A Typology of Intergroup Competencies

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The authors propose a theoretically and empirically grounded typology of 14 intergroup competence skills that may be applied across social group differences. The skills are classified according to two dimensions—approach (reflection and action) and focus (self, relationships, context, and organizational patterns). Self-related skills include becoming aware of one's cultural values and assumptions, committing to personal change, processing emotions, and reframing one's mental models. Relationship skills include empathizing with multiple perspectives, differentiating intent from impact, engaging in inquiry and openness, and engaging in responsible feedback. Contextual (critical consciousness) skills include connecting the personal to the cultural and societal and addressing dominant/nondominant group dynamics. Organizational skills include identifying systemic patterns, identifying one's role in perpetuating patterns, surfacing undiscussables, and advocating and engaging in systemic change.

Keywords: critical consciousness; cultural diversity; interpersonal relations; multicultural competencies; self-change; systems change

Most of us are challenged daily to interact effectively with individuals who are different from us in some way. Our lives and our workplaces are filled with diverse others, yet research has shown that people have more positive interactions with individuals

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who are similar to themselves demographically and attitudinally (Glaman, Jones, & Rozelle, 1996). Conversely, we are more likely to experience discomfort in situations where our significant group characteristics differ from those of others (Pelled, Eisenhardt, & Xin, 1999).

Accordingly, a growing body of literature on cultural competence and diversity competence has emerged (Ely & Thomas, 2001; Sue, 2001). Although this literature has contributed much to our understanding of competencies or skills for interacting with members of different social groups, only limited work has been done in specifying competencies needed to be effective across social groups. This article seeks to fill that gap by proposing a theoretically and empirically grounded typology of intergroup competencies that may be applied in personal and organizational settings across any social group difference.

BACKGROUND

Both cultural and diversity competence refer to the ability to establish effective relationships with members of diverse populations. Advocates for diversity and cultural competence have developed similar categories of competencies: (a) awareness about one's own biases and the benefits of change; (b) understanding and knowledge, particularly about specific cultural groups; and (c) action strategies for change, often including cross-cultural communication skills (Arrendondo et al., 1996; Cox & Beale, 1997).

This work has three limitations. First, although much attention has been paid to awareness and understanding, few authors have been explicit in describing specific skills or action strategies. Sue (2001), for example, referred to only general skills, such as the abilities to "engage in a variety of verbal/nonverbal helping styles" and "eliminate bias, prejudice, and discrimination" (pp. 798-799). Cox and Beale (1997) stated that they do not view "diversity competency as acquiring a list of skills but rather as working through a process of learning" (p. 3).

Second, although several authors (e.g., Stevenson, Cheung, & Leung, 1992) have described needed skills for dealing with specific cultures or social groups, most of us will simply lack time to learn about the group and subgroup norms of all those with whom we interact. What we do learn can be time limited: For example, terms such as *elderly, senior citizen, old person*, and *older adult* have had different connotations over the past few decades. Focusing on separate social groups may also obscure complex intersections among different sources of social identity (e.g., a disabled, third-generation Latina lesbian) or how dominant or nondominant group memberships vary from setting to setting.

Third, most of the diversity and cultural competence literature does not take full advantage of the foundational literature on how and why antagonisms across social groups occur or recent work on individual, group, and organizational strategies for fostering more productive interactions. This interdisciplinary literature includes theory and research on human behavior in the social environment (Germain, 1991),

organizational learning (Argyris, 1999), social cognition (Operario & Fiske, 1999), emotional self-regulation (Barrett, Gross, Christensen, & Benvenuto, 2001), intergroup bias (Hewstone, Rubin, & Willis, 2002), dominant/nondominant group memberships (Calvert & Ramsey, 1996), automatic stereotyping (Devine, 1996), and social-cognitive predictors of prejudice (e.g., modern and ambivalent racism, social dominance, and right-wing authoritarianism; Levy, 1999).

To overcome these limitations, a typology of intergroup competencies has been developed. Stangor (2004) defined a social group as "a collection of three or more individuals who are perceived, by themselves or others, to be a group" (p. 24).[1] Illustrative social groups include those distinguished by culture (e.g., race/ethnicity), biology (e.g., sex, age, sexual orientation), affiliations (e.g., religion, profession), hierarchy (e.g., positional authority, social class), geography (e.g., Middle Eastern, southwestern United States), personal style differences (e.g., personality or communication style), and sociopolitical affiliations (e.g., conservationist, pro-life). To be clear, these different social groups are not equivalent in terms of their histories of oppression. Neither would developing competencies that may be used with people in any of these groups substitute for gaining in-depth, group-specific knowledge and skills. Rather, the typology provides skills for intergroup competence in addition to any group-specific cultural or diversity competencies to reinforce the proposition that certain skills are generic across all social groups rather than pertinent to only certain ones. The typology explicitly concentrates on skills based on exciting new research demonstrating that people can unlearn ingrained habits such as automatic stereotyping (Galinsky & Moskowitz, 2000), reduce their intergroup biases (Hewstone et al., 2002), and foster organizational work climates in which differences are valued (Ely & Thomas, 2001). Thus, the typology makes unique contributions by identifying skills that are applicable across any social group difference and drawing from an extensive, interdisciplinary review of behavioral science theory and research.

