

DIVERSITY DYNAMICS

Marius Pretorius

The aim of this section is to integrate the literature review by applying group relations training to the study of diversity. The section starts off with an orientation to diversity dynamics, followed by the rationale for studying diversity from a group relations training perspective. Next the forces that underlie diversity dynamics are explored. This is followed by an exploration of the core concepts of diversity dynamics as used in the Robben Island Diversity Experience (RIDE). With the above as background, diversity dynamics is redefined.

1.1 ORIENTATION TO DIVERSITY DYNAMICS

The term diversity dynamics, as coined and explored in this chapter, refers to the field that integrates group relations training and diversity. In essence, this chapter is about exploring new frontiers and mapping new territories in the fields of diversity and group relations training. The field of diversity is broadened by moving beyond the traditional mechanistic and socio-cognitive approaches to diversity (Cox & Beale, 1997). The focus thus shifts from addressing stereotype and getting the numbers right, to an understanding of the unconscious, covert and non-rational forces that influence the way in which similarities and differences are perceived, interpreted and acted upon. The boundaries of group relations training are also redefined by moving away from its traditional focus on leadership, power and authority (Colman & Geller, 1985). By applying the group relations training approach to diversity, a new and exciting field of application is created.

1.2 THE RATIONALE FOR DIVERSITY DYNAMICS

The rationale for diversity dynamics can be stated as follows:

Diversity dynamics rejects overly rational and cognitive approaches to diversity. Diversity cannot be adequately described using only the language of consciousness and rationality since it is underpinned by powerful, hidden unconscious and irrational processes (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2000; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994).

The rational level of understanding and dealing with diversity refers to overt strategies that organisations employ in managing diversity (Carnevale & Stone, 1994; Loden, 1996). These strategies are driven by a variety of legal, moral and economic motives (Hayles & Russel, 1997; Newell, 2002). It aims to politically align the organisation with current legislation, and/or use diversity as a strategy for gaining a competitive advantage (Roosevelt Thomas, 1996b). Employment equity, equal opportunities and affirmative action initiatives can be seen as examples of rational or overt strategies in dealing with diversity (Loden, 1996). The end result of dealing with diversity on a rational level pertains to the physical survival of the organisation.

The non-rational level of understanding diversity refers to the underlying, unconscious, covert and non-rational forces that inform the way diversity is perceived, interpreted and acted upon (Czander, 1993; Gould, Ebers & Clinchy; 1999; Halton, 1994). It entails the socio-historical context as well as the fears, needs, anxieties, beliefs, and attitudes that organisations hold towards diversity and the way these dynamic forces move the organisations to react to diversity in various covert and non-rational ways (Bond & Pyle, 1998; Kets De Vries & Balazs, 1998; Newell, 2002). These reactions to diversity can either support or subvert the organisations rational or overt strategies towards diversity (Colman & Bexton, 1975; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). The non-rational level of functioning is related to the organisations emotional survival.

To gain a deeper understanding of diversity, the conscious, rational and overt forces as well as the unconscious, irrational and covert forces that impact on diversity have to be taken into consideration. Diversity dynamics is thus about understanding the conscious, rational and overt factors as well as the unconscious, irrational and covert forces that impact on the way organisations view, attribute meaning to and deal with difference and similarity in the workplace. Stemming from the above, it is the belief that the study of diversity dynamics can lead to a deeper and more complete awareness and understanding of diversity.

1.3 THE FORCES UNDERLYING DIVERSITY DYNAMICS

In the literature review of diversity and the GRTM the researcher identified the survival instinct, the pleasure principle, anxiety and the defences against anxiety, the attachment-individuation struggle, envy, contextual factors, vicious diversity-related circles and the need to deal with unresolved issues as the forces underlying diversity dynamics.

1.3.1 Survival instinct

From the GRTM diversity-related behaviour can best be understood in the context of the survival instinct which forms part of the biogenetic make-up of the human infant (McNeely, 1997; Miller, 1998; Sutherland, 1985). The premise is that an entity will attach, relate and connect with other entities in order to ensure its own survival (Ancona, 1990; McNeely, 1997).

