Multicultural leadership
The costs of its absence in organizational conflict management

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to contribute to the understanding of organizational conflict management from a multicultural perspective in the context of higher education institutions (HEIs).

Design/methodology/approach – Besides a theoretical discussion about multiculturalism and leadership, a case study based extensively, but not exclusively, on oral history has been undertaken within a unit of a HEI in Brazil. The case study, which illustrates the cost when multicultural leadership is absent, is based on a combination of first-hand information and facts reconstruction.

Findings – The research discussed in this paper showed that the system of constructing "otherness" and isolating it can actually be characterized as workplace bullying condoned by extremely mono-cultural leaders. An alternative scenario with more multiculturally competent leaders is discussed, providing possible tools and avenues for organizational conflict management.

Practical implications – HEIs should be viewed as multicultural organizations, not only for the purpose of developing multicultural curricula but also for reviewing the impact of institutional practices and leadership on the organizational climate. Leaders should be ethically and multiculturally accountable for ensuring an institutional identity that is open to cultural plurality and to the challenge of the institutionalization of differences.

Originality/value – This paper goes beyond multicultural issues restricted to individual and group identities and incorporates institutional cultural climate and the role of multicultural leaders in organizational conflict management in the context of HEIs, hitherto not much discussed, which may open up new debates in the area.

Keywords Multicultural management, Leadership, Higher education, Conflict management, Brazil

Paper type Case study

1. Introduction

In times of organizational competitiveness, reaching the cutting edge in pursuit of success goes beyond economic or academic factors. An organizational climate which values cultural diversity, builds on it to tap creative resources for the purposes of originality in problem-solving, and enhances each person's potential can add significant value to organizations. Multiculturalism is a theoretical, practical and political framework that values cultural diversity, seeks routes to translate such value

into actual responses to cultural plurality, and challenges prejudices and stereotyping against cultural, ethnic, racial, gender, religious and other identities. We argue that multiculturalism can assist in conflict management and in changing institutions into ethical, multicultural organizations.

This article discusses the meaning of multicultural organizations and the ways by which we measure and appraise the degree of multicultural sensitivity and its impact on organizational success. We also discuss the role of leaders in boosting an ethical and multicultural organizational climate and analyze the potential impact of their failure to do so on organizational conflict. In order to address these issues, the paper is comprised of two core sections: a theoretical literature review and a case study on a unit of a higher education institution (HEI). The first core section deals with HEIs as multicultural organizations and discusses the role of leadership in promoting a multicultural organizational climate. The second core section examines a unit of a HEI located in Brazil, an examination that is based largely, but not exclusively, on oral history. The section analyzes evidence of blindness to the value of diversity, the damage that can be inflicted on an organization by a mono-cultural leadership, and the challenges of creating multicultural thinking in that problematic scenario. The discussion then expands to the role of a multicultural leadership and the costs of its absence, comparing the outlooks of mono-cultural and multicultural leaders and considering some alternative scenarios and educational strategies with which to change mono-cultural organizations into multicultural organizations. Following the two core sections are implications for management, strengths and limitations of the study, and directions for future research.

The paper's primary argument is that, even though research has dealt significantly with opening individuals and curricula to cultural plurality, construction of a multicultural organizational identity and the role of leadership in that construction should be emphasized more. In order to do so, HEIs should be viewed as multicultural organizations themselves, not only in terms of developing multicultural curricula but also in reviewing institutional practices and leadership impacts on conflict management.

2. Higher-education institutions (HEIs) as multicultural organizations and the role of leadership

Research on multiculturalism has dealt primarily with the issue of constructing individual and group multicultural identities, but Canen and Canen (2005a) argued that applying multicultural principles to organizational identities could expand the influence of multiculturalism. The ethos and climate of institutions and the impact of leadership are critical to promoting multicultural sensitivity within organizations.

Based on those ideas, the present theoretical section develops the following hypotheses. Firstly, we discuss HEIs as multicultural organizations, contending they should value cultural plurality both in curriculum and in their everyday policies and practices. Secondly, the section also examines the role of leadership as critical to dealing effectively with the cultural identities of HEIs and to ensuring an ethical organizational climate that is open to cultural diversity. Finally, the section reviews ideas related to the importance of multicultural competence in leadership, and to the idea that leadership without multicultural competence cannot be ethical.

Related to the first hypothesis, Canen and Canen (2005a) defined multicultural organizations as those that deal with different levels of diversity and that seek to build a cultural institutional identity out of that diversity. Cox (2001) also stressed that

multicultural organizations deal with many group identities related to gender, national origin, race and work specialization, all of which make up "micro-culture groups" in organizations.