A TYPOLOGY OF INTERGROUP COMPETENCIES

The typology consists of 14 skills that foster successful relationships among people in different social groups; these are classified according to two dimensions—approach and focus (Table 1). The approach dimension indicates whether we are reflecting about a situation or are actually taking action in hopes of changing it. As Schön (1983) explained, we are prompted to engage in on-the-spot reflection during an interaction when our familiar repertoire of skills and assumptions fails to yield desired outcomes. We then improvise in hopes of promoting a change. After the interaction, we further reflect on what occurred, our assumptions, and what we learned. As we experience this sequence of surprising situations, reflection, and improved actions, a self-reinforcing cycle of increasingly successful interactions develops. The focus dimension uses an ecological perspective (Germain, 1991) to indicate the target for our reflections or actions: ourselves, our relationships, the societal context, or organizational systems.

TABLE 1
A Typology of Intergroup Competencies

	Focus			
Approach	*Self: Rescripting Our Individual Story*	*Relationships: Revealing Each Others' Stories*	*ConteXt: Building Critical Consciousness*	*Organizations: Repatterning Systems*
Reflection	1. Becoming aware of own cultural values/assumptions 2. Committing to personal change	5. Empathizing with multiple perspectives 6. Differentiating intent from impact	9. Connecting the personal to the cultural and societal	11. Identifying systemic patterns 12. Identifying own role in perpetuating patterns
Action	3. Processing emotions 4. Reframing mental models	7. Engaging in inquiry and openness 8. Engaging in responsible feedback	10. Addressing dominant/ nondominant group dynamics	13. Surfacing undiscussables 14. Advocating and engaging in systemic change

SELF: RESCRIPTING OUR INDIVIDUAL STORY

To make sense of the world, people organize information into mental models (Senge, 1990). Transactional analysts use the term *scripts* to refer to mental models we have of ourselves (Steiner, 1974). Developed during early childhood in response to powerful parental injunctions, scripts govern and often limit our perceptions, behavior, and aspirations as adults.

People have different ways of examining their mental models, including introspection; talking with trusted friends, therapists, or coaches; and participation in personal and professional development workshops. However we choose to do it, understanding our own individual story as just one of many stories is key to intergroup competence. With this understanding, we may be able to rescript our story to enhance our effectiveness.

Intergroup Competence Skill 1: Becoming Aware of Own Cultural Values/Assumptions

Derived from our social group memberships, embedded cultural values and assumptions form some of the mental models through which we make meaning of the world. These mental models serve as perceptual categories or filters that enable our thinking about an experience, govern our emotional reactions to it, and may be activated rapidly, automatically, and beyond awareness (Shweder & Haidt, 2000).

One way to identify our implicit cultural assumptions is to consciously use our discomfort in an interaction as a prompt to ask ourselves what assumptions we are making about the other's behavior and whether these assumptions arise from our social group memberships. Research on dual processing in social cognition suggests that identifying our embedded assumptions is indeed feasible (Operario & Fiske, 1999). In the automatic processing mode, implicit cultural assumptions lead us to form spontaneous and simplistic judgments about others. With sufficient effort and practice, we may use deliberate processing to override this automatic processing by recognizing our automatic, negative judgments and positive projections as assumptions rather than "facts."

Repeated practice in surfacing assumptions may also reduce our biases and tendencies to stereotype. Devine (1996) referred to these tendencies as "the prejudice habit," the automatic and nonintentional responses that most of us have developed through a lifetime of socialization experiences. Even though we may have internalized egalitarian personal standards, most of us still find ourselves forming culturally ingrained, automatic stereotypes about others or worse, spontaneously engaging in prejudicial behavior. When automatic thoughts and actions are in conflict with our beliefs, guilt ensues, which Devine reported as helpful in breaking the prejudice habit. Consistent with the dual process model, research studies have demonstrated that low-prejudiced individuals who are highly internally motivated to control their prejudices can learn to reduce their automatic stereotyping and behaviors with repeated practice over time

(Blair, 2002). Questioning our assumptions rather than simply assuming the "rightness" of our own view takes time, effort, and a commitment to personal change.