The pre-1994 governments policies on apartheid and separate development can be seen as part of the white Afrikaners struggle to survive as a minority. The strategy was to empower white people whilst disempowering people of colour by severely discriminating against them on a socio-economic and political level. The strategies of the National Party, such as denying black people the right to vote, banishing the African National Congress (ANC), and expelling political prisoners to Robben Island, can be better understood by taking the survival anxiety and needs of the white Afrikaner into account.

Current government legislation and organisational policies aimed at making organisations more representative organisations make for interesting case studies on the survival need of the individual and organisation alike. In an effort to cope with diversity-related challenges, organisations have to transform and revamp their policies, procedures and practices, as well as restructure their workforce in order to be more representative (Carrel et al, 1998; Laubscher, 2001). These changes result in huge amounts of uncertainty, anxiety and resistance because they impact directly on the survival of the employees (Chidester et al, 1999; Greenstein, 1998). In the South African context with its drive towards more representative organisations, this is especially relevant to white male employees who have to make way for previously disadvantaged people (Charlton & Van Niekerk, 1994; Human, 1996b). The paranoid fantasies and survival anxieties created by these changes ensure that new arrivals (affirmative action candidates) often enter a hostile environment in which the malevolence and hostility of current employees are projected onto and into them (Kets De Vries & Balazs, 1998; Newell, 2002).

1.3.2 The pleasure principle

According to Miller (1998), the two fundamental survival instincts of pleasure seeking and pain avoiding are enacted almost immediately at birth. It refers to the notion that when people deal with any given situation, the innate tendency is to choose the option that leads to pleasure (maximise pleasure) and avoid the option that leads to pain (minimise pain). This often involves choosing an option that provides a pleasurable short-term solution, but leads back to pain and agony over the long term (Badcock, 1992). People seldom choose the road less travelled (Peck, 1990) where they have to work through the problems and issues that confront them. The process of confronting and working through problematic issues implies renouncing the pleasure instinct since the process inevitably causes emotional pain. The easier option is to avoid, deny or rationalise these matters, thus choosing short-term pleasure over long-term growth and development. The tendency to choose pleasure over pain is one of the primary reasons why people remain in what Wachtel (2001) called vicious circles. Ironically the very act of opting for pleasurable (easy) options, keeps people bogged down in pain.

The only way to break these vicious circles lies in renouncing the instincts, giving up the comfort and seemingly simplicity of the pleasure principle and engaging in life ruled by the reality principle (Cilliers & Koortzen, 2000; Kets De Vries & Balazs, 1998; Wachtel, 2001). If this does not happen, dealing and working through the difficulties that diversity brings to the workplace will be too painful and will be avoided altogether. Consequently organisations will not have the opportunity to experience the value that diversity brings to the workplace because their members cannot delay gratification or endure the necessary suffering linked to working through the difficulties of dealing with differences (Lawrence, 1999; Miller, 1976).

The way South Africans dealt (avoided) with the differences in the country serves as an excellent example of the above (Beck, 2000). The emotional discomfort, anxiety and pain associated with

dealing with differences kept people from really dealing with them. The absence of dealing with these things simply widened the gap and made it even more difficult for the diverse society to reach each other - hence a vicious cycle was established and reinforced. South Africa broke this vicious cycle by initiating a process in which people of opposing factions started talking to one another. In this regard, the unbanning of the ANC and the start of the CODESA talks can be seen as turning points in South Africa's history (Thompson, 2001). For a diverse community to build bridges, it is thus necessary to contain or transcend the pain and anxiety associated with dealing with difference. This means that organisations have to acknowledge and pro-actively deal with their diversity before their differences can be used as a competitive advantage.

The effects of the pleasure-pain principle are also evident in splitting, projection and projective identification. This will be dealt with in section 4.4.3.1.

1.3.3 Anxiety and the defences against it

Anxiety resulting from the physical and emotional survival of entities can be seen as a primary basis of behaviour (Menzies, 1993; Stein, 2000). From this point of view, interaction with diverse people stimulates anxiety. The focus is thus on determining the way individuals and groups cope with or defend against diversity-related anxiety. The psychodynamic literature indicates various intra-personal and social defences that can be used to gain a sense of safety, security and acceptance. For the purpose of this research, the focus will be on (1) the processes of splitting, projection and projective identification, and (2) social constructed defences.