However, that the mere presence of cultural plurality is not enough to make an organization a multicultural one. Although diversity among the workers is an important factor, multiculturalism is more than that: it refers to what makes an organization into a place where all workers feel valued, whatever their culture. D'Netto and Sohal (1999, p. 531), for example, claimed multiculturalism is "one of the most important aspects of workforce diversity in the Australian workplace" and argued that managing diversity means building skills and creating policies and practices that get the best from every employee within an environment that encourages all employees to reach their full potential within the context of organizational goals. In order to achieve that, diversity practices in recruitment, training, development, appraisals, and pay are important.

Muller and Haase (1994) pointed out that many large corporations have reframed their managerial philosophies in order to acknowledge the value of workplace diversity. They suggested five evaluative criteria by which to assess the extent to which organizations are "diversity-friendly" (p. 419), namely: philosophy and support of organizational leaders, organizational strategies (policies and programs), workforce composition; structural integration (the degree to which women and all racio-ethnic minority groups have penetrated senior management and board decision-making levels), and organizational type (homogeneous, pluralistic, and multicultural).

Dale (1997, p. 92) found that some approaches to managing diversity, while stressing the value of differences, fail to make it clear "which differences are to be considered legitimate, by whom they are to be defined or how they are to be treated within the organization." Dale (1997) stressed that managing diversity should not be seen as a mere strategy in order to gain business advantage but that it should be viewed as changing the very power structure of the organization by addressing deep structural issues and challenging the status quo that reinforces inequalities. Managing diversity should reflect a constant questioning of how differences are made and maintained, whether they are individual or group differences, and pinpoint the ideological process by which those very differences are constructed, valued or denigrated. Therefore, managing diversity should foster the understanding of "how differences between individuals and groups can be so constructed as to lead to structural inequalities" (Dale, 1997, p. 93).

Considering its critical role in promoting critical thinking and challenging stereotypes and dogmas, such multicultural thinking should be embedded in HEIs. Embedding a multicultural perspective in curriculum means valuing cultural diversity, challenging stereotypes and breaking curriculum barriers since multiculturalism is implicit in all areas of education. Canen and Canen (2005b) called this a breaking of barriers in curriculum. As an illustration of a multicultural approach, Canen and Canen (2001) described the impact of a logistics course that highlighted the direct link between cultural plurality and logistics. Students in the course realized that economic factors were not the only determinant of success and that cultural issues could also be predictors of successes and pitfalls.

On the other hand, HEIs as multicultural organizations refer directly to the degree to which everyday institutional policies and practices support cultural plurality, which is the focus of the present study. In fact, our second hypothesis refers to the role of

leadership in promoting multiculturalism in the institution. In order to achieve their mission, HIEs should capture the power and potential of group and individual identities and cultures and, in order to do so, their leaders should support a climate in which all feel valued and where trust is a key element. Jackson (2002) argued that, if we are successful in negotiating the cross-cultural barrier, we can reduce other barriers and facilitate trust.

The literature that deals with cultural diversity in organizations and leadership offers important insights but is still in need of further studies that discuss cultural diversity and leadership in a multicultural framework for organizational conflict resolution. Muller and Haase (1994) suggested that the role of organizational leaders is to foster a proactive approach to managing diversity, working effectively with differences, and promoting "multiculturalism as a competitive advantage" (p. 417). They also proposed what they called an organization-centered approach that "assumes effective diversity management is an organizational, and therefore managerial responsibility" (p. 417). In fact, among the evaluative criteria that formed their assessment instrument to assess the extent to which organizations are multicultural, the first is the support of the organization's leaders. They identified from their research three leadership approaches to cultural diversity: "opposition or denial," "moderately supportive," and "both stated and actual valuing of differences" (p. 420).

Cox (2001) also contended that multiculturalism can add value to an organization by improving problem-solving; increasing creativity, innovation and organizational flexibility; and improving its services to culturally diverse audiences. Cox (2001) proposed some key individual and organizational elements that indicate the climate of diversity in an organization. At the individual level, these include the amount of prejudice for or against certain groups, the amount of stereotyping, the amount of ethnocentrism, diversity-relevant personality traits, the level of intergroup conflict, the strength of group identity, the quality of intergroup communication, and cultural differences and similarities. At the organizational level, key measures include the cultural profile of the workforce, the mode of acculturation, the content of the organizational culture, the power distribution among groups, the people-management practices and policies, and the openness of informal networks.

Cox (2001, p. 119) discussed the factors related to leaders that support multiculturalism, such as intervening to stop others from using slurs, telling offensive jokes, or displaying other inappropriate behaviors; openly expressing support for diversity-related goals; inviting feedback from colleagues on behavior related to diversity; seeking persons who are culturally different for informal contact (e.g. lunches or after-work activities); bringing diversity-related problems or opportunities to the attention of higher levels of management; mentoring people from diverse backgrounds; and participating in diversity-related education activities. Mark (1999) also stressed that a cross-cultural manager should develop different ways of looking at a situation and avoid automatic, ethnocentric, mono-cultural responses.

