

THE EFFECTS OF RACIAL CONFLICT ON ORGANIZATIONAL PERFORMANCE: A SEARCH FOR THEORY

Marilyn Y. Byrd
Instructor, Business Administration and Systems
University of Mary Hardin-Baylor

Abstract

This article addresses the effect of racial conflict on organizational performance as an issue that needs theoretical support in the foundational theories of human resource development (HRD). While the field of HRD recognizes theories from multiple disciplines, the field lacks a theoretical framework to inform leadership in managing racial conflict. In this article literature across multiple disciplines was reviewed to identify research and theory that links racial conflict, racial groups, organizational groups, and performance outcomes. The findings indicate Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1993; Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995) and Embedded Group Theory (Alderfer & Smith, 1982) provide useful frameworks for addressing inter-group conflict by offering counter discourse through storytelling. This article also suggests a conceptual framework for HRD to begin theory-building research of its own.

The purpose of this article is to address the effect of racial conflict on organizational performance as an issue that needs theoretical support in the foundational theories of HRD. This article examines foundational theories of HRD, suggest a conceptual framework for theory-building research addressing racial conflict, racial groups, organizational groups, and performance outcomes, discuss why HRD should be concerned with racial conflict, and review theories and research from other fields that might be useful in addressing the topic. The following research questions are addressed:

1. What foundational theories of HRD inform racial conflict among work groups?
2. How has research and theory linked racial conflict to organizational performance?

Theoretical Foundations of Human Resource Development

While the field of HRD has no universal view on the theories defining the field as a discipline, Swanson (1995) proposed that HRD is supported through system theory, theories from the field of economics, and theories from the field of psychology as a means for understanding HRD within the internal and external environments. These theories are “visually presented as comprising a three-legged stool, with the three legs providing great stability for HRD as a discipline and field of practice in the midst of uneven and changing conditions” (Swanson & Holton, 2001, p. 93). According to Swanson (1995), the integration of these theories

forms a theoretical framework for the discipline of HRD. This article uses Swanson's (1995) framework as a basis for discussing the theoretical framework of HRD.

Human Resource Development as a Performance System

Models of performance-based systems can be found throughout HRD literature. Performance is "any system organized to accomplish a mission or purpose" (Holton, 2002, p. 201). To this end, the function of HRD is "to advance the mission of the performance system that sponsors the HRD efforts by improving the capabilities of individuals working in the system and improving the systems in which they perform their work" (Holton, 2002, p. 201).

The more recent performance based models introduced into the HRD literature have been expanded to address multi-levels of performance. Swanson's (1995) model defines performance in terms of contributions at the organizational, process, and individual levels of the organization. Rummler and Brache (1995) offer an integrated framework of three levels (organization, process, and job/performer) designed for achieving competitive advantage. The omission of group relationships in both models neglects the realities of racial conflict in organizations. Cummings and Worley (2005) offer a group-focused model of performance, taking a more organizational development approach directed at change. Holton (1999) proposes an integrated taxonomy of performance, including a social subsystem supportive of research and theory building in the social systems of organizations. These latter two models are promising for offering a foundation whereby to address racial conflict within organizations.

Racial Conflict as a Deterrent to Performance

In HRD, organizations provide the stage for performance and its human resources are the actors. According to Swanson and Holton (2001) the determinants of performance are reflected in people, their ideas, and the resources that reproduce these ideas to the marketplace. Performance outputs, then, should reflect the actions of people within organizations. Some performance-based systems assume high performance is achieved through individual effort (Campbell, 1990; Gilbert, 1978). However, individual performance alone does not sustain organizations. Performance actions of individuals within a system are more likely to be exerted in part or whole through collective and synergetic actions of work groups rather than independent actions of individuals (Kraut, 2003). Therefore, when individuals perform within groups, the outcome of their performance is often dependent upon functioning within groups.

