

University of Northern Colorado

## Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC

---

Master's Theses

Student Research

---

8-4-2020

### THE POWER OF TOGETHER: APPLYING GROUP DYNAMICS TO ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE INITIATIVES

Megan Bissell  
megan.bissell@unco.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digscholarship.unco.edu/theses>

---

#### Recommended Citation

Bissell, Megan, "THE POWER OF TOGETHER: APPLYING GROUP DYNAMICS TO ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE INITIATIVES" (2020). *Master's Theses*. 173.  
<https://digscholarship.unco.edu/theses/173>

This Dissertation/Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Research at Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC. It has been accepted for inclusion in Master's Theses by an authorized administrator of Scholarship & Creative Works @ Digital UNC. For more information, please contact [Jane.Monson@unco.edu](mailto:Jane.Monson@unco.edu).

© 2020

Megan Lee Bissell

All Rights Reserved

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN COLORADO

Greeley, Colorado

The Graduate School

THE POWER OF TOGETHER: APPLYING GROUP  
DYNAMICS TO ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE  
INITIATIVES

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts

Megan Lee Bissell

College of Humanities and Social Sciences  
Sociology

August 2020

This Thesis by: Megan Lee Bissell

Entitled: *The Power of Together: Applying Group Dynamics to Organizational Change Initiatives*

has been approved as meeting the requirement for the Degree of Master of Arts in College of Humanities and Social Sciences in Department of Sociology.

Accepted by the Thesis Committee:

---

Josh Packard, Ph.D., Chair

---

Rebecca Beals, Ph.D., Committee Member

Accepted by the Graduate School

---

Cindy Wesley  
Interim Associate Provost and Dean  
The Graduate School and International Admissions

## ABSTRACT

Bissell, Megan. *The Power of Together: Applying Group Dynamics to Organizational Change Initiatives*. Unpublished Master of Arts thesis, University of Northern Colorado, 2020.

Work and occupations are among the oldest and most salient concepts studied in sociology. Sociology as a field has largely focused on organizations from a macro perspective; primarily looking at organizational systems and institutionalized systems of oppression. Conversely, in conjunction with other disciplines such as psychology, sociology has maintained a presence in the more micro space, focusing on individualized interaction and behaviors. However, there is a distinct lack of meso-level research about the impact of group dynamics and social interaction in the for-profit workplace. Since 2010, there have only been 89 articles published about groups and their interactions in the workplace in 11 of the flagship journals for the discipline. The lack of research at this level has contributed to the consistent underrepresentation of the impact that group dynamics has on organizational change; particularly diversity, equity and inclusion change initiatives. The gap in this area indicates that there is still a piece missing to the puzzle of creating sustainable organizational change and that there is a story for sociology to tell. Social theory can inform change agents about how those dynamics can be used to shape practices that encourage lasting change. In this study, 13 interviews are conducted with individuals who have led diversity initiatives in their workplace. The narratives are used to construct a picture of the meso-level group dynamics that contribute to the successes and failures of change efforts. This insight led to a group

dynamics-based model that can be used to design future change initiatives. Overall this study provides a glimpse into the role that sociology should be playing in the public understanding of and knowledge formation of our work-lives.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is the direct result of my being surrounded by a combination of guided ambition, never-ending ideas, conversations about leaving the ivory tower and endless support. My educational journey was anything but traditional and required strong partners and champions in order for me to get through it and feel as though every moment led to this one. I cannot capture all of the support on this page. However, there were a few key players that I would like to acknowledge because I would not have even considered this endeavor without them by my side. My husband David is the reason I feel nearly limitless, as he has convinced me that I can do anything. Our children mirror his strength and sacrificed a lot of time with their mother during this process. I thank you deeply, family.

Additionally, I have never been so accepted and nurtured as I was by the entire Sociology Department of the University of Northern Colorado. I would not have had the opportunities to thrive as I did without the support of ALL of the Sociology faculty. Specifically, Dr. Josh Packard. There just aren't enough words to express my gratitude. Dr. Packard was part of the aforementioned never-ending ideas and conversations, except when it mattered, and we had to make decisions about this study. He has guided and coached me through obstacles I did not anticipate and opened doors as I needed them. I would not be where I am as a Sociologist or as a person without him.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION.....	1
RATIONALE FOR STUDY .....	4
RESEARCH QUESTIONS .....	6
OUTLINE OF THE THESIS .....	6
CHAPTER II: THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND BACKGROUND.....	9
THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK.....	10
Group Dynamic .....	10
Social Construction of Reality .....	20
Organizational Change.....	25
BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY .....	31
The Missing Sociology in the For-Profit World .....	31
Investigative Preliminary Content Analysis.....	33
Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as a Context for Organizational Change Initiatives .....	36
CONCLUDING REMARKS.....	47
CHAPTER III: METHODS.....	48
RESEARCH DESIGN.....	48
RESEARCH SITES AND PARTICIPANTS .....	50
DATA COLLECTION PROCESS .....	53
DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS .....	54
Coding and Analysis of Qualitative Data.....	54
CREDIBILITY AND ANALYSIS INTEGRITY .....	54
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD.....	56
THE ROLE AND BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCHER .....	56
CONCLUDING REMARKS.....	58
CHAPTER IV: ANALYSIS AND RESULTS .....	59
OVERVIEW .....	59
THEME 1: EXPERIENCES WITH ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE INITIATIVES (RESEARCH QUESTION 1).....	60
Approach .....	61
Barriers.....	67
THEME 2: ATTRIBUTION OF MICRO OR MACRO PHENOMENA TO THE OUTCOME OF CHANGE EFFORTS (RESEARCH QUESTION 2) .....	73
Individuals (Micro) .....	74
Social Phenomena (Macro) .....	77
THEME 3: HOW PEOPLE ARE TALKING ABOUT GROUP DYNAMICS (RESEARCH QUESTION 3).....	80

Buy-In (Group Consensus).....	80
Recommendations for Future Efforts .....	84
Incentives .....	86
CONCLUDING REMARKS AND SUMMARY .....	87
CHAPTER V: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS .....	89
SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION.....	89
Group Dynamics and Change Efforts .....	89
MODEL POINT 1- APPROACH AND BARRIER ANTICIPATION.....	91
Interaction.....	91
MODEL POINT 2-FIND THE GROUPS.....	93
Influence.....	93
MODEL POINT 3-COME TOGETHER.....	95
Interdependence .....	95
GROUP DYNAMIC-BASED MODEL FOR CHANGE .....	97
Model Point 1 .....	97
Model Point 2.....	97
Model Point 3.....	97
RESEARCH LIMITATIONS.....	100
RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS .....	101
FUTURE RESEARCH .....	102
CONCLUSION .....	102
REFERENCES .....	104
APPENDIX.....	114
A. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL.....	114
B. INTERVIEW GUIDE .....	116

## LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

### TABLES

1. Results of Article Count for Content Analysis..... 35
2. Demographic Breakdown of Interview Participants..... 53

### FIGURES

1. Group Dynamic-Based Model for Change..... 99

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Organizational change is necessary and complex. Change initiatives ensure that organizations stay competitive, shape their internal cultures to maintain employee engagement, and respond to an ever-changing world. However, many change initiatives do not result in the desired outcome or fail completely (Beer 2001). This is important because organizations need to remain dynamic and resilient in order to survive the modern world of complex conditions (Rosenberg and Mosca 2011). Multiple studies have been designed to assess the likelihood that change would achieve an organization's desired result, leading to the popular statistic that 70% of change initiatives fail (Hughes 2011). This percentage is controversial on its own, because it is often taken out of context, but the more important accompanying story is that organizational change is ambiguous and complicated, calling for theory to help sort it out (Ellerman et al. 2017).

There is no shortage of change models in existence which have been developed to address the conundrum of just how to implement a well-devised strategy to a successful end (Rosenberg and Mosca 2011). Ultimately, there is a dearth of research about the wide range of organizational change models, indicating that there is no one right answer, but that there are applicable theories about the social world that we can use to shape more successful initiatives. In addition to literature about change models, experts have attempted to narrow down the types of barriers these models would have in implementation (Wentling 2004). Most change efforts will face barriers from the realms

of technology, structure, communication, culture and more (Ellerman 2017; Feldman and Pentland 2003). The multitude of models and variation in barriers lead to my assertion that experts and leadership need to be prepared to lead with a multi-faceted, multi-disciplinary approach to organizational change that proactively lays the groundwork for efforts to become rooted. I argue that one often overlooked pathway to laying the foundation for successful change initiatives stems from an understanding of social interactions and group dynamics, as found in meso-level sociological theory.

The primary focus for sociologists when studying the for-profit realm has been large-scale social phenomenon (macro) examples like “the economy” or “social media” and the other side of the spectrum, which includes the role of the individual (micro) in organizational change, such as “resistant leader” or “fearful employee.” However, though sociologists have made significant contributions to the macro- and micro-levels, they are missing the middle-level (meso) phenomenon that affect the intersection of individuals, organizations and larger society, particularly in the for-profit sector (Fine 2012). It is essential to understand meso-level dynamics in the modern workplace where individuality, social phenomenon and organizational structures overlap and connect (Harrington and Fine 2006).

Additionally, sociologists are not asserting themselves into the conversation about the for-profit world with our increasingly useful theories and applications (Parker 2015). For example, I analyzed a battery of academic sociology journal articles about organizational change in the for-profit arena over the last ten years and found that macro phenomena range from the impact of technology and social media to a modern review of isomorphism. Micro-level topics included showcases of leadership capabilities in change

contexts and how employee wellness is impacted by failed change efforts. Small groups and dynamics, interactions and culture are a few among many of the meso-level principles that sociology has at hand but are generally missing from the larger conversation about work and organizations (Harrington and Fine 2006). Meso-level theories offer insights into how humans behave within interactions with teams and groups (Goffman 1967) and how in those interactions we work together to reify our shared reality (Berger and Luckmann 1967). In short, our interactions shape who we are and shape the world around us. In the context of organizational change, applying these principles and theories enables us to impact the likelihood of success because we work *together*.

In this thesis, I demonstrate how theories about components and impacts of group dynamics they are not well utilized. Additionally, I show how they could be applied in organizational change efforts to make those efforts more successful and predictable. Below, I couple examples and analysis from the existing literature with relevant aspects of the theories to shape a model for theory application. In general, the literature supports my assertion that meso-level theories in organizational change efforts can be used to shape more successful change initiatives. Additionally, in an effort to expound upon theory application, I use an analysis of qualitative interviews with change leaders to highlight how group dynamics are being used to create successful change, where meso-level theory could have improved the outcome of a change initiative and how misattribution of causes of success and failure shaped the outcome of initiatives. The result is an empirically grounded, applied theoretical model of meso-level organizational change.

## RATIONALE FOR STUDY

This qualitative study is important because meso-level sociological theory has a role to play in how organizational change initiatives are shaped and performed. In this investigation, I explored the narratives that people use to discuss change initiatives that they have led and experienced in their work-lives. In order to narrow the topic of “change initiatives,” I focused the participants’ dialogue about successful or unsuccessful diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) initiatives that have been attempted in their work organizations. I chose the DEI change setting for this thesis to provide a relatable and relevant lens because our social climate demands a shift toward inclusion. DEI change efforts made a good case study for change initiatives because they often look similar and most change agents can envision what that type of initiative entails. DEI change efforts are among the most difficult to implement because they are rooted in complex ideals and individuals’ identities (Cui et al. 2018). Many organizations are not implementing changes in a way that last or make a culture shift and as a result, DEI change efforts do not last or fail entirely (Dobbin 2015). DEI change efforts were a good model to learn about change in general because the principles that could lead to a successful outcome in such complex settings can be used to inform other types of initiatives.

Change agents can use theory to inform how they design and implement practices that encourage lasting change. This project looked at leaders’ narratives about their experiences with change to identify what they perceived to have shaped and contributed to the outcomes. In the background explanation for this study, I addressed the importance of successful change efforts through a diversity, equity and inclusion lens to provide context for the specificity of the narratives provided by the interview participants. I

analyzed participants' language for themes that reveal how they are applying aspects of social theories of group dynamics, even if they were unaware that they were doing so. I also analyzed what micro- and macro-level factors participants were attributing to the outcomes of their change initiatives. It is necessary to see where sociological theory exists, if at all, in order to determine where it fits in the narrative of organizational change efforts in the for-profit world.

I discussed sociological theories that are applicable in an organizational change context in the review of literature, though generally speaking, sociologists are not addressing the meso-level theory as part of the conversation about change in the for-profit realm. Harrington and Fine (2006) express that in ignoring the meso-level theories, we are missing where the "action" happens and therefore are missing a better way to explore our world. In short, meso-level theories such as Goffman's interaction order and generalized theories of group dynamics give change agents the framework to take action with a higher chance of predictable outcomes. In addition to group dynamics, theories about social construction support how interaction can shape reality. The core of meso-level analysis is comprised of exploration of consistent, intentional and relevant interactions (Fine 2012).

Ideally, this research will help change agents to develop a theory-based model for change in their organization, that creates long-term, lasting improvements because people are working together toward that outcome. As a sociological practitioner, I intend for this study to provide a steppingstone in the advancement of the field of sociology in addition to the betterment of peoples' work-life experiences.

A generalized awareness of sociological theory is essential to systemic change and a deeper understanding of human behavior. The purpose of this qualitative study was to describe meso-level social theories as they apply to organizational change initiatives.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The primary research question for this study was, how can organizations use meso-level social theories to increase the likelihood of change initiative success? Additional questions supported the main investigation by refining the scope and guiding ways to think about the quandary. The following questions added depth and direction to the overall study and helped to frame the research in a way that can be immediately applied.

- Q1 How do people talk about their experiences with organizational change initiatives, specifically with regard to approach, barriers and reasons for the change?
- Q2 Where do opportunities to use meso-level social theory present themselves in the narratives about change initiatives? To what are people attributing successes and failures of their change initiatives?
- Q3 Do people recognize the impact that interactions with others have on individuals and on the organization as whole? How are people talking about group dynamics?

## OUTLINE OF THE THESIS

In Chapter One, I introduced the problem that I am focused on in this study and the rationale for why this is a worthy conversation in the field of sociology. In Chapter Two, I provided an overview of the theory that drove my realization about how useful and applicable the sociological imagination is in an organizational change context. I showed how theories of group dynamics and reality construction can be used intentionally to create meaningful, lasting change in the for-profit world. In addition to the foundational theory, I provided evidence that supports why this study needs to be

initiated with a content analysis of multiple academic journals. I concluded the chapter by providing a thoughtful overview of organizational change theory and relevant literature about the importance of diversity, equity and inclusion efforts.

Chapter Three outlined the research design and reasoning behind the chosen methodology for this study. I then identified the data collection and analysis process and did a summary of the ways in which I established and maintained credibility as well as how I adhered to ethical considerations.

In the Chapter Four, I shared the findings of the data analysis from the interviews and align them with the theory that was discussed in Chapter Two and the research questions that I used to guide this study. The content of this chapter was arranged by the categories that emerged from the data in conjunction with the research questions in order to create a defensible model for how to apply the theory in a generalized organizational change context. I first focused on how change agents discuss their approach and barriers to organizational change initiatives and then examine the language that was used by the participants to explain what factors attributed to the successes and failures of diversity change initiatives. Finally, I explored how participants spoke about principles of group dynamics, even if they did not know they were speaking about group dynamics. Finally, I outlined the results of any themes that emerged that provided insight into how people are thinking about change and what could be offered to encourage successful change initiatives.

In Chapter Five, I continued the conversation that was introduced in Chapter One, offering a discussion of the findings from Chapter Four. The research questions posed in Chapter One informed the structure of the discussion, supported by the application of

theory that was outlined in Chapter Two. Lastly, I concluded the analysis and discussion with an acknowledgement of the research limitations, how the study matters to sociology and I made recommendations for ways that others can use this study as a launching point for other work in this area.

## CHAPTER II

### THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVES AND BACKGROUND

This chapter presents an overview and discourse of literature relevant to the research questions in this study, the background literature that I used to support my choice of DEI change efforts as a research setting, and the results of the content analysis of sociological journals that I used to explore where meso-level theories were being discussed. This study was framed using theories of group dynamics and interaction, reality construction and organizational change to show how I developed the research questions and structured this study. The principle theories and intellectual works from Erving Goffman, Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, and Paul DiMaggio and Walter Powell were the foundation for the rest of the literature review. However, this section was not bound to specific theorists, as there is a broad swath of supporting literature that demonstrates how these base concepts are applied. I focused on how the theories work together in tandem, as opposed to concentrating on specific tenets of any one theory to develop my theory of applied group dynamics. Specifically, I used these theories to shape this study, explain my findings and to develop a model of theory application based on the evidence from the data. I concluded that applying the model of group dynamics that I developed using this theoretical framework will lead to more successful organizational change initiatives.

In the “Background of the Study” section below, I included a summary of the literature and observations that were the inspiration for this study and a preliminary

investigative content analysis. Specifically, the literature in this section supported my assertion that there is missing sociology in the for-profit world and that DEI change efforts are an appropriate setting for the study. In the content analysis, I looked at over 10 years of sociology academic journals to determine how and when practitioners in my discipline were discussing meso-level theories in the for-profit world.

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

### *Group Dynamic*

Groups are the powerful core from which change stems through the components of group dynamics; interaction, influence and interdependence. They are a tool in the formation of our collective reality, specifically institutions and other large-scale social phenomena, through micro-interactional processes as well as communities of influence that shape our identities through ongoing interaction and legitimization (Fine 2012). The group is a microcosm used to study the larger world because groups are positioned at the intersection of the individual (agent) and the institution (structure) (Harrington and Fine 2006). The power that groups have in shaping individual and societal worlds is an advantage in organizational change initiatives, if change agents have an understanding of the key components of group dynamics and how they affect the outcome of change efforts. A sound understanding of how interaction, influence and interdependence affect agents, culture and societal structures, provides change agents with a tool for affecting change in a positive way. The following theories provided a framework for me to explore the impact that groups have on change efforts in this study.

*Definition of Group Dynamics.* Groups are a collection of more than two people who intentionally interact with each other and identify themselves as together in some manner. A group's definition of together, in this context, comes from the set of shared

goals, expectations, rules and norms that the collection of people agrees upon (Hegtvedt and Johnson 2018). Individuals come together in groups for a purpose, often within the context of an institution. Groups are not groups by the claim of its members alone but are bonded and bounded by behaviors. Group members solidify their togetherness by identifying boundaries both within the group and externally. Groups legitimize their collective purpose, identity and rules of operation through a series of stages wherein members confirm their inclusion through interaction and affirmation of their behaviors, work through inherent conflict and ultimately become dependent on each other within that context (Sweet and Michaelsen 2007).

Bourdieu (1985) asserts that the group is the nucleus of “commonsense” which is just another term for collectively agreed upon and taken-for-granted knowledge. Groups aggregate stores of knowledge and standards that are used to identify acceptable courses of action for the individuals within a group to follow and for the group to follow when interacting with other groups. Groups contain both the history and future of human interaction which its members draw upon and utilize in tandem to achieve their desired outcomes (Bourdieu 1985). Knowledge is fostered in groups, kept by the agent, and spread to the structure. In turn, the structure affects how the groups operate and how those groups impact the agent. Groups that are situated within organizations are settings for sophisticated, ongoing, and consistent interactions that ultimately influence the culture of the parent organization. Within institutions, groups should be used as a way to measure how culture, community and belonging are fostered and changed because they are small subsections of a larger societal structure (Fine 2012). In a variety of settings,

groups are the force that create collective and widely accepted values, and this is done through the members' ongoing behaviors and responses; group dynamics (Fine 2014).