1.3.3.1 Splitting, projection and projective identification

The process of splitting and projection entails splitting off certain unacceptable or unwanted (good or bad) feelings or thoughts from the self and projecting them onto another part of the system (Cilliers & May; 2002). Projective identification refers to the process in which one part of the system (as subject) projects material into the other part (as the object), who identifies with the projection and takes it on as if it belongs to the object (Kets de Vries, 1991; Klein, 1997; Obholzer & Roberts, 1994). Through this process the subject thus tries to relieve anxiety by splitting off those parts that the self is struggling to integrate or accept as part of the self. Although the subject gains relief through this process, the projective loss (the split-off parts) leaves the self diminished and less aware of its whole. Projective identification results in changes in both subject and object (Coleman & Geller, 1985; Czander, 1993).

Instead of working through unpleasant emotions and undesirable content, these aspects are split off and projected into another part of the system (Kets de Vries, 1991). This part (often minority groups) thus contains these unpleasant and undesirable projections, which are too difficult or painful to deal with, on behalf of the whole system. Through this process society idealises or

denigrates the people/objects on to which it projects (Klein, 1997; Minsky, 1998). It thus seems difficult to view people/objects realistically as a mixture of good and bad qualities.

In this regard, Freud (1930) was of opinion that a group or society maintains cohesiveness and avoids anarchy, by directing its aggression outwards towards minorities or alien groups. In South Africa, projective identification is particularly evident in race. In the past, undesirable aspects of South African society (such as its incompetence, laziness, stubbornness, stupidity and dishonesty) were split off and projected onto people of colour, while desirable aspects (such as competence, intelligence, and leadership) were split off and projected onto white people. Hence white people did not have to carry their own incompetence, laziness and dishonesty. The anxiety that comes with these undesirable aspects was borne by people of colour.

According to Likierman (2001), splitting and projecting exploits the natural boundary between insiders and outsiders, and also leads to new boundaries within the same organisation. The less contact different parts of a system have with one another, the greater the scope for projections becomes. In order to further preserve the self-idealized state, contact may also be avoided.

Studying diversity dynamics thus entails understanding how a society through the process of projective identification has located aspects (undesirable and desirable) of itself within specific parts of that society, for instance, what aspects are located in women, disabled people, people of different sexual orientations and HIV-infected people. Analysing the stereotypes and prejudice within a society would probably provide a good idea of what society projects onto these groups (Wachtel, 1999; 2001). On a cultural level these projections can for example lead to racism, sexism and tribalism which at the most extreme may involve domestic violence, murder, rape and war. The repeated acts of genocide against those who have come to represent the different and therefore denigrated other, seem to indicate the destructive power that these projections hold (Minsky, 1998).

Dealing with these projective identifications entails a movement to what Klein (1997) called the depressive position. This position involves an awareness of the projections as well as a re-owning of the aspects that were projected onto others. The subject (see section 3.3.3.1) has to contain the anxiety and pain associated with these projections (emotions or split off parts) for long enough to enable itself to work through them. In essence, moving to the depressive position entails a process of integrating those aspects of the self that were previously unbearable, to become more whole (again). In practice it could imply that men are both tough and fragile, disabled people are both dependent and independent, HIV infected people are both sick and healthy. The learning can thus be that if an entity can contain and incorporate its own badness and vulnerability the need to project those aspects on others substantially lessens - people can thus relate to others that are different from them without projecting their own issues onto others (Minsky 1998).

4.3.3.2 Socially constructed defences

The need for social defences to reduce the anxiety inherent in human relations is reflected in the work of Menzies (1993) and Jaques (1955). Organisational structure, policies, procedures and the culture of an organisation, for instance are often designed to contain or defend against the anxiety that comes with diverse organisations (Gould et al, 1999).

South Africa is one of the best examples of a country in which social structures have been used to defend against the anxiety arising from dealing with a diverse society. The pre-1994 legislation and policies on apartheid, segregation and separate development can, for instance, be seen as a survival strategy of the white Afrikaner (Thompson, 2001). From this perspective, the unconscious needs for safety and protection, as well as the need to contain the anxiety of white people about being overpowered and annihilated by the black majority could probably have been the driving force behind policies that enforced apartheid, separate development, as well as separate schooling and housing. The assumption probably related to splitting of that part of society (people of colour) that creates anxiety, and physically locating it outside or away from the rest of the system (white people). Through the above-mentioned social structures, the white community thus created the illusion of safety and containment by mechanistically splitting off those people who created the anxiety from the rest of the system. The premise might have been out of sight, out of mind.

