

Mapping Capacity to Deal with Difference: Towards a Diagnostic Tool for Critical Diversity Literacy

Melissa Steyn

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0644-3606>

University of the Witwatersrand

melissa.steyn@wits.ac.za

Scott Burnett

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1497-9099>

University of the Witwatersrand

auschi@gmail.com

Nceba Ndzwayiba

<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5688-9035>

University of the Witwatersrand

nceban@webmail.co.za

Abstract

South Africa today faces both increasingly radical calls for systemic change from various sectors, and apparently intransigent organisational cultures whose performance in delivering racial “transformation” and equality in the workplace has been extremely disappointing. It is argued that a different way of managing organisations is possible, but that this requires both a commitment to a new set of values, and the possession of the skills to deal with difference, which are summarised as critical diversity literacy (CDL). In order to improve CDL capacity within organisations, baseline measurements are necessary to tailor interventions and to track progress. We propose a preliminary metric based on data gathered from practical interventions, including leadership interviews in a large national organisation, that revolve around five thematic hooks: (1) society at large, (2) the organisation’s understanding of the past, (3) ideologies around change, (4) apportioning of responsibility, and (5) the conception of difference. Ways of identifying capacity (positive scripts) or lack thereof (negative scripts) are proposed and discussed as a preface to future work on deepening and refining the model.

Keywords: critical diversity literacy; transformation; diversity management; measurement



Introduction

The transformation project in South Africa is in crisis. Almost a quarter of a century after the demise of legal apartheid, there is a growing sense that the “ghosts” of the past have not been laid to rest (Ramphela, 2009). These ghosts continue to haunt, and even terrorise, the present. In the private sector, top managers are disproportionately from the white and Indian apartheid-era “population groups.” In the private sector, white men, who make up only 5,3 per cent of the economically active population, account for just under 60 per cent of top management positions (Commission for Employment Equity, 2017, p. 16). Over the decade between 2007 and 2017, which saw the economically active African population increase 3,9 percentage points from 74,1 per cent to 78 per cent, the representation of Africans in the top management echelons grew by a meagre 3,1 points, from the low base of 11,3 per cent in 2007 to 14,4 per cent in 2017 (Commission for Employment Equity, 2007, 2017). Coloured people, who make up around 10 per cent of South Africa’s economically active population, increased their share by only 0,2 per cent over one decade, still accounting for less than 5 per cent of top management roles (Commission for Employment Equity, 2007, 2017). Workforce movement analysis and replacement trends raise questions about corporate intent to advance reforms as recruitment, promotion, and development opportunities remain disproportionately allocated in favour of already overrepresented white people. There are very few, if any, positive trends visible in the data.

South Africa’s current crisis arises from frustration with a plethora of social and economic inequalities that cleave to major social divisions, such as race and gender, brought to the fore of national consciousness most recently by the #FeesMustFall movement that started in 2015. While economic inequality is fundamental to the critique of the existing order, institutionalised norms that skew opportunity and psychologically internalised “othering” that polarises humanity along various axes of difference are equally transformation challenges.

Local scholars have drawn attention to the workplace as a site of social division, focusing on the persistent obstacles that frustrate meaningful change in organisations (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010; Kelly, Wale, Soudien, & Steyn, 2007; Nkomo, 2007, 2011; Steyn, 2010). The contextually and historically inflected inequality regimes (Acker, 2006) active in South African organisations militate for an analytical approach that is able to pick out the specificities of organisations in this context, rather than fitting local data to international theory. We should approach the South African organisation from the inside, taking its discourses seriously, before imposing imported models. This stance aligns with the growing call by some critical management scholars (Goldman, 2016; Ruggunan, 2016) for untangling South African (including human resource) management studies from the “colonial double bind” (Ruggunan, 2016, p. 104) of Anglo-Saxon epistemologies and a history of Afrikaner-nationalist dominance in the discipline.

Studies that adopt a critical approach to power in organisations and society are inevitably in an awkward relationship with traditional human resources scholarship, which tends to approach uncritically the socioeconomic operating environment of a business. The productivity and profitability of a business is the fundamental goal in this tradition. Critical management studies on the other hand, grounded in the Frankfurt School of (Marxist) critical theory, would seem to undermine these assumptions. However, while for many it had the promise to “expose, subvert and undermine dominant assumptions about the social order” (Kinna, 2014), its actual application in organisations has to a large extent succeeded only in advancing “micro-emancipations [that entail] improvements on authority, discipline, command, control, and the subordination of workers” (Klikauer, 2015).

We argue that a more radical approach to organisational change is both timely and possible. The critical diversity literacy (CDL) paradigm (Steyn, 2015) can be usefully applied in the workplace as an antidote to “diversity management” approaches that antagonise real change (Lorbiecki & Jack, 2000). Working with the CDL framework, this article proposes a simple tool for mapping the discursive terrain within an organisation, thus providing a clearer sense of the particular contours of the diversity challenges within the organisation—which is the first step towards designing meaningful interventions.

