Verena Bruchhagen/ Dr. Iris Koall

**Stream:**

**Handling Resistance as Resource in Diversity Practice**

We rarely can understood diversity practice without looking on what touches and triggers people in this context: who is full of emphasis and enthusiasm, who feels fascinated, invited and included, who hesitates or fears connecting diversity processes and - at least - who will start interactions and strategies full of resistance against it. Diversity brings up different forms of resistance (for example Erfurt 2004) as ambiguous, strenuous and stressful phenomena of diversity practice. These phenomenon’s not only challenge the success but also the quality of diversity work.

Nevertheless, resistance can appear as resistance against change and may be a conservative rejection of growth or maturation – or on the other hand as well as wish and desire for more (radical) change against stagnancy. Resistance in this perspective is a systemic form that reacts on irritation of the used procedure. It is substantial of systemic development - to operate the ambiguity of change and stability. In this sense, resistance against diversity can be interpreted as *bad* opposition against rising democracy as well as *good* withstood against neoliberal enhancement, depending on the standpoint of interest.

Our grounding hypothesis is: one should expect resistance as an inevitable phenomenon in processes of developing diversity culture or implementing Diversity Change Management. Ambiguity in resistance or defense can became relevant on different levels of system functions.

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| **Individual**  Resistance is the opportunity to keep in touch with the challenge of different perspectives but preserves the well-known identity construction. One function is to protect against the vulnerability of the self. | Defense as Protection of the Self (A. Freud, 1936/ 1959) |
| **Group**/ Group Dynamics:  Resistance as moment to reject involvement, irritation, growth and to build boundaries against external influence. By devaluating diverse perspectives the function of “othering“ is to stabilize group identity as an attempt to keep up dominance. | Predominant defense  mechanisms (Bion, 1961)  Defense, Resistance as Interpersonal Mechanism in diversity group processes (Vater, 2004) |
| **Organization**  By selecting the relevant diversity influences, depending on diverse markets and personal strategies, organizations often fail to work with resistance as necessary process. Hitherto, cultural dominance works as defense, selection and socialization process to avoid diverse influences. The intended “diversity learning approach” is rare reality. Dealing with resistance might be a resource for innovation and sustainable development. | System Psychodynamic Approach to Organizations  (Gould, 2006)  Institutionalized Defence (Mentzos, 1976)  Containment (Bion, 1990)  Defensive Organization (Lichtenberg/ Slap, 1970) |

By dealing with diversity processes in the context of training, management and teaching, we can experience and observe resistance as a kind of dominance, submission or rejection of change.

We ask for papers or events, which relate to resistance and defense mechanisms as theoretical constructs mainly based on socio-dynamic system theory and psychodynamic theories. There are early psychoanalytical explanations, that frame resistance and rejection as function to stabilize the EGO (Anna Freud), as well as processes of rejecting latency to defend against assumptions of fear and danger (Menzies Lyth, 1988) We might also rely to the mechanism of splitting, dividing, projection and introjection to keep up an idea of certainty and security, which Melanie Klein (1961) has described for depending infant and what - as a psychodynamic or psychosocial concept - is furthermore interesting. This might relate furthermore to the concept of maturity, which is a result of using irritation as chance to learn and enhance oneself from the phantasy of non-fragility.

It can be argued that resistance and defense mechanisms in many ways can be seen as integrative and helpful constructs (this assumption starts with Anna Freud in 1936) and that the potential fields of application actually have a wide ranging scope in organizational and institutional dimension. The application of resistance constructs in different fields of diversity practice with special regard to coping strategies and resilience competence for Diversity Practitioners (Bruchhagen, Koall, Wengelski-Strock, 2016) is the core work in this stream.

Resistance also deconstructs the concept of diversity as business case, in a neoliberal sense of optimization an easy going dealing with difference. We argue that looking on concrete phenomena of resistance against diversity (e.g. in trainings, educational contexts, coaching and supervision…) enables us to operate diversity work as an attempt of more consciousness in professional interventions.

We would like to discuss different patterns and mechanisms, e.g. defusing diversity potential in tenderly started working processes or even experiences of freezing the beginning of change processes or react with suppression. There will be the opportunity to explore the multiplicity of forms and dynamics and different practical methods and theoretical ideas in handling defense and resistance in the context learning, training, and teaching diversity. In this manner, it will be interesting to exchange experiences against diversity learning as defending practice. One might know normalizing of racism and discrimination in statements like: “there has always been racism and nationalism all over the world and any times”. This generalization “*prevents*” the speaker to differentiate and analyze the institutional, ideological embeddedness of discriminatory practice. It provides “*relief*” of responsibility for concrete action. An action to support diversity consciousness is to relate to historical, overarching development. However, there are also personal experiences like: “my best friend has a migration back ground and s/he never experiences or talks about discrimination.” This might function to avoid reflection and reject insights as “to theoretical” to offer practical guidance. The work with privileges – which is developed by Peggy McIntosh and continuously developed by diversity researcher and trainer – often causes resistance by accepting the own privileged situation. In training situations, the participants experience non-concrete, but instantly felt guilt. These negative feelings are projected on the training concept, persons, and methods – on everything available.

In this stream, we would like to invite Diversity Professionals who might have experienced their role as Change Agents or Tempered Radicals (Meyerson/Scully, 1995) in groups and organizations and who are interested to systematize, to diagnose and interpret resistance phenomena.

We invite papers and events, especially case studies to unfold forms and appearance of resistance as systemic embodied, social practices. In this perspective, it will be suspending to render hidden and unpublished latent agendas in diversity processes. We are looking forward to deconstruct the mechanisms, ideologies, habits, sayings of resistance against Diversity Management. Cui bono?

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