According to Vroom's (1964) Expectancy Theory, an individual's performance is based on varying expectations and needs for motivation. But it is expected that most people can be motivated to achieve a high level of performance if they expect their performance leads to a reward (McClelland, 1965). Richard and Johnson (2001) contend, "group members who differ from the majority tend to have lower levels of psychological commitment, higher levels of turnover intent, and absenteeism than do majority members" (p. 185). Considering these psychological effects, the field of HRD should be concerned with whether or not an individual's motivation to perform within diverse work groups is diminished by racial conflict.

Limitation of Human Resource Development's Theoretical Foundations

During the 2001 Academy of Human Resource Development (AHRD) Conference, Swanson (2001) led a forum with noted scholars to discuss the theoretical constraints facing HRD. While Swanson (2001) admits there are limited theory alternatives being proposed and debated in HRD literature, he contends, “our work is too central to host organizations to tolerate atheoretical explanations of what it can do for its sponsors” (p. 5). As Lynham (2004) points out, for scholarly and informed HRD, the foundational theories should be informed by the nature and context of the issue. Furthermore, “theoretical foundations should include knowledge and expertise about integrating systems (teams) and individuals (people) in performance systems (performance)” (Lynham, 2004, p. 2). From this perspective, for at least the following three reasons, system theory, theories from economics, and theories from psychology as proposed by Swanson (1995) may be lacking in explaining the nature of the issue (racial conflict), the context of the issue (organizations), and the effect on the organization as a performance system.

First, system theory provides a holistic view of the organization functioning as a unified body (Bertalanffy, 1968). From a systems perspective, the driving force is overall performance of the organization (Bierema, 1996). However, a major shortcoming of system theory is its failure to recognize that “only through relationships does anything get done; and to cultivate strong relationships throughout the organization is a key performance strategy” (Bierema, 1996, p. 27). Second, theories from economics, such as human capital theory (Becker, 1993), emphasize investing in the development of an organization’s human resources, hence recognizing human resources as a valuable asset to an organization. A major limitation of human capital theory is its failure to recognize the cooperative and collaborative value of relationships among an organization’s human resources within an organization as pointed out by Bierema (1996). Finally, theories from psychology (Maslow, 1970; Piaget, 1966) are useful for explaining individual behavior and actions; however, these theories are not sufficient for explaining racial groups in conflict or the nature and context of the issue as pointed out by Lynham (2004).

The theories that inform the field of HRD should be inclusive of theories that address how individuals are positioned in society because organizations simulate societal norms. Members of the dominant group are positioned within a culture of privilege (Rocco & West, 1998). Privilege is “any unearned asset or benefit received by virtue of being born with a particular characteristic or into a particular class” (Rocco & West, 1998, p. 172). From this position of privilege, the existence of racial tensions within an organizational setting may not be a performance hindrance to members of the dominant group because these tensions are not affective to this group. On the other hand, stress from racial tensions may prohibit members of minority groups from functioning at a high level of performance in the wake of conflict because tensions may lead to such negative psychological and physiological factors as depression, anger, nervousness, anxiety, and elevated blood pressure (Miller & Kaiser, 2001). For these reasons, we should recognize a need to expand foundational HRD theory to include performance outcomes in the presence of racial conflict.

A Conceptual Model for Theory-Building

Using Lynham’s (2000) five-phase system of theory building, a conceptual development framework is proposed for HRD to begin considering racial conflict as an issue for theory-

building research. Lynham (2000) defines theory building as “the process or recurring cycle by which coherent descriptions, explanations, and representations of observed or experience phenomena are generated, verified, and refined” (p. 162). Conceptual development is the first phase of the theory building process.

A conceptual development model for investigating racial conflict between racial groups and organizational groups is proposed in Figure I. The intersection of racial groups, organizational groups, and performance outcomes represent the gap between what we know and what we need to know about the nature and context of racial conflict. The conceptual development model in Figure I “provides an initial understanding and explanation of the nature and dynamics of the issue, problem, or phenomenon” (Lynham, 2002, p. 231) being studied. The intersection of the three constructs represents an area for theory building. The expected result is new theory to inform leadership for anticipating and resolving conflict triggered by racial group differences. The outcome expected is a higher level of organizational performance.