Aims and Structure

Below, we shall propose a foundational framework to assess CDL within an organisation. This framework is by no means a completed product, and is therefore presented as a working model that future research and interventions will improve upon. Our guiding assumption is that, while becoming “critical diversity” literate is an end in itself, any organisation will have members in leadership or other positions that contribute to specific discourses that either frustrate or promote social justice. The aim of this article is to propose the discursive “hooks” that the process of diagnosis should focus on in order to develop CDL interventions.

As we shall lay out in the next section, CDL is a theoretical elaboration of an ethical approach to human diversity that requires the refinement of our *reading practice* as people. We *read* difference in the world, but we also *write* it in that we participate in the production of scripts that help or harm other people, not least within organisations. The nuance in the model enables a multifaceted and evolving approach to human diversity. In order to translate CDL into clear metrics, we engaged iterative data analysis of a specific intervention and the insights of CDL practitioners, which we discuss under the heading Building a CDL Diagnostic Tool. Next, in exploring the scripts, we propose that CDL can be mapped by giving close attention to discourses related to five specific thematic hooks. Finally, we discuss the contribution that has been made, and make some suggestions for future research.

Becoming “Critical Diversity” Literate

Since at least the 1990s, various theorists have sought to refute the paradigm of diversity management, and to refocus diversity discourses on critical issues of hierarchies of power and inequality rather than on meritocracies, business cases, and organisational functionalism (Collins, 1996). In contradistinction to knowledge production on diversity that works as social regulation, we adopt a paradigm that works explicitly for justice-oriented and radical social change. While a more traditional Marxist approach would centre issues of class and domination (Collins, 1996), we present here an approach that furthers the radical humanist project of unpicking the social construction of reality (Aktouf, 1992; Collins, 1996; Kelly et al., 2007, p. 15; Litvin, 2006), what has been called *critical* diversity studies. The interest of the critical diversity research stream is to identify, challenge, and change hegemonic systems and processes of power that perpetuate oppression and domination in social organisations. Because this critical scholarly tradition does not study race, gender, and class in their organisational context merely for theoretical purposes, but with a genuine desire to promote social change, it is necessary to translate the theory into usable and practical tools that can be applied in everyday settings. These tools are developed within a variety of critical, post-modern, and decolonial theoretical paradigms, including critical race theory (Nkomo, 1992; Omi & Winant, 1994), critical whiteness studies (Steyn, 2001, 2015), feminism (Acker, 2006), critical disability theory (Pothier & Devlin, 2006), and queer theory (Parker, 2001).

CDL is a 10-point distillation of this rich theoretical tradition that outlines the analytical skills required for a conscious and just engagement with human diversity. CDL does not envision that any “single person is likely to be equally or fully adept at all the criteria” (Steyn, 2015, p. 388). Rather, the 10 criteria/principles should serve as avenues for ongoing personal and professional development, both for diversity practitioners and for humanity at large. These criteria/principles for this critical literacy (Steyn, 2015, p. 381–388) are briefly described below.

Power Is the Difference that Makes a Difference (1)

Some differences make more of a difference than others. These differences create a hierarchy privileging some people over others, often by dictating what some people are “good” at, and others not. This analytical skill requires interrogating how relations of power construct the difference in the first place, and how the maintenance of this construction serves those who already have power. The other nine skills are all linked to this fundamental insight.

Social Location Matters (2)

Where people are located (e.g. white, gay, man, middle class) in terms of these differences makes a difference in terms of their knowledge formation processes, their sense of reality, and their collective and personal self-understandings. People do not make meaning from a vacuum: we speak from bodies that come with histories of

domination and oppression, in social contexts thick with meaning. Dominant groups specifically are often unaware of what it means to occupy a subaltern position, and must resist the licence provided by the fact of their domination to describe, or speak for social locations they do not inhabit (Alcoff, 1991).

Oppressive Structures Overlap and Intersect (3)

Black feminists first pointed out that domination is not experienced discretely in each dimension (e.g. sexuality, race, gender) but as a mutually constitutive intersection (Crenshaw, 1991; Hill Collins, 2004; Yuval-Davis, 2006). Intersectional analysis requires close attention to who is left out in the blanket application of broad identity categories.

Oppression Exists in the Present (4)

Progress in twentieth-century race relations and advances in feminist and LGBTI projects contribute to a commonplace assumption that the world is post-race, gay-friendly, or post-feminist, and so forth. Though historical victories may be celebrated, they should not be used to silence dissent and social critique of current social arrangements.

Social Identities Are Learned (5)

Power normalises social identities through *naturalising* them, creating a sense that there is something essentially (biologically or culturally) different about a particular group of people that we have no social control over. These stereotypes mask the socially constructed and contingent nature of all social identities.

Discursive Choices Matter (6)

Being able to name the dynamics of oppression is an important first step to being able to challenge them; diversity vocabulary and grammar allows a challenging of “folk” theories of difference, and the introduction of more sophisticated and challenging conversations.

Hegemonic Structures Must Be Decoded (7)

The places where difference regimes are reproduced are often not explicitly prejudicial, but wrapped up in everyday ideas that seem common sense. For example, apparently neutral words like “merit” or “high standards” can serve as codes that obscure the harmful operation of power.