Group dynamics are the interplay of interaction, influence and interdependence of group members. The “dynamics” in group dynamics refers to the fact that groups are more than just a place where individuals connect, but a place where “action” happens. Action is the decisions of the present that agents deploy in conjunction with knowledge from the past (Harrington and Fine 2006). Group dynamics evolve over time, based on the reification of collectively agreed-upon interactions, norms and expectations and on the context within which the group is situated (Hegtvedt and Johnson 2018). The malleability of group dynamics, in addition to fact that groups are a central cog of both structure and agency, makes them an ideal phenomenon to root this study in when exploring how to create meaningful change (Harrington and Fine 2006). Erving Goffman's *Interaction Order* (1983), in which he asserts that our society is crafted through mutual agreement by individuals to create social order, explores the intersection of culture, interaction and structure. The interaction order can be directly observed in group dynamics.

Essentially, in the past there were rules that were legitimized by an interconnection of different groups' decisions and those rules determine the actions of today, also known as the social order. Goffman (1963:8) defines the social order as “any set of moral norms that regulates the way in which persons pursue their objectives.” Groups shape the social order because society is a group of groups with intersecting memberships and rules that people use to determine how they will act in any given situation (Fine 2012). Goffman (1983) explains that we need to understand how we are

“socially situated” in context when we are doing things together because interactions are based in social contract and social consensus. Additionally, Goffman (1959) situates the order and process of interactions between individuals within organizations and uses the metaphor of a “theater” to explain the interconnection between interaction and context. Organizations provide the framework for how and why interactions are “performed” (Manning 2008). He argues that by understanding group dynamics and interactions, it is possible to use that knowledge to influence larger social organizations (Fine 2014).

*Interaction.* Interaction is the central tenet of group dynamics because shared knowledge is created through the playing out of roles, norms and expectations. Goffman (1983:3) explains interaction in the following way,

When in each other’s presence individuals are admirably placed to share a joint focus of attention, perceive that they do so, and perceive this perceiving. This, in conjunction with their capacity to indicate their own courses of physical action and to rapidly convey reactions to such indications from others, provide the precondition for something crucial: the sustained, intimate coordination of action, whether in support of closely collaborative tasks or as a means of accommodating closely adjacent ones. (Goffman 1983:3)

Interaction within a group shapes what behaviors (practices) and patterns (routines) stay and go (Fine 2014). People transmit knowledge and provide the collective legitimization of actions which reinforce what the group overall knows and does (Carley 1991). In turn, agents make decisions about their behaviors and beliefs based on the action that takes place during interactions (Goffman 1967). Agents enter into a group interaction with their own version of the past, knowledge of the past decisions of the group and the understood rules of interaction during every social situation. The combination of those variables shapes the outcome of each interaction, and ultimately determine the group’s culture. Successful groups self-regulate through collective knowledge and the subsequent

interactions that adhere to the group's culture (Fine 2012). Goffman (1967) asserts that the action within an interaction is basically everyone putting their best effort into getting through the interaction successfully by meeting the expectations that it dictates.

The context of the group dictates the desired situational outcome that agents will try to accomplish (Goffman 1967). Situational outcome is not determined by the agents and their interactions, but by interactions and their agents (Collins 2004). Additionally, agents are held to expectations and roles that fit the type of group in which they are a part. For example, a musical performance group requires a different type and method of interaction than a sports team. In the case of the musical performance group, the roles are spelled out and the expected behaviors are rehearsed to ensure a degree of success (Goffman 1959). In our example, if a musician consistently plays at a different tempo than the rest, the group will correct the behavior through interaction. Group members will know how to approach the interaction because the group contains a store of knowledge that determines what corrections need to be made and how. Other groups, such as those in the workplace, have outcomes, just as the musical group would, but they are often less constructed and practiced, so the roles and expectations are more ambiguous (Nelson 2018). In the case of the workplace, interactions shape group dynamics through a series of formal and informal arrangements which are determined by desired organizational and interpersonal outcomes (Fine 2012). Change agents use an understanding of the interactions within group dynamics to recognize the conditions that make people act together and change the conditions, rather than trying to change individuals' behaviors (Collins 2004).

Goffman (1959), channeling Émile Durkheim (1912), describes interactions as rituals, asserting that everything from saying “hello” to performing tasks at work is a ritual that follows patterns based on the social context. Randall Collins (2004) summarizes what Goffman presented as a model of interaction rituals with the following designations. First, ritual interaction is reflexive of the social situation, meaning that people adjust the way that they interact based on the context. Second, the purpose of the interactions will become clear for all those involved. The next step of the ritual model is that interactions are kept up to demonstrate social solidarity, which creates pressure to conform. Goffman (1956) supports Durkheim’s assertion that rituals honor “sacred objects”, but he clarifies that in interactions, the sacred object is whatever is socially valued. Ultimately, interaction is the “ritual” that connects the structure of the group with the ideals of the group by creating symbols that agents use to establish the group’s meaning and identity (Collins 2004).

*Influence.* While interactions are the performance of expected behaviors to achieve an outcome, they are also the way that influence and conformity are established in the group. Agents influence each other’s behavior within a group setting, which sets up the expectations for the next set of behaviors (Hegtvedt and Johnson 2018). Agents within a group decide which behaviors and knowledge to internalize and carry forward based on the influence of other people that they interact with (Goffman 1959). Interaction rituals between agents that have reached the stage of mutual focus and agreement will exert pressure for all parties to conform to create social solidarity. Conformity is created by the influence of interacting group members through norms and information because agents are avoiding the “moral uneasiness” that would be caused by a lack of adherence

(Collins 2004). Groups need agent conformity in order to advance their purpose. Status impacts conformity both with the group itself and the agents within the group. Groups that are comprised of higher status people have higher pressure for conformity because those within the group face a (perceived) higher risk of loss if they do not perform at the level of consensus. Agents with higher status within the group wield the most significant influence in that they are the ones who get to decide what the norms, expectations, rule and goals of the group are (Hegtvedt and Johnson 2018). Even with parallel status, people influence each other by demonstrating their acceptance or rejection of each other's behaviors (Nelson 2018).

Influence is a key component in group dynamics, because it is the catalyst for the dynamic that the group adopts. Dynamics, or forces, can be altered by understanding the causes, conditions and consequences behind them. Influence through interaction is one way to shift dynamics (Cartwright 1959). Parallel to the agent's influence within a group, groups influence organizations. "Organizations are collections of groups, formal and informal, cohesive and disputatious, coordinating and conflictual" (Fine 2012). The entire organization is influenced by internal groups that intersect because they bridge each other's knowledge gaps and expand group membership through integration. Agents participate in a multitude of interconnecting groups, wielding their influence between them and that influence extends into their other memberships. Even when the interconnecting groups do not align, social interaction rituals create influence that sustains solidarity in and between groups. Durkheim argues that rituals are the basis for social trust and shared symbolic meanings that influence future exchanges (Collins 2004).

The conformity created through influence and the pressure for social solidarity fosters an interconnectedness between agents within a group (Hegtvedt and Johnson 2018).

*Interdependence.* Agents rely on one another to accomplish the desired outcomes of the group (Nelson 2018). Goffman (1967) explains that agents in groups are interdependent on each other during an interaction ritual because the outcome ultimately becomes a determinant of the agents' respective character. Meaning, agents rely on each other to interpret their behavior during an interaction in a way that maintains their perceptions of each other's characters. People take their cues from each other and are dependent on one another to perform their respective roles correctly. Groups have a purpose that is designed to be fulfilled by the coordination of roles and behaviors. The interaction order of the group is essentially a performance that consists of rituals and responses, not just impulse reflexes (Fine 2014). Actions and interactions depend entirely on the group context because behavior in a group is a cooperative effort (Goffman 1965). People within a group expect that others in the group will perform their roles in a way that supports themselves and the group as a whole. Trust between agents is a result of successful behavior outcomes within a group, which leads to future patterns and routines (Misztal 2001). Recognizable routines and patterns reinforce trust and establish agents' interdependence on one another in the group because they will rely on predictable cues from others to affirm that their behavior is on track (Fine 2014).

Agents who participate in groups with a high level of trust will form a heuristic based on their experiences that they use to guide their interactions in other areas of their lives (Putnam 1993). It is more effective to introduce a diversity of new ideas and actions into a group that has a high level of interdependent trust because the members will not

need to consistently look for historical knowledge of the outcome of an interaction that will inform their behaviors. (Fine 2014). Randall Collins poetically explains the importance of interdependence in group dynamics,

The central mechanism of interaction ritual theory is that occasions that combine a high degree of mutual focus of attention, that is, *a high degree of intersubjectivity*, [emphasis added] together with a high degree of emotional entrainment—through bodily synchronization, mutual stimulation / arousal of participants’ nervous systems—result in feelings of membership that are attached to cognitive symbols; and result also in the emotional energy of individual participants, giving them feelings of confidence, enthusiasm, and desire for action in what they consider a morally proper path. These moments of high degree of ritual intensity are high points of experience. They are high points of collective experience, the key moments of history, the times when significant things happen. These are moments that tear up old social structures or leave them behind, and shape new social structures. (Collins 2004:42)

Agents that have a high level of trust with and influence over each other are interdependent because they have achieved belonging and acceptance through their interaction rituals. This emotional energy is exalted when people have interactions that support and progress the purpose of the group (Hegtvedt and Johnson 2018). Though interactions do not always rise to the level of momentous, this phenomenon of group cohesion with emotion is referred to by Durkheim (1912) and later by Collins (2004) as collective effervescence. Collective effervescence is momentary “group-focused solidarity and individual-focused emotional energy” that translates into group-shared sentiments and identity (Hegtvedt and Johnson 2018). Collins (1990) explains that emotions are present in any interaction, but for groups to solidify, common and shared feelings need to happen from interaction to interaction. When group members share emotional experiences that are solidified and validated by their interaction, they collectively influence future interactions and outcomes. Additionally, groups that have

experience shared emotional energy also assign meaning to symbols which prolong sentiments. For example, a work group has come together once a week to discuss an inclusion initiative happening within their department to create gender neutral bathrooms. They have shared concerns and made decisions that will be challenging to implement. During those meetings, they created a list of all of the positive outcomes that the initiative will bring. The list made them feel collectively hopeful and in turn became a symbol of their efforts. They assigned meaning to the sheet of paper that held hope for them and in doing so extended the sentiment of hope. The agents in the group are now interdependent on each other to feel that hope and share the meaning of the symbol. Each time they meet, the feelings that bind them are revived. Collective effervescence is an effective method to unite groups and create change by fostering feelings of mutual motivation toward a specific outcome. Desired change can occur when interaction rituals continue because the group's dynamics are collectively interdependent.

*Summary.* Groups are collections of agents who interact in a ritualized fashion based on shared knowledge, working consensus and mutual understanding about the general purpose of the collective. Interaction is the pattern of behaviors that people perform, which reifies norms and expectations and creates pressure for agents to conform. Social solidarity and interpersonal relationships influence agents, who in turn influence others that they come in contact with. Agents become dependent on each other as they share group symbols and develop trust. These dynamics are shaped by the interactions and interactions shape the dynamics. Additionally, the dynamics of the groups establish how agents perform both within and outside of their overlapping groups. Agents operate within the collectives (groups) that operate within institutions, which

operate within society (Fine 2012). The interplay of these cyclical interactions shapes our reality and our identities by connecting what is occurring in the present to what was collectively decided from the past (Goffman 1983). Group dynamics are a component of how our reality is constructed.

### *Social Construction of Reality*

Groups are the meso-level place of interactions where rituals and responses are acted out by individuals in order to affect all of society (Fine 2014). Individual agents share common or opposing interactions which extend beyond their immediate dynamics into the larger sphere of social reality. Social construction theory provides the framework for how agents use interaction and influence to seed the collaborative pursuit of meaningful change (Salipante and Niederpruem 2014). Berger and Luckmann (1967:23), the seminal theorists in this realm, explain that reality is “taken for granted *as* reality” and that commonsense knowledge is shared with others as *truth*. They assert that the only *truth* about reality is that *truth* is chosen by the people that agree on that *truth*. Agents have power over truth through externalization, objectivation and internalization. Externalization is outward human action that creates social order in an ongoing and ever-changing manner. Objectivation is the process by which agents institutionalize behaviors through repeated habitual behaviors that occur over time, establishing a legitimized historical pattern. Such behaviors become accepted as “the things we do” and so become the constructed, objective *truth*. Internalization occurs when the objectivated social world becomes a part of the agent’s socialized set of behaviors and patterns (Berger and Luckmann 1967). In short, the theorists sum up this vast set of phenomena with the following “Society is a human product. Society is an objective reality. Man is a social product” (1967:61) surmising that our world can be and IS shaped by interaction.

Social construction theorists assert that individuals have the responsibility (and privilege) of being revolutionary about our reality (Gergen 2009). The skeleton of this notion is that we should make choices about our reality and own our part in its construction with shared meaning and action (Gergen 1994). The extent of agents' collective power is not idealistic in this context as long as we can reconcile that it stems from arming ourselves with knowledge about group dynamics and the fragility of truth. We take one step toward revolutionary change when we foster understanding about the small ways in which we shape our reality in order to create a more proactive approach to the future. One place that we as a collective people have the power to change the world, and recognize that change, is in the workplace. We can see revolution within the confines of the places that we work because they are usually controlled and measured places with a predictable set of phenomena (Berger and Luckmann 1967).

As social creatures, reality is a "given" that is not intentionally considered or questioned most of the time (Mehan and Wood 1975). The reality that we exist within at any given time is what we assume to be explainable and rational and serves as the comparison by which we judge others' realities. The reality of everyday life is a set of patterns of phenomena that, despite seeming as though they are independent of influence, are actually established, reified and legitimized by the influence of the people, contexts and knowledge involved in each one (Berger and Luckmann 1967). Berger and Luckmann (1967) refer to it as an "ordered reality" and Mehan and Wood (1975) offer the explanation that the ordered reality is reflexive.

Berger and Luckmann assert that "Social order is a human product, or more precisely, an ongoing human production" (1967:52). The impact of our collective influence

presents itself in the coherent body of knowledge that we share about any situation (Mehan and Wood 1975). The knowledge that we share within a context is determined by the people around us who have adopted the same logic, structure, rules and patterns that dictate that phenomenon. Individuals who hold the cohesive knowledge of the context will know what to expect and predict from others in those contexts (Berger and Luckmann 1967). Those who are engaged in an interaction develop and possess a shared knowledge of the interaction, as well as perform an expected reciprocation of actions that cement the shared knowledge about the interaction (Giddens 1984). The type of organization that we work in sets the stage for the development of knowledge as a collective.

In the case of the workplace, for example, a group from Organization A gathers regularly to discuss how they might improve the recruitment of underrepresented populations. They cannot have dialogue without communicating in a way that establishes a trusting team-based culture. A member of Organization B asks one of the group members from Organization A if they could show their Human Resources team how to do the same. The agent from the Organization A's group cannot simply apply their collectively shared coherent body of knowledge in a distinctly different context. The two bodies of knowledge will not align automatically. It is disruptive to peoples' respective realities to impose a "foreign" body of knowledge if there is no understanding of how that body of knowledge comes to be. However, interrupting each other's' realities is not something to be avoided (Gergen 2009). Instead, agents from both workplaces should work to construct a new shared body of knowledge in order to foster innovative ways of creating new realities using pieces of each other's knowledge. Knowledge is not a *thing* that remains at stasis but is rather a process of participation (Brown and Duguid 1991). In

this example, the group from Organization A operates together as a trusting team and they find that the trust helps them be more productive and efficient. Workers from Organization B could learn how to create a more cohesive workplace culture if they watched how those from Organization A worked together, fostering a trusting culture. Organization B's culture would change for the better by adopting principles of a different industry that ultimately led to a more productive environment. Knowledge transfer between different groups has cultivated the seed of meaningful work within two separate truths (Hosking 1991). Shared knowledge empowers change agents to influence others in their organizations, as well as intra-organizationally. In short, the new knowledge becomes the foundation for creating an entirely new reality (Berger and Luckmann 1967).

Reality is not set in stone, but is, in fact, fragile (Mehan and Wood 1975[;]). The disruption of what we believe to be true by shifting our collective knowledge can "break" reality. Interactions with each other dictates how that knowledge should shift. Berger and Luckmann (1967) call the breaking of our expected reality "primary socialization" because it requires a person to realign themselves with the situation and interactions. Reality's fragility is a benefit, not a detriment, if one adopts a revolutionary, innovative perspective (Gergen 2009). A better version of our context can be created through the reification of new, shared knowledge and interaction. The understood truth of reality is the gateway into its own undoing. People do not often question the rules of a phenomena unless there is a shift beyond their expectations in how people interact or share knowledge (Mehan and Wood 1975). Meaningful change is forged by disrupting truth. In the example of Organizations A and B, Organization B's truth was disrupted by an interjection of new knowledge from the group from Organization A. Organization B's

reality was changed by the knowledge that fostering a trusting work culture could actually increase the likelihood that they could attract and retain diverse employees. The new truth was modeled by people who interacted in a way that demonstrated how Organization B's reality COULD look. Organization B's agents' new actions are a response to the knowledge learned through interactions with Organization A's workers. Action toward the change developed out of a shared understanding of the newly constructed knowledge base between the groups (Berger and Luckmann 1967). In environments where agents want to change the narrative, they began exchanging information and exhibiting interactive behavior that showed the outcomes of these beliefs.

Agents are not stuck in any one reality. As demonstrated above, it is movable, and it is a choice. There are certain aspects of any reality that are more difficult to change, but there are others that only require knowledge and interaction in order to make a difference. Mehan and Wood (1975) assert that reality's fragile framework is permeable, impacted by knowledge that can be shifted through the influence of interaction. Agents can float between versions of reality and can change what is experienced entirely, with the help of others. The varied experiences of all involved parties play into the version of reality that agents occupy at any given time (Salipante and Niederpruem 2014). In the workplace, reality shifts when an agent's group associations shift and overlap (Gergen 2009). The reality changes when the context changes because the knowledge and interactions will be inherently different. For example, a promotion might mean that an employee spends their time with managers, learning their differing knowledge base, behaviors, rules and controls. It will shift their reality to something that would have been unrecognizable by a previous version of themselves from a different reality. The new context becomes our

reality through “secondary socialization” which is the process of internalizing what’s happening in order to accept it as the new truth (Berger and Luckmann 1967). The agent’s new experiences coupled with the history of old experiences become their foundation of knowledge that they carry into all of their group affiliations.

The most powerful tool of change that we have is interaction (Fine 2014). Partnered with the understanding that our reality is as movable as smoke, we should embrace the revolution that groups can create (Gergen 2009). The world is shaped by consensus, which when armed with the knowledge of social construction, can be intentional and calculated. The changes we make in the workplace can trickle into the larger world (Salipante and Niederpruem 2014). Essentially, reality is made by the agreement of groups that something SHOULD be reality. Patterns of behavior and belief are tried out for time until they become an accepted truth (Berger and Luckmann 1967). Reality is not real without the consensus by those involved that it is, in fact, real. Our accepted and agreed-upon reality is the way that it is because of the culture and context of ourselves and those around us. Reality is not discovered; it is nothing until it is created. Groups have the power to create reality.

### *Organizational Change*

Social behavior and institutions affect one another in an ongoing evolution which ultimately impacts society at large (Fine 2012). Most people in our society are employees, and the organizations that they work for are the mechanisms that drive the economy and society. Organizations of every size and purpose are necessary for the economic, policy and educational functions of society. Organizations are fields for social interaction and interaction within those fields, in turn, shapes the organization (Granovetter 1992). The impact of social interaction on organizations makes the nature of

organizations inherently fluid, though they are designed and built with the intention to be the static and sustained (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). There is no shortage of theory about the importance of change in organizations. The controversial, but largely compelling figure that 70% of organizational change efforts fail is widely discussed because change is imperative to the long-term success of organizations (Packard 2013). Organizations that are resistant to change and fail to adapt to social forces are likely to lose money, employees and status because they have not attempted to become what society needs (Rosenberg and Mosca 2011).