1.3.4 The need for attachment

Klein (1997) proposes that the inner world of a person is a world of human relations. In this world, establishing and maintaining relations are seen as the primary motivating force behind human behaviour (Cashdan, 1988; Czander, 1993). The basic human need is thus seen as the need to be attached, connected and related to other people (Elliott, 1994; Minsky, 1998). In this regard Sutherland (1985) mentioned that an individual cannot survive without this need for social relatedness. Bion (1961) uses the term groupishness to refer to this need for social relatedness.

According to Miller (1998), the inclination to connect with other people is grounded at an unconscious level and relates specifically to the need for (1) containment, safety, security and protection, (2) belonging, acceptance and self-esteem, and (3) affirmation of own identity. The primacy of these needs ensures that the tendency to link, attach or group together with other people will be one of the basic drives that influence the behaviour of human beings. This need to attach seems to become more prominent in new and anxiety-provoking situations, or in situations where people feel insecure and uncertain (Minsky, 1998).

From a diversity dynamics perspective, it is important to note the criteria or characteristics according to which a society links together. South African society, for example, has a tendency to link according to race and culture (Beck, 2000). People find security, acceptance and an affirmation of their identity by linking to others of the same race. These race-related clusters have to a large degree structured

South African society (Thompson, 2001). The colour of a person's skin has thus pre-empted the way in which a person is viewed, accepted and treated.

1.3.5 The struggle for individuation

In contrast to the above-mentioned need to attach, the literature also indicates that people have a need for individuation where they can affirm their uniqueness or difference (Miller, 1998). Where the need for attachment is closely linked to a state of safety, security and dependence, the need for individuation is rooted in the need to develop one's own distinct identity and to be an entity on one's own.

According to Miller (1998), human maturation can be seen as a process of individuation. Where the individual develops from attachment to the mother towards separation and autonomy, the group moves from homogenisation towards differentiation. The struggle for individuation starts at birth when the infant is physically severed from the mother and this continues throughout life on an emotional level (Likierman, 2001). Individuation is thus a process that is never complete, and continues throughout life.

In the struggle between the needs for attachment and individuation, lies one of the basic dilemmas of the human condition. Humans are caught in the dilemma where they wish to be part of a group but at the same time want to remain a separate and unique individual (Colman & Geller, 1985). According to Bion (1961), the individual is a group animal by nature, yet at war with the group and with the forces in him/her that determines his/her groupishness. The ultimate aim is to establish one's uniqueness while remaining related to others - thus the struggle between being an individual but also part of society (Turquet, 1974).

1.3.6 Envy

In analysing the concept of envy, two key factors surface. Envy firstly, involves the relation to another who is perceived to be more fortunate than the self, and secondly it encompasses feelings of ill-will and the active desire to damage or see harm done to the more fortunate party (Stein, 2000).

Klein's concept of envy builds on the above-mentioned characteristics of envy. According to Klein (1997), these vindictive desires and feelings of ill-will are often unconscious. This implies that people are mostly unaware of the extent to which they feel envious of another whom they perceive as special or in some way advantaged. Hence studies of envy are particularly alarming since they alert people to the degree of malevolence into which social systems may descend (Stein, 2000). While the defence against anxiety paradigm focuses on modes of activity that are defensive, envy and its

resulting dynamics enforces modes of activity that are attacking (Stein, 2000). Envy thus involves violent attack that is not concerned with self-preservation or protection. Instead, it is inspired by malevolence (Segal, 1996).

According to Klein (1997), envy is a primitive emotion that lies at the base of most interpersonal conflict. Envy in organisations is inevitable given the inequitable nature of organisational status, power and reward systems as well as the allocation of scarce resources (Czander, 1993). Envy also often arises from the sense of being a loser in a competitive struggle. The survival anxiety of the less successful section stimulates an envious desire to spoil the others success. The spoiling envy operates like a spanner in the works either by withholding necessary cooperation or by active sabotage.

