidency that the Network formally apologized for failing to support equity and fair treatment of all people in the workplace. The equity issue referred explicitly to race, with no mention made of gender as an equity issue. Race was highlighted as a primary issue irrespective of the skewed gender base of the organization: the executive base of the organization consists of 20 members—4 Black men, 1 Black female, 2 white women, and 13 white men. The central office consists of 28 staff members, all female with a race breakdown of 18 white women and 10 Black women. With the exception of 1 white office manager, all the women are secretaries and administrative clerks servicing the different chapters of the organization. The demographics of the membership is also rapidly changing: 70% of the membership are women (Black and white), and 90% of students who registered for the Network's Diploma course on "Developing a Relevant and Effective Human Resource Practice" are Black.

The organization has had much debate and discussion on its vision, mission, values and relevance in a “new” South Africa, but has still not developed, much less accepted, an internal policy on race and gender equity. Recently, a disgruntled Black female member remarked, “Even though The Network has a Black male president, the culture of the organization still reflects a white, male mindset that is apparent in the organizational culture and work practices, and the changes around race appear to have been a technical exercise with no behavioral changes and no regard for gender.” Other female members complained of a male “broederbond” (brotherhood) and a reluctance to pay more than lip service to equity imperatives beyond opening up for a small number of Black men at management level that, with a majority white executive group, continues to preside over a predominantly Black membership.

1. Some lessons learned

The change process of The Network is an example of the way in which organizational routines are embedded in the implicit value base of dominant groups. The dominant group, although a minority in terms of numbers, remains the referent for organizational interaction. Although the demographics of the organization have shifted substantially, the values that flow among and in the structure, culture, and strategy of the organization still reflect the original value base of its (white) founding members. The strategy employed aimed to reflect the demographics of the country in response to equity legislation. However, the problem with this approach is two-fold. First, this approach assumes that a Black membership is a single category that is undifferentiated, and so fails to distinguish the diverse needs and interests of Black and white women and men. Second, the approach assumes that changing the demographic profile of the organization is a sufficient condition to address deep-rooted traditions and practices within the institutional culture of the organization. A strategy of number crunching that stops short of addressing institutional norms will make little difference to organizational functioning. Given the fact that this is the professional body within the private sector charged with the responsibility to develop and deliver good human resource practices, it still seems that this organization understands equity as a mere number-crunching exercise. The Network is clearly struggling to move away from its own racist past and practices. Overall it appears that The Network has adjusted its racial demographics without concomitant changes to achieve internal equity, democratization, and organizational culture.

C. VIGNETTE THREE: PUBLIC SECTOR TRANSFORMATION—A GOVERNMENT DEPARTMENT

The transformation process of government departments in the Public Sector had an over-arching goal—to rationalize and re-structure the Public Service so as to ensure a unified, integrated and leaner Public Service. In line with this goal, government departments initiated their own transformation process, in most cases with the assistance and facilitation of consultant groups. The Department of Trees and Land was no exception. In January 1998, the department contracted ABC Consultancy to assist the department to develop a new mission, vision, ethos, and structure for the integration of tasks in the department. The task specifications included: a) to facilitate the development of a new ethos, vision and organizational culture that can sustain the productive needs of the department; b) to develop leadership and management capacity at the regional and national level based on the philosophy of the “learning organization” and that draws on international thinking and distinctly African and South African practices and values; c) to

identify and ensure participation of all stakeholders; and d) to facilitate the development of a stakeholder communication strategy. The transformation process was facilitated over a period of two years with the department, and the ABC Consultancy highlights the following achievements of this change project:

- the emergence of legitimate and effective transformation structures;
- internal and external consultation processes driven by the department;
- the direct engagement of 10,000 department officials and approximately 1,500 external stakeholders in the “vision-building” process;
- the opportunities created by the identification of 200 internal change agents/sponsors;
- the frameworks created by the 9 Leadership “Future Searches” in the regions and Head Office and the establishment of Integrated Management Planning frameworks;
- the common ground, synergy, and energy created in the 10 Regional Stakeholder Future Search Conferences in the lead-up to the National Vision-Building Conference;
- approximately 900 department officials and external stakeholders directly involved in the “Regional Stakeholder Future Searches”;
- the commitment and creativity displayed at the National Strategic Planning meeting;
- the emergence of a number of implementation processes for the further operationalization and institutionalization of the transformation process;
- the “Triumvirate” to integrate and lead the areas of policy, culture, and structure;
- the Regional Steering;
- groups who have constructed preliminary transformation implementation plans based on the agreed National framework; and
- the strong seeds and possibilities of a new ethos, culture, and shared vision for a united, effective, and democratic department.

However, a recent check-in with the department revealed that two months after the transformation process was completed by ABC Consultancy, gender was still identified as a key issue in the organization. The Gender Desk Officer, who was appointed during the change process to “care-take” gender, shared the following with me:

We still struggle to ensure representation of women in the department. And when we raise the issue, leadership dismisses us. They argue that the managerial positions are open to everyone in the organization and that all women need to do is to apply for those positions. But the women tell me that they find the male culture overwhelming, and they cite the recent increase in incidents of overt and covert sexual harassment as a further deterrent. Women simply don't feel empowered enough to make their voices heard much less influence organizational policy and implementation. It feels to me (reflecting on the change process) that the restructuring war was won through the change process, but that we lost the gender battle.

1. Some lessons learned

The transformation process brief/specifications took insufficient account of gender as an explicit goal, with the result that gender has now become an add-on after the change process was formally completed. Leaving it up to “the process” to throw up gender will disappear gender as a transformation issue that links with other transformation goals. Where consultants draw their terms of reference from, and the assumptions that they bring into their design specifications of change interventions, are critical determinants of process and outcomes of change agendas. The transformation process failed to interact with gender and, more specifically, with women stakeholders to bring their concerns into the change agenda.

Gender needed to be more explicitly addressed and articulated in all sections of the consultancy terms of reference and reflected in the vision, mission, ethos, and productive and democratic needs of the organization. The different aspects of the change process—the equity process, the culture change process, and the task output function—has to be integrated at all stages of the wider and ongoing transformation process. Overall, it appears that the ABC Consultancy was more committed to the process of change, rather than to the content of transformation. Here, the implicit expectation held was that the process would throw up issues of gender within the micro-institutional context, and the macro-societal transformation context would make race explicit as part of the transformation brief. The consultant terms of reference appear to have established what are apparently gender-neutral strategies and structures. Being responsive to a client-centered process cannot be separated from the issues of the transformation. In this case, allowing the organization to shape the process had particular consequences for what agenda was built (and whose interests were served) during the change process.

D. VIGNETTE FOUR: INSTITUTIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

The “University of Life” (UOL) is one of the oldest universities in South Africa and one whose historical ideology has always been based on liberalism, a belief in academic freedom, as well as freedom of expression through intellectual knowledge production. Originally set up as an exclusively white institution, the University began to restructure its practice around equity and diversity under the rubric of what it calls “transformation,” in response to the changing legislative context—notably the new Constitution (1996), the Labour Relations Act (1995), and the Employment Equity Act (1997). The University’s Mission Statement, adopted in 1996, declares that “it is central to our mission that we . . . recognize our location in Africa and our historical context . . . strive to transcend the legacy of apartheid in South Africa and to overcome all forms of gender and other oppressive discrimination . . . and to promote equal opportunity and the full development of human potential.” The Strategic Planning Framework, developed in 1997, states that the UOL, as an African university, needs to “reflect the diversity of African society in all aspects of university life.” It asserts “UOL cannot be a university of world class quality if it fails to draw on the widest possible pool of human potential.” Thus, one of the key priorities set by the Framework is a “staff profile that better reflects the diverse society that UOL serves.”