Culture Has Material Effects (and vice versa) (8)

Why are disabled children placed in faraway special schools in some societies? Why do some societies allow the rich to buy their own healthcare, while others do not? Space,

social context, history, and material arrangements are in dynamic relationships with social constructions that need to be unpicked.

Emotions Are Integral to Difference Hierarchies (9)

Our belonging to a particular group is structured by asymmetrical aversions and attractions that keep us in (social) place. The social performance of emotion contributes to the circulation of feeling in an “affective economy” (Ahmed, 2004) that can work to maintain unequal power relations.

The Result is Social Justice (10)

Understanding, and committing to, the preceding nine principles should ultimately result in taking action in the real world to change relations of domination and inequality. Once people learn the ability to see through the coded structures and harmful arrangements sustained by unequal power, injustice becomes undeniable, and action unavoidable.

Building a CDL Diagnostic Tool

In order to establish the extent to which the 10 criteria exist in an organisation, clear metrics are required. Our theoretical starting point implies that the way that change, diversity, and transformation are spoken about in the organisation literally *constructs* these realities. Because all social life is discourse, “it is not possible to recover an extra-discursive realm, or an ‘objective’ set of criteria against which its adequacy could be measured and evaluated” (Norval, 1996, p. 3). If change is spoken about as a threat, it will always seem threatening within the organisation, until some other discourse is introduced. The “reality” is thus to be found in the way that people talk. So what do people talk about when they talk about transformation?

In order to arrive at suitable metrics, we analysed data from three sources: nine one-on-one interviews with top management and six focus group discussions with staff who participated in a CDL intervention at the South African National Research Foundation, and professional critical diversity practitioners (seven one-on-one interviews), some (but not all) of whom were involved in this intervention. The 22 texts were transcribed and manually coded according to theme. We then compared these themes to the 10 criteria of CDL, refining the list down to what was directly relevant to actual issues of diversity literacy. After a number of iterations, five clear themes—or what we will refer to as “hooks”—emerged: (1) society, (2) the past, (3) change, (4) responsibility, and (5) difference.

What we noticed in the organisation we studied, and in what was articulated by the practitioners from their experience across a number of organisations, was that a focus on how people connected their discursive articulations to these five “hooks” provided a clear indication of their understanding of the 10 CDL principles. So, for example, in advocating an attitude to the past (i.e. that it should be forgotten, or that people should

not fixate on it too much), a particular agent shows the level to which they are able to analyse power (principle 1), historicise social location (principle 2), or unpick oppression in the present (principle 4). A one-to-many relationship between the hooks and the principles thus exists, as does a many-to-one relationship, such as when articulations about the past, change, and society all distil to an inability to decode a hegemonic structure (principle 7). Different people will articulate different “scripts” around a particular hook, providing the analyst with diagnostic insight. At least two possibilities are opened up by these relationships: the incidence of good or bad scripts around the “hooks” points to the overall level of diversity literacy in the organisation, whereas the CDL principles connected to the scripts provide the framework for the design of the intervention.

The interviews with the professional practitioners were specifically helpful in pointing to the “typical” scripts that will be of use to analysts working in a wide variety of organisations, which we use in the next section as examples. These scripts and examples are defined (in a necessarily reductive manner) as either “CDL negative” or “CDL positive.” Scripts that do not clearly fall into either category do not contribute to the diagnostic process. Negative or positive evaluations of scripts do not constitute a positive or negative moral judgement of the individuals interviewed. The “typical” scripts we developed are not attributed to any particular research participant. Where quotes came directly from participants, we name people only by their gender identity and whether they fall into the *political* definition of “black” or “white.” More granular classifications would violate our commitment to preserve anonymity.

Exploring the Scripts

For diagnostic purposes, it is helpful to not attempt to be “fair” to what are perceived as the intentions of speakers. Uttering a “negative” script reproduces the discourse, regardless of intention. This does not necessarily make this a moral failure worthy of reprimand or ridicule: the point is to inform the ultimate design of the intervention, and to be able to track change in CDL levels over time.

The First Hook: Society

How do team members talk about society, and how does the organisation and its processes relate to their social context? Is the company understood as a closed system, a culture unto itself that can be separated from the societal norms, rights, and obligations in which it exists? What does internal transformation mean in relation to societal transformation? Is it an external risk, a firestorm of laws and metrics that impinge upon the otherwise stable, hermetic organisation from the outside? Or is it understood as arising from the needs of a society of which the organisation itself is part, and to which its employees belong?

CDL positive scripts will assert that the organisation is part of the society in which it operates, and not a closed system separate from it. If the demographic makeup of a

society is not reflected in a large organisation, this may be because of an unjust history, structural barriers, or current discriminatory practices. It follows from this recognition that *transformation is a matter of social justice* (script 1).

Example: “[We’ve] got to move towards a ‘reflection’ of the demography of the country, or ask ourselves some strong questions why we’re not.” (Man, white)

Organisations that see themselves as part of society will also involve society in their definitions of excellence, and assert that performance is a social construct that is under their control. A common excuse organisations use not to meet transformation targets is that they are moving as fast as their commitment to “excellence” will allow. The point that sets the progressive organisation apart is realising *there can be no excellence without social justice* (script 2).