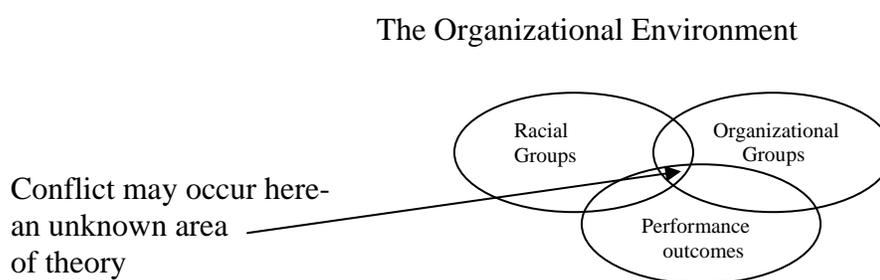


Figure 1. Conceptual model for theory-building research.

Why Should Racial Conflict Concern Human Resource Development?

Racism is “the dogma that one ethnic group is condemned by nature to congenital inferiority and another group is destined to congenital superiority” (Benedict, 1983, p. 87). Racism is a conscious or unconscious belief directed towards certain racial groups and is expressed by attitudes, behaviors, and organizational practices (Colin & Preciphs, 1991). Racial groups are social groups that share common historical experiences and are subjected to certain social forces (Alderfer & Smith, 1982). Racial conflict can occur when diverse individuals and groups interact and experience incompatibilities based on their racial group membership (Proudford & Smith, 2003). While other groups experience racism, the dominant conversation has centered on conflict between black and white racial groups. In the workplace, racial groups are members of organizational groups. Organizational group members share similar jobs, work experiences, and organizational views (Alderfer & Smith, 1982).

Does Race Matter?

This question is probably best answered by engaging in serious conversation on how race shapes our perceptions and responses to issues in our society (West, 1993). Perhaps more relevant to HRD is: Why does race matter? At least four reasons can be given.

Contributes to stress. Racial tensions may prohibit members of minority groups from functioning at high levels of performance in the presence of conflict because tensions are affective (Outlaw, 1993; Peters, 2004; Utsey, 1998). Stress caused by racial conflict may affect

self-esteem, produce feelings of low self-worth, and lead to other dysfunctional psychological outcomes. Moreover, an individual's drive to reach the highest level of potential or self-actualization (Maslow, 1970) is often satisfied through social interactions in the workplace. For instance, daily interactions such as functioning in work teams or participating in workplace social events offer individuals the opportunity to satisfy these social needs. Social satisfaction in the work environment is also consistent with Maslow's theory that humans are motivated and gratified through a sense of belonging and group identification.

Interferes with individual learning and performance. Gilley and Egglund (1989) define HRD as "organized learning activities arranged within an organization to improve performance and or personal growth for the purpose of improving the job, the individual and or the organization" (p. 5). Therefore, if HRD is about developing individual learning and performance, we should be concerned with the possibility that stress and anxiety caused by racial conflict may interfere with an individual's capacity to learn and ability to perform.

Impedes opportunities for social networking. Social psychology informs us that people prefer to interact with others like themselves and are less likely to have meaningful interactions with those different from themselves (Ohlott, Chrobot-Mason, & Dalton, 2004). Organizations are socialized environments that replicate the larger society. The attitudes and beliefs by which we are socialized transfer to the workplace. It is not likely these socialized attitudes and beliefs will change in workplace interactions. Generally, minorities and whites maintain separate social existences and do not encounter each other on a personal level until they meet in institutions of higher education or the workplace (Martin & Ross-Gordon, 1990). These encounters are often shaped by pre-conceived, stereotypical images created by broadcast and print media (Dixon, 2001). Whereas segregation ended decades ago, whites and people of color are forced to work in organizations where conflict caused by race and racially related issues persists (Kahn, 1991). However, blatant forms of racial conflict have been replaced by more subtle behaviors such as avoidance, closed and unfriendly communication, unwillingness to communicate, and failure to offer assistance (Deitch et al., 2003).