Organizations need to respond to changing social conditions by evolving or transforming. Change is difficult and can have downsides, particularly if the change is a radical transformation that affects the whole of society, like diversity initiatives. However, the outcome of a well-executed transformational change is a resoundingly improved standard of living (Schubert 2013). Small, slow changes are always going to be necessary as well. They are easier for individuals and organizations to accommodate and are met with less resistance. Ultimately, radical change, even on a small scale, is required to move the needle of societal progress (Greenwood and Hinings 1996) and organizations that adapt to changing social conditions are the ones that survive and succeed (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

Organizations rationalize to be efficient and solid, and in doing so, follow the model of success led by their predecessors. As a result, organizations all look similar to each other. Industries that are highly rationalized, such as banks or universities, utilize guiding rules and social pressures that force organizations to mirror each other. Essentially this means that when you think of “bank” or a “university” a distinct picture

of that type of organization emerges. DiMaggio and Powell (1983) refer to this phenomenon as organizational *isomorphism*. Despite small, convergent changes in practice that inevitably occur, organizations largely homogenize to match others within their industry. The more similar an organization is to others within its field, the more legitimate it appears to be. Isomorphism is the social force that socially constructs organizations to be identifiable (Berger and Luckmann 1990).

Isomorphism makes organizational change difficult. Resistance to new options that comes with isomorphism shuts the doors to change, and fights organizations' ability to shift rules and resources to respond to social conditions. A significant portion of research about organizational change points to leadership to place the onus of success or failure, but the larger driving forces are the mechanistic systems that leadership is expected to follow (Rosenberg and Mosca 2011). Organizational leadership is typically limited by the pressures of isomorphism, which translates to the body of the organization. Patterns of rules and structure with these organizations become the understood guideline of social interaction, making the individual's impact less influential than in settings where there is flexibility (Feldman 2004). Behaviors within the organization reflect the rules that are established, and because deviation comes with steep penalty, those behaviors are difficult to adjust (Berger and Luckmann 1990). Organizations and individuals adopt the expectation of their reality (rules of structure) and perform to those expectations with the belief that those patterns will legitimize the organization and establish certainty (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

Change is barricaded by resistance. Leadership and employees within an organization are resistant to change because shifts in rules and resources create

uncertainty about their practice (Rafferty and Griffin 2006). An unnecessary response to barriers is when leadership creates policies and guidelines to offset the effects of change, which ultimately become an additional barrier to success. For example, when leadership makes all employees attend mandatory diversity trainings as a policy, it becomes a barrier to change because diversity cannot happen from a place of resentment. In this example, agency is removed by the policy and people are automatically defensive, so they will not likely readily adopt different perspectives. In an attempt to avoid the barrier of a lack of participation, a barrier of reluctance and resentment has been erected. Barriers are to be expected, and even planned for, not resisted. Resistance is spurred by the practiced response of agents within the organization to uphold routine, tradition and conventions (Swedberg 2009). Routine is a predictable pattern of social decision making. Routine is isomorphic individual agency (practice) that needs to be disrupted in order to create organizational change. Practice of routines is not a repetition of the past, but a utilization of past experiences to determine future action (Giddens 1984). Just as organizations mirror, replicate and feel pressure to assimilate to the form that epitomizes success, so do agents within a rationalized field. Agents adhere to professionalized expectations that are asserted to drive the progress of the affiliated organization as a form of isomorphic practice (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

Giddens (1984) explains that organizations are the settings where routinized interaction occurs, and tradition is monitored to ensure that practice legitimizes the organization. Practices that perpetuate the existing nature of the organization are repeated because organizations are hubs of collective identity. People identify with their work and their practices display this connection (Berger and Luckmann 1990). Professionalism is

the reflection of a set of norms that makes a person identifiable by their role. For example, the term “teacher” elicits a singular image that reflects a professionalized norm. Though teachers all look physically different, behavior patterns, activities and expectations are similar enough to construct a mental image of “teacher” and those who do not fit that image are not legitimized in the same way (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). At the organizational level, using the same example, “school” also fits the model of the set of social legitimized norms created by isomorphic forces.

Organizational resistance shows up in the form of stagnant systems, and reversion to old routines in the face of new policy (Rosenberg and Mosca 2011). Change is an accepted phenomenon, but leadership often does not anticipate the social pressures that drive change or the inability to change (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Mirroring the isomorphism that organizations face, individual agents come with sets of their own patterns that they have adapted to fit within the constructs of the organizational structure (Bourdieu 1977). To encourage change, individual agents need to feel as though their individual and collective identities within the organization will not be jeopardized (Mackillop 2018). Transformational change, which is the type that makes the most impact long-term, is unsettling for individuals within the organization because the unknown is also unexpected. In standard organizational cultures, people are not prepared for transformational change because they have had no exposure to what it will look like and what they will have to sacrifice in order for it to happen. The typical approach to organizational change includes very little laying of groundwork or preparation which leads to agents feel surprised or believing the efforts are fleeting. The result is that they do not invest in the change long-term (Rafferty and Griffin 2006). Most organizational

cultures are built to avoid transformational change, so implementation and sustaining the changes can be very difficult (DiMaggio and Powell 1983).

*Summary.* Organizational culture shapes practice and a shift in practice is necessary to create a culture of change. When organizations change their culture to create space for change, they open windows for economic advancement, deeper connection to community and the ability to shift with changing conditions (Heilbrunn 2005). The components of an organization's culture that tell their story, foster positive group dynamics and construct the reality of their social context can all be altered to shift work practice (Brown and Duguid 1991). The transformational nature of practice comes from the intended and unintended consequences of social interaction, and how that shapes the relative structures that the interaction is based in. Agency, by practice, can be transformational (Giddens 1984). Individuals are embedded within an organization's existing culture, which causes the cyclical reproduction of the culture, and in turn contributes to the isomorphic nature of the organization toward sameness, not change (Granovetter 1992). Within organizations, individuals need to be socialized into processes that encourage vision beyond the embedded scope to which they have grown (or are learning to be) accustomed to (Martins and Terblanche 2003). Organizations that design a platform for continual change within their walls will have the nimble resilience to flux with changing social conditions and will survive dynamic shifts. With a culture shift, individuals will practice that culture by adapting norms, values and beliefs that represent the accepted "way things are done" (Zhao 2005). Appealing to the individuals within an organization is affective to a certain extent, but the collective nature of an organization demands that practice be addressed at a meso-level (Taylor and Wilson 2012).

## BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The following section contains a summary of the background observations that led to the design of this study and the content analysis that I performed to support the assertions about the gap in literature in the field, currently. Additionally, I included a defense for the selection of my research setting; DEI initiatives in organizations. This section is designed to provide context for the study and to establish the foundation for the decisions that I made throughout.

### *The Missing Sociology in the For-Profit World*

Sociology provides the theory needed to garner a robust understanding of what shapes the world around us and a way to apply principles of social dynamics to employ empathy, logic and critical thinking. This crucial science is distinctly missing from our work-life experiences, specifically in for-profit organizations. Sociology as a field has largely focused on organizations from a macro perspective; primarily looking at organizational structures and institutionalized systems of oppression. Conversely, in conjunction with other disciplines such as psychology, sociology has maintained a presence in the more micro space, focusing on identity formation and the self. There is little popular research, documentation or overall conversation in the field about the impact of meso-level group dynamics on how our work-lives are constructed. In an assessment of the last 10 years of major, general-topic sociological journals, less than 1.5% of all articles written in the field focus on meso-level dynamics in the for-profit world. Additionally, other disciplines, such as business management, have co-opted social principles (Parker 2015), but there is still a gap between the comprehension of social dynamics and how to apply them to create change.

There is a place for sociology in the for-profit world because understanding the social components of and applying principles of group dynamics to our work-lives will help create lasting and meaningful change. This can be accomplished by building a bridge between the academic field of sociology and for-profit organizations. Sociology has intentionally removed itself from the conversation within the for-profit world, so the bridge between academia and the application of principles of social dynamics does not exist in any meaningful (Fine 2012). Individualized explanations, aided by the field of psychology, among others, are used to provide the narratives about how our experiences are constructed. Other disciplines apply their principles, making them actionable and useful to people. It is time to build social dynamics into the conversation about our experiences and demonstrate ways to pragmatically apply social theory in order to create a more robust plan for action and change.

Our work-lives are a complex and seemingly individualized experience, despite that we most often share it with other people. The narratives that we share about how we experience work demonstrate that we do not recognize the impact of group dynamics on that experience even though our work-lives are inherently social. Often, narratives about particular events in our work-lives involve personalized stories that highlight decisions and behaviors of individuals or large-scale explanations about societal phenomena that impact the organization in a way that cannot be controlled. Our work-lives are largely assumed to be constructed psychologically, with little regard to the social component. That is not to say that people are ignorant of other people in their work-lives, but that the attribution of the impact of scientifically proven social dynamics rarely exists. Knowledge about social interaction could be utilized to shape how our work-lives, and

reality overall, are constructed. With an understanding of group dynamics, we could be proactive about how we shape our experiences and respond to situations (Fine 2014).

Work happens within organizations; comprised of systems, cultures and people. Organizations require change and development in order to be sustainable and yet change is often thwarted by the very systems, culture and people that they exist because of and for. Sustainable and meaningful organizational change is notoriously difficult to establish (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). We see this today specifically with diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) efforts in organizations. The body of literature outlining the benefits of DEI efforts to people and businesses is extensive and largely irrefutable. However, these efforts are difficult to implement in a lasting and meaningful way within the organizations that are attempting DEI change (Dobbin et. al 2015). This means that our work-lives are not receiving the benefits of DEI and that people are experiencing a failure of these types of organizational change efforts. Many change efforts fail because of social dynamics that contribute to ill-equipped teams, lack of innovation, resistance to change by groups of employees and an overall absence of adequate communication throughout the organization (Dobbin et. al 2011).

*Investigative Preliminary  
Content Analysis*

I conducted a content analysis of existing literature to determine if and how meso-level sociological principles were discussed or applied in the for-profit world. The following table summarizes the findings from an assessment of articles in 11 sociology disciplinary journals from the last 10 years. For the purposes of this exercise, articles were counted if the setting was in the for-profit world and fell into one of these three (micro, meso, macro) categories. Working definitions for this assessment are as follows:

*Micro.* Content is based on impact to or action by the individual. Analysis focuses on how individuals are affected by or affect for-profit organizations. This includes identity formation, individual context within a social setting and the impact of individuals on an organization, etc.

*Meso.* Content is based on impact to or action by teams, groups and interactional dynamics. Analysis focuses on how small group dynamics can impact for-profit organizations. This includes practice, norms, behaviors and knowledge formation in group social situations.

*Macro.* Content is based on overall for-profit organizational trends. Analysis focuses on large-scale social trends. This including demographics, examples of isomorphism, summaries about generational differences, economic impact, etc.

*Table 1. Results of Article Count for Content Analysis*

<i>Journal</i>	<i>#Micro</i>	<i>#Meso</i>	<i>#Macro</i>	<i>Total Articles</i>	<i>%Meso</i>
American Journal of Sociology	3	6	26	1754	.3%
American Sociological Review	0	17	20	499	3%
Annual Review of Sociology	1	2	11	262	1%
The American Sociologist	0	0	315	315	0%
Current Sociology	0	0	16	559	0%
Sociological Inquiry	0	2	4	265	1%
Sociological Forum	0	7	6	497	1%
Sociology	1	5	16	664	1%
Social Forces	2	8	35	621	1%
Work and Occupations	1	37	122	160	23%
The Sociological Review	1	5	9	673	1%
<b><i>Total over 10 years</i></b>	<b><i>9</i></b>	<b><i>89</i></b>	<b><i>580</i></b>	<b><i>6269</i></b>	<b><i>1.42%</i></b>

To supplement this assessment of literature, I searched the Harvard Business Review for articles containing the subjects of “teams,” “groups,” “behavior,” and “social”. The Harvard Business Review is a consistently cited, reputable source in the for-profit world. The purpose of performing this search is to determine the primary sources of information that are informing the construction of the modern workplace.

Academic and non-academic resources in tandem provide a more robust picture of how knowledge is formed in for-profit organizations. The search returned 585 articles in the past 10 years. The non-academic realm is using the terminology from sociological theories, but application of those theories does not always accompany the language.

*Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as a  
Context for Organizational  
Change Initiatives*

Organizations need to create spaces of inclusion in an effort to respond to social demands and also for their long-term success (Cox and Blake 1991). All sectors of institutions are faced with the challenge of responding to an increasingly more global and diverse market of consumers (clients) and competition by demonstrating that they can meet needs in a skillful and meaningful way. Research has demonstrated that to have a diverse and talented workforce, it is necessary to be intentional about the culture of an organization (Wentling 2004; Cao, Clark and Lehane 2003). The perspectives and contributions of diverse teams have a more significant impact on organizational innovation, and ultimately change, than more homogenous teams (Jang 2017). Spaces that are created to exemplify inclusion will draw a more diverse population of both employees and clients (Pless and Maak 2004). Organizations are more successful with diversity, and those that prioritize diversity are setting the standard for the future (Cox and Blake 1991). The benefits of diversity and inclusion are clear, and research shows that it is a sound decision to implement diversity initiatives in an organization.

For decades, diversity initiatives that have made little to no impact on the nature of how organizations operate have been implemented. This is not to say that NO initiatives have worked, but generally speaking, the standard approach is not sustainable and is met with resistance even now because of its ineffectiveness. Frank Dobbin and

colleagues (2011) studied diversity initiatives for over 30 years and conducted research to demonstrate that initiatives thus far have done little to impact the leverage of anyone but white men into positions of power in organizations. Most managers are still white men and standard diversity initiatives have been designed to further uphold systems of power by not focusing on inclusion and making these efforts seem like a zero-sum game for the people in power (Kidder et al. 2004; Dobbin, Kim and Kalev 2011). Criticisms of standard diversity initiatives include that they are control mechanisms instilled to manage the bias of leadership. This framework puts people who do not hold marginalized identities on the defense because it creates division and othering. No one wants to be a problem that needs to be solved, and traditional fix-the-bias approaches to diversity do not consider inclusion, but rather exclusion (Kidder et al. 2004). When initiatives are not sustainable, the systems that create the culture and practices do not change, and so the experiences of the individuals in the organization do not change (Peacock 2014). Ultimately, no lasting benefit happens. There are social barriers to change that are not being acknowledged or planned for. Social barriers differ from psychological and organizationally structural barriers in that they are based in overall societal forces, systems that create culture and group dynamics with regard to actual initiatives (Dobbin, Kim and Kalev 2011).

*Importance of Diversity in Organizations.* Organizations increase their value to clients, employees and stakeholders when diversity and inclusion measures are considered. Cox and Blake (1991:46) asserted nearly 30 years ago that “diversity brings net-added value to organization processes.” They also explain that mis-managing diversity can have the opposite impact. Diversity in work groups is generally defined as a

combination of people with differing individual identities that operate in a collective. The group itself will have an identity, but the personal identities of the group's members have an impact on how work is conceptualized, operationalized and implemented (Roberge and Dick 2010). Workforce diversity is not a new topic, and some efforts to create inclusion have been successful enough to measure the impact over time. Diversity has been a strategy that organizations use to become more successful (Pless and Maak 2004). However, large-scale contemporary social movements such as #metoo, addressing gender discrimination and Black Lives Matter (BLM; #blacklivesmatter), which sheds light on pervasive racial inequality, have brought the glaring face of inequity and power differentials to light in a way this country has not experienced since the Civil Rights era (Puritty et al. 2017). Currently, we are seeing a shift in emphasizing diversity for the employee, not just the organization. Initiatives go beyond the idea of diversity to the application of inclusion. Diversity, equity and inclusion are more important now than they have been in the past because the tone of their purpose has a distinctly human quality in that it has moved beyond the strictly business-related interests. Recent research has demonstrated that marginalized employees are more likely to be stressed, isolated and rated lower in performance evaluations (Puritty et al. 2017; Rivera and Tilcsik 2019). Performance, morale, employee engagement, innovation and profitability will decrease as people begin to feel as though they do not belong (Huo and Molina 2006). Conversely, interactions within a workplace that are more diverse contribute positively to the level of an employee's social trust in others within that workplace (Cui et al. 2018). Social trust builds community both inside and outside of the workplace and is beneficial to the experiences of the people connected to that community.

Organizations are built to uphold systems of power because those systems of power have created success in the past. Historically, this means that an organization will emulate another organization that looks like their picture of success (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). The systems, practices and employees are chosen to reproduce the symbol of success in an organization. Ultimately, this creates a gendered and racialized (among other identities) profile of what a workplace looks like (Ray 2019). The complexity of the workplace with regard to identity is a dilemma because ultimately, even when a workplace is not diverse, those within the organization benefit from membership. People who are not being oppressed and discriminated against perceive others to receive the same benefit that they do (Schneider and Northcraft 1999). The disconnection between the perception and reality of who is benefiting from the organization further exacerbates the isomorphic forces that inhibit diversity initiatives from succeeding. The workplace is a controlled group to pilot modern diversity, equity and inclusion initiatives, but the workplace does not operate in isolation. The workplace is a social structure that shapes agency (Sewell 1992). People within the workplace exist within society, and the organizations that they work in shape society. There are significant social ramifications to homogenous structure, including the social construction of power and race dynamics, status division, and the widening of opportunity cost gaps both in organizations and within society (Ray 2019).

*Current Approach to Diversity Initiatives.* Diversity initiatives are implemented in many organizations, regardless of the perception that, until recently, diversity is not valued as a society. Organizations that have recognized the value of diversity have taken measures to ensure that their education and professional development programs include

diversity as part of their long-term strategy. In a meta-analysis of diversity programs, Kalinoski et. al (2013) share that 67% of US organizations report that they use diversity training, but the efficacy of these individual measures is often difficult to determine. Over the last few decades, multiple different methods of diversity models have emerged and been implemented, but many have led to backlash, overt bias and increased occurrences of anger and discrimination (Pendry, Driscoll and Field 2007). Implicit bias is a relatively new component of diversity initiatives and is one that was long overlooked for a more structural and punitive approach, though neither in isolation is effective (2007). Some organizations' current approaches to diversity initiatives are beginning to include components that are more effective, but many still view it as a problem to solve, focusing on tolerance over inclusion (Von Bergen and Collier 2013). Initiatives are often built to be a one-off training that does not consider the impact of social identity and the challenge to power dynamics. They do not create lasting effects and can cause more harm than good.

Most organizations, at the bare minimum, introduce diversity as a concept of value, and have approached it as something to manage at a human resources level (Kossek, Lobel and Brown 2006). Diversity was recognized as a benefit decades ago, but the response to many initiatives by people in power and with privilege has positioned diversity as a problem to be solved. As with most workplace initiatives, there is always an economic consideration first (Prasad and Mills 1997). Organizations weigh financial ramifications to a business, to their clients and customers, and to their employees in order to ascertain whether an initiative is worth pursuing. The downside of this strategy with regard to diversity is that organizations inadvertently align their values with economics,

and place diversity into a checkbox category, as if it is something that needs to be fixed in order to make more money. With this framework as the foundation for most diversity initiatives since the early 1990s, it is not surprising that there is a punitive, obligatory perception about initiatives (Prasad and Mills 1997).