Such qualities are good indicators of a multicultural leader. Similarly, Thomas and Woodruff (1999) argued that an effective leader should have a mature understanding of diversity and of himself or herself, as well as the organization. Thomas and Woodruff (1999) suggested that effective leaders of organizations aiming at being responsive to diversity should accept personal responsibility for enhancing their own and their organization's effectiveness, demonstrate contextual knowledge, understand key

diversity concepts and definitions, be clear about requirements and base include/exclude decisions about differences on how they impact the ability to meet these requirements, understand that diversity is accompanied by complexity and tension and be prepared to cope with these in pursuit of greater diversity, and be willing to challenge conventional wisdom and engage in continuous learning. Thomas and Woodruff (1999) also suggested some personal and organizational diversity questions that would help assess effective leaders: am I comfortable working with people from all demographic groups? Is there a group or groups that I struggle to accept? How will my comfort or lack of comfort with people different from me affect my ability to advance within this workplace? Do I enjoy diversity and, if so, what kind and how much? Do we need diversity in this organization or in this situation and, if so, what kind and how much?

According to Jacob (2005, p. 515), "cultural boundaries need to be construed as permeable, rather than walls that differentiate and segregate." The role of leaders in a multicultural environment should be that of responding effectively to diversity (Thomas and Woodruff, 1999), bearing in mind that organizational identity is forged in everyday policies and practices. A multicultural perspective (Hickling-Hudson, 2005; Canen and de Oliveira, 2002; Canen and Peters, 2005) should challenge stereotyping and dichotomies and capture the ways that normalcy and otherness are constructed concepts so diversity is considered an asset rather than a liability. That involves respecting diverse individual and group identities not only with respect to gender, race, sexual options, ethnicity, and religious beliefs, but also in terms of diverse behaviors (Thomas and Woodruff, 1999) to ensure a diversity of opinions concerning organizational issues. Thomas and Woodruff (1999) also stressed that "managing diversity is about pursuing collective objectives with individuals who are qualified but significantly different" (Thomas and Woodruff, 1999, p. 25).

A highly mono-cultural leadership approach means that the leadership may be blind to – or at least not appreciate – cultural differences, which can result in a toxic, unethical, ethnocentric organizational ethos antithetical to the multicultural perspective. An extreme mono-cultural leadership suggests personality disorders, as Goldman (2006) postulated in presenting two case studies of leaders who exhibited personality disorders. One leader, the head of a medical department, demonstrated a "narcissistic personality disorder" and was not satisfied with only doing a good job but "had to be ignoring and emotionally abusing her colleagues" while she herself "was busy shattering surgical precedent" and exploiting others "in order to achieve her personal goals" (p. 397). The leader in the other case study, a senior manager, showed an "antisocial personality disorder" and was involved in repeated incidents of abuse of subordinates.

The traits and patterns of mono-cultural leadership, then, are often self-centered approaches that ignore the value of diversity and are blind or abusive towards other identities, group feelings and cultures. The usual result of such disruptive and pathological leaders is the impairment of interpersonal relations and organizational ethos, not to mention widespread facetious mimicking and mirroring of aspects of the leaders' traits and behaviors throughout the organization – behaviors hardly conducive to facilitating respect and whole-hearted pursuit of organizational goals.

Burke (2006) also researched the characteristics of leaders that fail, suggesting that "one can learn as much from leadership successes as from leadership failures" (p. 92).

Citing Kellerman, Burke focused on two categories of bad leadership – ineffective and unethical – and seven patterns: incompetence, rigidity, lack of self-control, lack of caring, corruption, insularity and evil. Burke (2006) also mentioned literature that deals with a bullying style of leadership, aloofness and arrogance, betrayal of personal trust, self-centered ambition, and over-dependence on a mentor, among others. Thus, insensitivity to others and self-centeredness emerged again as central to leadership failure and to development of a toxic, mono-cultural organizational ethos.

Even though the literature on leadership offers important information about its role in organizations, it could be enhanced by studies that more clearly build the connection between leadership and multiculturalism. Our third hypothesis focuses on the processes and discourses that institutionalize differences in the organization and on the role of multiculturally competent leadership in challenging them.