In the workplace, social networking provides a source of access to information and resources that assure individual success. People of color may have limited access to social connections in this setting. Furthermore, Schneider et al. (2000) found that exclusion from work-related or social interactions may be more detrimental to the well being of minorities than experiences that involve more open forms of discrimination.

The work performed by individuals in organizational settings is most often inter-related with organizational sub-systems, forcing individuals into work relationships. Work groups often require functioning outside racial groups in the form of peer-to-peer, supervisor-to-supervisor, and supervisor-to-subordinate relationships (Martin, 1996). Excluding references to racial conflict among organizational workgroups from HRD literature alludes to homogeneous systems. Because work groups and teams are formed from a diverse workforce, there are few homogenous work situations (Wentling, 2001). The conflicts that stem from diverse relationships in the workplace present a complex and challenging dilemma for managers; namely, how people with strong inherent aversions to one another are coerced to work together effectively (Ohlott, Chrobot-Mason, & Dalton, 2004).

Returns HRD to a concern for effective human relations. The emerging field and profession of HRD has origins in “the improvement of human relations in the workplace” (Swanson & Holton, 2001, p. 9). However, HRD literature makes no reference to racial conflict among workgroups as a threat to effective human relations. Therefore, our focus has apparently changed or we have neglected to advance our theoretical models to include societal issues of the workplace.

Research Design

To address the research questions posed in this article, a thematic literature review of HRD publications and sociology, business, management, and psychology journals was conducted. EBSCOhost, ProQuest, and Wiley Interscience database sources were used to search journals indexed in ABI/Inform, Academic Search Premier, Business Source Premier, ERIC, Professional Development Collection, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, and Sociological Collection databases. All four major publications for HRD are supported through the databases that were searched.

The following keywords were used as the search criteria: racial groups, racial conflict, organizational groups, organizational performance, and theory. There were no publications returned from this search. Using a combination of the keywords, 67 publications were returned. Six publications were selected that refer to theories, and six publications were selected that refer to research studies that have been conducted on racial groups, racial conflict, and performance in organizational settings. These studies were selected based on how closely they matched the keyword search.

Summary of the Findings

The study of black and white race relations has primarily taken place outside organizational research (Alderfer & Tucker, 1996), being studied largely within sociological and cultural research. However, sociology is not one of the disciplines that Swanson’s (1995) model identifies as foundational to HRD. Furthermore, from the review of literature, theories or theory-building models informing racial groups and racial conflict are not included in the foundational theories of HRD as proposed by Swanson (1995). This literary gap between the interactive effects of racial groups, work or organizational groups, and performance outcomes needs to be addressed. The effect of conflict between racial groups and organizational groups on performance outcomes, as presented earlier in Figure 1, remains relatively uninformed through HRD research and theory. Expanding on this conceptual model for theory building will require integrating research and theory from sociological and cultural studies.

The field of HRD has generally left unattended theories that explain racial groups. In general, HRD has focused on theories and studies relating to common processes (training, career development, organization development), the associated roles (trainers, counselors, consultants), and relevant knowledge and skills (Watkins, 2000). For this reason, the theoretical foundations proposed by Swanson (1995) may be inadequate to inform racial conflict within the workplace. In the absence of theories informing racial groups, there will be a lack of understanding on the conflict that might result. Swanson (2001) acknowledges the need for theory that informs the

social systems of organizations and recognizes theories from social psychology as holding some merit. According to Wiggins, Wiggins, and Vander Zanden (1994), social psychology is “the study of behavior, thoughts, and feelings of an individual or interacting individuals and their relationships with larger social units” (p. 17).