Behavior modification programming with tolerance as the central tenet is a popular approach. However, tolerance is not inclusion. Tolerance is the acknowledgement of difference, without the obligation of acceptance. Tolerance creates power dynamics and positions people in opposition. When a group or person is asked to be tolerant, as they have been during traditional diversity initiatives, they are given permission to hold power over those they are tolerating (Von Bergen and Collier 2013). Social identity theory contributes to the perpetuation of tolerance in diversity trainings because it states that people identify more strongly with groups that they identify with and regard groups with different identities as “other” or “outsiders” (Schneider and Northcraft 1999). Basically, social identity is responsible for in-group and out-group identification of individuals and is foundational to the “dilemma” of diversity in organizations. Diversity initiatives that focus on tolerance position a person within their social identity group and assert that there are consequences for not “putting up with” other groups as they do their own (Von Bergen and Collier 2013). Inclusion means adopting acceptance, civility and understanding, while tolerance does not dignify others.

In addition to the complexity of creating diversity initiatives that acknowledge social identity, diversity initiatives should be designed to alleviate the backlash and resistance by people who hold power and privilege (Pendry, Driscoll and Field 2007). Diversity initiatives are met with preconceived notions in organizations because of their

history of inefficacy and even harm. This perception precedes trainings, programs and conversations, which can lead to barriers to sustained implementation (Bezrukova, Jehn and Spell 2012). One reason why diversity initiative may be met with this level of resistance is because historically, they have been one-off trainings used to “solve a problem” or “manage diversity” (Kalinowski et al. 2013). Diversity trainings in isolation are found to lack the connection to the long-term application that is required in order to create lasting, inclusive change. Participants are less likely to engage in these types of activities if they believe that it is an obligatory exercise (Kulik and Roberson 2008). Diversity initiatives need to be embedded in the culture of an organization and need to be accompanied by a shift of culture that often challenges conventional power dynamics.

Power dynamics are challenged in the face of mandatory one-off diversity programming. Despite the belief that mandatory trainings demonstrate solidarity, people are often not in the same place of understanding and mandatory trainings can be isolating. Mandatory trainings, particularly if there is not a consideration for the communication strategy about the trainings, can actually be additionally marginalizing for those who already experience oppression. In the same way that demanding top-down diversity decrees can alienate people of color or other identities, so do trainings that require people to attend (Shih 2017). There is a higher likelihood of those with privilege feeling attacked and defensive if they are forced to participate without a significant organization-wide culture change in conjunction with it (Kossek, Lobel and Brown 2006). Diversity competency needs to be developed at all levels of an organization. Developing this competency becomes more difficult when the participants are set up in opposition to the initiative and to each other (Kulik and Roberson 2008). Capacity for diversity

competency needs to be built over time, and in conjunction with long-term culture shifts. One common outcome of one-off, mandatory trainings that are focused on *fixing* a diversity problem is that those with privilege can feel guilty or defensive, and those who have been marginalized will be harmed further. This undesired outcome can be caused by the misalignment of objectives with outcomes in one-off trainings (Bezrukova, Jehn and Spell 2012).

Diversity in an organization is systemic, but has long been approached in a linear, measurable manner. An organization and the people within it are complex, and the approach to inclusion should be as well. Isolated trainings that punish agents' individual thoughts and behaviors, even if they are problematic, do not create lasting change (Gonzalez 2010). Alienation of those in power will ultimately cause more harm than good and perpetuate the myth that diversity initiatives are essentially useless (Prasad and Mills 1997). Organizations need to demonstrate their value by creating systems that will shift culture to encourage pluralism. Pluralism should be part of the organization's climate and culture, demonstrating its value. The climate and culture are the results of the systems created by the organization. When systems are in place to encourage diversity and focus on representation of multiple identities, the culture shifts, and the culture shift is more impactful on the long-term success of the organization than a decree from a power position (Reeves, McKinney and Azam 2012).

*Barriers to Change with Diversity Initiatives.* Organizational change is driven by the power majority, and when there is little benefit to those in leadership, those changes are not implemented (Dobbin, Kim and Kalev 2011). Isomorphism is the motivating force to maintain the status-quo. Those in power who do not perceive to benefit from

diversity changes lean into the homogeneity of organizations that are also not implementing these changes. Dobbin et al. (2011) explored diversity initiatives that have been implemented in 816 firms over 23 years to look at the internal and external pressures that thwart the successes of these initiatives. They analyzed the factors that would impact whether a diversity initiative was likely to remain in an organization and determined that organizational culture has the most sway over that outcome. The forces that typically lead to isomorphism in organizations shape an organization's culture, the culture reinforces the isomorphism (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). Organizational fields and the organizations within them mirror each other because they are structured to do so (Giddens 1984). One organization in a field will continue to look like all the others in that field because they face the same internal and external pressures. This does not bode well for diversity initiatives because they require a culture change, and isomorphic cultures do not change, by design.

Isomorphism is a demonstration of a macro-level social barrier to diversity initiatives. Organizational culture is a meso-level barrier to diversity initiatives. Maria T. Allison (1999) explored three major types of organizational cultures and their qualities in order to understand how diversity initiatives would be received and retained. She identified dominance-focused culture that excludes differences, a middle ground that ignores differences, and a multicultural environment that includes differences. Allison (1999) suggests that leadership and human resource professional perform an internal institutional introspection to determine which of these cultures they most closely resemble. Later research outlined the complexities of organizational cultures and looked at a large breadth of contingencies that also impact an organization's readiness to adopt

diversity (Yang and Konrad 2011). Yang and Konrad (2011) found that organizations that had a culture which created a system for diversity management were more likely to be able to adopt initiatives.

Dobbin, Schrage and Kalev (2015) argue that there needs to be internal, organization-wide bureaucratic reform in order to ensure that diversity initiatives have the support needed to survive. Specifically, they outline four types of bureaucracy that need to be addressed. They assert that managers need to promote diversity systematically and that a manager's ability to discriminate should be alleviated. Just as Yang and Konrad (2011) insisted that diversity management was necessary, Dobbin, Schrage and Kalev (2015) argue that hiring needs to be a more transparent process. They also explain that internal and external forces should be regulators of diversity. This resonated with the theory of isomorphism in that creating an organizational culture that supports diversity using internal and external forces as a check and balance will ensure that all organizations will mirror the success of the most diverse organizations. A cultural, bureaucratic approach to diversity enables organizations to create positions and structures to support new initiatives that would otherwise be resisted by employees (Kalev, Kelly and Dobbin 2006). Responsibility and ownership need to be attached to diversity initiatives in order for it to matter to people.

Organizational cultures that approach diversity as a problem to be solved are more likely to face resistance. Cultures that measure the efficacy of diversity initiatives with performance evaluations and address mistakes with punitive measures will also face resistance and even backlash (Rivera and Tilcsik 2019). Cultures that uphold principles of dominance perceive diversity changes within an organization to have short-term costs

to those who hold power, and thus diversity is regarded as a social dilemma (Schneider and Northcraft 1999). Social dilemmas are caused when it is assumed that groups of different social identities will benefit from different norms and values, and therefore are at odds with each other. Particularly in groups that hold power, adopting diversity feels like a loss. In cultures where power groups view their integrity, authority or benefits to be challenged, diversity initiatives are resisted (Pendry, Driscoll and Field 2007).

At the micro-level, diversity programs themselves can be a barrier. There are a number of dynamics of diversity initiatives that can cause barriers to their long-term implementation. Just as cultures that address these values in a punitive or loss-focused way can be a barrier, initiatives that are mandatory create backlash and resentment. Initially, diversity trainings and programming were mandatory as a way of enforcing the value that discrimination would not be tolerated (Von Bergen and Collier 2013). Mandatory diversity fosters environments of guilt and conflict where productive conversations cannot happen organically. This approach is damaging both for people of color and dominant groups (Pendry, Driscoll and Field 2007). Often, mandatory trainings are implemented as a response to a harmful incident, or as an attempt by leadership to demonstrate that they are serious about implementation (Dobbin and Kalev 2016). Backlash by those in power is an automatic barrier to implementation. Mandatory trainings that point out biases of dominant groups feel like an attack and leadership will resist. Training should be expected in general, but when it is couched in a “do it or else” message, diversity programs and initiatives are less effective (Bezrukova, Jehn and Spell 2012). While mandatory diversity initiatives demonstrate an organization’s commitment to diversity, there should not be punitive outcomes for non-participation. People need to

understand that they need change and organizations should foster that accountability (Kulik and Roberson 2008).

In many cases, there is not trust or safety established in organizational culture before initiatives are launched and they are reactionary to some sort of incident (Kalev, Kelly and Dobbin 2006). Power dynamics within the hierarchy of a typical organization do not allow for appropriate responses to such grievance procedures, as the people in power are also regarded as the decision-maker in reports. When procedures are structured to eliminate leadership from the process, they are perceived as a threat and often not supported by leadership (Dobbin, Schrage and Kalev 2015). Organizational change is more effective when there is a holistic culture change. Culture change is more effective when groups are deployed as the instrument.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter, I provided an overview of the three main theories that drove this study, including group dynamics, social construction of reality and organizational isomorphism. The explanations of the theories are designed to help shape the way that the theories could be used by a change agent implementing organizational change initiatives. In addition to the summary introductions to the theories, I shared the content analysis of meso-level theory in sociological work that led to this study in the first place and the background inspiration for setting the context of the study in DEI change initiatives. In the next chapter, I provide a description of how the study was designed.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS

The methods outlined in this chapter were carefully selected in order to provide the most robust and honest examination of peoples' experiences. Using a phenomenological lens, I designed the methods to help understand how people came to the conclusions that they shared in their narratives, and how they create and share knowledge that shapes the experiences of those around them. The objectives of this study were to explore how people explain the successes and failures of diversity initiatives that they have led, and to determine what they attribute their successes or failures to in an attempt to discover how they were relying on group dynamics and other constructive social principles.

### RESEARCH DESIGN

This study was designed to be inductive, primarily based on the framework of the data collection in a phenomenological paradigm, with the goal of better understanding the patterns of what people are experiencing. In conjunction with phenomenology, I used a social constructivist approach to the application of theory to the data findings. Constructivists believe that reality is dynamic, multi-faceted, interpretive and based in context (Creswell and Miller 2000). In similar types of research, interviews were designed to approach the conversations with a phenomenological lens (Creswell and Poth 2017). This purview helped shape the research to focus on how people were explaining

their experiences of success and failure in diversity change initiatives and to what factors they were attributing the outcomes.

The sites, settings, types of initiatives and identity backgrounds of the participants varied so significantly, which allowed me to explore a large swath of examples. Due to the variation, I evaluated the phenomenon and patterns found in the stories in order to determine underlying correlating characteristics using the phenomenological perspective. I could have chosen an ethnographic approach because of my background and lived experience, but I wanted to ensure that I had a variety of stories that could be used to evaluate where patterns emerged in different contexts. I needed to determine that there was a phenomenon occurring, not just a cohesive narrative.

Qualitative interviews provided a glimpse into the experiences of participants in which they led change initiatives or participated in an instrumental way. Despite the unique settings and scenarios of each story, the type of change initiative remained similar as a constant. This type of initiative was selected specifically because organizational change can be nebulous and amorphous at best, and the fact that DEI initiatives are valuable and necessary in our modern workforce. The narrative and conversational nature of the interviews allowed participants to speak of the initiatives as isolated events that could be explained in order to measure the occurrences of similarities between participants' stories. Each story and organizational experience was individual, while still representing a set of factors that were examined by the study. The organizations that I studied were not as similar as the DEI initiatives themselves, but the behavior patterns were, so approaching the phenomenological approach is sound in accordance with the intention of the study.

The social constructivist approach to the analysis served as the baseline for recommendations for the application that follows in the discussion. Social construction of reality is both a theory and approach in that it provides a way to measure the impact of behaviors and understand the impact of the behaviors. Though the stories are from individual leaders of change, they are speaking of outcomes as they pertain to large groups of people, so there is value in determining which patterns shaped the outcome of the larger reality. In order to determine how to apply any findings, I explored patterns of what is working or not working. Patterns make it easier to apply the knowledge to future leaders who are leading change in similar situations.

#### RESEARCH SITES AND PARTICIPANTS

In this research, I focused on leaders in organizations that had undergone DEI initiatives. The organizations were from varying locations around the United States and were of varying sizes and compositions. The change agents had a wide range of backgrounds and identities, and there was not a pattern that emerged from their personal demographics that was either relevant or worth investigating. In addition to those who led specific initiatives within an organization, several of the participants were organizational change consultants who worked directly with leaders that were tasked with change. Consultants lent a somewhat removed perspective, as they were responsible for implementing the change alongside the leaders in multiple organizations but did not reside within a specific organization. In the places where ownership of an initiative was pertinent, this is an important distinction. This did not emerge as a theme, so the ownership is a negligible point of distinction.

I selected participants for my sample based on a set of appropriate criteria that I constructed specifically for conducting this study (Strauss 1987). Participants had to be in a leadership capacity in one of the following ways: was an executive in the organization's hierarchy who was responsible for change, led a committee or charge for this initiative, or worked directly alongside the change leader. The only other criterion was that the change initiative that we were discussing was for diversity, equity and inclusion. In addition to the first set of participants that I selected based on specific criteria, I asked for referrals from some of the leaders for additional interviews, and in some instances, they did volunteer the name of another change leader. This technique is referred to as snowball sampling (Strauss 1987). I was selective about who I spoke to in order to maintain the integrity of the sample and to contain the number of scenarios that I would have to contend with. The organizations represented were primarily in the industries of education, for-profit service industries, and consultancy. Education organizations were not necessarily for-profit, but the university setting has a similar structure to a corporate setting with regard to their bureaucracy and systems (Schmitz et. al 2014).

The sample includes 13 individuals, each representing different organizations. While the organizations' functions had some overlap, the participants still provided a diversity of experiences and initiatives. The participants were in leadership roles and were charged, tasked or volunteered to lead the initiative at some point in their career - even if it was not the organization that they were currently part of. See *Table 2* below for a breakdown of participants' alias, role at the time they were interviewed, level of achieved education, years of experience with change efforts overall, and the type of institution that they worked for.

The interview guide was not adjusted significantly throughout the process, as it was designed to be an informative guide to in-depth conversations. However, I adjusted what became important to focus on during the interviews, which happened organically at first. People naturally wanted to speak of specific events, and the pattern for asking that of others became evident over time.

*Table 2. Demographic Breakdown of Interview Participants*

<i>Alias</i>	<i>Role</i>	<i>Level of Education</i>	<i>Years of Experience with change efforts</i>	<i>Type of institution</i>
Bruce	Director	Bachelors	3	Education
Mary	Consultant	Masters	20	Education
Leigh	Director	Bachelors	15	For-Profit Service
Naomi	Director	Masters	5	Education
Rob	Executive	PhD	15	Education
Corrine	Executive	PhD	25	Education
Melanie	Director	Masters	5	Education
Charles	Executive	PhD	3	For-Profit Service
Kate	Director	Bachelors	8	For-Profit Service
Fiona	Consultant	Masters	15	Consultant
Dawn	Consultant	PhD	15	Consultant
Regina	Director	PhD	8	For-Profit Education
Josie	Consultant	Masters	18	Consultant

#### DATA COLLECTION PROCESS

Interviews were conducted at the place of the participants choosing and were arranged for an hour each. Most interviews exceeded the one-hour mark and all of them were recorded. Efforts were made do reduce distractions and noise, though schedules did not always allow for private locations. Interviews were recorded with a digital audio recorder and were guided by a printed interview script, though the script was not strictly

adhered to depending on the direction that the participant wished to take the conversation. There were a set few points of the phenomenon that I was examining based on theory and experience, but I was intentionally trying to allow themes to emerge inductively. A few notes were taken throughout the process as additional prompts and questions arose. In a few circumstances, additional documentation and information were volunteered by the participants, but nothing significant emerged from the materials.

## DATA ANALYSIS PROCESS

### *Coding and Analysis of Qualitative Data*

Recordings were transcribed using Temi online transcription software and then uploaded into Dedoose (Version 8.0.31) to assign codes and analyze the frequency of codes. The frequency denoted the pattern of occurrences, but not whether or not they were important to the themes. The themes that emerged aligned with theory as responses to the research questions, particularly in the areas of group dynamics and social construction. The themes highlight participants' general understanding of both group dynamics as they relate to change efforts and the impact of groups on organizations and the larger world. Codes were assigned using an "open coding" method, which allowed me to assign codes to the interviews based on the principles of the theory and the actual context of the content. The codes were aggregated to determine the categories for analysis as they align with the research questions.

## CREDIBILITY AND ANALYSIS INTEGRITY

Qualitative research often comes under scrutiny with regard to credibility and quality in ways that qualitative research does not because there are formulaic rules in quantitative processes that are far more routinized and generalized over multiple

disciplines. While qualitative data collection and analysis is more creative and contingent on the researcher's skill set, the techniques are rigorous and rely on testing integrity in the analysis (Patton 1999). In this study, credibility and analysis integrity are established by testing rival explanations. I looked for patterns that denote whether alternative themes may exist after I established my findings through inductive analysis (1999).

In addition to evaluating alternative explanations, I triangulated the qualitative findings in two ways. Triangulation compares multiple points of view or other sources of data to establish credibility in the data (Creswell and Miller 2000). First, I used the quantitative findings from the content analysis of journal articles to complement the findings from the qualitative work. I used this examination to look at what is present in the interviews in conjunction with what is missing from the journal articles. Additionally, I used theory triangulation by viewing the findings through the lens of the three primary theories in this study: group dynamics, social construction of reality, and organizational isomorphism. I approached the data in this way to create a foundation of understanding of how the experiences of participants map on to the applied social theory (Patton 1999).

This study is a way to demonstrate the ways that group dynamics can aid in the intentional construction of our social world with an approach to change efforts. The participants who provided the narrative were deeply invested in the success of the work that they did and have extensive individualized experiences. Though the analysis does account for the bias of the participants in the findings, participants have a subjective view of the events which needs to be acknowledged. I focused on the theoretical triangulation and possibility of alternative explanations using a detail-rich exploration of the stories in order to ensure the transferability of the findings (Creswell and Miller 2000).

## INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

Prior to data collection, this research was reviewed and approved by the University of Northern Colorado's Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that all ethical considerations were met. I submitted the research design to my committee for approval and then applied for Exempt Status in the IRB application. The application included the rationale of the study, methods of data collection, research questions, consent form and interview guide. Materials were reviewed by the Institutional Review Board, one round of minor revisions was made to adjust language on the consent form, and approval was granted to conduct the research.

## THE ROLE AND BACKGROUND OF THE RESEARCHER

As the researcher, I am the key component in the collection, analysis and explanation of the data. Qualitative research requires a high level of trust with the participants, which I established through identifying a mutual investment in the topic and a shared phenomenology. The themes and trends were based in theory, but were subject to interpretation which comes with biases, values and backgrounds that may shape that view. Full transparency about my background and purview in this context was required to demonstrate that I acknowledge my position and experiences which may have shaped the study. In the context of the interviews, I was clear with participants about my interests and investment in the content to establish trust and alleviate concerns about judgements and incorrect portrayals of their experiences and character (Creswell and Miller 2000). The following disclosure was relevant to offset concern about researcher subjectivity.

My professional experience and personal interests led to the belief that this study is worthy of exploration. I worked in an administrative capacity at an institution of higher education, giving me exposure to the successes and failures of organizational change initiatives. In many instances, I experienced the outcomes firsthand both as an employee of the organization that was being changed, and as a teammate in the group that was leading the change. Later in my career, after departing from the administrative role, I spent more than two years coordinating social theory with the real-life applications of the theory that I was witnessing in a consultancy capacity. The act of distilling down theory into usable pieces for people who are not privy to useful social theories was an exercise in practicing sociology in the for-profit world. I believe that sociologists do a terrible job doing that and I have since made it my mission to be part of the discipline that wants us to be viable in all spaces, not just those that are activist and non-profit- focused on changing the world from “honorable” and less capitalist-type avenues. We spend an inordinate amount of time working, we should know how to work with others. We should understand how to think like people who do life together, instead of thinking like people who do life in SPITE of other people. I believe that sociologists are the ones to do this and I have set out to show just one of the ways of doing that with this thesis.

