

The Path to High Performing Inclusive Organizations

A Developmental Process

In biology, a species that breeds strictly within a narrow population group becomes weaker. Similarly, metallurgists know that alloys offer a far greater range of performance than their individual metal components. Iron rusts and is brittle but add carbon and nickel and the resulting steel is stronger, more malleable and more durable.

In organizations, just as with living organisms and metals, diversity can lead to greater strength if nurtured and leveraged. Organizations can utilize diversity as a source of added value—a resource crucial to the organization having even higher performance. Diversity can give a group a greater range of creativity, problem-solving and decision-making skills, and a potential for obtaining more of a 360-degree view of a problem or the landscape (Miller, 1994). Organizations can see and utilize diversity as a fundamental enhancement, not as an obstacle to be overcome or a condition to be managed. They can seek to tap their diversity, not merely survive it. In an inclusive organization, diversity is seen as a necessity, not a luxury and monocultural groups are seen as inherently deficient.

An inclusive organization supports individuals of all identity groups, e.g., class, age, mental ability, physical ability, sexual orientation, age, gender identity, racial and ethnic groups (Jackson, 1993) to contribute all their talents,

skills and energies to accomplishing the organization's mission and key strategies.

Creating an organization that leverages diversity and people's unique talents, has systems and interactions that treat people equitably, and fosters an inclusive environment in which people have agency is a tall order and a departure from many of today's organizations. In addition, the ever-changing ecosystem of today's marketplace requires a workplace culture that allows for greater flexibility, innovation, problem-solving and rapid service of customer needs and expectations. Old organizational models left over from the Industrial Age—where people were seen as “hands and feet” and hired for predictable and well-defined tasks—do not work in this new era, nor do organizations which are fixed in one style, culture or approach. Making this shift requires a strategic, phased process. Too many organizations approach inclusion, diversity and equity like turning on a light switch—you are not diverse, simply add in some people from missing groups, flip the switch and there you have it...a diverse organization.

The diversity that will catapult organizations to higher performance and a stronger competitive position is not through a “light switch” approach. Diversity cannot be solely about numbers or mere tolerance. It entails having an inclusive environment that enables people to thrive. Having an inclusive

environment goes far beyond hiring goals, beyond addressing bias and barriers or setting up Employee Resource Groups (ERGs). Although all these factors have a role in the change process, none result in the fundamental shifts needed so organizations are able to tap their diversity as a lever for higher individual, pair, team and organization performance. Becoming a high performing, inclusive organization requires a significant transformation in mindsets, culture, processes and practices that enhance and better accomplish the organization's vision, mission, values and strategic direction.

Evolving to be such an organization requires fundamental organization and interaction changes: new styles of leadership, new mindsets, new capabilities and expectations of all individuals to effectively partner across differences, enhance engagement, problem solve and increase organizational performance. It requires strategy and planning to create a new culture and new organizational structures, policies, practices, behaviors, values, goals and accountabilities—in short, a complete systemic culture change.

Consequences of Failure

Some organizations realize that the above realities plus societal shifts, advances in technology and increasing globalization have created an environment that continually raises the bar on performance, and that bar can only be met through

greater diversity. But without inclusion, realizing the value diversity brings is difficult, if not impossible.

Many organizations whose systems, structures and processes were developed with a monocultural approach might find themselves unable to evolve fast enough to attract and retain the diverse talent they need to be successful in this new reality. The issue today is not can they become a high performing inclusive organization that leverages diversity, but can they get there fast enough? Young people of all backgrounds expect organizations to have already done the work of becoming more inclusive, equitable and valuing and tapping diversity. They expect their differences will be welcomed and leveraged. They are less willing than previous generations to be trailblazers leading the way. When they are hired, they expect to be able to contribute quickly (e.g., day 1) and encounter few barriers. These expectations aren't limited to younger people, either. Just as the bar on performance has been raised, so too has the bar of expectations many bring to how they are able to contribute, develop and succeed at work. The challenge organizations face today: Are you prepared and positioned to attract, retain and leverage the diversity of talent you need for your current and future success? The consequence of not changing fast enough is that many organizations find themselves in a revolving door in which they hire and continually lose the talent that they bring in. As a result, this creates a significant waste of time, resources, and money and in the end not much to show for it. Many organizations who continue to have a revolving door find themselves unable to continue to attract the talent they need for success.