In diversity-related settings, envy is rife where certain subgroups receive (real or perceived) preferential treatment. The have not's often become extremely frustrated, agitated and angry because of the differential treatment. The envy aroused through the discrimination (real or perceived) incites various direct and/or indirect ill-willed reactions from the disadvantaged group. A hypothesis could be that envy is the primary driving force behind the way white employees sabotage affirmative action candidates. Being in a disadvantaged position (real or perceived), the white employees often withhold information, training and support from affirmative action candidates, and thus make it difficult if not impossible to succeed. These actions are driven by malevolence and are aimed at getting back at the affirmative action candidates for receiving preferential treatment.

A more controversial hypothesis could be that envy might be the primary motive behind many of the farm attacks that have been plaguing South Africa for quite some time. The measure of aggression and malevolence of many of these attacks gives a clue that the attacks might be more about getting back at the privileged than they are about the financial gain of these acts.

Although the concept of envy has largely been neglected in the study of diversity, it is clearly an important phenomenon in understanding how people relate to one another (Halton, 1994; Obholzer, 1994). According to Stein (2000), the ideas related to envy are about allowing for a range of emotions other than anxiety in explaining human behaviour. The impact of other emotions such as hate, greed and envy opens the door to understanding diversity from another perspective.

1.3.7 Vicious diversity-related circles

The cyclical psychodynamic perspective contends that unconscious motivations, fantasies, conflicts, defences and past experiences set in motion certain patterns in a persons life that perpetuate themselves through a virtual infinite series of bidirectional transactions between internal psychological states and the real world consequences they bring about (Wachtel, 2001). It proposes that people act unintentionally in ways to bring about again and again the very experience that were problematic in the past and which they wanted to avoid. Wachtel (1999) indicates how defences against certain feared experiences, can ironically bring about the very experience it is suppose to

ward off. These processes happen largely outside awareness with all the parties oblivious to the circular and repetitive nature of the patterns in which they reciprocally participate (Wachtel, 2001).

Steele (1997) provides an example of how beliefs and stereotypes regarding the intellectual abilities of black students actually lead to a vicious circle. According to Steele, anxiety associated with the burden of representation, rather than any difference in the actual capacity or ability, accounts for the poor performance of black students. Black students experience anxiety associated with concerns about confirming stereotypes about black intellectual ability. This anxiety leads to poor performance which then once again strengthens and reaffirms the beliefs and stereotypes regarding the intellectual ability of black students. Wachtel (1999) calls this the pseudo-confirmation of the stereotypes.

The anxiety related to stereotypes also sets a process in motion which Steele (1997) calls disidentification. It entails a process in which, firstly, a person or group protects themselves (self-esteem) by disengaging from areas in which they are believed to be inferior, and secondly, then seeks to bolster their self-esteem by doing other activities. It can be practically illustrated in the vicious circle in which women found themselves previously. Due to specific beliefs and stereotypes regarding their role, place, and abilities, women had few career options. Discouraged by the poor prospect of being successful and competent in specialised careers such as the medical profession or in high organisational positions, women disengaged themselves from these professions and positions. They settled for careers and positions that were within their perceived capabilities. Rather than seeking self-esteem through organisational/professional life they tried to bolster their self-esteem through other activities. This reinforced the beliefs and stereotypes that led to the situation - hence reinforcing the vicious circle. Although the process of disidentification brings certain short-term comfort, it is bought at a considerable long-term disadvantage.

Wachtel (1999) also indicates how defences against stigmatisation lead to vicious circles. Research on the way people maintain self-esteem in the face of stigmatisation indicates that stigmatised groups (1) interpret failure as a result of prejudice and discrimination by others rather than as reflecting directly on the self; (2) compare their performance only to those in their own group; and (3) selectively devalue activities in which their group does poorly and emphasises those in which they excel (Crocker & Major, 1989). Although these defences help to mitigate the impact of unfair stigmatisation, it plunges the individual back into a vicious circle - the individual thus finds himself/herself in the same circumstances that made the defences necessary in the first place. Through these vicious circles, society's damaging and unjust divisions are maintained (Wachtel, 1999)

1.3.8 Contextual influences

The ecological perspective of diversity is rooted in the notion that the environment exerts a powerful effect on human behaviour and that people's behaviour can only be understood when viewed in context (Trickett, 1996). From this perspective, the environment not only refers to the physical setting but also includes the socio-historical background, traditions, policies, practices and culture of a society.