Specifically, with regard to diversity change initiatives, I have experience working through and with these types of efforts, and because of my years of researching how to apply our theories in the real world, I have seen how essential it is to focus on DEI effort. As a sociologist who sees the positive power of capitalism, I know that diversity initiatives are both essential to a progressive and powerful future for all people and is also profitable. In my consultancy, I witnessed ineffective approaches to change,

and ultimately long-term failures. Those who lead change do not know that they are in the middle of the power of groups, and so they blame the larger culture of the world and they blame the individuals around them. Sometimes that blame gets placed on a charismatic leader (both for successes and failures) and sometimes that blame goes to the people who are resistant to change because they do not understand why it's necessary.

Through this research, I hope to help leaders of for-profit organizations understand ways of using a significant social principle as a way of encouraging and designing successful change initiatives. The act of changing the environment of the place where we spend the most time will trickle into the world and create more inclusion in the larger society, by virtue of how our beliefs are constructed and legitimized. I hope this research informs future contestations with sociologists about sharing our ideas and principles in a useful and digestible way. This thesis is a root and route for thinking about distilling theory into non-academic application.

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS

In this chapter, I have outlined the method of study and the research design for this thesis. The collected data were coded and categorized for themes that are supported in the literature about group dynamics and the social construction of reality. In the next section, Chapter Four, the findings and analysis are provided in detail as well as a discussion about how to use them.

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS AND RESULTS

The structure of this research allowed me to assure that the results of the subsequent conversations focused on phenomenon, not topics. Throughout this section, I described how participants' narratives map on to the research questions and demonstrate the impact of group dynamics. Originally, I analyzed the outcomes and impacts of change initiatives in order to evaluate how participants perceived success and failures, but the analysis did not provide useful information and is not included in this section. The findings were organized by emergent themes with respective sub-themes and are supported by the theories from the literature in Chapter 2. The findings fill a gap in the research by providing data that can be used to demonstrate how organizations can use an understanding of group dynamics to increase the likelihood of change initiative success.

#### OVERVIEW

The qualitative interviews produced several salient themes that are described in this chapter. First, I demonstrate the emergent themes regarding how participants described their approach to change, including the barriers and reasons for the initiatives. Next, participants attributed success and failure of the change initiatives to a number of factors including individuals, organizational structure and society at large. Finally, I highlighted themes that emerged regarding how participants talked about the role of group dynamics in their change initiatives, even if they were unaware of its impact and I show how group dynamics shaped the experiences within change efforts. Where

applicable in this section, I noted the contrast between the perspectives of those who lead change as an organizational leader and those who lead change through consultation and guidance roles. This highlights the role of interaction dynamics between leadership and adopting groups.

Themes emerged from the findings that were in alignment with the theories described throughout the study. A useful application of the findings was to focus on how people demonstrated their experiences, as opposed to discussing overall support of the existing theory. Participants' contributions provided the framework for application of the theory proposed by the study. The findings are organized by overarching thematic categories and the themes that were aggregated into those categories. Themes are directly connected to the research questions, and this section is structured in alignment with those questions. Though the format and approach of each DEI initiatives varied from participant to participant, the themes emerged as people discussed the process, intentions and outcomes within initiatives.

#### **THEME 1: EXPERIENCES WITH ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE INITIATIVES (RESEARCH QUESTION 1)**

Participants were selected because they led diversity change initiatives within the context of an organization. The specific initiatives, settings and outcomes of the initiatives varied from participant to participant. Since many of the participants had experience leading diversity change in more than one setting, I wanted them to choose the examples that were salient to them because it would be more salient to them without strict guidelines from me. The interview guide was intentionally constructed to leave the context undefined to allow participants the freedom to choose which initiatives they

wanted to focus on. During the interviews, participants were asked to describe their experiences and in doing so offered information about their approach to change and barriers that they faced during the implementation of their respective initiatives.

Participants offered information about their experiences from multiple angles and perspectives. The sub-themes that emerged happened organically with no coaching or prompting as a result of the free-form conversational structure.

### *Approach*

Participants began their stories by sharing experiences of interactions with others that were designed to assess the situation in the organization. This is important because knowledge transfer between groups and individuals needs to occur to shift culture.

Collective knowledge builds trust between all parties involved, making it easier to disrupt the shared reality. As Brown and Duguid (1991) share, knowledge is a process of participation. Participants who shared their approach did not always realize that their interactions were a method of shifting reality, and in some cases, they did not recognize the power of the collective group.

All of the participants were in change leadership roles which required them to develop a way forward that they could implement that would move their organization closer to inclusion. As they disclosed the details of their experiences, each participant shared ways that communication was valuable and a focus for them. Specifically, they acknowledged that the topics involved in DEI initiatives are difficult and cumbersome, and so required intentional discussions with multiple parties. Many of the initiatives began because harm had already been done in the organization's culture and the DEI effort intended to be a solution. Communication efforts were a way for peoples' voices to be heard in organizations where harm had already been done and change agents were

tasked with transformation. Change agents sought out feedback and input from others in the organization to create a picture of what they were facing in addition to laying the foundation for relationships. This type of interaction is knowledge transfer, which is needed for a working consensus about the type of actions that must be taken and is required to shape the next version of reality (Mehan and Wood 1975). One participant shared that they had opened up listening sessions with leadership in order to glean what people wanted to get out of the change efforts. When the listening sessions did not go as planned, the leadership made time to meet with those who wanted to share.

They were such a highly organized group and very vocal and had a lot of great things to share. Every time one of them wanted to meet, we kept in touch with them and tried to have a regular schedule to continue to have the conversation because it was important to, to listen and not as in the presence listening session, which that had its value. (Corrine)

In this data point, the group was mentioned as instrumental, but the participant's effort was focused on the individuals.

One participant shared that they knew that there was a culture issue and before they did anything, they wanted people to have a place to be heard. They shared that sometimes change efforts take a long time, so they wanted people to be able to vent right away. "These things are happening in our community and how do we create space for folks to heal from that or talk about how these things that aren't okay" (Regina). In addition to opening up dialogue during times of existing harm, change agents wanted to offer people a space to give feedback and share stories that would ultimately shape the trajectory of change efforts. One participant, who was specifically hired to repair a deeply damaged system, began by doing nothing but listening. They held listening sessions and

office hours for anyone who wanted to share. Their approach was to hear what people had to say and without making promises and to begin formulating a plan.

You heard what they had to say and then I would take away what I could do. I had to start working sometimes quietly. I didn't know how much I could get done and then come back to them and then sometimes I would have to commit, 'we'll see where it goes and then I'll get back to you.'

This participant believed that communication and listening were the right first steps.

So, it was a lot of work. That was immediate though. I had to do that [conversations] right away and I'm glad I understood that as a change agent. If you don't understand that you need to talk to them first and just start taking care of things, they can become their worst enemy. Even if you're making progress. Even if you're doing it, they will just resist you because they feel like they're not feeling taken care of. Or they don't feel safe, or they don't even know that you're making these changes because they're not close enough. (Fiona)

This participant recognized that the group was acting as a collective and could have worked against the effort if there had not been intentional knowledge transfer.

Many of the change agents that I spoke with understood the value of involving as many voices as possible from the very beginning of a change effort. Goffman (1959) argues that interactions are successful if situations have a "working consensus" amongst players. A working consensus with a collective store of knowledge about what everyone wants is advantageous in change efforts and is shaped by gathering stories and involving a variety of voices. One participant believed that getting all voices involved was a seminal part of their role as a change agent,

A lot of my work was just to get all the players in the room to help facilitate so that it wasn't just the people in authority who got to control the conversation and just say, 'well, this is what's happening,' or 'this isn't happening.' Like they're delivering the message, but instead to create an atmosphere where there could actually be real exchange and listening. (Melanie)

Many participants believed that giving voice was a key component of the change effort, "They don't feel like they're empowered to have a voice" (Naomi) and that shutting people down was detrimental to progress, "but in a space where they're supposed to be learning and growing, it's a lot more difficult. And you can't say this is a safe space to make mistakes and then shame somebody" (Mary). Mary was specifically concerned about the impact that shutting people down can have on those with dominant identities because if they do not feel like they have a place to have a voice, they will not "buy-in" to change efforts. While she did not agree that people with dominant identities need more of a voice in the grand scheme, she did believe that open communication opportunities for all would set a better precedent for the organization's culture and a better foundation for the change overall.

In another approach, participants began by establishing rapport and dialogue with leadership that had power over the outcome of the initiatives. Many of the participants shared that they were in a position to have difficult conversations with leadership in the organization because they were given the change agent mantle. Even those who felt as though they did not have any institutionally given power or had marginalized identities that did not allow them the privilege of power in some spaces, approached the change effort with their own form of power that enabled them to interact with leadership as an authority. In the interaction order, these change agents were the de facto experts in interactions surrounding the change efforts. They were the personnel that held the most knowledge about the initiatives, they held influence and other people depended on them to lead the initiatives through their constructed interactions (Goffman 1983). One

participant shared that they were the knowledge holder and expert of the change with the following example of an interaction,

When she told me and we met to talk about it, my first question was, ‘do you really want change or is this just that you want somebody to handle the pressure and we're not going to make any change?’ And we kept talking and I kept coming back around because I was not going to change my mind and take the role if this was in name only. I just wasn't like, ‘I'm in,’ you know. This is an identity thing for me as a woman of color. Coming into something and being like the target potentially if there was going to be no support. So, she kept guaranteeing me and wrote the job description and put all that together. I kept a huge focus on that because at any moment I was going to pull out of it if things were emerging during that time and talking with her. I was so frank with her that I, I wasn't afraid to just push the envelope and so I don't, I think it felt like she was empowering me to take this on. (Corrine)

Another shared, similarly, that he knew that it would be his role to educate leadership, but he approached it carefully.

I couldn't go in there and say, ‘this is what you all should do. This is what you've been doing, but now this is what you all should do.’ I had sort of incrementally teach them the benefit of doing the things they did, but in terms of like real change. (Rob)

The participants in the sample that led change through a consultancy role knew that difficult conversations, sometimes with people in power roles, were necessary to set the stage for change.

A successful client for me is somebody who is really motivated to create a cultural shift in the organization. I'm really not super interested in working with people who are only doing it for compliance. I feel like that they're a waste of time. Not only is it a waste of time, it can sometimes do more harm than good. (Dawn)

Many participants approached change by developing a strategy while also building trust with key players and constituencies. In most cases, trust was used as a tool for building individual social capital for the change agent. Participants knew that the relationship with key people would be essential to the success of their initiatives and

therefore focused on trust as part of their strategy. One participant shared that she knew that trust was important for people in order to get anything done. She highlighted this when saying,

So, there needs to be some larger foundational work that needs to be done before introducing things like this [DEI] because you create a platform for folks to come and share their experiences. And they will do that, particularly if it is, you know, by folks they trust. (Regina)

Another saw that the impact of trust as key to the progress that they were making and shared his experience by stating,

So, we're starting to spread amongst the employees that the organization, the HR department was becoming a place of trust again, especially in certain areas. And so, there was a huge uptick in complaints now, right. Because, you know, they found someone that they could trust. (Charles)

One participant shared that she clearly knew the power and impact of trust when building a new culture and coming in as an unknown entity,

I mean I still got resistance, but the beautiful thing is that a change agent has to understand cause you gotta build your allies. You ask yourself, 'Did you get enough other people to believe in you?' They see you're real and they see what you're putting into place and you always choose low hanging fruit. So, you get those done. That starts to build trust and say, 'Oh, she's hearing and then you figure out what is the next, the kind of happy medium.' Like we might need a little more time, a little more resources, but you can start making plans and talk about those next things when there is trust. (Fiona)

Trust between individuals reduces the likelihood of an “unsuccessful” interaction because individuals will believe that other people in the interaction are acting and responding with their best interest in mind (Goffman 1959). Additionally, those who diversify their interactions are more likely to trust others because they have had exposure to more types of interaction outcomes (Cui et al. 2018). When individuals intentionally seek exposure to a variety of interactions with parties that would not ordinarily be part of their regular repertoire, they learn how to trust a wider variety of responses and routines. Participants

shared this affect with their stories about audiences that they connected with in order to build trust for future interactions that may be challenging.

### *Barriers*

Participants spoke candidly about barriers that they faced in addition to sharing their approach to the efforts. In most cases, barriers were unanticipated and led to setbacks. In a few select conversations, the participant planned for barriers. As discussed throughout this study, barriers to change often include organizational isomorphism as evidenced by an organization's static (or resistant) culture or structure, individuals with power and even the initiatives themselves (DiMaggio and Powell 1983; Allison 1999; Dobbin et al. 2015). Participants' stories corroborated that the barriers to their change efforts were in alignment with culture, structure, power dynamics or ineffectual initiatives. They shared the impact that the barriers had on their change efforts. One participant shared that it felt like the culture of the organization was both a reason that change was needed and a barrier to the success of change implementation,

Because part of this climate, part of all this work was with faculty who don't care about DEI. The administration doesn't care. The only people who are doing anything are students. And it's only some students and a few staff. And we certainly don't have representation on our faculty or administration that represents the campus identities. (Corrine)

Another participant shared that he felt isolated in his role because there was no infrastructure to support the changes that needed to be made institutionally, "it has to be top down. It can't just be like you been arguing, you know, an isolated person sitting in one office" (Rob).

Resources, which are part of an organization's culture and structure, were a barrier to several participants. One shared that it was difficult to implement what needed to be done and there was resistance because,

I think a lot of times in school settings, public school settings, and I'm sure this could extend to other workplaces, there's such a feeling of scarcity and the scarcity, it's not just a feeling, it is real. I mean schools often face shortage of money and lack of funding. (Melanie)

Another participant was responsible for leading change that dealt specifically with resources. He recognized the barrier and approached it in the following way, “The question becomes ‘what are that level's priorities and how can you meet those needs?’ So, from a CFO standpoint, a lot of times it's about money. So, we say okay, ‘Here's what that looks like. We're spending more, here's how we're saving.’ Speaking their language builds trust” (Charles). Though he indicated that resources were always a barrier, his anticipation of that group’s response eased the pushback.

Culture was always a difficult topic during the interviews because there is no agreed-upon, public, working definition for culture in an organizational setting, yet change agents know it is essential to shift culture in order to make lasting change (Dobbin, Kim and Kalev 2011). One participant shared how the culture of the organization had made just enough of a shift that people were becoming tired of the lack of meaningful change and also felt resistant to the types of change that had been ineffectual. One incident led to the undoing of a major initiative by causing harm to multiple groups in the organization,

I think [the incident] created a shift of culture at the institution. So much so that people were saying like, [expletive] this, we're done. I've been expecting folks to continue to fight because it did create resistance to everything with the word social justice in it and anything that talked about bias. (Regina)

The result was institution-wide pushback toward the initiative. One of the consultants that I spoke with approached culture from a different angle,

Culture can be good and still be resistant: I was saying about preaching to the choir that some people will say, ‘Yeah, but if it's not mandatory and

we're just going to be preaching to the choir.' And I said, 'Yeah and the choir needs practice.' Like, so every level, every step of the way, everybody needs something. Nobody knows everything there is to know about culture. I've been studying it for my entire career, decades at this point, and I'm always going to be learning. (Dawn)

This participant had the advantage of seeing how multiple organizational cultures respond to change efforts, so she had a proactive approach to managing culture shifts. She anticipated barriers by knowing what types of interaction rituals would be needed to ward off barriers.

One participant was hired into an organization that was not prepared for any sort of change, so when budget cuts were needed, they cut most of the positions that were doing DEI work,

They laid off a lot of people or a lot of people quit because they felt like their rights weren't being respected. And so then, you know, any sort of DEI push after that feels really hollow because they weren't responsive or proactive when they needed to be. And then there had to be such a big job loss that felt like it could have been prevented if there would have been the right listening happening and the right cultural brokering. (Melanie)

This participant did not say that the barrier was the budget cut, but that the interactions that followed the budget cut and shifted the organization's culture were the barriers.

In addition to culture, resistant leadership is an organizational barrier to change. Though leadership is often an individual or small group that leads the hierarchy, they are a product of the organization that they are a part of, in many cases (Ruvolo, Petersen and LeBoef 2004). Many participants knew that they would likely have to work with challenging leadership, or proactively approach leadership as a barrier to their change efforts. One participant entered into their role with knowledge about the leadership barrier,

If I was not on my game and already making progress and building trust, they totally would have won. They were ready to fight. Very popular,

honest, people. But unfortunately for them, people also saw them as bullying, but they were willing to follow their leadership because no one else was doing the work. So, once I came in and I started doing things, then they lost that. I was doing it while being compassionate and I believe right, I was doing it with legit care, legit leadership, I was able to get leadership to buy in, um, and certain things. (Fiona)

This participant shared that they knew that the bullying interactions were a barrier and that her approach to future interaction would shift culture.

Another participant did not realize that the job that they had been hired to do came with the resistance of the people with power, which was culturally ingrained,

The hierarchical culture, or maybe I should say organizational style, of the office was that I wasn't allowed to talk to anybody without permission from my boss. But in order for me to talk to like closeted faculty and staff, I would need to do that without my boss, knowing where I was going. So, I often had office hours outside of the office so that I could meet with people. But then I got in trouble for not being in the office. I don't I don't actually blame anyone in particular person because I don't actually think that they were ready to institutionally support it. (Josie)

In another case, the change agent knew that even if leadership wanted to be supportive, they did not have the freedom to do so because of the culture of fear in the organization. In this case, the barrier was from the leadership and they could identify the component of the culture that created that barrier for leadership,

People in leadership don't feel safe to be affiliated to groups: higher levels have occasionally been asked to lead in this ERG [employee resource group], they have not wanted to because they would feel outed. And so, there are totally other out leaders, but there are still definitely a lot of folks who are not out and who do not want to be involved with this group because it will out them. People get really caught up in their head. And even if there isn't truly some sort of negative thing that could happen, there might be in your mind a perceived sort of possibility of well I might not get that promotion or well I don't know. (Leigh)

Change agents do not set out to fail. Though the initiative may be well designed, it may be misplaced in the change effort for a number of reasons. Isolated, specific initiatives that are not connected to any larger structural changes often fall flat because

they are not designed to create lasting change (Kalev, Kelly and Dobbin 2006). DEI change efforts are “systemic, multilevel and nonlinear” but change agents often implement programs or plans without the necessary intergroup commitment (Gonzales 2010). In some cases, the initiatives can actually become a barrier unto themselves because they do not build the necessary scaffolding needed in robust change measures. Participants shared that some of their plans turned out being more of a detriment to them as they led efforts toward a more inclusive organization. One participant shared that leadership tried to be a sounding board for those who were unhappy, but there was no plan for how to follow through and respond, so the listening sessions did more harm than good. “Her whole point was to listen. But students really wanted her to respond. But that wasn't her goal. And I think students were even more outrage because she seemed to just nod.” Additionally, that same participant was the reporting leader for another initiative that the culture of the organization was not prepared for, which became another setback for the organization, “Then the whole [initiative] thing exploded. So, it was like, you know, baptism by fire, trying to deal with that in the publicness of that and kind of feeling afraid” (Corrine).