The work of DiTomaso and Hooijberg (1996) did get closer to such an approach, as they claimed that people act through social, political, and economic institutions that, through moral and ethical rationalizations, create, embed, and reproduce inequality. The authors argued that such rationalizations may perpetuate the construction of differences and claimed that leaders should help develop and position multicultural role models to ensure their effectiveness, and create channels and pathways to ensure that those who have been excluded get opportunities for full participation and inclusion. Similarly, Kezar (2000) discussed culturally diverse views on higher education leadership, focusing on the role of power relations and positional perspectives as critical to understanding differing perceptions of multiculturalism. In the same vein, Rahim *et al.* (2006) stated the need to go beyond studies on the adaptive use of cognition by leaders to include intrapersonal and interpersonal intelligences, particularly focusing on the latter in its use of empathy (the ability of understanding others and taking active interest in them) and social skills (the ability to induce desirable responses and deal with problems without demeaning others) for transformational leadership.

Building on these ideas, we suggest that multicultural leaders should be role models to support and maintain multicultural organizations. Absent of multicultural leadership an organization may sink into hegemonic thinking, exclusion of diversity in opinion and, at the extreme, condoning of bullying. In fact, as discussed by Vega and Comer (2005), workplace bullying, which is both deliberate and destructive, can be inhibited by clear policy and organizational structures that ensure zero tolerance, policies and structures which, of course, directly affect leadership responsibilities.

Canen and Canen (2004) considered multicultural competence to be the ability and flexibility to deal with the tensions of cultural differences by valuing cultural diversity, recognizing the organization's cultural identity, and understanding the cultural diversity of suppliers and customers. In the case of HIEs, this last dimension could be in terms of students and other social actors involved in HIE activities. Marx (1999) presented a comparison between mono-cultural and "cross-cultural" managers, where mono-cultural managers tend to reinforce well known mono-cultural solutions when faced with a cultural or a cross-cultural management problem, while cross-cultural managers search for and apply more culturally effective solutions.

The next section discusses a case study in a unit of a HEI in Brazil, in which other characteristics besides those presented by Marx (1999) have emerged as a result of a mono-cultural leadership. The names of the institution and its actors have been omitted.

3. Blindness to diversity: dangers of a monocultural leadership

The present case study is intended not only to assess the sensitivity of leaders to cultural diversity and to bring to light the damage that lack of multicultural competence (Canen and Canen, 2004) brings to a HIE climate, but also to suggest how to reverse that damage. The case study is based largely (although not exclusively) on oral history, also referred to by some authors as autoethnography or personal narrative (Ellis and Bochner, 2000), which is a qualitative methodology that builds on personal narratives of events, particularly appropriate in the case of researchers that are "fully committed to and immersed in the groups they study" (Ellis and Bochner, 2000, p. 741). Therefore, the case study is built on a combination of first-hand information and reconstruction of facts as told the authors. Because of the sensitivity of the situation described, no formal interviews with its participants could be carried out. Having acknowledged that methodological limitation, the study should, nevertheless, offer a fair view of the participants' voices and perceptions as gauged from the evidence of the email messages they authored and their public comments. As in all qualitative studies, the results of this study are not intended to be generalized but to be used to show how policies and practices and the role of leadership can create a mono-cultural and even a toxic institutional climate that is detrimental to conflict resolution and academic success.

The actors in the case study addressed are the members of the Board of Directors of the HEI unit. Figure 1 illustrates the administrative structure at the time the study was made.

Three positions in the unit were occupied by the same person; the Deputy Director was also the Director for Post-Graduate Studies and the Coordinator for Post-Graduate Studies. The Director and the Deputy Director were elected by the HEI unit community, using the campaign slogan, "Reconstruction and Democracy." The post-graduate program had seen some upheaval because of political contentions and, with the new elections, was supposed to begin a new era. The post-graduate board consisted of the members of the academic staff in the MSc and PhD program and students' representatives. The post-graduate board was consultative under the present legislation, which means it had no real decision-making power, including decisions regarding criteria for selecting Master and Doctorate students and curriculum issues. It was presided over by the coordinator of the post-graduate studies.

A chronicle of events shows the increasing intolerance towards differences and the mismanagement of institutional conflicts. A meeting of the post-graduate board began with criticisms from a member of the board about the way students for Masters and
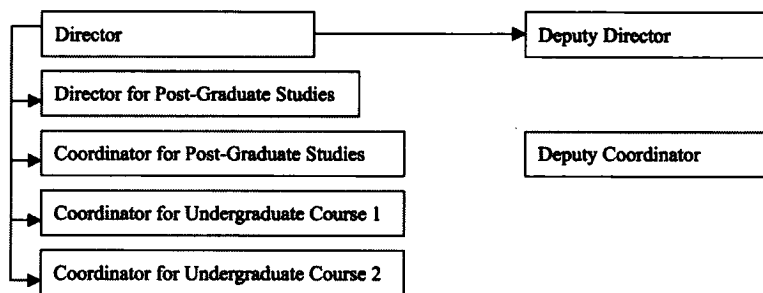

Figure 1.
Organizational structure
of the HEI unit

PhD courses had been selected the previous year by the selection committee. The board member complained that only two members of the academic staff had marked all the exams, analyzed all the research projects, and carried out all the interviews. The board decided that the new selection committee would be chaired by the member of the academic staff who voiced those criticisms. From the multicultural perspective, such a decision seemed to be a mature response (Canen and Canen, 2005a, b; Thomas and Woodruff, 1999; Cox, 2001), in that it offered voice and decision-making to plural voices.