Table 1 represents a collection of selected theories gathered from multi-disciplines, including sociological and cultural studies. Studying these theories may give further insight for understanding relationships between racial groups and, thereby, explaining the role racial conflict plays in performance outcomes.

Table 1

Selected Theories and Models Informing the Conceptual Framework

Constructs	Foundational HRD theory	Theory/models from other disciplines
Racial groups	None located	Embedded Group Theory (Alderfer & Smith, 1982) Critical Race Theory (Bell, 1993; Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995)
Organizational groups	Group Consultation/ Psychological Theory (Schein, 1969)	Ethnic Identity Theory (Phinney, 1992)
Performance outcomes	System Theory (von Bertalanffy, 1968)	Diversity Research Network model of organizational groups (Kochan et al., 2003)

Theories Informing Racial Groups, Organizational Groups, and Performance

The Embedded Group Theory expounds on the notion that organizational researchers are often confronted with the problems of racial dynamics and organizational hierarchy, particularly when the organizations are predominantly white and leadership is reluctant to deal explicitly with racial dynamics (Alderfer & Smith, 1982). This theory combines basic research and action research methodologies to address the theoretical nature of groups within groups. According to this theory

Relations among identity groups and among organizational groups are shaped by how these groups and their representatives are embedded in the organization and also by how the organization is embedded in its environment. The effects of embeddedness may be observed on individual members, on the dynamics within identity groups and organizational groups, and on the inter-group transactions among diverse identity groups and organizational groups. (Alderfer & Smith, 1982, p. 61)

Inter-group conflict may result from group boundaries and characteristics or how the conflict relates indirectly or directly to race or culture (Bell, 2002). Embedded Group Theory argues that individuals may feel a greater affiliation to their identity (racial) group than their organization (work) group. Therefore, “people in organizations are a function of their identity and not always their organization group membership” (Alderfer & Smith, 1982, p. 60). When these two perspectives of identity clash in the workplace, conflict may occur.

Critical race theory (CRT), with roots in legal scholarship, is based on the notion of social construction and reality of race (Bell, 1993; Delgado, 1995; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995). Utilizing interdisciplinary knowledge, CRT is emerging as a useful framework in the field of education to explain and understand the experiences of people of color and offers a liberatory or transformative solution to the effects of race and class (Solórzano & Yosso 2002). The basic assumptions underlying CRT are: (a) the intercentricity of race and racism with other forms of subordination, (b) the challenge to dominant ideology, (c) the commitment to social justice, (d) the centrality of experiential knowledge, and (e) the transdisciplinary perspective (pp. 25-26). According to Bernier and Rocco (2003), CRT provides a paradigm for organizations to begin deconstructing structures of power and privilege “responsible for our homogenous workforce, the need for affirmative action policies, the glass ceiling effect, and the devaluing of core human attributes” (p. 17).

Through narratives and storytelling, racial issues within the context of the workplace can be critically examined through the lens of the marginalized through counter discourse. According to Taylor (2004), CRT posits, “issues of race, class, and gender are inextricably bound by economic, social, and political hegemonic power structures” (p. 35). Therefore, using counter stories based on experiences are useful for addressing racial conflict and challenging the discourse and beliefs of the dominant group.

Group process consultation theory (Schein, 1969) is useful in understanding how groups interact within the larger organizational society. Viewing organizational groups from this perspective gives a holistic view of the types of organizational groups that racial groups are embedded. Group process consultation theory “provides useful and relevant knowledge and methods about how human behaviors and mental processes affect internal subsystems with established goals that contribute to the overall mission in a performance system” (Lynham, Chermack, & Noggle, 2004, p. 161). Theories relating to group process offer HRD a beginning point for deeper probing for links to racial conflict and performance outcomes.