One participant shared that they had a plan for creating positions and hiring people who could do DEI work, but there was no infrastructure to support the development of the roles,

We totally did them a disservice by hiring social justice advocates instead of leaders. There was some fallout. Some want nothing to do with diversity training ever again. There were a few folks who were experts who did not have a good experience in their job and now we've lost them as allies and leaders. (Charles)

Some participants shared that they designed initiatives to increase the collaboration of different groups, but that the initiatives did not have the desired effect. By premise,

intergroup contact does not necessarily lead to effort coordination or integration (Gonzales 2010). When members of groups are not certain about their role in the effort or the purpose of the collective action, barriers are more common than success. One participant shared that she had a very large initiative that was designed to draw groups together in an effort to be collaborative about the culture change that was needed for the organization. She and her team were met with constant resistance and they were unsure why. As we spoke, it occurred to her that the group they were trying to coordinate with may not have understood why they were being asked to participate,

And so, we tried like so hard last year and we tried so many different ways to ask them what they wanted and come to the table with everything that they wanted, and nobody would show up. It was a huge failure. Which is why we're trying new ways this year. We never gave them a reason to participate before. They didn't know why we were asking. (Naomi)

I asked all participant what they would have done differently if they had it to do over again. One participant disclosed part of the initiative that was implemented became a barrier to success because an entire part of the population of the organization not even considered during the planning,

We did not even have diversity inclusion efforts for support staff. Um, and it's a way more diverse group, right? And it's the biggest group. I was able to get a certain amount of programming that I could then invite support staff to, to, and by the end we had done some at least manager training with support staff. But like I wasn't really responsible for it. I just kinda kept it advocating for it. (Kate)

Dobbin and Kaley (2016) assert that mandatory programming designed to garner participation from all parties in an organization can actually be detrimental, in addition to leading to change failure. All levels of the organization may feel singled out or experience backlash if they are mandated to be part of the change efforts without having incentive to buy in. Most participants acknowledged the harm that mandatory

programming can create. One shared that the organization she was working for tried to mandate change, and it had the following affect,

It wasn't a personal thing, but they were like, 'why are we even required to be talking about this?' And that was really hard on like client, the people who hired me, they ended up having to do a lot of cleanup and they ended up using me as a consultant to help them clean it up because they weren't sure exactly how to do that. So, I mean from my perspective it's like, I learned to be asking, 'Is this mandatory?' (Dawn)

Barriers are a response to the perceived threat of reality disruption during change efforts. People resist a break with their accepted reality and will identify any challenge to their reality as an obstacle (Mehan and Wood 1975). As organizations are naturally resistant to change, so are the people who reside and operate within them. Barriers to change are often anything that challenges the stasis of an organization's culture or structure (DiMaggio and Powell 1983). To disrupt reality in a way that creates meaningful change, change agents need to transfer knowledge and identify the places where people resist change. In the examples above, barriers were recognized retroactively. Models of change should include an assessment of barriers that can be gained through the approach with knowledge transfer and a pre-calculation of future interaction rituals.

**THEME 2: ATTRIBUTION OF MICRO  
OR MACRO PHENOMENA TO THE  
OUTCOME OF CHANGE EFFORTS  
(RESEARCH QUESTION 2)**

Most participants focused on the successful components of their change efforts, which was to be expected. Those that did offer insight about the failures were accountable to their role in that failure. Whether they spoke of successes or failures, participants often attributed the outcomes to either individual people or larger social or organizational conditions. When they did speak of groups or collections of people, it was

more in the context of outcomes, rather than what led to the change. For example, many participants shared that people were impacted a certain way as a group, rather than being part of what led to the overall outcome.

### *Individuals (Micro)*

Individuals are a key part of change initiatives. There is no dispute that there need to be key players to usher in the change. There is also no dispute that individuals can have a huge impact on the outcome. However, individuals are products of their social environments, so there is more power in the groups that individuals are a part of than there is in the hands of just one person (Sewell 1992). Additionally, many diversity initiatives focus on changing the behaviors of individuals rather than taking a holistic approach to changing the conditions that created and supported those behaviors (Von Bergen and Collier 2013). American society is individualistic, and individual personalities or dispositions are often used as an explanation for outcomes (Nelson 2018). In all of the following examples of this theme, participants attributed the outcome to individuals, whether themselves or someone else. They are undoubtedly correct that the individual made an impact, but there are large social contexts that also contributed to the outcome (Berger and Luckmann 1967).

One participant shared that they put themselves in a vulnerable position as a leader because they believe that it makes an impact on the outcome of initiatives,

I come out constantly because folks need to have a safe space to come to. I would say at least three to four times a year, I have someone come to me and say, 'I want to come out and I don't know how help me or my kid just came out and I think they're going to help me.' So, I deal with that so much because I am so out, and people feel comfortable talking to me about that. (Leigh)

Another shared that she was the only person in her role and that her approach was to act alone because she believed that was her obligation, “I’m kind of paid to be a bit of an annoyance because I’m paid to [inaudible] go into a room and look at things through the lens of how does this fit into our bigger diversity and inclusion story.” This same participant shared that they believed that one of their biggest mistakes was waiting too long to earn the respect of those who had any “real” power. She believed her personal credentials, or lack thereof, were a barrier,

I think I spent too long trying to earn their respect rather than just saying ‘this is the way it is.’ I should have been a little more demanding, a little more trusting of my instincts. I think I trusted my instincts, but I don’t think I expressed my instincts as boldly as I could have. I did towards the end, but I know there are even things about my title that I raised with leadership that I think really impacted my authority and I did raise them, but I was told ‘Oh yeah, that’s not going to happen.’ And I was like, ‘okay.’  
(Kate)

One of the consultants who participated worked alone often. Her entire business is based around her own identity, so of course the individual is salient in her examples. She was able to articulate ways in which organization and groups could have an impact, but she often fell back into the comfort of her own knowledge and capability as an explanation for how things turned out in an initiative.

I really do feel like I was a party of one spearheading a thing. Most of the change initiatives or whatever that I had been involved in, and I guess, to some degree- I feel like being able to pull from multiple failed attempts at rolling out a diversity initiative has helped me hold their hands while they also continue to struggle and fail.

She also focused on the salience of a change agent’s individual identity as an asset and liability in leading change efforts,

As a consultant, I see that, often with the identity-based person charged with doing diversity initiatives, they are in a new position and don’t have the social capital to get things done themselves. But then no matter what they do they’re not doing everything that the people who fought for them

to be there want. So, then they don't even have the social capital of the people who seem to be the most obvious people to support them. (Josie)

One participant knew the detriment that her individual role could have on change initiatives, if she allowed that lens to lead her approach,

I have got to constantly pull back my white savior-ness. I do believe in taking all the privilege I have and lifting others up. And that's already problematic even by saying it. So, an empowerment piece is just hard for me- knowing how to do that well sometimes. Like I'm not apologizing for it, but I'm saying here is a place where some people would find me to be very closed minded or very one sided. And that's hard for me to pull back. I think I can be sympathetic to people who are figuring out spaces of inclusion, but I am not empathetic. (Mary)

Another recognized her power and position as she led change in her current role. She focused on this component because she watched her largest initiative be dismantled because of the perceived actions of one person in a previous role. She believes that her success in her current role is attributed to the following, “When I make decisions, you know, I often lead with my values. I think because I'm in leadership there's just some different things that I get away with, or that I get just more access to” (Regina).

One of the participants who consistently seemed to understand the impact of group dynamics also defaulted to focusing on their individual impact, which was undoubtedly crucial, but was difficult for them to separate from the other dynamics,

They got to see me in action and see me elevate their work. So, then that helps them trust. That helped me get more faculty behind me and so forth. So, you know, I knew one of my strengths is how to build social capital, cultural capital to gain the trust of the administration. (Fiona)

As with most of the participants, this person was hired for his specific skill set to lead the change efforts. This participant attributed the success of the initiatives to this skill set and his access to resources,

Having someone do that job was going to change things. And then of course, having someone that can, who knows what they're doing in that

job is really important. And then thirdly, having someone be resourced well so they can do that job effectively. Having position, having somebody who knows what they're doing and then resourcing the position does or they can do what they want to do, what they need to do. We need somebody at a position and then somebody who at least these are the experience, has thought about these things. (Rob)

Other participants were leaders of the change efforts, but attributed success to the involvement of a different individual. One shared that she has a team member who has taken the lead of the initiatives by working with the groups, but in this recollection, she focused on his role, not that of the groups,

He's really chairing those initiatives. And what I love about what he did, he opened it up because I had kind of had this small group and um, I needed to open it up, but we just hadn't got to that last year. So, that's kind of like was the next stage. So, he took it this year and just made a broad call for participation. He has 50 people who come regularly to this meeting and he's got subcommittees working on different things. And so, he's really, um, brought that along.

This same participant was grateful for the commitment and contribution of other individuals in the work her organization was doing,

[He]'s willing to stand on that line and say, I'm not putting up with this. Not okay. And he's willing, you know, he's willing to talk about willing is not the right word. He cares about DEI. He wants it to be different and he's willing to take a stand and take the criticism if there is some. So, it's so different. (Corrine)

On the flip side, one participant pointed directly to the actions of another that allegedly derailed the initiative, "I think we were finally getting to a place where it was starting to gel and then it kinda got pulled out from underneath us because of someone's missteps" (Regina).

### *Social Phenomena (Macro)*

Just as diversity initiatives are more effective when approached at more levels than just the individual, it is also difficult to make lasting change when the outcome is attributed to macro-level phenomena. It is important to understand large-scale

sociological happenings, but initiatives should incorporate a way to respond to those things, not to change those things or use them as an excuse for failure. Participants were aware of macro-level social conditions and used that knowledge to understand the context that they were operating within during their time leading change. In some circumstances, participants connected the phenomenon with the reasons for the implementation of their change efforts overall. For some change agents, societal phenomenon can feel like the cause of a problem that needs to be addressed by their initiatives. Systems of oppression and institutional discrimination are damaging and do, in fact, create the need for response, but when change agents focus on these things as causes, DEI initiatives seem like a problem to be solved instead of proactively creating a desirable culture (Rivera and Tilcsik 2019). Change agents should have an awareness of social conditions, but organizations have their own cultures that are responding to conditions and are also a place where social conditions can be changed. Organizations are the place where social systems are reinforced and reframed (Manning 2008).

One participant shared that they were trying to create a more inclusive culture because he felt that there needed to be a place that was a refuge from the world,

We're a polarized nation right now. So [people are] bringing those opinions and values and information, whether it's true or false, under one roof. T-shirts are worn, statements are made, questions are asked at our events. The intent might not be hateful. I may be completely on the other side-the extreme other side-of that other person's values. And we have a space that is specifically programmed around spirituality and meditation for students that just to have downtime and have their faith, no matter their faith, is to provide a space like that creates an opportunity for conversations.

He also shared that he felt that resistance to the change efforts could be coming from the political climate of our society, "we're a very divided nation right now and even as a liberal liberally progressive States and a County that we live in, there's always going to

be a percentage. They're resistant or just don't agree” (Bruce). This participant suggested that conversations would be a way to respond to social conditions.

A participant who is a consultant shared that their approach to all DEI work that they do comes from an understanding of how our society has evolved,

I started to think about was the fact that we live in a more segregated society today than we did during the civil rights era. In terms of housing, in terms of lots of things. And we're not meeting our neighbors. And even if we did, they would look like me. So, being more segregated, we're just not building relationships across social differences. The patriarchy that we live in is horrible- if you look at our history of the in the United States, that's where the resistance come from. (Dawn)

Another participant knew that the culture in their organization was responding to the larger social events that were happening, and felt that the events contributed to the need for change,

This generation who've always had devices and have watched police shootings and beatings, particularly our African American communities, we know this generation is saying, ‘Not okay, like we want change, we expect change.’ We live in more diverse communities. So, not everybody of course, but that's the trend with this, with the gen Z that's here right now. And so, I think all of those things lead to some of the changes that are happening. (Corrine)

Along those same lines, many participants referenced the social and political climate of the country when the initiatives were launched, or when they noticed things were increasingly more difficult during their change efforts,

It can often feel like personal attacks, post 2016. I just talked last night to my class about this- teaching post 2008 and teaching post 2016 are totally different things. 2008 it was a time when a lot of white kids kind of gave up on the language of exclusion in 2016 is when a lot of them took it back. And I have like many anecdotal incidents of this. The MAGA [Make America Great Again] kid is the one that's actually the one I need to win over, but I'm not going to win them over by shaming them. I'm going to win them over by giving them the benefit of the doubt. (Mary)

Another shared that they had many setbacks with their initiatives because people did not feel as safe to be open about their identities as they once did,

Like maybe you were feeling pretty good and then 2016 hit and you're like, 'Nope, I need to go back in the closet.' I've actually had a couple people say that to me. I have pulled back my outness because of the election because I'm worried about what that might mean for me. There was a lot of pushback around starting the ERGs there. There was a lot of pushback around starting it. 'Why do we need this?' 'Why is this important?' Because people were terrified of what it might mean for them in their role. (Leigh)

THEME 3: HOW PEOPLE ARE  
TALKING ABOUT GROUP  
DYNAMICS (RESEARCH  
QUESTION 3)

As participants shared how they experienced change initiatives, they talked about others who contributed to the successes and failures of their efforts. Not surprisingly, most did not have specific examples of how they mobilized and utilized groups, but they were able to articulate the power that other people could have in making change stick. Most noticed the impact of groups or referenced the impact that having a group had on themselves. A few participants shared specific ways that groups made or could have made a difference. In the following sub-themes, participants either knew that group dynamics were the key to successful change, did not feel that group dynamics were the key to the successful change, or discussed the impact of groups, or did not realize that was what they were talking about, specifically. The analysis of the findings in this section is key to understanding how people are experiencing and thinking about group dynamics in change work, and therefore key to understanding where knowledge gaps might exist.

*Buy-In (Group Consensus)*

Participants identified “buy-in”, or working consensus, from groups of people as a key component to the success of their initiatives, and even when they weren’t successful,

lack of group buy-in was noted as a reason. This participant shared that she knew that there was not enough consensus from key stakeholders to have the wide-spread impact that was needed. She could identify a specific group that she worked with that could have made the difference by interacting with other groups to form a larger consensus, “I think it needed to happen at a larger scale to get faculty and instructors to see what we were starting to do, and like get even some buy-in and build relationships with some of our teams to have some more intentional work around conflict within faculty and adjunct instructors.” This same participant shared that she also gauged the initiative’s traction by looking at groups.

We were visible, and I think that our very presence, our showing up, like spoke a lot to students that we weren't just talking the talk, but we were doing this work alongside with them. I think that really there was that like participatory action research and in some ways. I think students felt validated that what we were doing was the same work that they were. That's how I know that it was working.

She also shared that those doing the work did not feel that they had working consensus or support from groups, which led to the failure of the change efforts,

I think the interesting piece is that multiple folks that were champions for a lot of this change started transitioning out because they didn't feel the work was supported or they were being pushed out. I feel people were in alignment with it. They felt the impact. The organization itself though was just not ready. They weren't gonna do anything until the president had stepped down. (Regina)

In some cases, there was buy-in that led to the change being successful, but the coordination of those groups was not intentional or designed. The change agent noticed the buy-in later. One participant shared, “We counted let's say 15 different groups on campus that were doing various DEI initiatives and folks who wanted to be a part of things and I knew there were administrators who wanted to be a part of things, but people

didn't know this" (Corrine). Another shared that he recognized the success of his efforts when seeing people starting to show up in a very visible way.

So, the first ripple effect feels super obvious. There were 30% more black and Brown people on campus and in 2011 than there were in 2007. That means they were more black and brown people on the webpage, right? That means when someone is looking at graduate school, they say, 'Oh my God, that department has more black people in it. I think I'll go there.' So, you wind up having the ripple effect of a critical mass that leads to people say, 'Oh, I can be safe enough to be there.'

This same respondent shared that it was a large part of his job to work with constituencies that could make a difference with regard to his efforts,

The other part of my job, I think, was expanding faculty's views on diversity. Empowering them to be the change agent who is getting people outside of our university, that is students, to see the world differently and their role in that world in terms of being a professor of color or a woman like that. (Rob)

Many participants knew that they could not be successful if they were acting alone, leading them to actively seek out a group or team to work with. One shared that she had to regroup after recognizing that she would be more successful with a combination of people with different skillsets. "Some failures were things that I just had to figure out another way to reroute because you knew how necessary it was to get it done and then come back with new team or new allies or gear for better data or research or something also" (Fiona). Yet another participant shared that it was not effective to work alone. "When you're doing it on your own, it's increasingly more difficult to do walk into a place and expect change. And I think that a lot of people find themselves in those places" (Melanie). One participant hired his own team with group dynamics in mind so that he did not have to operate in isolation,

I'm very cognizant of diversity and the dynamics of the team, so I hired thinking of that. I mean if you want to think race, ethnicity, gender fine, but I also think of experience that's really where I'm coming from. So, I

wanted to hire people who had different experience, or experts in different functional areas of HR so that I could have a well-rounded team I could learn as the leader. (Charles)

Groups can be a hinge to success or detriment. When used appropriately and intentionally, participants shared how the groups were a key component to things going well for them. One participant shared that the intention behind the change effort was to get groups mobilized. They used other groups to further their efforts, utilizing interdependency and influence. She shared,

So, it was really this grassroots kind of informed practice which was really valuable. Students were seeing the response team and people like navigating conversations with people that were invoking harm on them. I think there was kind of this buy-in from students to utilize the process.

The buy-in was key to being able to form the process that was the seminal component of the change effort. Additionally, she shared that,

On top of just the process, there was a team of folks that were kind of intentionally selected because of their placement throughout the campus. And so, it was folks that were student facing. Really, that were either in like a coaching or mentoring capacity or you know leadership roles in their area. So, we had a representative from most of our cultural and gender, gender advocacy centers, which was really important so that folks felt like they had someone to process and think through the thought of even sharing their experience. I think we just kind of blasted it everywhere so that folks knew that this was an option for them to share their experience. (Regina)

One participant shared that when she was establishing the group of people who led change in her organization, they were not always cohesive, which made change more difficult,

I had a little bit more problem because it was so new that people were like, 'Why are we here? I don't get it. Like, how am I not being equitable?' They're not mal intentioned, but they just didn't understand, and they didn't have the whole background. So, it was a lot of just learning about What is equity? Why is it important? What does it look like? How do you do it? How do you know if you're doing it? Last year I felt like I had a lot

more pushback and resistance of just people being uncomfortable or afraid of change or feeling like, 'Well, I just don't know how to do this.' (Naomi)

In contrast to groups leading to the success of change efforts, one participant shared that the group dynamics of the other change agents that she was working with actually worked against the overall objective of the change effort. The values of the group that she was working with did not allow for those with opposing views to succeed. When I asked her what it looks like for the people who do not feel welcome in the group she offered,

It looks like, the people who want to push back actually shut up because they're very afraid of liberal spaces and they don't want to be shamed and they feel already like an overwhelming sense of having to be PC [politically correct]. So, they typically do not do it out loud. That's a pity because it should be a safe space for them and it's not. (Mary)

Another participant shared that their team training was an intentional way for people to connect in a way that they would grow together throughout the changes,

So, we would take the 'it' team and we would do [the training] for them and then they would get to meet with someone individually. So that was almost a follow-up. So, it was like, we're going to do it in a group setting, but we do want to have a follow-up conversation with every individual, with our qualified administrators and so, so that we can continue through this process for people to grow. (Charles)

For one participant, the key group was the leadership of the organization, "It's important that leadership shows up and I'm proud of a transparent executive leadership and board of trustees that attends our events regularly; looks forward to them. There's some real heart and some real need for them right now" (Corrine).

### *Recommendations for Future Efforts*

The participants in this study were experts in their fields and change agents doing difficult work in complicated organizations. I asked them directly if their model of change was a good way to approach future initiatives, and most would not commit one way or another. However, they did offer recommendations for future change efforts based

on things that they would have changed about their own experiences. Many of the recommendations that participants shared were rooted in hindsight and frustration about the outcomes of their own efforts. Group dynamics make an appearance in this section because many reflected that their experience would have been better with buy-in, other people, and culture change.