Example: We may be profitable, but until we have achieved racial and gender equity in our senior management we cannot really call ourselves successful.

The greater the difference between external social dynamics and internal structure, the more charged the transformation project should be. Social inequality situated in the *present* should deepen organisational commitment to doing something transformative, by creating an affective gradient away from injustice, and towards restitution: a recognition that *transformative change is a matter of urgency* (script 3).

Example: “The organisation is hungry for visible change and it is our role as management to deliver it.” (Woman, black)

Organisations are continually benchmarking against each other. In the context of sluggish transformation in South Africa, it is very easy to look around and see failure, or to bemoan the source of the problem as being outside of the organisation’s control. Progressive organisations will assert the idea that *they can lead societal change* (script 4).

Example: “When we leave this organisation [...] we should be proud to say, this is the organisation I once served; [...] this organisation brought positive change for the good of everyone.” (Man, black)

In summary, CDL-positive scripts around the societal hook view the organisation as continuous with society, and view transformation as a social justice imperative, without which there can be no excellence, which is urgent, and which should be pursued as an expression of the organisation’s willingness to lead societal change.

CDL-negative scripts on the other hand imagine an organisation that is a closed system sealed from the rest of society. This organisation associates *advances in transformation with retreats in excellence* (script 1). Implicitly, this organisation asserts (and is widely seen to assert) that affirmative action appointees are less capable, and that projects

undertaken with transformative aims are charity targeted at the permanently “less fortunate.”

Example: We believe in transformation, but we just cannot do it at the same time as competing in this crowded market!

These organisations will *focus on the pitfalls* (script 2) of transformation. Employees may share horror stories about transformation, framing change in terms of fraud and deceit. It is certainly not wrong to decry fraud and criminality. The problem is the regularity and consistency with which this script enchains broad-based black economic empowerment (BBBEE), black economic empowerment (BEE) or economic empowerment (EE) to, for example, “scammers” or “tenderpreneurs.” This derisory language implies that there is something intrinsically dishonest about BBBEE and EE; that swindling is just in the nature of the system.

Example: “So we end up with all these ‘scammers’ who are, you know, [...] sort of BEE interventionists who act as middle-men between the people who really do the job, and [the] procurement officer.” (Man, white)

The reactionary organisation believes that without more funding (or, in the case of the private sector, tax breaks or other public-private mechanisms) there is no way they can transform. They repeat: *no money, no transformation* (script 3). While it is clear that transformation does require time, money, labour, and commitment, and that in the absence of these resources it is difficult, members of organisations often frame transformation as being *entirely* dependent on money. This is clearly a tactic to sideline transformation as a “nice-to-have” that threatens performance.

Example: “You know you can’t have a transformational policy and there’s no transformation budget. [...] There’s a plan but there’s no budget you know, so it’s all empty words.” (Man, white)

It is a psychological commonplace that individuals need an internal locus of control in order to be effective actors in the world; the same is quite clearly true of organisations. Many of the people we interviewed considered *transformation as imposed externally on the organisation* (script 4) through government fiat, or societal pressure, and not as coming from within the organisation itself.

Example: “You see, the [organisation] doesn’t actually do anything. The [organisation] has a policy which they inherited from the government and so there’s no transformation policy.” (Man, white)

The reactionary organisation asserts: *do not mix work with politics* (script 5). It imagines that the space outside of the organisation may be political, but that politics somehow stops at the door. Rather than having a chance of success, what this script *effectively*

does is to reinforce a pre-existing political regime that may be invisible to executives, and to shut down dissenting voices that may help the organisation to learn and grow.

Example: “You see, so they [government decision-makers] start mixing science and politics and that is always a recipe for some sort of disaster.” (Man, white)

In summary, CDL-negative scripts understand transformation as antagonising performance, as synonymous with dodgy dealings and other pitfalls, as externally imposed, and consider politics as a realm that can be banished to the outside of an organisation, rather than as something in which all organisations are deeply implicated.

The Second Hook: The Past

How do employees in the organisation talk about history and their relation to it? Do employees critique what has gone before, with a clear understanding that there are problems that may be perpetuated or valuable lessons that can be learned, or is history absent from critical conversation? Are norms and traditions deconstructed and dissected, or accepted as ossified?

The first positive script was recently articulated by Barack Obama when he quoted a remark by William Faulkner (quoted in Sugrue, 2010, p. 93): “*The past is never dead. It’s not even past*” (script 1). Seeing the reality of the past in the present is an important part of leadership. Identifying the way that social habits form over long periods of time in ways that may be oppressive and exclusionary can be an important first step in tackling inequality within an organisation.

Example: “I know there are people who still meet in a tea group who used to meet 15 years ago, which is nice, but if you look at who they are they are all white people.” (Woman, black)

Once people start to appropriately historicise the present, they notice that *past injustices determine present social realities* (script 2). The impact of the past may often provide the historical reasons for current imbalances, and point in the direction of specific actions that may be taken in order to correct what has gone wrong. Specifically, this means moving beyond the liberal credo of “equal treatment” or “equal opportunity” which often merely reproduces the effects of painful histories.