Ethnic identity theory (Phinney, 1992) proposes that people who accept and give retrospect to their ethnic identity have higher ethnic identity. In the process of self-reflection, individuals are able to make more informed decisions when confronting and coping with racial conflict. Further examination of how a positive attitude towards one’s own group helps to promote positive attitudes across racial groups is significant to the purpose of this article. According to Linnehan, Chrobot-Mason, and Konrad (2006), achieving ethnic identity “enhances the likelihood that people will expect positive outcomes to ensue from working in a diverse group” (p. 436). Incorporating this theory into the foundational theories of HRD might be useful for “building a critical mass of people who can effectively work in a diverse organization” (Linnehan et al., 2006, p. 436).

Kochan et al. (2003) designed a research model as shown in Figure 2 suggesting the relationship between diversity and performance is dependent upon organizational context variables (i.e., the organizational culture, business strategy, and human resource practices). The results from this empirical research found, under facilitating conditions, the effects of diversity are likely to be associated with positive performance outcomes; under inhibiting conditions, the effects can be detrimental to performance. The model conceptualized by Kochan et al. (2003) contains the basic components of system theory. System theory is foundational theory to HRD as suggested by Swanson's (1995) model. The General System Theory ([GST]; Bertalanffy, 1968) defines systems as a set of interrelated elements. Components of the basic system theory model include inputs, processes, and outputs of the system (Swanson & Holton, 2001). In Kochan's (2003) model, the diversity components (inputs) execute individual or group actions (processes) that yield an expected or unexpected measure of outcome (outputs). GST utilizes a holistic approach for problem solving in an organization. Using a system approach and including race in the components of diversity might be useful to the field of HRD in identifying the interactive effects of diversity, groups, and outcomes. Further, the model in Figure II supports the conceptual model presented in this article.



Figure 2. *The model: The effects of diversity on group processes and outcomes*

From "The Effects of Diversity on Business Performance," by T. Kochan, K. Bezrukova, R. Ely, S. Jackson, A. Joshi, K. Jehn, et al., 2003, *Human Resource Management*, 42(1), p. 6. Reproduced with permission of author.

Research Informing Racial Groups, Organizational Groups, and Performance

While there are numerous articles that discuss the topic of race, few research studies have examined racial conflict in connection with racial groups, organizational groups, and performance terms of groups. Moreover, research conducted across multi-disciplines generally addresses race under the topic of diversity. As a result, racial diversity is the term most often returned when researching the topic of racial conflict in an organizational context. However, these two terms convey different meanings depending upon the context they are used. For example, many organizations embrace the term diversity as a desired state of being or an indicator of being in compliance with mandated laws of equity and fairness. While the following

selected studies are not exhaustive, they are representative of research most closely representing the criteria of the keyword search.

Christian, Porter, and Moffitt (2006) argue that research using social categorizations generally use constructs such as race, gender, and ethnicity that are more salient and recognizable; whereas, studies using a decision-making approach have tended to classify differences in knowledge, skills, and abilities which are “at least hypothetically, unrelated to the group performance” (p. 461). Therefore, “the effect of diversity in characteristics that are subject to social categorization processes potentially will lead to reduced cohesion within the group, while the influence of diversity in attributes that are perceived as being task-orientated potentially will lead to increased group performance” (Christian et al., 2006, p. 461).

Furthermore, the literature on diversity offers conflicting reports (Christian, Porter, & Moffitt, 2006). On one hand, diversity is suggested to improve performance among organizational groups because of the wider range of perspectives that it offers. On the other hand, the effects of diversity are reported as having the potential to exert a negative influence on organizational groups because of the differences in individual backgrounds (Milliken & Martins, 1996). Common to most race-based research is how the topic is framed. Because race is typically embedded within the construct of diversity, the issue of differences between people as a source of conflict rarely surfaces.