Intergroup Competence Skill 2: Committing to Personal Change

Intergroup competence entails changing one's self, not blaming or seeking to change others. Rather than engage in "othering" behavior that perpetuates prejudices and distancing, we seek to improve our own ability to contribute to the success or failure of our interactions. Committing to personal change may create considerable angst. Schein (1996) noted that defensive reactions may be caused by learning anxiety, "the feeling that if we allow ourselves to enter a learning or change process, if we admit to ourselves and others that something is wrong or imperfect, we will lose our effectiveness, our self-esteem and maybe even our identity" (p. 60). Complexity theory offers some comfort, particularly if we are hoping that others will be the first to change. If we allow ourselves to change—to let go of our defensive reactions and ineffective behaviors—we may spawn a ripple effect of successive changes in our environment. Over time, people in our social networks may respond to our new behaviors with their own changes. These shifts may prompt changes in their social networks, which then transfer to still other interconnecting networks (Marion & Uhl-Bien, 2001).

Often however, despite our best efforts, change does not occur as rapidly as we would like. If so, the temptation to blame others or declare the situation hopeless may be great. Our commitment to personal change fortifies our willingness to remain vulnerable, take risks, and not get it right the 1st, 2nd, or even 10th time (Ramsey, 1994).

Intergroup Competence Skill 3: Processing Emotions

When, despite our best intentions, interactions across differences are unsatisfactory, we may feel unjustly accused, embarrassed, or frustrated. Instead of discounting these feelings, we might recognize them as signals to change our attitudes or behavior (George & Jones, 2001). The stronger our emotional reactions, the greater the potential benefit of self-regulation by fully experiencing and then processing our emotions. Most people have not learned how to do this and are not even aware that technologies for processing emotions exist. Rather, many have been socialized to "keep a stiff upper lip" for fear of showing weakness.

Unexamined emotions can interfere with productive interactions across differences for at least four reasons. First, negative emotions constrain our ability to perceive alternative courses of action (Fredrickson, 2000). Second, we may inadvertently engage in prejudicial scapegoating as we project onto others emotions we deny within ourselves (Newman, Duff, & Baumeister, 1997). Third, suppressed emotions create internal havoc through the rebound effect—becoming preoccupied with the very thing we are trying to avoid. As a consequence, short-term memory, processing performance, and ability to empathize with others are reduced (Gross, 2001). Fourth, suppressed emotions leak out anyway. Others notice our negative affect and unconscious cues and form possibly inaccurate attributions about their causes (Devine, 1996).

Suppressing our emotions may also make it harder to differentiate our feelings. Yet, the more able we are to differentiate rather than suppress our emotions, the greater our ability to self-regulate them through emotional processing (Barrett et al., 2001). In recent years, several self-directed structured methods have emerged for processing emotions. Those with solid empirical support include writing about one's emotional experiences (Pennebaker, 1997) and mindfulness meditation practice (Davidson et al., 2003). We process our emotions so they lose their charge. Once the charge is gone, we can think and respond to others more effectively.

Intergroup Competence Skill 4:
Reframing Mental Models

Gaining intergroup competence requires knowing how to free ourselves from perceptual shackles that constrict our thinking. Research has demonstrated that cognitive restructuring and mental imagery can help people reframe their negative self-talk so they may choose more effective behavior. One cognitive restructuring approach contains several steps, including (a) identify antecedent events, (b) identify related beliefs, (c) identify negative consequences, (d) dispute beliefs, and (e) become energized by replacement thoughts (Seligman, 1991). Mental imagery entails creating mental representations of desired events or outcomes as though they were actually taking place. Repeated mental imagery rehearsals have been shown to alter people's judgments and behavior in learning, memory, and athletic and intellectual performance (Blair, Ma, & Lenton, 2001).

Both cognitive restructuring and mental imagery have been empirically demonstrated to help people reduce a powerful form of mental modeling: automatic negative stereotyping of others. Effective methods include substituting egalitarian beliefs for stereotypical thoughts, consciously focusing on unique characteristics of the stereotyped individual, and imagining concrete details of a counterstereotypic image (e.g., a strong rather than fragile woman) (Blair et al., 2001; Monteith, Sherman, & Devine, 1998).

RELATIONSHIPS: REVEALING EACH OTHER'S STORIES

Devine (1996) noted that many of us lack skills for "how to do the intergroup thing well" (p. 11). This skill deficiency stems from our perceptual filters. We categorize to simplify, and then the categorization becomes the basis for stereotypes (Macrae & Bodenhausen, 2000). Placing negative judgments on the stereotypes is an easy next step, leading us to derogate those who are different while favoring those with whom we identify (Hewstone et al., 2002). We may also believe that people from different social groups are stereotyping us or our social group (Vorauer & Kumhyr, 2001). As a result, our strained and awkward behaviors may appear to others as antipathy toward them as members of their social group (Devine, 1996). The four relationship skills are intended to help us get better at doing "the intergroup thing."