Example: “Now colour and gender and excellence are not mutually exclusive, we know that, but we also know that in many respects home life, history, and all that, mean that there are bigger challenges for some individuals than others.” (Man, white)

Facing the past means that *we need to interrogate tradition* (script 3). The way organisations assert that things ought to be done largely reflects the social norms produced by previous cultural systems. The dominance of men in the sciences, for example, is attributable to a number of historical factors, all interwoven with patriarchal

power, and the “traditions” at a scientific institution should therefore be interrogated and open to challenge. Another common example is following what people find most comfortable because it has always worked that way—a white doctor, or a woman to take the minutes of a meeting.

Example: The reason they are not comfortable with a transgender person at reception is that it is new to them. In time, they will learn.

In summary, CDL-positive scripts about the past will describe the ways that the past lives on in the present, unpick its harmful effects, and have a critical and circumspect approach to soothing ideas about what we have grown accustomed to.

CDL-negative scripts about the past are identifiable when employees hearken back to the *good old days* (script 1) when there was “professionalism” and “world-class results.” These scripts mourn the death of an unjust order, and erase the historical reality of South Africa’s unequal education system, job reservation, and systematic racial oppression, as well as the legitimate and ultimately effective resistance to it.

Example: We used to be the world leader in this technology in the 1970s, but thanks to politics we are now far behind.

Organisations may also assert that *past injustice is just an opinion* (script 2). This script reflects moral relativism about the apartheid past, and the idea that there were “two sides” that might construct equally valid interpretations of the past.

Example: “You know, transformation [...] shouldn’t be based on some sort of political party’s story, its interpretation of history, its interpretation of the future or anything like that.” (Man, white)

Social mores and norms have their roots in the past; negative scripts *reproduce regimes of the normal* (script 3). They frame what has been traditionally done in an organisation as being an uncomplicated and common-sense, value-neutral norm that ought to be respected by everybody. Very often, these norms encode or perpetuate racist, heterosexist, ableist, or otherwise harmful notions of acceptable behaviour.

Example: Scholars are expected to keep their hair in neat braids and not in an unruly “afro” hairstyle.

In summary, CDL-negative scripts about the past long for the good old days, in which injustice was really only a matter of opinion, and show no evidence of appropriately deconstructing and criticising the impact of past harmful structures in the present.

The Third Hook: Change

Is organisational change seen as a standard operating reality, something that must be managed closely and attentively? Is change measured, and are efforts made to include diverse people in leading it? Or is change seen as an occasional emergency, something that a few confident mavericks do, at the pace they are comfortable with?

The first CDL-positive script when it comes to change is a basic management insight. In line with other theories of managing change, such as that of Kotter (2010), it is clear that *change must be closely managed and measured* (script 1) by dedicated leaders. This means, simply put, that if an organisation aims to transform, it must manage and measure this transformation.

Example: “We should not transform just because someone has cried ‘foul’ about it. It’s an ongoing practice that needs to be done on a daily basis. It’s like brushing your teeth.”
(Man, black)

Progressive organisations are aware that transformative change means we have to *identify structural and cultural impediments* (script 2) to a better working environment, and work hard to remove them. You cannot wish inequality away: it has to be managed with policies and material practices.

Example: “Jill Marcus once talked about her experiences when she was a younger mother, where male colleagues would schedule meetings at 07:00 and 08:00 in the morning because that’s the male norm. Why can’t an executive meeting start at 10 o’clock? Why does it have to start at 08:30?” (Woman, black)

Or indeed, why are women assumed to be responsible for getting children to school in the first place?

There cannot be a meaningful change of power relations without some people losing power, and some people gaining power. There thus has to be open talk about equity targets (script 3). There is nothing problematic or offensive about insisting in the open that black people, women, or people with disabilities are hired into certain positions. Managing change includes being specific about your targets, talking about them, and making them happen.

Example: Our management team will be at least 80 per cent black by the end of 2020.

Transformative change must be bold, but it must also keep the organisation focused on other dimensions of performance and not disengage its team members. *Leading change is a skill* (script 4) and it must be developed and trained for.

Example: “That’s why we’re thinking it is so necessary to [build critical diversity literacy skills, because] it speaks to a culture of our organisation that maybe we’ve not

found a way to deal with it. [...] if as an organisation we're not skilled to handle this, you know, do we cause more damage?" (Man, white)

Systems, structures, and demographic representivity must change, but so must organisational culture. To a large extent, *change is cultural* (script 5). It is in the everyday practice of organisational life—the way people interact with each other, their customers, their work—that transformation comes to life.

Example: "People say [...] we need things to change—for me it's very important to change the culture [...]. Not just exchange bodies at the top." (Woman, black)

In summary, members of organisations invoke CDL-positive scripts when they articulate that change must be closely managed, must focus on overcoming structural barriers as well as on cultural change, and must include the open and honest discussion of specific equity targets.

Employees who articulate CDL-negative scripts may *emphasise the risk* (script 1) of transformative change, making a catastrophic business outcome seem a likely consequence of transformation. This includes maligning the motives and future performance of the beneficiaries of transformation efforts.