Milton and Westphal’s (2005) study on identity confirmation suggests that people relate to each other in ways that value self-identity, which may result in greater cooperation and enhanced performance. This study integrated social psychological theory, group identity, and social networking to examine cooperation and performance in organizational work groups. Significant findings from this study propose that “individuals’ social psychological positions in a group influences who they cooperate with and their level of performance...race-based diversity leads to dissimilarity in identity confirmation, hampering cooperation in work groups leading to social disintegration,” (Milton & Westphal, 2005, p. 205). This study suggests further research of racial groups embedded within an organization’s social systems and the effects on performance outcomes is needed.

Howard and Brakefield (2002) examined diversity among group members in relationship to performance and found the effects of diversity inconclusive. However this study, as has others, investigated an organization’s bottom-line based on diverse abilities and skills. This study does increase the various dimensions by which to study the effects of diversity on group performance (e.g., demographic diversity, cooperative performance, competitive performance). While racial conflict was not used as a variable, this study suggests another perspective by which to address racial conflict – affect on profitability.

Richard and Johnson (2001) studied the relationship between diversity and performance and introduced the concept of diversity orientation. Diversity orientation utilizes the varying backgrounds and cultures of an organization’s human resources to foster innovation and creativity, although this varying of perspectives “generates inefficiencies in that diverse groups lack a shared understanding, potentially making communication slow and laborious” (Richard & Johnson, 2001, p. 179). For this reason, a key contingency for organizational effectiveness is the level of diversity (race, gender, culture, age). Furthermore, the heterogeneity of groups in an

organization is usually associated with stereotyping, ingroup/outgroup effects, affective conflict, and employee turnover. This study made the assertion that racial and gender diversity is negatively related to organizational performance, which implies that implementation of appropriate interventions is critical to offsetting negative outcomes and sustaining the organization's orientation to diversity.

Jehn, Northcraft, and Neale (1999) identified types of diversity associated with performance in organizations: informational diversity (differences in knowledge bases), social category diversity (differences in people), and value diversity (differences in task or goal accomplishment). Findings from this research support the complex nature of studying the effects of social category diversity on workgroup performance, namely, "social category diversity resulted in increased relationship conflict" (Jehn et al., 1999, p. 758).

Pelled (1996) developed a model to explain the consequences of demographic diversity, conflict, and work group outcomes. This study suggests that the visibility and job relatedness of a diversity variable may influence the levels of affective (emotional) and substantive (task) conflict in the group. Consequently, affective and substantive conflict influences the amount of turnover from the group and the group's performance.

These six studies offer some indication that studying diversity among work groups does not necessarily capture the nature and context of racial conflict and performance outcomes. If organizations expect to achieve optimal performance among work groups for the ultimate performance of the organization, the word diversity as it applies to race must be deconstructed. Diversity cannot be sustained unless based on an understanding of the underlying causes of racism (Bernier & Rocco, 2003). Further, unless there is an understanding of racism, how will research lead to informed explanations and interventions for racial conflict?

As Lynham (2004) suggests, the field of HRD must consider the issue as well as the context as a scholarly approach to applying theory. In the absence of relevant theory to provide management with tools for practice, our mission should become one of theory building research. While there is evidence of research from related fields and disciplines such as organizational behavior and management, there is a lack of inquiry in the field of HRD as to the effects of racial conflict on organizational performance.

How the Findings Contribute to New Knowledge in Human Resource Development

Studying theories relating to racial conflict may be necessary for understanding the effect on performance outcomes. Whereas the theories proposed by Swanson (1995) inform individuals and performance, these theories are inadequate for informing racial groups and racial conflict. It is reasonable that we call upon system theory to explain outcomes from group processes. It is reasonable that we call upon theories from economics to explain the value of an organization's human resources. It is also reasonable that we call upon theories from psychology to inform us about individual behaviors. However, by adding racial groups and racial conflict, the context of the HRD issue changes. If the foundational theories proposed by Swanson are not sufficient to explain the new problem, we might consider looking at theories uncommon to HRD, such as CRT and Embedded Group Theory, or begin theory-building research of our own.