Intergroup Competence Skill 5:
Empathizing With Multiple Perspectives

More than 40 years ago, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. inspired a nation when he declared, "I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character" (Carson, 1998, p. 226). This statement reinforced a cultural taboo against even seeing social group differences. Dominant group members of good will may assert, "I don't see color" or "I don't care who they sleep with, just don't put it in front of my face." Some decide it's better to walk past a person in a wheelchair struggling to open a door rather than risk offering assistance that might imply the person's incompetence. King, however, cautioned against *judging* based on differences; he did not caution against *noticing* them. In that same speech, he explicitly celebrated social group difference by anticipating "the day when . . . black men and white men, Jews and Gentiles, Protestants and Catholics, will be able to join hands" (Carson, 1998, p. 227).

Ignoring differences has unintended consequences. It trivializes the experiences of nondominant group members, prevents power inequalities and other differences among social groups from being addressed, and implies that membership in nondominant groups is inherently undesirable (O'Brien, 2000). In the name of treating different others as "just the same," dominant group members end up privileging their own social group norms, and nondominant group members delegitimize their unique perspectives and experiences. An alternative is cultivating the skill of empathizing with multiple perspectives.

Empathy may manifest as cognitive understanding of others' perspectives and experiences (perspective taking) or as sympathy and compassion (empathic concern) (Stephan & Finlay, 1999). Vescio, Sechrist, and Paolucci (2003) compared perspective taking ("imagine how the person feels") with remaining objective ("try not to get caught up in how the person feels") and found that perspective takers experienced more empathetic concern, were more likely to consider situational context, were less likely to stereotype, and had more positive intergroup attitudes. Galinsky and Moskowitz (2000) found that perspective taking activated participants' self-concepts; this in turn led to more positive evaluations and less stereotyping.

By repeatedly empathizing with others in different situations, we eventually develop the skill of empathizing with multiple perspectives simultaneously. We strive to see and feel all sides of an issue and become comfortable with contradictions. Rather than claiming that social group differences are irrelevant, we acknowledge these differences and open the door for people to bring their whole selves into their interactions with us and a richer form of mutual learning to develop.

Intergroup Competence Skill 6:
Differentiating Intent From Impact[2]

Successful management of intergroup relationships requires being sensitive to our impact on others regardless of our intent. Even if we have benign motives, our words or

actions may hurt another. Differentiating intent (which only we can know unless we articulate it) from impact (which only the other person can know unless they articulate it) requires awareness that a "disconnect" between them is possible or even likely, and monitoring of verbal and nonverbal reactions to our statements and behaviors (Stone, Patton, & Heen, 1999). Here is where emotional awareness and empathy can help. When someone reacts negatively to something we've said or done, we often "feel" it. The feeling is a clue that something is not as we intended. Reflection may generate alternative interpretations of our actions from the other's perspective. If the other person responds defensively, perhaps our tone or actions appeared accusatory. Similarly, if another's actions hurt or anger us, we avoid jumping to the conclusion that they meant to harm or undermine us.

For example, who prefers what terms: *African American* or *Black*? *Chicano/ Chicana* or *Hispanic*? *Handicapped* or *person with disabilities*? *Sexual orientation* or *sexual preference*? *Oriental* or *Asian American*? *Caucasian or White*? If we sense that someone dislikes terms we use, four common errors are to (a) assume that it's not our problem if the person is offended ("She just has a chip on her shoulder!"); (b) assume that the other person is responsible for monitoring our words or behavior ("He needs to tell me if it bothers him."); (c) throw up our hands, certain that someone will always be upset; or (d) dismiss the person's statements as undue censorship on our freedom of speech. Distinguishing intent from impact requires a more skilled response: We might apologize for any unintended negative impact and inquire about the preferred term and reasons for it. The skill of inquiry will help with this.

Intergroup Competence Skill 7:
Engaging in Inquiry and Openness[3]

Through inquiry, we seek to understand more about others—what they mean and how they perceive what we mean. Through openness, we seek to render ourselves more understandable to others (Argyris, 1999; Senge, 1990).

We practice inquiry by inviting others to make their thinking processes visible so we might compare our assumptions to theirs (Senge, 1990). Inquiry goes beyond simply asking questions. Commonly, people ask questions to ascertain facts. Inquiry uses questions to uncover underlying assumptions and meanings.

We practice openness by assuming responsibility for making our own thinking processes visible to others and encouraging them to challenge our assumptions and conclusions. We welcome others' questions because we may be talking about something that is tacit knowledge to us yet unclear to them. Openness is particularly critical across social group differences. Rather than having people's different mental models as barriers, we practice openness so they may become a source of learning. As shown in Table 2, the practices of openness and inquiry parallel one another.

A cautionary note: When practicing these skills, dominant group members in particular should take special care to invite rather than demand responses from nondominant group members. This precaution helps us avoid appearing intrusive, entitled, or patronizing.