The ecological perspective examines the way the organisational context interacts with individual and subgroup characteristics as well with the broader social and economic influences to create powerful forces for and against diversity. Ultimately, the goal is to understand the evolution and creation of settings that support diversity.

1.3.8.1 History and traditions as the context of diversity dynamics

The ecological perspective emphasises the importance of understanding the historical bases of diversity. It holds that the history and traditions established over time create a context that determines how an organisation will represent itself (in terms of its population), how people in those organisations perceive and interact with diverse people, and the values and beliefs that are integrated into the organisation's culture (Bond & Pyle, 1998).

The history and traditions of an organisation have determined who has been appointed and to what positions. This has influenced the type of people (race, gender, language) employed by the organisation. The Afrikaner-male dominated organisations of the past serve as a good example of selective hiring practices. Efforts to make organisations more representative through affirmative action and employment equity strategies often fail because these ecological factors are not taken into account. Historical hiring trends often combine with group dynamics (eg. the preference for working with similar others) to work against these initiatives. As indicated by Bond and Pyle (1998), the dynamic interaction between historical and interpersonal forces evolves into a self-perpetuating process in which change is resisted and the status quo strengthened. In their opinion, a few years of applying affirmative action and employment equity strategies are unlikely to change patterns entrenched over decades.

On an interactional level, the type of people employed by an organisation leads to the development of subgroup formation. Informal organisational processes often lead to subtle yet powerful forces that create and maintain an organisational culture that protects the in-groups while keeping the minorities at the margin.

According to Bond and Pyle (1998) the in-groups (eg. white males) often marginalise women, people of colour and other minorities by:

adopting operating procedures that are not equally suited to diverse groups

- .1 not recognising minority experiences and needs
- .2 stereotyping
- .3 creating an unwelcome and non-inclusive organisational culture
- .4 through frequent micro-inequalities in the way minorities are treated.

This often leads minorities to feel less thanâ€™ or simply that they perceive themselves as not good enoughâ€™ (Davis & Wallbridge, 1987). In line with this, Greenstein (1998) states that diversity cannot be studied in isolation of the historical context since it is central to the way people view others and themselves. Identity formation emerges from prolonged historical processes through which meaning is attributed to entities. Understanding different identities thus helps to examine diversity historically as it has developed over time and within specific environments (Greenstein, 1998).

4.3.8.2 Macro-environmental influences

It is also important to realise that individual, group, and organisational dynamics are shaped by influences from the broader environmental/cultural (national as well as international) context (Bond & Pyle, 1998). The international movement towards equity, equality and human rights serves as a good example of these broader environmental or societal influences (Braathen et al, 2000). Predominant societal values and beliefs regarding diverse people also undoubtedly influence the way that people are perceived and treated in an organisation.

The importance of these contextual influences is emphasised by qualitative methodology whose starting point is the belief that human experience cannot be comprehended without understanding the social, linguistic and historical features that shaped it (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2002).

1.3.9 The need to deal with unresolved issues

The need to work through unresolved issues links to the psychoanalytic postulate that unresolved or fixated issues will keep on reoccurring or resurfacing until it is worked through (Badcock, 1992; Brown & Pedder, 1991). Painful or traumatic events are repressed, denied or pushed out of consciousness. These issues do not disappear, but become part of the unconscious baggageâ€™ that a person carry with them (Rutan & Stone, 1993). These issues would in some form then keep surfacing until they are adequately addressed (Elliott, 1994). For an individual to move beyond these issues, he/she have to contain the pain and anxiety associated with these issues for long enough, to work through them and in some way resolve them.

1.3.10 Integration: the forces underlying diversity dynamics

This section (sec 4.3) integrated concepts from group relations training and diversity in order to explore various unconscious, covert and non-rational forces that underlie diversity dynamics. The researcher identified the survival instinct, pleasure principle, anxiety, envy, as well as the need for attachment and individuation as the most prominent underlying emotions, needs and drives that influence the way differences and similarities are perceived, interpreted and acted upon. The section on vicious diversity-related circles further indicated how these emotions, needs and drives often lead to the reoccurring patterns of dependency, inferiority and discrimination. The contextual factors (socio-historical and macro-environmental context) shape diversity by creating the framework within which it occurs and according to which meaning is attributed to specific differences.