I asked the first participant if they thought their model was a good foundation for change, and he said he could not say for certain but that he would advise change agents to do the following:

Don't stop, keep building. Invite them to the conversation. We're philosophically all about building dialogue and building opportunities for dialogue. I think these are challenging conversations that are worthwhile and you're always going to get resistance just because of a perception of power loss and power gain and what it looks like for those groups. But again, because the conversations are at least happening, I see that as a win. At least we're talking about it. (Bruce)

Similarly, another participant said that they thought their model would be good if there were more people adopting the model so that it would have a larger reach, "I would love to see other education programs have the requirements of this nature. It's going to start with all the professors of those programs going through the training and buying in" (Mary).

Several participants shared that they would have done things differently and were very thoughtful about what they offered in response to my question.

I think one thing I would change is more community investment in people. So, needing community allies and mentorship. And so if you look at it through the lens of DEI, how would a city and how with all the different infrastructure within a city or town, how would they take on DEI aspects to really be a place of welcoming so that it's not just certain players feeling like they're scrambling something together and trying to build consensus, but that there's like an actual model of welcome that really should have come from like the mayor, that should've come from like a lot of other places. So, I don't know, would that look like DEI principles being taught at different levels of business? I really think it has to go beyond just, 'well

we had a seminar about diversity.’ How does that implementation actually transform communities and build partners and bridges? (Melanie)

Similarly, one participant recognized the importance of creating the foundation before implementing large-scale change,

I probably would have tried to build a little bit more infrastructure and having probably some more conversations with folks and making sure they had the capacity to even have these conversations themselves. So, like, not making assumptions about- because you have a certain title, you know how to have conversations. (Regina)

Another participant shared that since she was hired with no team or plan, she had to approach the change effort with a mentality that was group-focused, even though she did not have a group. She shared,

You just have to kind of begin to unpack it and be like, ‘okay, what do we need to do? What do we need to do internally, externally? What is our external messaging? What is our internal messaging? What is actually our, our staff experience?’ I think you start out reactionary, you just do. I think you kind of have to deal with things as they come up and then slowly kind of become more of a split. We were maybe 50/50 [reactive/proactive] when we started and then maybe by the time we left we were being a little more proactive. The scales were kind of shifting. (Kate)

### *Incentives*

Participants shared that in certain circumstances, even if there was a willing group in place, they did not want to take on the additional risk or responsibility that comes along with DEI change efforts unless there were incentives. Several offered insights about how their key players were not as effective because they had no clear or intrinsic reason to be. The working consensus of a group may have offset the need for this to be the answer, but nonetheless, participants shared how they think incentives could have shifted their experience.

It’s really hard to push, especially when people are working a lot. It's not like they're making a bunch of money and sitting around their offices like, ‘oh no, what do I do with my time?’ It's just that there's so many things

culturally you have to change. You have to change how people work and give them reason to take an interest. (Kate)

One participant had a long history of creating inclusive groups for people to be a part of, but they would not do work beyond the safety of their Employee Resource Groups (ERG) because they had no reason to take a risk or take time away from their work to do anything further.

There is no carrot and there is no stick. If you want to accomplish things as an ERG, you have to do it through influence. I need to influence you to work a little harder in the morning so that you can take an hour before lunch and work on something for me like, and you can get management approval and there is sometimes just like time away, but it's very rare. And also, as someone who's been a manager, I get this- it's very rare that you're going to get an hour away if you're not doing your job well. (Leigh)

Though this participant knew that he had made a large impact on his organization, he recognized that he was not able to have the reach that he had hoped during his limited tenure and with limited resources.

I worked very hard trying to help them think differently so that they became the sensitive people. But in my position you are often in need in terms of resources like sticks and carrots. And I think one of the reasons many DEI folks fail is that they only have the power of persuasion. And that's limited because they don't have the power in their position at all. (Rob)

Yet another suggested that change agents work with leadership to incentivize people with time. "Free people up so they could do the more proactive things that they never got to in their job, as opposed to the reactive piece" (Charles).

#### CONCLUDING REMARKS AND SUMMARY

This chapter was the summation of stories of change initiated from a wide range of change agents. The qualitative analysis and description of themes were connected to the theories of group dynamics and social construction of reality with explanations for how the theories were applied to the analysis. The next chapter includes a discussion of

the findings and why they matter to the future of organizational change initiatives in addition to a summary of the overall study.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study was designed to collect the experiences of those who are in the field leading organizational change initiatives in an effort to determine how those experiences are shaped. The intention behind this exploration was to find evidence that supports the creation of a pathway forward for change agents to follow. This pathway took a sociological approach by applying principles of group dynamics with an understanding of how groups impact the construction of reality. Additionally, the data collected shaped a picture of the types of isomorphic forces that are at play for most organizations. The result of this study supported my assertion that knowledge of group dynamics should be applied to organizational change efforts. This chapter is my discussion about the findings including the limitations of the research and recommendations for future research. The findings section addressed the sub-questions of the overarching research question and this discussion connects them together. I also provided an overview of the contributions of this thesis to sociological theory and to the application of social theory in organizational change initiatives.

#### SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

##### *Group Dynamics and Change Efforts*

In this study, I created a pathway to discover how leadership in organizations can use meso-level social theories to increase the likelihood that change initiatives succeed. I defined group dynamics at the base level of its components in order to create a simplistic

guide that could be used to determine how people speak about it in various contexts. Groups are an assembly of people within which interaction, influence and interdependence take place (Hegtvedt and Johnson 2018). The interaction order is the primary focus of group dynamics because interaction is the way people create a working consensus for values and behaviors and the way people know what decisions to make when they are with each other (Goffman 1983). This definition was necessary in order to understand the ways in which people could learn to use a working knowledge of group dynamics in their work with organizational change efforts. Group dynamics and interactions came up organically and indirectly in all of the interviews and usually without direct prompting toward the topic. As discussed in Chapter Two, group dynamics are defined and manipulated by the combination of interaction, influence and interdependence which ultimately shape individuals and reality.

The three research sub-questions that were used to shape how the data were collected and I organized the findings section ultimately form the foundation for a model of group dynamics that can be used to develop organizational change efforts. The first question inquired about how people were talking about their change experiences. Using this question, I analyzed whether participants recognized the value of interaction, either consciously or unconsciously. When participants were discussing their approaches and barriers to the change efforts, they described interactions that were both beneficial and detrimental. The second question sought to find out what participants were attributing successes and failures to in order to determine what they thought was influencing their change efforts. Many spoke to the influence of their own efforts or to the influence of another impactful individual. Additionally, they discussed how larger social conditions

such as the political atmosphere influenced their change efforts. Participants did not consistently discuss groups or group interactions when indicating what influenced the outcomes of their initiatives. The final question examined how participants ARE talking about the impact of group dynamics and how change efforts improve because of the interdependence of agents. The findings supported that group dynamics are a necessary component of organizational change, even if the participants did not say so explicitly. The following discussion expounds upon the aggregated responses to these questions in order to shape the structure of a model for change agents to use during DEI change efforts.

#### MODEL POINT 1- APPROACH AND BARRIER ANTICIPATION

##### *Interaction*

In the analysis, I showed that participants were sharing stories of their experiences by telling of their specific role and initiative, focusing on how they approached the change and what obstacles they faced. The analysis revealed that interactions drove change agents' approach to change as well as their assessment of barriers. They understood the value of establishing trust and spoke often about how they built relationships in an effort to create cohesive messaging. Members of a group that have a high level of trust have created a "working consensus" that drives responses and behaviors that occur within interactions (Goffman 1959). Change agents knew that they had to build trust and communication with key players in their approach. In the approach stage, change agents should be developing a sense for where change can actually make an impact. Change agents revealed that a new approach should consider interactions. When approaching a change project, agents evaluate the roles of others, ingrained isomorphic practices and the rituals that currently exist within the organization. A key part of

building trust is to determine the situational expectations by encouraging knowledge transfer between change agents and other members of the organization. In the analysis, change agents were performing some semblance of this practice by hosting listening sessions and having conversations with people who they deemed valuable to the change effort. Change agents can usher knowledge transfer through interactions during their approach, which can help them proactively identify barriers that will be caused by isomorphic conditions.

When recognizing barriers, participants did not take the same proactive purview. They were able to recognize that barriers exist after the fact, but when they were discussing how they addressed change, they did not acknowledge structural, systemic or cultural barriers. The results demonstrate that change agents could incorporate barriers into their approach by anticipating them. The relationships they develop in the beginning stages should help them shape a picture of barriers that are movable and those that are not. Examples of barriers ranged from the design of the initiative itself to routinized practices that lead to isomorphism and organizational stagnation. In the planning stages when change agents are determining how to build trust, they should also be considering what could happen in the organization to break that trust, thereby identifying barriers. For example, in the case of the organization that was assembling teams of key stakeholders, they should be listening to those people to identify where the pushback will come from and anticipate how to respond to it. Barriers stem from uncertainty about future interaction rituals and unchanging, routinized practices (Collins 2004). Change agents can anticipate barriers such as a cultural shift, problematic power dynamics and undefined expectations when an organization's established rituals are identified.

This theme highlighted participants' reliance on interaction when initiating and implementing change, though they were not always using interactions intentionally. While planned tasks and specific types of initiatives are crucial to change efforts, these structures cannot become ritual until the current rituals of an organization are identified. Barriers to change will present themselves when there is an unanticipated disruption to the rituals that an organization values or upholds as part of their identity. Interactions create these rituals and the rituals are a reflection of what is happening in the organization; the social situations. Change agents made intentional efforts to discover how people interacted during their approach to change, but the next step is to intentionally design interaction that will become reflexive and mutual. For example, several participants shared that they hosted a form of listening sessions to hear peoples' stories about what was happening in the organization and what they thought needed to be changed. In listening sessions, the change agent should identify what symbols people value such as "gender neutral pronouns" or "employee resource groups" or "representative hiring committees." If these symbols represent the groups' ideas, then future interactions should be intentionally designed to encourage support for them. Participants' stories about interactions demonstrate the importance of establishing norms for future interactions in order to build influence.

#### MODEL POINT 2-FIND THE GROUPS

##### *Influence*

Change agents assigned blame for the outcomes of their change initiatives, successful or not, to individuals and larger social conditions. In many cases, the cause of the outcome was attributed to an individual or a societal structure that could not be influenced by a change agent within an organization. Change agents take on individual

responsibility for the outcomes, or they have some key player in mind that swayed the course of the initiative. Overall, it is much cleaner for the change agent to identify the influence of an individual, as we evaluate them in isolation, not within a context.

Dispositional attribution is a very common cognitive tool used to provide explanations for outcomes in our culture of individualism. It is a natural reaction to use a person's disposition to explain what may actually be too complicated to explain (Hegtvedt and Johnson 2018). Alternatively, change efforts in the area of DEI are exceedingly complicated in our current social climate. This makes social conditions an ideal scapegoat for the difficulty that change agents face when launching a challenging initiative. Social conditions, or macro-level forces, can only warrant a response and may be a cause for why change efforts are needed, but they should not be the narrative for why change efforts fail. The next result that emerged from the sub-question about what participants were attributing successes and failures to is that change agents need to identify what influences their efforts and in what way. The results demonstrate that participants believe that individuals wield a greater influence than a group and that there are larger forces at work which consistently get in their way without relent. For example, despite acknowledging that a group was working together to shift the culture of an organization, one participant shared that an individual uprooted the entire effort. The part that she did not connect was that the culture had shifted in a way that was supportive of the actions of the individual because there were other, less supportive groups that had a larger influence.

Influence is the pressure to conform to a norm. In groups, the social pressure to conform is key to the identity, function and interdependence of the group and its

members. Conformity is key to group cohesion, which ultimately exacerbates the group's influence overall and is achieved through knowledge sharing and ritual establishment. Influence is needed to lead to disruption, which is key to shifting reality. Individuals are a product of their environment because of the influence of the interactions that they have in groups. Influence between groups will shift the culture of the organization. While society does have influence over the conditions that organizations experience and the lives that people lead, groups can change society's influence through their interdependent influence. Change agents can use influence as a tool in change efforts. Once they have established the types of meaningful interactions that are shaping symbols and meanings in the organization, they can evaluate what type of influence those collective groups have. One way to find influence is to determine how individuals are connected to each other and what they are currently accomplishing. From there, it is easier to recognize their spheres of influence and how far they reach because of overlapping influence. Macro-level conditions are impactful, so a change agent should remain diligent about understanding what is influencing the organization. However, the group is the place where influence extends both to the individual and to their intersecting groups.

### MODEL POINT 3-COME TOGETHER

#### *Interdependence*

For the most part, when participants spoke of examples of group dynamics within the context of an organization, they had little theoretical conception for how the organization impacted those interactions or how the interactions impacted the organization. However, several participants articulated the value of the group and the subsequent interactions in their recount of change experiences. Participants shared stories that fell into the categories of shared knowledge interactions or that demonstrated key

behaviors and actions that were instrumental in the outcome of the change efforts. When participants did speak into the value of groups, whether they understood the impact of the group on the change effort or not, they recognized that the interdependence of people within the organization was something to pay attention to. Specifically, those who had experienced it, shared that they knew that buy-in made a positive impact and that when groups were not cohesive or were ill-equipped, they had a negative impact. The recommendations that participants made for future change models included establishing groups that fostered conversation and education, eliciting wide-scale buy-in and being proactive instead of reactive along with establishing why the change efforts are worth people's energy. When members of groups are interdependent and have a consensus about beliefs and values, they impact other overlapping and interconnecting groups that they are a part of, expanding the consensus. The incentive to participate becomes intrinsic in the collective understanding about what needs to be done.

Interdependence is the connection that group members have with each other that keeps them tied to the group. Groups also have interdependence between them, which extends their reach and creates a shift in reality through their collective actions. Reality is constructed by groups through consensus that is created by interaction, influence and interdependence. Buy-in, a term used by many participants, is another way to say that people believed and were willing to interact together to make the necessary change happen. This type of solidarity happens when members of groups feel emotionally connected to each other and to the purpose of their collective action. Durkheim (1912) refers to this phenomenon as collective effervescence. Collective effervescence is the last step of the model of change through interaction. When groups have interactions that are

attached to symbolic meaning and influence their own members and other groups, they become reliant on each other to reproduce those interactions, creating collective action. Collective effervescence happens when groups are emotionally invested and connected to one another for a common cause. Individuals do not experience this level of emotional investment without other individuals who share their commitment.

#### GROUP DYNAMIC-BASED MODEL FOR CHANGE

##### *Model Point 1*

Change agents will identify types of interactions, rituals and routinized practices that already exist, that need to exist and should not exist in the organization in order to shift the culture toward their desired outcome. This part of the process occurs during when the change agent is designing their approach and anticipating barriers. The interactions that are valuable to the change efforts determine the types of future groups and rituals that will be used to influence.

##### *Model Point 2*

Change agents intentionally gather people or encourage gathering that is already happening to establish interaction rituals between people in groups. The collective will exert influence over the current members, future members and other groups through overlapping membership. Group members' knowledge transfer and ritual sharing encourage conformity and extend influence and foster a collective practice that will lead to interdependence.

##### *Model Point 3*

Change agents encourage groups to continue to gather and exert influence over each other, shifting the culture of the organization through buy-in and collective purpose

that all members and groups share (collective effervescence). The interdependence that is created because of the collective energy and practiced gatherings will influence future interactions and rituals. Change agents should periodically assess interactions and rituals to ensure that the desired effects of collective effervescence are occurring.

See *Figure 1* below for the logic flowchart depicting the concepts in this model as applicable steps to follow during a change initiative

### Group Dynamic-Based Model for Change

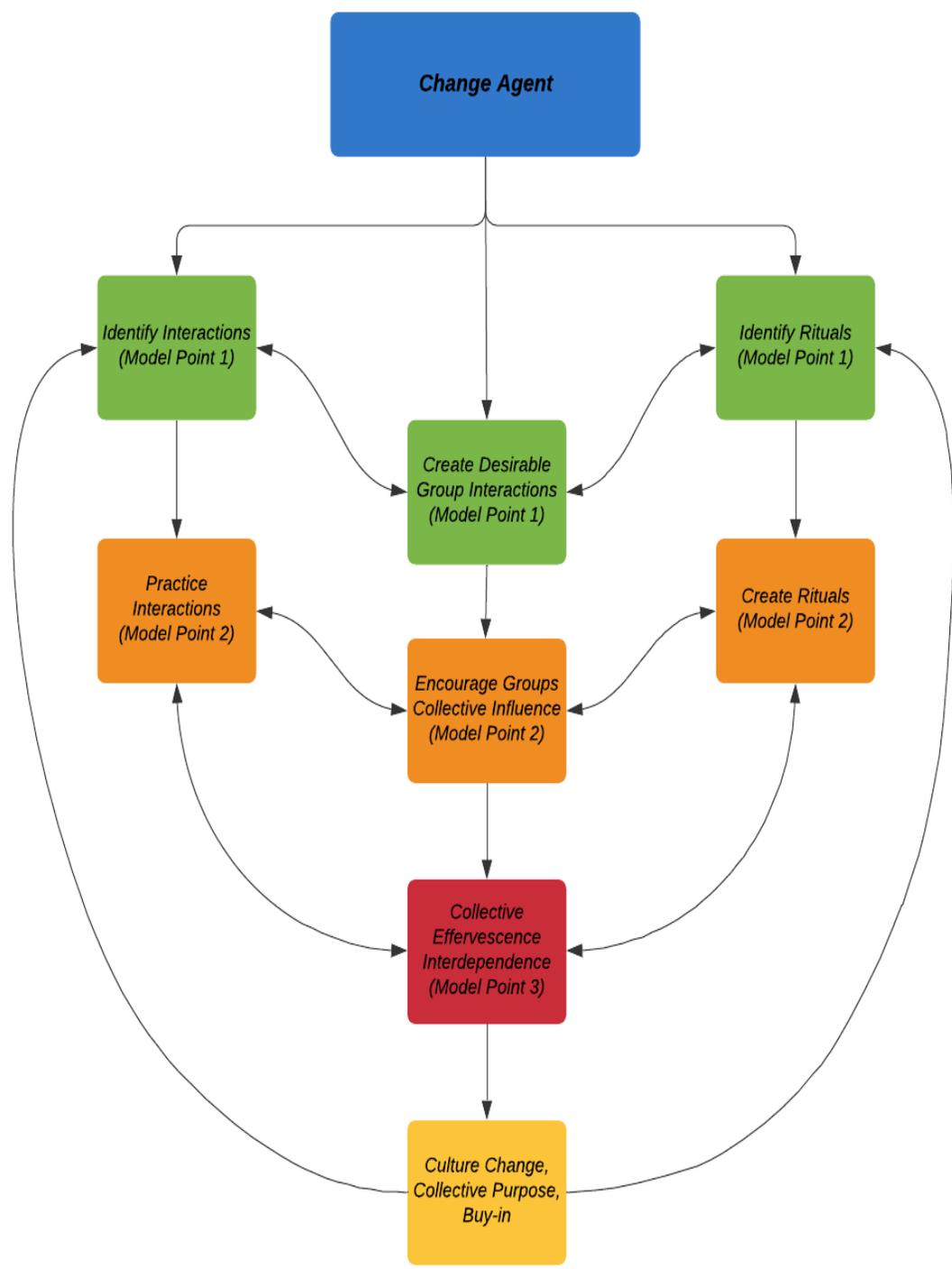


Figure 1. Group Dynamic-Based Model for Change

## RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

In this study, I focused largely on leadership and the experiences of change agents who designed and led the efforts within the organizations. While there was a variety of types of organizations, roles and initiatives, the primary limitation is that there are not stories from those who experienced the change from other levels of the organization. It was necessary for this study that I collect stories of those from the same general perspective in order to aggregate the narrative and elicit themes. Additionally, the intention of this study was to explore ways that leaders and change agents lead initiatives in order to ascertain the process and outcomes that could be improved upon by using theories of group dynamics. The results of this study indicated support for the application of group dynamics, but only from the perspective of leadership. For this reason, the model of application is generalized. The study included literature with the generalized theories in an effort to make them accessible to other hierarchical levels of an organization, but there is not support to demonstrate that application because I did not focus on that demographic. This study offered a demonstration of how knowledge of group dynamics theories is used in change practices, which provides insight to change agents when they are developing future initiatives. The next step in this research is to collect stories from those who experienced change efforts but did not hold a power role in order to determine how group dynamics were affecting their purview.