TABLE 2
Engaging in Inquiry and Openness

Inquiry		*Openness*	
Practice	*Example*	*Practice*	*Example*
Probing and asking for examples	"Could you help me understand your thinking here?"	Giving examples so that our thinking processes become clearer	"Here's an example of what I mean."
Asking about the reasoning that led to conclusions	"What factors led you to this conclusion?"	Explaining our reasoning by connecting the dots	"I came to this conclusion because . . ."
Asking about shades of difference	"How does this differ from what occurred during Situation C?"	Encouraging others to explore our subtle meanings	"What do you think about the difference between A and B?"
Testing understanding of others' views	"Is your basic concern that . . .?"	Welcoming others' views	"Have I overlooked something?"
Testing assumptions about others' behaviors and motives	"I'm guessing here, but are A and B two of your goals?"	Surfacing concerns about our behaviors or motives	"Does anything bother you about why I did it that way?"

Intergroup Competence Skill 8:
Engaging in Responsible Feedback

Feedback skills help us provide and solicit feedback in ways that build rather than damage relationships. In the context of differences, power relationships may affect how feedback is given or received. Both dominant and nondominant group members may be reluctant to give or ask for accurate feedback from one another, particularly if the setting or work culture does not encourage it. For example, a manager may want to avoid giving feedback that might hurt a direct report's feelings, and the direct report might fear retribution if he or she gives critical feedback to his or her manager. Similarly, a White person giving critical feedback to a person of color might worry about appearing insensitive, and a person of color might fear being labeled as too aggressive if he or she gives critical feedback to the White person. The feedback skills will help overcome such hesitations.

Although some people have difficulty giving appreciative feedback, most of us are particularly challenged to give corrective feedback. Four principles enhance the likelihood that our corrective feedback will be well received. The first principle, choice, sets the stage for feedback as a mutual exchange rather than one-way delivery. The next three principles help us provide concrete information about standards undergirding the feedback and convey the belief that feedback recipients are capable of attaining those standards. The four principles are as follows:

- Choice: Avoid seeking to change others' behavior; rather, give information so people may decide whether they wish to change. Accordingly, provide choice in when to hear the feedback, whether to accept it, and how to use it. By acknowledging people's choices, we minimize psychological reactance—resistance to losing important freedoms (Brehm & Brehm, 1981).
- Future oriented: Speak to the future, not the past. Individuals are more responsive to feedback they believe is given to support their development and growth rather than to blame or accuse (Deci & Ryan, 1985).
- Self-correcting or self-reinforcing: Provide informational rather than controlling feedback. Feedback becomes informational when people are provided with sufficient information about expectations so they may monitor their own behavior in the future (e.g., "This report addresses the first two questions but not the third."). Feedback is experienced as controlling when a judgment is rendered without explanation (e.g., "Your report is terrible."). People are more likely to feel intrinsically motivated if they are given informational rather than controlling feedback (Deci & Ryan, 1985).
- Reinforcement: During interactions subsequent to the feedback, provide appreciative feedback about any movement in the desired direction. Individuals rarely change as fast as we would like; small, tentative steps are common (Meyerson, 2001), and periodic relapse may occur until the new behavior becomes habitual.

Seeking feedback is also an important skill. Research has found that managers who seek to determine how well they are meeting expectations by direct inquiry or monitoring performance feedback data are regarded as more effective than those who only monitor indirect cues from others' behavior or the environment. Furthermore, those who ask for negative feedback are seen as more effective than those who seek positive feedback (Tsui, Ashford, St. Clair, & Xin, 1995).

Skill in asking for feedback may be even more critical for nondominant group members because dominant group members with egalitarian beliefs may be particularly reluctant to give critical feedback to nondominant members. In a study by Harber (1998), White reviewers provided more lenient feedback to essay writers believed to be Black than to those believed to be White.

CONTEXT: BUILDING CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Based on Freire (1992), Mustakova-Possardt (1995) defined critical consciousness as "the ability to understand, relate personally to, and influence larger social reality" (¶3). Instead of accepting the status quo as given or inevitable, critical consciousness "engages the creative capacity of the individual to imagine a better way and leads to the individual becoming a connected and caring agent in his/her social world" (Mustakova-Possardt, 1995, ¶16). We build critical consciousness when we connect the personal with the cultural and societal and address dominant/nondominant group dynamics influencing our interactions.

Intergroup Competence Skill 9: Connecting the Personal to the Cultural and Societal

Incidents initially interpreted as private troubles at the intrapersonal or interpersonal levels often reflect public issues at the cultural and societal levels. At the intrapersonal level, we may conclude that the person is a jerk; at the interpersonal level, we may describe the situation as a personality conflict. To move beyond these easy explanations, we search for contextual explanations by examining how cultural and societal factors infuse the conflict. This may require complex analysis because all four of these forces (intrapersonal, interpersonal, cultural, and societal) are operating simultaneously and sometimes in contradictory ways. Critical consciousness allows us to take action within the context of this complexity.