The new chairperson led the selection committee to a selection process of new Masters and PhD students in which all members of the academic staff were invited to participate in marking written exams, interviews, analyses of research projects, according to their areas of expertise. The committee developed a timetable in order to satisfy all the constraints presented by the academic staff, so the process involved political as well as technical considerations. From the technical point-of-view, it was the first time that criteria for assessing the written exams, the interviews and the projects had been clearly stated in written form and were distributed to all the academic staff interested in participating in the process. From the political perspective, the involvement of all academic staff who wished to participate represented a breakthrough, since the group had been severely divided due to past conflicts; candidate selection had been under the control of the political group that was in power in that unit of the HEI. Therefore, this was the first time the selection process was carried out by the whole academic staff, with the exception of one who declined to participate.

Next, the committee chair – hereafter referred to as "X" – presented the committee's selection report to the post-graduate board, summarizing the main points and emphasizing the new era that the new process seemed to bring to the post-graduate program. Everything led to the impression that, rather than persisting in barriers and divisions, the group had decided to manage diversity and work together in order to build an organizational identity based on cultural plurality, conflict resolution and common goals and objectives. However, by the end of the chair's report, the single member of the academic staff who had not agreed to participate directed a series of personal insults to X, implying that X had a hidden agenda in carrying out the selection process via a multicultural approach. Rather than cutting the outburst short, the coordinator for post-graduate studies (already mentioned above, who occupied three positions in the administrative structure of the unit, as shown in Figure 1) maintained his silence, implying that he agreed with what was being said. Even though X answered that personal attacks had no place in a board meeting, which was intended for the discussion of ideas and not for attacking those with diverse ideas, the attack continued without interference from the coordinator for post-graduate studies, reinforcing his mono-cultural leadership (Table I).

Allowing tensions and conflicts to increase and allowing members to abuse one another for thinking differently are the actions of a mono-cultural leader (Canen and Canen, 2001, 2004; Cox, 2001; Thomas and Woodruff, 1999). The coordinator also failed to demonstrate empathy and social skills (Rahim *et al.*, 2006) in allowing the abuse to continue. Some of the terms used to refer to X were: "moved by electoral motives," "demagogic," and "populist," terms that seemed to show a fear of competence, since chairing the selection committee was viewed as a stepping stone to a management position even though the chair expressed no such desire.

An extreme mono-cultural leader	A multicultural leader
Lets tensions increase	Handles tensions without letting them become real conflicts and without losing control
Presents a response that tends to silence cultural diversity	Values culturally diverse voices and makes sure they are all respected
Reinforces hegemonic voices	Tries to build cultural consensus
Reinforces stereotypes	Challenges stereotypes
Abuses others who think differently	Challenges conventional wisdom
Engenders a climate that encourages mimicking of mono-cultural behavior	Accepts personal responsibility for organizational climate
Condones bullying	Proactively and retroactively works against bullying in the work place
	Creates channels so excluded voices are included

Table I.
Characteristics of an extreme mono-cultural leader and a multicultural leader

Later, in preparation for two initial meetings with the new Masters and PhD students, the personal attacks continued in a set of e-mail messages, and an informal discussion initiated by X with the coordinator for post-graduate studies reinforced the coordinator's tacit agreement with what had been said in the board meeting. The coordinator asserted that, even though the objecting colleague had been a "little bit aggressive," the coordinator and his group, including the director of the unit, did not favor X's efforts to bring together the academic staff for the selection process because it would include those members of the academic staff who were considered "political enemies," since they had belonged to the group that had been in power before the elections.

From then on, in all meetings and at every opportunity, X's suggestions were met with offensive remarks, innuendo and direct attacks by the member of the academic staff who had offered the abuse at the initial board meeting, and those attacks were joined by either passive or active support of the coordinator and the director. At that point, other members of the academic staff began to echo the aggressive tone and the view that everything the chair said was infused with "political ambitions."