Example: "We have had people here and have given them all sorts of opportunities and the only thing they did was to steal." (Man, white)

Some managers will assert that they should be left to manage the pace of transformation, that "*we don't need employment equity targets*" (script 2) in order to drive change. If this is accepted by the organisation, what happens is that the power of the privileged few to control the process is asserted. Power is maintained in the hands of the powerful, thwarting meaningful change.

Example: "There was no 'equal opportunity' required. It took me years to train him until he was ready, so the opportunity was made [...] via [my] intervention." (Man, white)

Instead of targets, a counter-script is opposed: *trust in gradualism* (script 3). Leaders of reactionary organisations will assert that they should be trusted to lead transformation at their own pace in a more organic, self-regulatory manner. The "gradual" approach is one of the main reasons why actual equity in South African organisations has been so elusive.

Example: "So we've made a second tier of managers now where we've created sort of a level of supervisors and there are many black people in that capacity ... now the hope is that these people will study further, grow in their jobs, etcetera, etcetera, and eventually you can then say, right, we need you on the management team." (Man, white)

Another tactic used by managers is to present *transformation as impossibly difficult* (script 4). If they have tried to deliver what is impossible to deliver, they are thereby exonerated from non-delivery. In this extract, it is stated that the organisation must either massively expand its salaries budget to pay trainees, or cease to exist, and contains the executive's veiled threat to participate in "killing" it.

Example: "Who can I train to put into my place? [...] I can't appoint anybody [because there is no budget]. So it's just an organisational statement that looks good somewhere but it actually is a waste of time. [...] [We should have] money to appoint somebody and you can tell this person, now you are my trainee for the next five years. You know, otherwise they have to become prescriptive and say, you must fire [this] lot and you must appoint this lot, you know, which will probably kill them as an organisation within twenty-four hours." (Man, white)

People in organisations will also subtly assert that it is acceptable to *maintain the comfort of dominant groups* (script 5). If it is unthinkable that a member of an over-represented group should actually lose power in a change intervention, change becomes impossible. Change means being allowed to open the door to discomfort.

Example: "[The] union raised the fact of 'too many' Indians. [...] it's really caused quite a lot of hurt in the sense of singling out in this case Indian people in senior management [...] it's not a conversation that is easily taken out into a broader [forum]." (Woman, black)

In summary, CDL-negative scripts about change are invoked when the members of organisations present change as inherently risky, or even impossible to achieve; where change is admitted as needing to happen it will be asserted as being better accomplished by a gradual approach that is not driven by targets, and keeping powerful groups from feeling uncomfortable will be prioritised.

The Fourth Hook: Responsibility

The fourth hook deals with how employees talk about agency and responsibility for building a transformed organisation. Does the organisation make it the responsibility of marginalised groups to speak up, compete on what is said to be a "level playing field," and prove themselves worthy of jobs? Or is responsibility shared, and powerful groups clearly aware that they need to let go of power in order for other people to find room in the organisation?

A team working together on a complex challenge has a better chance of succeeding if they recognise that *transformation is a shared responsibility* (script 1). Because cultural change requires change from powerful groups, they cannot abdicate their responsibility to "transformation reps," nor should marginalised groups disengage from processes.

Example: Our HR manager reports on our progress against transformation targets, but we consider transformation part of everybody's job.

Dominant groups (e.g. white people, men, the able-bodied, cisgendered people) have a specific responsibility to *check their privilege* (script 2), to self-correct, and to amend their behaviour in order to be part of a transformed organisation.

Example: "I came across as being a bit patriarchal, like the big white boss man ... so that was quite painful because [...] I had to realise that I got it wrong even though I had the right intention." (Man, white)

Transformational change needs to be led. A CDL-positive script also focuses on the responsibility of *leaders to work on themselves* (script 3) wherever they might be in the organisation.

Example: "You can have a diverse organisation, but your leadership style might not actually bring that diversity to fruition so that it actually is a positive, so that it brings the best out of everybody, which is what I am trying to learn to do." (Woman, black)

Difference hierarchies determine subject positions in such a way that *people can be complicit without intending to be* (script 4). This means, for example, that women can reproduce sexism, that gay people can promote homophobia, and that people who are progressive in one dimension of difference may be blind to the harm they cause in another. We see this process in action in the following example of self-awareness from a black woman executive in an environment dominated by men.

Example: "[For] myself, with all these guys it is easy to be complicit because I speak upon things that I totally take offense to—but for the most part they know they don't ask me to make tea, don't ask me to—you know all the normal things—and they are almost extra sensitive because they know where I come from. But, like, sometimes you wonder, have I kind of glazed over on some areas that I might have challenged—just because you now have familiar bonds?" (Woman, black)

In summary, CDL-positive responsibility scripts articulate transformation as a shared responsibility, holding people accountable for their own development as leaders and for checking their own privilege as well as their own (possibly unintended) complicity in harmful systems.

CDL-negative scripts around responsibility, on the other hand, will often include *shifting blame to dominated groups* (script 1). Frequent appeal is made to the idea that the responsibility for succeeding or failing at transformation lies with under-represented and historically dominated groups.