Intergroup Competence Skill 10: Addressing Dominant/Nondominant Group Dynamics

Addressing dominant/nondominant group dynamics requires understanding that our relationships may be influenced by societal and historical classifications of dominance or nondominance—beyond what is happening in a particular interaction (Bell, Meyerson, Nkomo, & Scully, 2003).

Nondominant group members are often acutely aware of the subtle ways in which systems and individuals privilege dominant members and stigmatize nondominant members. To nondominant group members, conflicts with dominant group members often reflect system-level dynamics they and their ancestors have experienced all their lives. Dominant group members, however, often lack awareness of the unwritten norms that differentially benefit them and unconsciously assume these norms reflect

the "proper" way for things to be (Calvert & Ramsey, 1996). Because they are focusing their attention on the presumed deviance of nondominant group members, dominant group members may find it difficult to believe that their actions appear insensitive, uncaring, or prejudiced (Vorauer & Kumhyr, 2001).

Individuals who primarily identify with a nondominant group status may find it difficult to see themselves as also having dominant group status. Here's a true example. A White female chair of a multicultural community group was one of several people accusing a Black male member of trying to take over one of the group's activities. From her vantage point, his behavior was typical of men who try to usurp women in leadership roles. From his vantage point, she was yet another White person accusing him of acting "uppity" and "out of place." Both were able to articulate the relative powerlessness they felt in their nondominant group roles (she as female, he as Black), yet neither initially understood how their actions were also perceived by the other as typical of their respective dominant groups (she as White, he as male).

To address dominant/nondominant group dynamics in the context of their interaction, both persons could have responded to the other's charge of gender or racial bias with sensitivity to the other's historical perspective, recognizing that it is logical for a nondominant group member to question whether conscious or unconscious biases affect any dominant group member's actions. The Black man could have explained that he did indeed respect her leadership, yet he intentionally took the initiative because he had doubted the group would move quickly enough on the issue. In so doing, he asserts his power and responsibility while offering her respect historically denied to women leaders. The White woman could have applauded his initiative and requested that she be kept more closely in the loop. In this way, she would have supported his right to take initiative, a right historically denied to Black men, while asserting her power and responsibility as the overall group leader. By recognizing how systemic factors and historical perspectives impinged on their here-and-now interactions, both could have helped produce more desirable outcomes.

ORGANIZATIONS: REPATTERNING SYSTEMS[4]

Systems change is not for the fainthearted. The preceding intergroup competence skills have involved uncertainty, but the risk exposure has only been in interaction with one person or a few. When we decide to undertake systems change, we risk incurring the wrath of the relatively powerful who benefit from the status quo and that of the relatively powerless who fear that their position in the social system, no matter how unsatisfactory, will be jeopardized. Yet if we only work on our intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, we collude in supporting systems that perpetuate dysfunctional conflicts and inequitable allocation of resources among members of different social groups. Our critical consciousness skills help us become aware of these inequalities, yet we must overcome our fears to act on that awareness.

Intergroup Competence Skill 11:
Identifying Systemic Processes and Patterns

Most of us have been socialized to focus on individual culpability rather than systemic patterns. Thus, we often overlook mostly invisible systemic patterns in the background that provide a breeding ground for problems. To identify unintended effects of organizational structures and processes, we ask how one or more of an organization's policies and procedures, communication channels, reporting relationships, leadership, reward systems, and other characteristics favor or penalize different social groups. Are only verbal, aggressive people considered management material? Does informal mentoring support some groups and not others? Similar questions may be asked about time-off policies, accessibility of physical workspaces, recruiting practices, performance appraisal systems, and career development programs.

In addition, we might also consider systemic patterns that cut across processes. Senge (1990) identified several "systems archetypes" that repeatedly occur in systems of all types and sizes. Three of these archetypes particularly help in understanding group-based inequalities: fixes that fail (adopting a quick fix that eventually goes awry), shifting the burden (applying a symptomatic rather than fundamental solution), and success to the successful (wherein the successful are increasingly granted resources that eventually ensure their dominance). All three patterns mitigate against meaningful remedies to inequalities.

Intergroup Competence Skill 12:
Identifying Own Role in Perpetuating Patterns

Once we are able to identify systemic processes and patterns, uncovering our own role can be enlightening and humbling. Eventually—and sometimes painfully—we recognize how our actions support those systemic patterns and that it's not just something "out there" that needs to change. We ourselves are contributors to the situations we decry.

Sometimes the patterns that maintain inequalities can be very subtle. Cultural rules used by employees to address each other may reinforce distant or demeaning relationships (Baker, 1995). Both high- and low-status groups might "consciously and unconsciously perpetuate existing social arrangements" to reduce dissonance, gain a sense of control, or support a belief in a just world (Jost, Pelham, & Carvallo, 2002, p. 587). Our collusion in the system may be active (by endorsing quick fixes or reward systems that privilege our own social groups) or passive (by failing to advocate for a systemic change that would improve the success potential of nondominant group members).