The institutional climate created by these events and the momentum of the effects they produced were made apparent in a chain of oral and email messages that preceded the welcome meeting to the new Masters and PhD students. The meeting had initially been arranged by the coordinator to be held between himself and the students but, in line with a multicultural approach and the desire to build a new institutional climate, X suggested that the meeting could also involve academic staff who wished to attend. After some days of repeating the request, X received an e-mail from the deputy coordinator agreeing to the proposal, but stating that it was not X's original idea because it had also been proposed by two other members of the staff. The e-mail expressed slightly negatively the fact that X's e-mail had reached their "enemies." Again, the idea that the chair of the committee had "a hidden electoral agenda" was indirectly suggested. Apparently, the group that supported the director and his deputy director were in the process of attributing X's consensus-building and multicultural approaches to that presumed agenda.

Some days later, the director of the unit approached X and, in the presence of a colleague, asked in a loud voice what X really intended with those e-mails. When X and the other colleague voiced the desire for plural ideas and for free expression of them, the director shouted that he was "not the idiot X thought" he was and that he "had two years to go in the post as a director" and that he "intended to do so." With this tirade, it became clear that the director was also a mono-cultural leader (Table I).

When the day for the first meeting with the new post-graduate students arrived, many of the academic staff were there. The coordinator for post-graduate studies presented to the new students the program's academic situation in gloomy and dark colors before asking each of the academic staff to introduce themselves to the students. X talked of the happiness to receive those students, warmly welcomed them and emphasized that they would mark the start of a new era of the post-graduate program. X also talked about the agendas of meetings where they would talk about their research interests. The climate that had been created by the prior few weeks of conflict manifested itself when one of the academic staff grumbled that the coordinator should stop "some lecturers" from talking too much and should restrict their discourses to their areas of research interest. Another stated that the new students "should not believe we are in a new era of the postgraduate program," and neither should they "believe all academic staff were the same," since X's had been the "populist and demagogic words of those who had hidden electoral intentions." Again, complete silence from both the coordinator and the deputy coordinator indicated tacit support for the staff members' words, and the negative impact on the new students' morale was evident.

After that meeting, messages concerning the next step of the selection process – the inscriptions of the new students into disciplines – included a suggestion from X that interested academic staff should help new post-graduate students in this process. This suggestion received no answer from the coordinator for post-graduate studies, his deputy coordinator or the director. However, messages from members of the academic staff called the suggestion an "attempt to undermine the coordinator," "populist" and "guerrilla tactics." One staff member sent an e-mail asking X to remove his address from the mailing list, so he would not have "to bear [X's] exhibitions anymore." X replied that he did not feel comfortable removing a member of the post-graduate program from the email list, so the staff member said he would do it himself "and leave to the other colleagues decisions concerning the issue, depending on their degree of tolerance for X's messages."

After those exchanges, the second meeting with the new students for their inscriptions arrived. X and some other staff members showed up and, while they were giving information to students about the process, the director said in a high voice that it was not proper for X and the others to be there and that they should leave the room immediately. The director insisted that X should have interpreted the lack of response from the coordinator as a signal that the request was rejected and that the coordinator of post-graduate studies alone would instruct students as to choices for inscription into disciplines and courses. This should have come as no surprise to X, since the coordinator of post-graduate studies had previously used the inscription meeting to pressure students into choosing some members of the staff over other for post-graduate courses and supervision.

Workplace bullying (Vega and Comer, 2005) and the institutionalization of mono-culturalism (Kezar, 2000) were well under way with the approval of an unethical, mono-cultural leadership. Therefore, X sent a letter to all academic staff of the unit, with the exception of those in the post-graduate program, with copies to the higher administrative staff of the HEI. In the letter, X reviewed what had happened and called for measures to stop the bullying. In reply, the coordinator of post-graduate studies referred to X's "moment of insanity" and explained that he had not answered X's e-mails because "he was out of the country." He did not explain what reasons the deputy coordinator of the post-graduate studies may have had to ignore the suggestion or why he was not able to read his e-mail in another country. X also received a reply from a member of the academic staff who "gave support to the coordinator" and "confirmed X was disrupting the post-graduate program by always making suggestions and by forcing the presence on the welcome date for post-graduate students." X replied that the deputy coordinator had actually agreed to the suggestion and had even said that other lecturers, including the writer of the second e-mail, had made the same suggestion X had. X asked whether it was possible that the deputy coordinator had used the lecturer's name without her consent.

In view of this series of events, what can be said about multicultural leadership under these conditions? What should happen next?

4. Multicultural leadership and the costs of its absence: possible scenarios

The case study is useful in generating insights that could help fuel conflict management research which, according to Posthuma (2005, p. 216), could help researchers understand "how differences in culture, cultural distance, language differences, time zones, and institutional factors may affect both the sources of conflict as well as the manner in which it may be effectively managed."