Example: "First of all, a lot of responsibility lies with the individuals that you want to transform [...] if the individuals who are targeted for the transformation do not come to

the party then you are just messing around with, you know, all sorts of cost inefficiencies and you're actually not doing [the] organisation any good." (Man, white)

An organisation that has ossified power relations will tend to assert that *it is impossible to expect powerful people to surrender their power* (script 2). This script is used by powerful people to avoid taking personal responsibility for transformation; it is often expressed as a common-sense insight about the world. What is uncommon is the realisation that for change to happen, some people need to make way.

Example: "You know you've got maybe five people [on the management team] that you can work with. How do you transform that?" (Man, white)

In summary, CDL-negative responsibility scripts shift responsibility away from powerful groups and onto those who have been historically dispossessed, even asserting that it is impossible for the powerful to ever surrender their power.

The Fifth Hook: Difference

The fifth and final hook is difference itself. Are people in the organisation able to speak openly and honestly about their different experiences of history, of their positionalities, or of their struggles to be part of the company in the first place? Or is difference seen either as something that needs to be "smoothed out" in an assimilationist corporate culture, or only invoked in essentialised, stereotyped terms?

It is important that an organisation *celebrates power shifts* (script 1) across lines of difference, and names the salient axes of difference.

Example: "Well, we are happy with that because at least she's female; it's what we've been crying for. We want at least someone female in the executive—because if you look at the executive positions, they are mainly male dominated." (Man, black)

Far from assimilating different viewpoints and cultures into a monolithic corporate culture (which is almost always merely a mask for the dominant societal culture), progressive organisations will *make room for difference* (script 2). This means openness to different perspectives, and not trying to impose "one story" on a diverse group of people.

Example: "So, I mean, I'm actually always aware of the implications for access to power of our language differences, cultural differences; people express themselves in different ways." (Man, white)

Difference when understood merely as "the spice of life" does not provide a satisfactory analytical tool for challenging the ways that difference regimes vest different groups over time differentially with power, and ultimately determine life prospects. Organisations and their members thus need to *grapple with the structural aspects of*

difference (script 3). This means asking what the effects of company policies are on different people and how these could worsen or alleviate unjust social differences.

Example: “[The organisation does not make] provision for maternity leave in their budgets, and that just propagates that whole issue of people being on maternity leave is seen as [...] liabilities to the organisation.” (Woman, black)

Progressive approaches to difference in the organisation start to add value when *difference is discussed openly and respectfully* (script 4) in the organisation, and not swept under the carpet.

Example: “I think when there is a lot of tolerance, but a mutual understanding that you can have ‘robust debate’ [...]. One has got to be able to stand up and say what you feel and be respected for it and have the tolerance to say it, so that is one measure which means that you’ve actually got free debate within your organisation whether it be on whatever topic.” (Man, white)

It is important to actively encourage the idea that diverse skills sets will affect performance parameters within the organisation. *We can be excellent, differently* (script 5).

Example: “We need to really ‘broaden’ our search, we need to be prepared to take people maybe with different skills bases, but will still be able to give us what we need in terms of each of the different portfolios we have.” (Woman, black)

In summary, organisations that make room for difference, that discuss it openly, that celebrate power shifts, and that open up the definition of excellence to different forms, are invoking CDL-positive scripts. They open up the social imaginary to novel and diverse ways of doing things, allowing innovation in organisational structure and self-definition.

CDL-negative scripts, on the other hand, justify discrimination in the workplace. A prime example is the idea that *groups have essential aptitudes* (script 1) to play specific roles in organisations. Notions, such as the ideas that women are especially suited to take minutes in meetings and that Indians make good accountants, constitute essentialisms, and are corrosive of CDL.

Example: “Astronomy and geodesy are both very, very mathematical fields which have a lot to do with why they are male dominated as well, which the ladies can tell you.” (Man, white)

These “essential” characteristics—whether viewed as positive or negative—belong to the same category of thinking that led H. F. Verwoerd to say that black people are “hewers of wood and drawers of water.”

Other bad organisational habits include pretending *differences do not exist* (script 2). This script has been extensively deconstructed in the theoretical discussion of “colour-blind” racial ideology. The point is not that we should essentialise abilities (as per script 1) but that real historical differences between people have to be taken into account, and respected in the work environment. There are reasons, connected to historical oppression, that we may experience organisations and their tasks in different ways.

Example: “I myself don’t look at people and say, but oh, you are a coloured and, you know, maybe you drink too much or whatever. So I don’t have that sort of problem. I look at people, you know, what are they doing? Do they work hard? Can you work with them? Are they easy to get along with? You know, are they part of the team? Are they a valuable asset to the facility? You know that’s what impresses me, not whether you are black or white.” (Man, white)

When more powerful actors speak or act on behalf of marginalised groups, then they are asserting a *duty of paternalism* (script 3). Paternalism often thinks of itself as doing good in the world, while in fact working to undermine the agency and self-determination of others.

Example: “One female colleague was oppressed by the previous director. And so as soon as I took over I said to her, right, you and I are taking over the science awareness component, don’t worry about pretending to be a researcher, just [...] do the stuff that you feel you’re comfortable with and that you are good with.” (Man, white)

Being different together is not the same as assimilating different people into a “professional” culture. What may seem to be a “neutral” *monolithic corporate culture* (script 4) may indeed be the environment that suits the interests of those with power, and not a reflection of the diversity of the team.