One way to identify our role is to search for patterns that exist in an organizational unit, the larger organization, or an interorganizational network. Parallel process theory suggests that patterns occurring in one part of a system are likely to be replicated in other parts (Smith, Simmons, & Thames, 1989). Accordingly, once we identify a pattern elsewhere in the system, we then explore whether the pattern is replicated in our part of the system.

Intergroup Competence Skill 13:
Surfacing Undiscussables

Argyris (1999) noted that some topics are so uncomfortable that they are undiscussable in organizational settings; even the fact that they are undiscussable is undiscussable. People holding nondominant views may remain silent for fear of being isolated from those supporting dominant views (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003). As those with nondominant opinions become more silent and those with dominant views become more vocal, dominant views become foremost over time, even at the societal level. This concretely illustrates the success to the successful archetype discussed previously.

Perlow and Williams (2003) noted that we often choose silence because we are "aware of how terribly painful it can be to raise and work through differences" (p. 54). Yet the penalty for silence is considerable. When negative emotions are buried beneath the surface, defensiveness and distrust flourish, and relationships we hope to preserve through our silence become undermined. Social group divisions become amplified, and our organizations or groups suffer as new ideas are withheld and superficial discussions about critical issues prevail (Bowen & Blackmon, 2003).

On July 29, 1920, Mahatma Gandhi gave a speech to prepare a nation for the anticipated campaign of "non-cooperation" and likely reactions of those in opposition. Given the likelihood of ridicule, repression, and persecution from a powerful opponent, Gandhi advised three courses of action: an "open and truthful manner," "abstention from violence," and "persistence" (Gandhi, 1922). Consistent with his advice, surfacing undiscussables may be more successful if we do the following:

- Maintain an "open and truthful manner"—that is, use the skill of openness and invite others to freely inquire about our reasoning and actions.
- Avoid violent expressions as well as blaming and shaming of individuals. Instead, encourage shared commitment to correct the problem at the systemic level.
- Persist by surfacing the undiscussable during opportune times and repeatedly surfacing it as opportunities occur. Undiscussables are more likely to be well received during times when normal work rhythms are disturbed by either a disruptive event or a temporary hiatus in activity. The former may predispose people to explore new approaches to old problems; the latter may increase the likelihood that people will take the time to entertain new ideas (Staudenmayer, Tyre, & Perlow, 2002).

Surfacing undiscussables entails (a) discerning what is undiscussable in a given context, (b) openly acknowledging its existence by selecting an appropriate "name" for it, and (c) in so doing, promoting cognitive dissonance by exposing the gap between the current and desired realities. Surfacing undiscussables sets the stage for systemic change (Argyris, 1999).

Intergroup Competence Skill 14:
Advocating and Engaging in Systemic Change

Volumes have been written on how to effect change; nevertheless, many change efforts are unsuccessful (Armenakis & Bedeian, 1999). People who do not understand

the change process are likely to make the following errors when attempting to induce others to change:

- announce the change they think is best and offer rational, logical reasons for it;
- assume that change cannot occur unless "everybody" or people high in rank (e.g., top management) support it;
- argue their position to those who oppose the change;
- label those who oppose the change with adjectives such as *turf-protecting, naïve*, or *incompetent*;
- if change does not occur fast enough, either push harder for the desired change or abandon the change effort altogether.

Meyerson (2001) suggested instead that individuals initiate systemic change by "making a difference in small but steady ways and setting examples from which others can learn" (p. 94). The goal is to initiate a small change that will spread through networks within the organization so eventually larger-scale change will appear to occur naturally. If people experience success in making small but meaningful changes, they may be more willing to take on larger challenges later (Rogers, 2003).

To pinpoint a good lever for change, we identify visible and invisible systemic patterns, examine our role in perpetuating those patterns, and analyze others' receptivity to the surfaced undiscussables. We then do our homework by sharing our ideas and soliciting suggestions from probable supporters and neutral observers. As we initiate the change, we not only expect opposition, we embrace it (Maurer, 1996). This entails going into inquiry to try to determine what the defenders are protecting and how their concerns may be accommodated within the context of the desired change. Embracing the resistance minimizes psychological reactance (Brehm & Brehm, 1981) and allows people time to absorb the change. As we address people's concerns, the change efforts may incorporate elements worth preserving in the system and ultimately gain a broader base of support. Embracing the resistance also may prevent us from engaging in behaviors we criticize in others. To set an example, we avoid persecuting the persecutors, oppressing the oppressors, opposing the opposers, or not listening to those who aren't listening to others.

Throughout the change effort, no matter how long it takes (and it always takes longer than seems reasonable), we remain steadfast. Steadfastness is not obstinacy; rather, it entails consistency in one's value-based position and flexibility that does not compromise the appearance of consistency (Nemeth, 1986).