Another limitation of this study is in the exploration of scholarly literature about group dynamics in Sociology journals. Though I did a content analysis of ten years of sociological journals to look for places where the field was focusing on meso-level theories, I did not conduct the same level of analysis in the popular for-profit literature

that change agents would be reading to access these theories. One of the original intentions of this study was to address sociological practitioners about how we were not reaching lay audiences with things that could benefit the world in the same ways that disciplines like psychology, economics and anthropology are. However, as I did the research, I uncovered evidence that the study would be better suited speaking directly to change agents. There is value in showing how the discipline is not making these theories accessible to other practitioners, let alone the general public because it demonstrates that there is a battery of knowledge that people do not have access to which could be very useful.

### RESEARCH CONTRIBUTIONS

This study contributes to the body of sociological literature in that it further asserts that the meso-level interactions are an ideal place to study social phenomenon and combines the application of interaction theory, social construction of reality and organizational isomorphism. The study offers evidence that an application of social theory can impact for-profit practices in organizations. Additionally, it demonstrates how organizations are a necessary place to focus social theory because of the impact that organizations have on large society as well as the individual. I used theoretical works to shape how I collected data, viewed the data and formed my analysis. In addition to providing a theoretical approach to change initiatives, this study offers a generalized approach to theories that could be accessible to non-sociologists. It also provides a general framework for how sociologists could use theory to help organizations lead change efforts by applying our theories.

The findings can be used for future researchers who want to evaluate ways that interactions shape both the individual and organizations. With an in-depth analysis of the collected data, researchers can assess how the interaction order shaped the outcomes of

change efforts and ultimately how that shapes organizations. Fine (2014) states that groups are the micro culture that feeds civil society through the impact that individuals and organizations have because they are embedded and interact within society.

Goffman's (1983) interaction order is the foundation for this assertion because it is found at the intersection of culture, interaction and structure. This study is an example of how to use knowledge of the interaction order to design the ways that group dynamics can be intentionally structured to change society through for-profit organizations.

### FUTURE RESEARCH

The limitations of this study denote that future research should be done to assess how various levels of an organization respond to change efforts in order to establish how group dynamics are affecting the change holistically. Future research should include different participant perspectives in addition to establishing a metric for success and failure in change efforts. It would be worth evaluating specific group practices that lead to success and failure. In addition to collecting narratives about experiences of other roles in a change initiative, future research should include an exploration of articles that share sociological theory with the general public as a guide for how sociological practitioners could be impacting change efforts by making theories accessible for all.

### CONCLUSION

Meso-level social theory is useful in understanding change initiatives and the impact that they have on our larger society (Fine 2014). Sociologists have not made theories accessible to non-academic practitioners that work within organizations. Group dynamics impact both the individual and the organization, and by extension, society. If change agents had an understanding of how to apply theories of group dynamics, their change efforts could be more successful. Much of the existing research about

organizational change focuses on processes of change that attribute successes and failures to the individual, organizational structure or larger social conditions. This study contributes to the literature by examining the impact of group dynamics on change initiatives in an effort to shape a model that change agents can use to apply social theory to their endeavors. In conclusion, this research demonstrates how using interaction practices can benefit organizations, the individual and society.

## REFERENCES

- Allison, Maria T. 1999. "Organizational Barriers to Diversity in the Workplace." *Journal of Leisure Research* 31(1):78–101.
- Beer, Michael. 2001. "How to Develop an Organization Capable of Sustained High Performance." *Organizational Dynamics* 29(4):233–47.
- Berger, Peter L. and Thomas Luckmann. 1967. *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge*. New York, NY: Anchor Books.
- Bezrukova, Katerina, Karen A. Jehn, and Chester S. Spell. 2012. "Reviewing Diversity Training: Where We Have Been and Where We Should Go." *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 11(2):207-27.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977. *Outline of a Theory of Practice*. New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Bourdieu, Pierre. 1985. "The Social Space and the Genesis of Groups." *Theory and Society* 14(6):723-44.
- Brown, John Seeley and Paul Duguid. 1991. "Organizational Learning and Communities-Of-Practice: Toward a Unified View of Working, Learning and Innovation." *Organization Science* 2(1):40-57.
- Cao, GM, S. Clarke, and B. Lehaney. 2003. "Diversity management in organizational change: Towards a systemic framework." *Systems Research and Behavioral Science* 20 (3):231-42.
- Carley Kathleen. 1991. "A theory of group stability." *American Sociological Review*

56:331–354.

- Cartwright, Dorwin. 1959. *Studies in Social Power*. Vol. no. 6. Ann Arbor: Research Center for Group Dynamics, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan.
- Collins, Randall. 1990. "Stratification, Emotional Energy, and the Transient Emotions." Pp. 27-57 in *Research Agendas in the Sociology of Emotions*. Edited by T.D. Kemper. Albany: State University of New York Press.
- Collins, Randall. 2004. *Interaction Ritual Chains*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press.
- Cox, Taylor H., Jr, and Stacy Blake. 1991. "Managing cultural diversity: Implications for organizational competitiveness." *The Executive* 5(3):45.
- Creswell, John W and Dana L Miller. 2000. "Determining Validity in Qualitative Inquiry." *Theory Into Practice* 39(3):124-130.
- Creswell, John W., and Cheryl N. Poth. 2017. *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing among Five Approaches*. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.
- Cui, Victor, Ilan Vertinsky, Sandra Robinson, and Oana Branzei. 2018. "Trust in the Workplace: The Role of Social Interaction Diversity in the Community and in the Workplace." *Business & Society* 57(2):378–412.
- DiMaggio, Paul J. and Walter W. Powell. 1983. "The Iron Cage Revisited: Institutional Isomorphism and Collective Rationality in Organizational Fields." *American Sociological Review* 48(2):147.
- Dobbin, Frank, Soohan Kim and Alexandra Kalev. 2011. "You Can't Always Get What You Need: Organizational Determinants of Diversity Programs." *American*

*Sociological Association* 76(3):386-411.

Dobbin, Frank, Daniel Schrage, and Alexandra Kalev. 2015. "Rage against the Iron Cage:

The Varied Effects of Bureaucratic Personnel Reforms on Diversity." *American Sociological Review* 80(5):1014-44.

Dobbin, Frank and Alexandra Kalev. 2016. "Why Doesn't Diversity Training Work? The Challenge for Industry and Academia." *Anthropology Now* 10(2):48-55.

Durkheim, Emile. [1912] 1965. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Reprint, New York: Free Press.

Ellermann, Horst, Peter Kreutter, and Wolfgang Messner, eds. 2017. *The Palgrave Handbook of Managing Continuous Business Transformation*. London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.

Fine, Gary Alan. 2012. "Group Culture and the Interaction Order: Local Sociology on the Meso-Level." *Annual Review of Sociology* 38(1):159-79.

Fine, Gary Alan. 2014. "The Hinge: Civil Society, Group Culture, and the Interaction Order." *Social Psychology Quarterly* 77(1):5-26.

Feldman, Martha S. 2004. "Resources in Emerging Structures and Processes of Change." *Organization Science* 15(3):295-309.

Gergen, Kenneth J. 1994. *Realities and Relationships: Soundings in Social Construction*. Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press.

Gergen, Kenneth J. 2009. "Social Construction: Revolution in the Making." Pp. 1-30 in *An Invitation to Social Construction*. London: Atlantic Books.

Giddens, Anthony. 1984. *The Constitution of Society*. University of California Press.

Goffman, Erving. 1956. "The Nature of Deference and Demeanor." *American*

*Anthropologist* 58 (3): 473-502.

Goffman, Erving. 1959. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.

Goffman, Erving. 1963. *Behavior in Public Places*. New York: Free Press.

Goffman, Erving. 1967. *Interaction Rituals: Essays on Face-To-Face Behavior*. New York: Pantheon Books.

Goffman, Erving. 1983. "The Interaction Order: American Sociological Association, 1982 Presidential Address." *American Sociological Review* 48(1):1.

Gonzalez, Jorge A. 2010. "Diversity change in organizations: A systemic, multilevel, and nonlinear process." *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 46(2):197-219.

Granovetter, Mark. 1992. "Economic Action and Social Structure: The Problem of Embeddedness." Pp. 53-81 in *The Sociology of Economic Life*, edited by Mark Granovetter and Richard Swedberg. Boulder: Westview Press.

Greenwood, Royston and C.R. Hinings. 1996. "Understanding Radical Organizational Change: Bringing together the Old and the New Institutionalism." *The Academy of Management Review* 21(4):1022-1054.

Harrington Brooke and Gary Alan Fine. 2006. "Where the Action Is: Small Groups and Recent Developments in Sociological Theory." *Small Group Research* 37(1):4-19.

Hegtvedt, Karen A. And Cathryn Johnson. 2018. *Social Psychology: Individuals, Interaction and Inequality*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Heilbrunn, Sibylle. 2005. "The impact of organizational change on entrepreneurship in community settings." *Journal of Small Business and Enterprise Development* 12(3):422-36.

- Hosking, DM. 1991. "Chief Executives, Organizing processes, and skill." *European Review of Applied Psychology* 41(2):95-106.
- Hughes, Mark. 2011. "Do 70 Per Cent of All Organizational Change Initiatives Really Fail?" *Journal of Change Management* 11(4):451-464.
- Huo, Yuen J. and Ludwin E. Molina. 2006. "Is Pluralism a Viable Model of Diversity? The Benefits and Limits of Subgroup Respect." *Group Processes & Intergroup Relations* 9(3):359-76.
- Kalev, Alexandra, Erin Kelly, and Frank Dobbin. 2006. "Best Practices Or Best Guesses? Assessing the Efficacy of Corporate Affirmative Action and Diversity Policies." *American Sociological Review* 71(4): 589-617.
- Kalinoski, Zachary T., Debra Steele-Johnson, Elizabeth J. Peyton, Keith A. Leas, Julie Steinke, and Nathan A. Bowling. 2013. "A Meta-Analytic Evaluation of Diversity Training Outcomes: Diversity Training." *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 34(8):1076-1104.
- Kalleberg, Ragnvald. 2015. "What is 'public sociology'? Why and how should it be made stronger?" *The British Journal of Sociology* 56(3):387-393.
- Kidder, Deborah L., Melenie J. Lankau, Donna Chrobot-Mason, Kelly A. Mollica, and Raymond A. Friedman. 2004. "Backlash Toward Diversity Initiatives: Examining the Impact of Diversity Program Justification, Personal and Group Outcomes." *International Journal of Conflict Management* 15(1):77-102.
- Kossek, Ellen Ernst, Sharon A. Lobel, and Jennifer Brown. 2006. "Human Resource Strategies to Manage Workforce Diversity: Examining 'The Business Case.'" Pp. 54-75 in *Handbook of Workplace Diversity*. London, UK: SAGE Publications Ltd.

- Kulik, Carol T. and Loriann Roberson. 2008. "Common Goals and Golden Opportunities: Evaluations of Diversity Education in Academic and Organizational Settings." *Academy of Management Learning & Education* 7(3):309–31.
- MacKillop, Eleanor. 2018. "Leadership in Organisational Change: A Post-Structuralist Research Agenda." *Organization* 25(2):205-222.
- Manning, Peter K. 2008. "Goffman on Organizations." *Organizations Studies* 29(5):677-699.
- Martins, E. C., and F. Terblanche. 2003. "Building organisational culture that stimulates creativity and innovation." *European Journal of Innovation Management* 6(1):64-74.
- Mehan, Hugh and Houston Wood. 1975. *The Reality of Ethnomethodology*. New York: John Wiley and Sons.
- Misztal, Barbara. 2001. "Normality and Trust in Goffman's Theory of Interaction Order." *Sociological Theory* 19:312-324.
- Nelson, Todd D. ed. 2018. *Getting Grounded in Social Psychology: The Essential Literature for Beginning Researchers*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Packard, Thomas. 2013. "Organizational Change: A Conceptual Framework to Advance the Evidence Base." *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 23:75-90.
- Parker, Martin. 2015. "Between Sociology and the Business School: Critical Studies of Work, Employment and Organization in the UK." *The Sociological Review* 63(1):162–80.
- Patton, Michael Quinn. 1999. "Enhancing the Quality and Credibility of Qualitative

- Analysis.” *Health Services Research* 34(5):1189-1208.
- Peacock, Angela. 2104. “How Blended Learning can Create a More Inclusive Culture.” *Strategic HR Review* 13(3):118-122.
- Pendry, Louise F., Denise M. Driscoll, and Susannah C. T. Field. 2007. “Diversity Training: Putting Theory into Practice.” *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology* 80(1):27-50.
- Pless, Nicola M., and Thomas Maak. 2004. “Building an inclusive diversity culture: Principles, processes and practice.” *Journal of Business Ethics* 54(2):129-47.
- Prasad, Pushkala and Albert J. Mills. 1997. “From Showcase to Shadow: Understanding the Dilemmas of Managing Workplace Diversity.” Pp. 3-28 in *Managing the Organizational Melting Pot: Dilemmas of Workplace Diversity*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc.
- Puritty, Chandler, Lynette R. Strickland, Eanas Alia, Benjamin Blonder, Emily Klein, Michel T. Kohl, Earyn McGee, Maclovia Quintana, Robyn E. Ridley, Beth Tellman, and Leah R. Gerber. 2017. “Without Inclusion, Diversity Initiatives May Not Be Enough.” *Science* 357(6356):1101-2.
- Putnam, Robert D. 1993. “The prosperous community: Social capital and public life.” *American Prospect* 13:35-42.
- Rafferty, Alannah E and Mark A. Griffin. 2006. “Perceptions of organizational change: A Stress and coping perspective.” *Journal of Applied Psychology* 91:1154-1162.
- Ray, Victor. 2019. “A Theory of Racialized Organizations.” *American Sociological Review* 84(1):26-53.
- Reeves, Terrie C., Arlise P. McKinney, and Laila Azam. 2012. “Muslim Women’s

- Workplace Experiences: Implications for Strategic Diversity Initiatives.” *Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal* 32(1):49–67.
- Rivera, Lauren A. and András Tilcsik. 2019 “Scaling Down Inequality: Rating Scales, Gender Bias, and the Architecture of Evaluation.” *American Sociological Review* 84(2):248-274.
- Roberge, Marie-Élène and Rolf van Dick. 2010. “Recognizing the Benefits of Diversity: When and How Does Diversity Increase Group Performance?” *Human Resource Management Review* 20(4):295–308.
- Rosenberg, Stuart and Joseph Mosca. 2011. “Breaking Down The Barriers To Organizational Change.” *International Journal of Management & Information Systems* 15(3):139-146.
- Ruvolo, Catherine M., Scott A. Petersen and Joseph N.G. LeBoef. 2004. “Leaders Are Made, Not Born: The Critical Role of a Developmental Framework to Facilitate an Organizational Culture of Development.” *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* 56(1):10-19.
- Salipante, Paul and Mike Niederpruem. 2014. “Applying Social Construction Theory to Collaborative Phenomena in the Nonprofit Sector.” Paper presented at the Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action, Conference November 2014, Denver, CO.
- Schmitz, Ademar, Pierry Teza, Gertrudes Aparecida Dandolini, Joao Artur de Souza. 2014. “Universities as Knowledge Intensive Business Services – A Systematic Literature Review and a Case Study of a Research Group.” *International Journal of Engineering and Innovative Technology* 3(7):40-47.

- Schneider, Sherry K. and Gregory B. Northcraft. 1999. "Three Social Dilemmas of Workforce Diversity in Organizations: A Social Identity Perspective." *Human Relations* 52(11):1445-67.
- Schubert, Christian. 2013. "How to evaluate creative destruction: reconstructing Schumpeter's approach." *Cambridge Journal of Economics* 37:227-250.
- Schumpeter, Joseph A. 1942. *Capitalism, Socialism and Democracy*. London: Routledge.
- Sewell, William H. 1992. "A Theory of Structure: Duality, Agency, and Transformation." *American Journal of Sociology* 98(1):1-29.
- Shih, David. 2017. "A Theory to Better Understand Diversity, And Who Really Benefits." *NPR Code Switch Blog*, April 19. Retrieved December 2019 (<https://unco.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://search.proquest.com/docview/1889558560?accountid=12832>)
- Strauss, Anselm L. 1987. *Qualitative Analysis for Social Scientists*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Swedberg, Richard. 2009. "Schumpeter's Full Model of Entrepreneurship: Economic, Non-Economic and Social Entrepreneurship." Pp. 77-106 in *An Introduction to Social Entrepreneurship* edited by Rafael Ziegler. Massachusetts: Edward Elgar Publishing, Inc.
- Sweet, Michael and Larry Michaelsen. 2007. "How Group Dynamics Research Can Inform the Theory and Practice of Postsecondary Small Group Learning." *Education Psychological Review* 19:31-47.
- Taylor, Mark Zachary and Sean Wilson. 2012. "Does culture still matter?: The effects of individualism on national innovation rates." *Journal of Business Venturing* 27(2):

234-47.

Von Bergen, C. W. and George Collier. 2013. "Tolerance as Civility in Contemporary Workplace Diversity Initiatives." *Administrative Issues Journal Education Practice and Research* 3(1):86.

Wentling, Rose Mary. 2004. "Factors that assist and barriers that hinder the success of diversity initiatives in multinational corporations." *Human Resource Development International*. 7(2):165-80.

Yang, Yang and Alison M. Konrad. 2011. "Understanding Diversity Management Practices: Implications of Institutional Theory and Resource-Based Theory." *Group & Organization Management* 36(1):6-38.

Zhao, Fang. 2005. "Exploring the Synergy between Entrepreneurship and Innovation." *International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behaviour & Research* 11(1):25-41.

APPENDIX A  
INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL



*Institutional Review  
Board*

DATE: January 6, 2020

TO: Megan Bissell, BA

FROM: University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB

PROJECT TITLE: [1513656-2] A place for us: The missing sociology in organizational change initiatives

SUBMISSION TYPE: Amendment/Modification

ACTION: APPROVAL/VERIFICATION OF EXEMPT STATUS

DECISION DATE: January 6, 2020

EXPIRATION DATE: January 6, 2024

Thank you for your submission of Amendment/Modification materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB approves this project and verifies its status as EXEMPT according to federal IRB regulations.

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records for a duration of 4 years.

If you have any questions, please contact Nicole Morse at 970-351-1910 or [nicole.morse@unco.edu](mailto:nicole.morse@unco.edu). Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.

This letter has been electronically signed in accordance with all applicable regulations, and a copy is retained within University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB's records.

APPENDIX B  
INTERVIEW GUIDE

## INTERVIEW GUIDE

Interviews will be semi-structured and conversational. The interview guide below is intended as a guiding document to move through the interview with cues and guided dialogue.

What role do you play in your organization?

Tell me about a time where your organization underwent a major diversity, equity and inclusion change initiative.

What was your role in that change?

Was the change successful?  
Why or why not?

What did other areas in the organization do to encourage the change?

Where did you see resistance during the change process?  
With whom?

Do you work in a team of people? How did you perceive that they experienced the change initiative?

Who were the key players in the roll out of this change? How did they help or hinder the process?

In the following scenario, what do you think prevented the change from lasting at the org?

What are your information sources at work? How do you know what's going on in your workplace?

Potential additional question:

How is your organization like other organizations?

Do you believe these types of changes are difficult for all organizations? Why or why not?