The University also revised its recruitment procedures so as to ensure broader staff diversity. A typical advertisement for an academic post thus read as follows:

The University of Life is committed to recruiting the best possible academic staff and we want, therefore, to draw from the widest pool of talent available to us in South Africa. Because of past inequities the pool of South Africans from which this and other universities in the country have been able to recruit, has been kept artificially small and has consisted predominantly of only a small fraction of the total population, namely those who have enjoyed the most opportunities. To contribute to developing this pool such that it reflects the diverse talents of all South Africans, UOL plans to make a number of contract development appointments across the university, of candidates who have demonstrated excellent potential, but who need the opportunity to complete a higher degree, gain teaching experience or begin publishing their research, in order to become competitive for permanent academic posts. We therefore invite applications from South Africans who are black and/or women, for a post in the department of your choice (Sunday Times, 1997).

However, tensions arose around which category—race or gender—were to be prioritized with the selection process. The Transformation Officer at the time noted the following:

More than 200 applications were received and some excellent appointments made. One issue which arose in this context, as in other recent recruitment and selection processes, and which had been difficult to resolve with consensus, was that of whether the recruitment of black people (irrespective of gender) should be prioritized over the recruitment of women (irrespective of race) and whether to prioritize the recruitment of African people over the recruitment of Coloured and Indian people. The official view is that it depends on the particular context within the university. Thus, as far as the academic staff is concerned, the under-representation of both black people and women is so severe that there needs to be no prioritizing of one above the other. This contrasts with, for example, the situation in the secretarial ranks where almost 100% of staff is women, and it is therefore not a priority to recruit more women. Another such example would be the situation in the junior ranks of the administrative and support staff where as a result of the Coloured Labour Preference Policy (in the province) of the apartheid regime the overwhelming majority of that staff are Coloured men and women and therefore the priority is not to recruit more staff who are black (generically) but to recruit specifically more African staff (Transformation Officer, unpublished mimeo).

1. Some lessons learned

This example highlights the complexity of implementing equity in a post-apartheid South Africa, particularly in light of the rise of “new managerialism” in South African higher education where emphasis is on economy, effectiveness, and efficiency, and not on equity, because it is not regarded as a social justice issue (Sporn, 1996). Given the history of apartheid, and the way in which apartheid had developed and actively fostered a pigmentocracy through racial stratification, the implementation of equity policy is not simply a question of leveling the playing fields between Black and white, but also of changing the rules about who is allowed to play. Any strategy to implement equity would have to recognize, first and foremost, that there exists a plurality of identities within the categories of women and men whose gender is raced and classed. The implementation of the policy would have to take into account the way in which apartheid had privileged particular groups in ways that continue to set groups (white, “Coloured,” Indian, African) against each other. The institutional hierarchy reflects the heritage of this racial privileging, and gender encases that privilege in very particular ways for all groups.

Dealing with our apartheid legacy also means that the implementation of Employment Equity is not devoid of the specific context that apartheid had shaped in relation to access to employment. The strategy employed by the University reflects how an understanding of the context and terrain of inequality influences a change strategy. The provision of seemingly open and equal opportunities will result in the reproduction of the same privilege that the implementation of equity policies are attempting to reverse. In this case, the University has developed plans to intensify their recruitment strategy so that staff can approximate the demographics of the wider South African population. In addition to this, the strategy of recruiting young, Black university graduates to entry-level posts in the University administration has also expanded and shifted the existing demographic make-up of the administrative and support staff. It is critical that a context-responsive equity strategy considers the legacy of apartheid, and the reflection of that legacy within existing institutional arrangements, against the specific relevance of the goals of equity in the workplace.

