

Organizing Socially Diverse Communities

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Abstract

This study analyzes how community-based organizations navigate social differences and leverage those differences to enhance their effectiveness. Analyses for this research are based primarily on data I collected for the National Study of Community Organizing (NSCO). The organizations in the NSCO bring together a broad array of local organizations to collectively address social, economic, and political issues impacting their respective communities. This study focuses on the following three dynamics: 1) social diversity and political efficacy, 2) organizational culture and navigating social differences, and 3) social diversity and organizational performance.

Social Diversity and Political Efficacy

To examine how social diversity is associated with the political efficacy of community organizing groups, I combine data from the NSCO with additional qualitative data. Providing a broad view of the community organizing field and an in-depth focus on specific organizations, I explain how socially diverse community organizing groups negotiate differing perspectives on universal versus targeted policies. I find that when organizations engage this tension effectively, they can increase their mobilizing capacity and bolster their political efficacy. My research also reveals how some organizations leverage their internal diversity to credibly and effectively confront economic and racial inequality and advance democracy ideals.

Organizational Culture and Navigating Social Differences

To better understand how internally diverse organizations navigate challenges arising from social differences, I combine data from the NSCO with qualitative data to explain how demographically diverse organizations draw on cultural practices to bridge social differences. A related study extends research on representative bureaucracy by analyzing how an organization's culture influences its ability to recruit and retain a socially diverse base of participants.

Social Diversity and Organizational Performance

I advance diversity-performance research through analyzing the leadership teams of the organizations surveyed in the NSCO. Specifically, I examine how a team's social composition and the social interactions of its members are associated with the organization's performance. This study advances diversity-performance research by identifying bridging and bonding as distinct mechanisms and measuring them independently; bridging is based on the diversity of a team's social composition and bonding is based on the social interaction of its members. The analysis then assesses the mechanisms' effects on performance by analyzing data from the NSCO, which contain information on the race, class, gender, and religion of each organization's leadership team as well as information on the frequency, type, and content of their interactions.

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