Example: She does not realise that light-heartedness is just part of our corporate culture, it is our brand—if she cannot take a joke, even a bad joke, then perhaps she does not fit in here.

The idea that we should all discuss difference openly and honestly is a good starting point, but it is not enough. The underlying power dynamics in the discussion must also be addressed. Firstly, there is no guarantee that a contestation of opinions will result in a just and equitable decision; and, secondly, people have different access to discourse based on their unequal social locations. When it comes to issues of marginalisation and unequal power, the discussion about difference cannot become an open *marketplace of ideas* (script 5).

Example: He was just expressing his opinion; there was no need to get offended. We cannot tell him to keep quiet because that would interfere with his freedom of speech.

In summary, organisations engaging with difference using CDL-negative scripts might on one extreme essentialise the abilities of groups, or on the other pretend that no differences whatsoever exist between groups. They might also adopt paternalistic attitudes to less powerful groups, try to suppress dissent through appeal to a monolithic corporate culture, or fail to manage discriminatory speech by letting employees have their say in the marketplace of ideas.

Discussion and Conclusion

Though the approaches of practitioners may vary, initial semi-structured interviews with the members of organisations on the subject of transformation (e.g. What is transformation? What are your experiences of transformation?) or how the organisation is dealing with difference (e.g. What is discrimination? How do you deal with it?) may be transcribed and coded according to the five hooks, and then assessed as positive or negative scripts against the CDL criteria. These scripts can give a tangible picture of the overall diversity literacy of the organisational members interviewed, who in turn discursively construct the social "reality" within it. While negative scripts point to specific gaps in literacy that must be addressed during the intervention, positive scripts are also very important as pivot points to lever other CDL principles, or to other dimensions of difference. So, for example, if positive scripts about the past are present in a team, these can be built into a discussion that addresses the importance of organisational continuity with a changing society.

This list should by no means be seen as final: this is merely a first step. Further empirical work can be done to expand or alter the framework produced. What remains important, however, is the translation of the theoretically rich and analytical, complex categories of CDL into metrics that can be coded for with a modicum of familiarity with the CDL model. In Table 1, the outline of this starting point becomes visible.

Table 1: Summary of CDL discursive hooks, with typical positive and negative scripts

<i>Society</i>	
+	-
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Transformation is a matter of social justice. 2. There can be no excellence without social justice. 3. Transformative change is a matter of urgency. 4. Organisations can lead societal change. 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Advances in transformation equal retreats in excellence. 2. Focus on the pitfalls. 3. If there is no money, there is no transformation. 4. Transformation is imposed externally on the organisation. 5. Do not mix work with politics.
<i>The Past</i>	
+	-

1. “The past is never dead. It’s not even past.” 2. Past injustices determine present social realities. 3. We need to interrogate tradition.	1. The good old days 2. Past injustice is just an opinion. 3. Reproduce regimes of the normal.
<i>Change</i>	
+	-
1. Change must be closely managed and measured. 2. Identify structural and cultural impediments. 3. Open talk about equity targets. 4. Leading change is a skill. 5. Change is cultural.	1. Emphasise the risk. 2. We do not need employment equity targets. 3. Trust in gradualism. 4. Transformation is impossibly difficult. 5. Maintain the comfort of dominant groups.
<i>Responsibility</i>	
+	-
1. Transformation is a shared responsibility. 2. Check your own privilege. 3. Leaders must work on themselves. 4. People can be complicit without intending to be.	1. Shift blame to dominated groups. 2. It is impossible to expect powerful people to surrender their power.
<i>Difference</i>	
+	-
1. Celebrate power shifts. 2. Make room for difference. 3. Grapple with the structural aspects of difference. 4. Difference is discussed openly and respectfully. 5. We can be excellent, differently.	1. Groups have essential aptitudes. 2. Differences do not exist. 3. Duty of paternalism 4. Monolithic corporate culture 5. “Marketplace of ideas”

This model takes as its grounding assumption that leadership of an organisation is to a great extent about setting discursive parameters: What does success mean? What does change mean? What do we and our stakeholders get out of this organisation? All of these dimensions are discursively constructed. In orienting an organisation towards social justice, team members and leaders will need to understand the crucially important role that their everyday language plays in constructing the reality of the organisation. The mapping of CDL scripts provides such feedback for the key organisational role players. For diversity practitioners who want to measure progress in an organisation, analysis of the key scripts against the hooks can give a good sense of where both problems and opportunities for learning reside. Processing this data in a way specific enough to track progress and change is, however, a challenging exercise, and it is to this challenge that this article has proposed a first step.

This framework, as well as the iterations that can be built onto it, allows for targeted interventions that address specific scripts in specific contexts, and as such works organically with South African realities and challenges. What is positive about our experience of working with organisations is that for every CDL-negative script, there is always a CDL-positive one to counter it within the same organisation. Teams usually already know the solutions to their own problems, and building CDL literacy is

ultimately about allowing individuals and teams the time and space to reflect on themselves and their practices, and to commit to a different way of doing things. Without these important processes, we will consistently fail to deliver on the promise of a transformed society.

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