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V. DEVELOPING CONTEXTUALLY APPROPRIATE CHANGE STRATEGIES

Douglas North (1990) argues that institutions are best described as frameworks for socially constructed rules and norms that function to limit choice. These are humanly devised constraints that provide structure to everyday life, making certain forms of behavior predictable and routine by institutionalizing them. Recognizing the human dimension in the construction of institutions reminds us that institutions are neither immutable nor natural, but that all institutions embody a history of social choices by particular groups (Goetz, 1997). Reading the cultural narrative within South African institutions allows us to investigate how these choices are sometimes socially sub-optimal, not made with either efficiency or equity in mind, but rather made to preserve the power of privileged groups. Reading this narrative also reminds us that human beings do not simply passively respond to policy directives, but that they bring their individual and behavioral patterns to their work which influences practices and structures.

The implication of this for developing context-appropriate change strategies in South Africa require the development of change strategy interventions that begin the process of articulating a locally derived theory, based on our organizational change experiences, and the particularity of the race/gender/class intersection and dynamic. I want to propose that such interventions consider the “Big Looming Questions” (BLQ) around which to build appropriate change processes (see next page). These are questions that will allow for deeper reflection on the context, content, and scope of change processes. Implicit in the questions are also strategies that can be derived for specific processes, albeit in different environments. For example, the BLQ for change agents would form part of the reflexivity and the fluid expertise that should be part of the conceptual and practical orientation for all change agents working within a diversity context.

The case studies, as discussed in the vignettes, reflect some of these issues.

BIG LOOMING QUESTIONS

Developing Vision

- What will we be able to see, feel, and hear that will tell us (inside and outside) that an organization is equitable?
- When will we (as change agents) be able to pack up and go home?
- What will the world look like then?

↑

Change and Transformation

- What is the relationship between the inside and the outside?
- What is the cost of change at the level of the personal?

↓

Understanding Context

- What is the relationship between institutional change and societal transformation?
- How do we assess the ability of the external environment to sustain change?
- How do we bring the politics back into our institutional change strategies?
- How do we use institutional leverages for change that exist on the inside and on the outside?

Working as Change Agents

- How do we carry “difference”?
- How do we bargain with difference at the individual as well as the systemic level?
- How do we establish an effective institutional presence within institutions that reflects difference?

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Working with “Difference”

- What is the imagery at the unconscious individual level that we need to surface at the collective level?
- How does that imagery reflect “the real world” in institutions?
- What are the entitlement claims that arise from such institutional arrangements?

Work and Personal Life Issues

- How do we build processes that will lead to more equitable outcomes?
- How do we make the link between personal life and work?
- How do we understand the impact of the organization on family, community, and personal well-being?

VI. CONCLUSION

The post-apartheid moment allows us to work with and through “difference” in ways that contribute to the development of a locally derived change management theory that is based on the social and historical dynamics of race, class, and gender. The myths of the apartheid institutional environment remain to a great extent compatible with the internal organizational environment (Meyer et al., 1980). The uniqueness of “difference” in our context is that it had been institutionalized within and through institutions using gender, race, and class as organizing principles (Marks et al., 2000). While our context reflects a particular complexity, it also generates a vitality and depth that is uniquely shaped by the active engagement of all citizens.

Because of our history, change management is an overtly political issue, and the questions of who drives, who owns, who manages, and who benefits are key (Flederman, 1997). These are the issues that make the change terrain a contested one and that shape the spaces and potential for change. Our change efforts also face possible co-optation within organizations, either by groups who take on victim status—Black as well as white—in ways that privilege their own role even more, or by groups who resist change because they assume that the change can only lead to loss and not gain and organizational renewal (Marks et al., 2000). South Africans are also beginning to suffer from change fatigue, because the complications of implementing equity was not foreseen in the early, heady, post-apartheid days. The implementation of equity policies are also contested: Ball (1994a: 10 quoted in Morley, 1999: 59) notes that “policy is both text and action, words and deeds . . . policies are crude and simple. Practice is sophisticated, contingent, complex and unstable.”