Introduces Racial Conflict to the Discourse

This article brings racial conflict to the discourse of HRD issues. Sheared (1994) explains this process as giving voice. Giving voice brings to the discourse previously silenced topics and seeks an understanding of whose knowledge is heard in the discourse. By giving voice to racial conflict as an issue of concern to HRD, four key discoveries were made.

First, improving relationships among racial groups is not an expressed goal of HRD, although “improvement is possibly the single most important idea in the profession and the core motivator of HRD professionals” (Swanson & Holton, 2001, p. 15). Second, the theoretical foundations as proposed by Swanson (1995) inform individual performance, but we have not added the variables of racial conflict among organizational groups as a concern to performance outcomes. Third, problems relating to conflict and tensions between racial groups are deeply embedded within the issues of group conflict. Racial groups are immersed within work teams and work groups, and as such, the nature, problems, and issues of the racial group, along with the inherent potential for conflict, are not addressed. The heterogeneity of the people within work teams is buried within the homogeneity of the work group task and function. Studying the nature and problems of groups within organizations without differentiating race from the general study of groups will not uncover the problems emerging from racial conflict. Finally, while the theoretical foundations inform individual performance, individuals are often developed in one-on-one relationships, such as mentoring or coaching, where the mentor-protégé relationship is cross-racial. There are few studies that have examined the effect of cross-racial developmental relationships such as mentoring (Blake-Beard, 1999; Thomas, 1993). If the mentor-protégé relationship is affected by racial conflict, individual development and performance may be hindered.

Uncovers the Language of Racism

Racial conflict may be embedded in the more commonly used language of diversity. However rarely are the effects of “race and racism used to examine diversity within organizations” (Bernier & Rocco, 2003, p. 14). Therefore, studying diversity can be misleading because the language of diversity conveys a variety of meanings, some of which include a state of being that organizations should strive for (valuing diversity, celebrating diversity, etc), thereby rendering invisible the issues of racial conflict. HRD should be concerned with deconstructing the terminology and attending to racial issues that may be occurring in the workplace. Left unattended, we lose sight of performance improvement as the purpose and essence of HRD.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The work of HRD researchers and scholars should be concerned with investigating and solving issues occurring everyday in the workplace. To this end, theory-building research should yield theory that is clear, understandable, and applicable to these everyday occurrences. If our work is to make a difference, we must broaden the scope of our ontological perspectives and embrace the multi-paradigms available to advance research and theory in the field of HRD.

Our workplaces will continue to pattern themselves from society. HRD must be adaptable to these changes and move towards new paradigms of research and theory. We must confront head-on the societal issues within the workplace as a means of ensuring high performing systems. To do so, the field of HRD should embrace research and theory from sociological and ethnic studies that focus on the interactions and relationships of people from varying races and backgrounds.

Further research is needed to expand the body of literature in HRD on the study of racial conflict in organizations. In doing so, we may begin to understand how to offer solutions for managing racial conflict and its impact on performance in the workplace. This study illustrated race-related research resides in multi-discipline research areas. As Lynham (2000) points out, there is “an absence of tried and tested methods of theory-building that enables us to develop theory from multiple research paradigms” (p. 167). However, researchers tend to isolate themselves within their own research communities. The HRD community of scholars and researchers is challenged to collaborate with researchers from other disciplines and engage in theory-building research addressing racial conflict among organizational groups. Minority researchers and scholars have primarily led the dominating conversation on racial topics in the workplace. Since minority voices are few, interest in racial issues is minimal.

HRD should engage in theory-building research as a means of responding to new problems and evaluating solutions so that we may direct our research towards a common language and frame of reference (Torraco, 1997). Clearly consistent, persistent, and rigorous inquiry is needed to validate applicable theories for problem solving issues in HRD. The conceptual model presented in this article is offered as an initial step toward theory-building research examining the effects of racial conflict on organizational performance.

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