In fact, the case study showed the impact of leadership that not only lacked empathy and social skills (Rahim *et al.*, 2006), but was also resistant to a multicultural approach and actively sought to stifle behavioral diversity (Thomas and Woodruff, 1999). It was a far cry from Muller and Haase's (1994) suggested role of organizational leaders as actively fostering a proactive approach to managing diversity and working with differences. The leadership in the case study was also in direct opposition to what D'Netto and Sohal (1999) suggested in terms of strategies to manage diversity in that it failed to encourage all to reach their full potential towards the fulfillment of organizational goals. Above all, the case study showed the construction of differences that were ideologically laden so as to denigrate the image of the Chair of the committee, as opposed to Dale's (1997) argument that managing diversity should problematize the very construction of those differences so as to challenge unequal organizational power relations.

The leaders in the case study showed a lack of multicultural competence (Canen and Canen, 2005a, b) in deciding to reinforce stereotyping, to support the concept of "otherness" (Canen and Peters, 2005; Hickling-Hudson, 2005), and to encourage bullying (Vega and Comer, 2005), even though X was one of the most productive academic members of the staff. Another way of reading the situation is to understand it as a case study about power: the power of the new group, the initial power of X as chair of the selection committee, and the growing power of the objector. Power struggles that

are based on bullying reinforce mono-culturalism, inflate organizational conflict, and put multicultural approaches at risk from political processes.

Further, the institutional culture, as demonstrated by the email messages from staff members, was one in which fear was an important player, e.g. fear of expressing differences and fear of supporting the former chair of the selection committee. The institutional culture was one in which stereotypes were constructed by some of the academic staff and by the managers, and in which the culture of assimilation (Thomas and Woodruff, 1999) was held at bay by techniques of silencing and isolating those who expressed opposing views.

From the post-colonial perspective, as well as post-structural and whiteness studies, while X was successful in going beyond differences and bringing the academic staff together for a successful selection process, a new "otherness" had to be created to replace the older dichotomy and to ensure symbolic and real power to the group who was now in power. That "otherness" was represented by X, now viewed as "the enemy," "the different," the one who was betraying the group and was "moved by political motives and a hidden electoral agenda." The construction of differences in everyday institutional life is linked directly to power relationships, so any attempt to differ from the point of view of the one in power is a menace that must be eliminated. The system of constructing and isolating otherness extended to bullying – aggressive and repetitive behaviors that aim to morally and emotionally impair professional identity.

Table I presents a visual picture of the general insights from the research. The left side of the table depicts the extreme mono-cultural behavior evidenced in the study, and the right hand side presents an alternative scenario that shows how more multiculturally competent actors might have behaved in the same situation to manage the conflict more productively.

As shown in Table I, a multiculturally competent leader would have been successful in creating a multicultural environment conducive to resolving organizational conflict and to the success of the program in the case study.

However, from the account, little seemed to be likely to be achieved in terms of multicultural leadership. From a proposal of "reconstruction and democracy" initially presented by the director and the deputy director of the unit came an institutional climate in which the leaders' lack of a post-colonial approach, a multicultural perception, and attributes for multicultural competence influenced the institution's entire ethos. The staff member who clearly had power over staff and managers, who was a negative leader and mentor (Burke, 2006) of both the director and his deputy director, who was insensitive to multicultural imperatives, and who probably had an anti-social leadership disorder (Goldman, 2006), clearly aggravated the situation. The resulting conflicts reinforced an institutional climate in which a lack of trust in the leadership undermined any effort towards improving the post-graduate program. The result was a climate in which the institution will very likely lose its standing in the academic area by alienating its best staff (Thomas and Woodruff, 1999).

The current status of the case is already leaning toward that unfortunate outcome. In Brazil, post-graduate courses are evaluated by a body of the Ministry of Education through a rigorous system, and the program in the case study had been awarded a low grade. The case study makes evident the cost of mono-cultural leadership: students are afraid, academic staff is split, the institutional climate is tense, and academic

production is low. Moreover, the wish to secure re-elections became something of an obsession for the leaders, which led to their continued efforts to dispose of dissenting voices. They viewed their election as director and deputy director of the unit almost as a question of life or death. The situation shows how qualified people can endorse mono-culturalism and intolerance by simple consent or silence. The characteristics described listed in Table I show how mono-culturalism stifles plural voices and encourages others to mirror the mono-cultural behavior and perspective in a process is akin to that which leads to totalitarian regimes.

The silence of the HEI's higher administration is unfortunate and difficult to understand. Higher management's deciding not to be involved in such situations may bring a false sense of power to lower-level leaders, where the managerial position seems a question of overriding importance for their academic careers. Perhaps the higher administration was simply "sitting on the problem" and waiting for time to solve it, although this is clearly not the best strategy with which to manage organizational conflict.