CONCLUSION

After reviewing an earlier version of this article, a colleague commented, "You've identified the skills we need. How do we actually develop these skills? How do we remain 'open' with people who have control issues and a history of manipulation?" A step-by-step approach to developing these skills is beyond the scope of this article. Rather, our intent is simply to provide a theoretically and empirically grounded

typology of skills useful to researchers and practitioners alike. In subsequent work, we plan to explain how to go about actually developing the skills.

Our colleague's words, however, probably reflect concerns of others. What do we do when we experience flashes of anger at a person we believe is deliberately or unconsciously destructive? How do we protect ourselves from victimization? The answer has been a theme throughout this article: When confronted with such situations, we change ourselves, recognizing that no matter how much we may wish otherwise, we can control only our own behaviors. As long as our focus is on the behavior of the other and how that person should change, we diminish our ability to effect meaningful change. When confronted with a dissonant situation or negative interaction, we use the following theory-in-use for change: We set the intention to change ourselves, anticipating that as we alter our own thoughts, emotions, and behaviors, our relationships and eventually the systems of which we are a part will inevitably change in response.

We change ourselves by working through the intergroup skills. We identify our own cultural values and assumptions and process our emotions to resolve our anger, hurt, or fear. Freed from overwhelming emotions, we choose more effective action by cognitively reframing our mental models about ourselves, the person, and the context. We seek to understand and empathize with that person's perspective and distinguish his or her intent from the impact on us, recognizing that we are only assuming—but cannot know for sure—that the person intends harm. We use inquiry, openness, and responsible feedback to promote mutual understanding. We identify how larger societal or cultural dynamics may influence our interactions and address these dynamics openly, considering our own and the other person's social group history. Concurrently, we identify systemic patterns that support our negative interactions. How have we implicitly colluded in supporting these patterns? What undiscussables are simply too hot to talk about, thereby ensuring that the patterns remain unaddressed? Armed with that knowledge, we take small but meaningful steps to change systemic patterns so the negative interactions just experienced won't again find fertile ground. We take these proactive steps whether or not the individual responds or continues to persist in onerous behavior. In so doing, we maintain empathy for the person and remain alert to any subtle signs that the person's harsh stance is softening. We don't expect immediate change. Rather, we remain steadfast for however long it takes, recognizing that if we persist, change is inevitable.

Is this easy? Obviously not. The key, however, is to begin with ourselves—to change our thinking, our strategies, and our behavior. A negative interaction with another may or may not reflect the other's malfeasance, yet the lack of resolution of that interaction does reflect our lack of skills in handling the situation. Until we look within, we may flounder, feel demoralized, or passively collude in the continuance of oppressive and unjust patterns. We may take heart from the Dalai Lama's explanation of how he maintains his effectiveness despite ongoing challenges with colleagues:

> I have to start with the irritation I feel when I have to answer a nagging question from a co-worker. I have to appreciate that person as someone who also has a job to do and whose needs are at least as important, if not more so, than my own . . . then I can see the purpose of my job is really to alleviate

> suffering. But it's not easy to maintain. . . . It's a mind-training exercise that I have to engage in all the time. And crabbiness at work is the sign that I need to do it again, and again, and again, until one day the feeling just comes naturally, spontaneously, and for a moment, . . . I feel great joy that just comes out of nowhere. (His Holiness the Dalai Lama & Cutler, 2003, p. 116)

NOTES

1. We selected Stangor's (2004) definition of a social group because of its emphasis on the subjective perception of being a group member. Stangor arrived at this definition after reviewing 13 other definitions by various authors. In explaining why he excluded dyads from his definition and did not focus on them in his book on social groups, Stangor wrote,

> Many people do define dyads as groups. Although this is not unreasonable, dyads are usually studied separately from larger social groups, and we will not address them in great detail in this book. *The reason for this is primarily because in most cases the dyad does not usually produce a "group feeling" on the part of the individuals who comprise it, and as we will see later in this chapter, this feeling is an important part of group behavior* [italics added]. (p. 6)

2. The authors gratefully acknowledge the contribution of Mary Harlan, Harlan Consulting, to our conceptualization of the intent-impact distinction.

3. We chose the term *openness* rather than *advocacy* (as used by Argyris, 1999, and Senge, 1990) because in several disciplines (e.g., social work, public health, and public administration), *advocacy* refers to a staunch defense and promotion of a position while possibly concealing concerns or motives from one's opponents. In contrast, *openness* implies willingly revealing one's meanings, understandings, and motives.

4. "Systems" can be found at many levels: intrapersonal, interpersonal, family, organizational, interorganizational, societal, and so on. Because fundamental attributes of systems are the same no matter the level, when we provide an organizational example, the application of the concept can also be made at other levels.

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