The change management process is also influenced by boundary-issues⁹—the national change process affects all citizens and all institutional sites. While this gives impetus to institutional transformation processes, it also runs the risk of influencing organizational change processes negatively. It is primarily the politics of the national transformation process that has set the pace for institutional change processes. There are a range of policy leverages for change that allow for debate and the development of new organizational rules. The achievement of employment equity is therefore contingent upon progress made in other areas of South African society. However, because the pace of the national transformation process so closely defines the pace of organizational change, it will be critical to assess the ability of the external environment to sustain change over time.

We also face a further dilemma: to demonstrate the value of dealing and managing diversity within the context of scarce resources. Diversity is a budget line item that has to be resourced, and this has implications for what we are able to push as part of organizational change agendas. Our erstwhile “open” organizational boundaries that allowed the outside to come in are beginning to close up again as organizations experience the effects that a negative economic growth rate has on productivity and profit. As the vignettes demonstrate, a strong tension is also apparent between gender justice goals and race/class goals. In the context of increasing globalization and market pressure, it has become especially important to carry out best practice research and guidelines to guide effective change strategies. These strategies need to link change interventions to societal transformation goals. As well, they need to be located within a change

framework that links questions of vision, context, difference, and equity with a (self)-conscious assessment of the work of change agents, and they need to be guided by the broader transformation goals of equity and social justice.

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¹ A CGO panel—Evangelina Holvino, Ruby Marks, and Bridgette Sheridan—presented “From Transformation-Speak to Transformation-Do: Moving from Theories of Race, Gender and Class Intersections to Practices of Organizational Justice and Change,” where we explored some of the dilemmas of change and diversity. Presented at 2000 Subversions: 21st National Women’s Studies Association Conference, June 14-18, 2000, Boston, MA, USA.

² This quotation was taken from Joseph G.I. & Lewis J. (1981).

³ Resolution taken at Congress of South African Trade Unions (COSATU), 7th National Congress. COSATU Gender Policy, July 2000, COSATU, Johannesburg.

⁴ Patriarchy and traditional culture and customs combined with sexism to subordinate the specific gender concerns of women. The national liberation struggle is implicated by this: the movement tended to subsume women’s demands under the broad objectives of non-racialism and non-sexism, without spelling out what that means in relation to root causes and implementation strategy. For example, Meer (2000: 16) commenting on women’s involvement in the progressive trade union movement, asserts that “Some of the discussion on the need for shared reproductive responsibilities between women and men in the household was thus framed within the context of strengthening women’s role in the struggle . . . as elements of instrumentalism.” Irrespective of a strong and active trade union movement in which women and men participate around class based interests, the silence on patriarchy makes it unlikely that women’s interests will be substantively addressed.

⁵ Newman (1995) refers to culture as a site where wider ideologies of homophobia, racism, and sexism are lived out in organizational discourses and practices. I situate organizational culture within this text in this paper.

⁶ Hurtado’s (1996) work on seduction vs. rejection discusses the tensions that emerge in workplace settings between white women and women of color.

⁷ Organizational ideologies are in a state of constant shift, and different ideologies are apparent in different organizations depending on the leadership, culture and the implementation of equity. For example, the ideology of WHAMM is not one that is a constant within South African organizations. In many institutional settings, it is possible to observe a number of “profiles” of “ideal workers” located at different levels of the same institution. In a previously white designated university, located in a previously designated “Coloured job preferential” area, recent interviews (Marks, forthcoming) revealed a profile based on historically different race groups: the “ideal” student was assumed to be white, university support staff “Coloured,” and cleaning staff Black. The coexistence of different cultures and profile makes the tackling of institutional culture even more slippery and elusive.

⁸ These vignettes are based on actual case studies that were recorded by the African Gender Institute's Programme on Institutional Transformation at the University of Cape Town. The author carried out follow-up with these organizations two years after the initial case studies were completed.

⁹ Robin Ely alerted me to boundary issues during conversations about differences and similarities in U.S./South Africa change projects.

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