In a more optimistic scenario, the role of X would be to resist and aggregating forces to combat any attempt to silence plural voices. Such an approach could result in a more obvious need for management education and changing perceptions toward a multicultural approach. That could have an impact on development of more multiculturally effective respondents and show how an environment better at nurturing cultural diversity could help in constructing a more mutually supportive organizational identity – one that builds on everyone's potential for development.

5. Implications for management
What implications for management can be drawn? First, from the theoretical point-of-view, the study shows that multiculturalism should go beyond group identities to eliminate discourses that construct otherness and that perpetrate prejudices against not only ethnic, racial and other group-related identities, but also against behavioral diversity in institutions. Such an effort should contribute to the understanding of organizational conflict from a multicultural perspective and help to devise training paths for managers in support of multicultural organizations.

Second, multicultural study should deal with organizational culture and identity in order to address tensions and build multicultural climates in organizations. In the case study, X was the "other" when he proposed steps that challenged mono-cultural views and became a target for systematic attacks. Prejudices, then, were being constructed not only based on group affiliations but also based on behaviors and attitudes. Multiculturalism study should include organizational identity, the schemes of power and the symbolic and real roads by which discourses that construct "otherness" circulate in those environments.

Third, multicultural aspects of leadership and multicultural organizations should underlie both management education and ongoing management training and assessment within HEIs. Future managers should be exposed to multicultural curricula based on theoretical knowledge and practical illustrations, such as the case study in this paper. At the same time, managers in HEIs should be evaluated in terms of multicultural competence and should be offered in-service training to help them develop a more sensitive approach to cultural diversity.

Fourth, the role of leaders and the extent to which HEIs should ensure multicultural education for them is a topic worth considering. In the case study, the higher echelons of the HEI administration should have monitored more closely how leaders were carrying out policy in the several units of that institution. HEI administration initiatives – such as reinforcing the need for sensitivity to cultural plurality as part of its mission and vision, and providing workshops, lectures and an overall multicultural education for its leaders – could be undertaken.

6. Strengths and limitations of the study
The present study addressed the need for multicultural leadership in organizations such as HEIs and illustrated the costs of its absence in a case study carried out in a unit in a HEI in Brazil. The case study showed a process by which the institutional climate and post-graduate academic performance were degraded following a mono-cultural leadership that stifled cultural differences and endorsed workplace bullying against opposing voices. However, because of the highly sensitive situation described in the study, neither the voices of those who authored the emails nor those who helped perpetrate the institutional bullying could be brought forward via formal interviews.

As with qualitative methodologies in general, the case study approach allows for generalization, the process by which the identification of similar situations by readers and researchers provide for an impact of the study beyond its specific borders. This personal history offers a frightening picture that can be generalized only in a qualitative framework because such a situation is arguably bound to occur in other places. It is, however, limited in terms of providing the kind of statistical generalization that would ensue from quantitative methodologies.

The strength of the study lies in its contribution to a new vision of HEIs as multicultural organizations, not only in terms of developing multicultural curricula but also in reviewing institutional practices and leadership impacts on the organizational climate. The study strongly supports the argument that leaders must be ethically and multiculturally accountable for ensuring an institutional identity open to cultural plurality and to the challenge of deconstructing institutionalized differences.

The study's originality and value come from the fact that it goes beyond multicultural issues restricted to individual and group identities and incorporates into the study of multiculturalism the institutional cultural climate and the role of multicultural leaders in managing organizational conflict.

7. Directions for future research
Other qualitative and quantitative studies could be undertaken using culturally diverse HEIs to provide a cross-cultural perspective on the prevalence of multicultural leadership and the view of HEIs as multicultural organizations. Such studies could also probe into how effectively those institutions have answered the challenge of becoming multicultural organizations and of preparing current and future managers in a multicultural approach. There is also a need for research that can provide models for effective leadership in organizational conflict management. Such models might associate multicultural variables with others related to emotional aspects (for example) to provide useful frameworks not only for management education and assessment, but also for clear criteria for the ongoing development of leaders who are able to impact positively organizational conflict management in HEIs and elsewhere.

8. A concluding remark

The need for multicultural leadership that helps change culturally problematic institutions into multicultural organizations is more and more critical. In order to make these changes, leaders should be ethically and multiculturally accountable for ensuring an institutional identity open to cultural plurality and ready for the challenge of the institutionalizing the value of individual differences. In HEIs, this will allow the institutions to fulfill their aim of representing plurality and democracy. An HEI must build on cultural difference to build a culturally diverse, nurturing climate that fosters creativity and critical thinking. Such a climate is central to acquiring and retaining staff from culturally diverse backgrounds who can help in make the institution flourish. Most of all, it is imperative that future leaders be open to cultural diversity, equipped to challenge stereotypes and prejudices, and able to move towards a democratic, multicultural society.

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