What is an Inclusive Organization?

Inclusion is critical: an organization is inclusive when everyone has a sense of belonging and agency; feels respected, valued and seen for who they are as individuals; and feels a level of supportive energy and commitment from leaders, colleagues and others so that all people—

Inclusion is...

A sense of belonging and agency.

Feeling respected, valued and seen for who we are as individuals.

There is a level of supportive energy and commitment from leaders, colleagues and others so that we —individually and collectively—can do our best work.

individually and collectively—can do their best work (Katz & Miller, 2009).

When inclusion becomes a way of life, everyone in the organization has agency. People know that they are a full and deserving member of the organization and that their voice will be heard. Every person feels a sense of ownership and accountability for improving things within their area of responsibility and throughout the organization when something seems not aligned with the mission and values of the organization. People bring a Joining Mindset (Katz & Miller, 2013) to every interaction in which they assume they and others have value to contribute, trust is assumed. Individuals are given the benefit of the doubt and different perspectives and experiences are seen as critical to enhance problem solving and decision making. In an inclusive organization, there is a fundamental shift away from a Judging Mindset that exists today in many organizations in which there is a sink or swim culture, trust must be earned, people who are defined as “outsiders” are rarely given the benefit of the doubt and differences are not valued or welcomed. In an inclusive organization all the people with information about the situation are able to bring their perspective to the team or group, as they solve problems together (Miller & Katz, 2018). As one client said, “I know we are an inclusive organization when the same group of leaders don't go into the same room to solve all our problems.”

Developmental Stages

Just as every human being must undergo a developmental process to reach adulthood, organizations must experience a series of developmental

stages to achieve the enriching benefits of diversity and to create an inclusive culture. These developmental stages have a natural progression; passing through them requires the sustained effort of planned, systemic change over a multi-year period, depending where the organization is on The Path when it decides to make inclusion an organization priority and goal and how aggressively it pursues the change process. Just as children must crawl before they walk, organizations cannot expect to skip stages or buy a speed pass to inclusiveness. And just as children inevitably start by falling frequently, the road to inclusion is not traversed without bumps.

The Path

Using the developmental model of “the Path” (see Figure 2) as a road map can assist an organization to avoid some bumpy ground without getting lost along the way.

There are many pitfalls along the way. Many organizations fail to clearly identify where they are on the Path to inclusion, or recognize the need for different strategies and interventions at different stages of their culture change journey. Perhaps some do not realize it *is* a journey.

This model is a guide for recognizing where the organization is and determining which interventions are best suited for that stage and how they might need to be tailored. Too often, organizations approach culture efforts with a laundry list of best practices they apply indiscriminately. Yet just because something is called a best practice, that does not mean it is one.¹ Many are simply common practices and can be unhelpful or even harmful when applied at the

wrong time or in the wrong stage of the organization's development. Force fitting the wrong practice into an organization before it is ready guarantees more struggle and probably a setback. And even a "right" practice might only be right for some parts of an organization. It is inevitable that some business units, divisions or groups will be farther along the Path than others. Using the same strategies in all segments of the organization can be wasteful and counterproductive, and result in greater resistance or backlash. Diagnosing each unit individually and tailoring appropriate interventions are critical to success and making progress in moving to a more inclusive organization that leverages its diversity.

Beware of Self-Diagnosis

Barriers to inclusion tend to be invisible to those who are included and already succeeding—often leaders and those seen as "high potential"—leading them to believe their organization is farther along the Path toward inclusion than they really are. This disconnect leads to the creation of diversity initiatives that lack the comprehensiveness necessary to really transform the organization.

Sometimes leaders, managers and other team members find it difficult to accept that systemic and cultural barriers are embedded in the organization and that

those barriers prevent some people from contributing or succeeding. To those who are most accepted in the mainstream life and work of the organization, the organization's culture is virtually invisible. It fits them or they have adjusted earlier in their careers, so that they rarely have to make new adjustments or accommodations in their behaviors to "fit in." The organization's environment, policies and practices mostly support them and how they get their work done. They tend to believe success is based strictly on individual merit or talent and that the organization has few or no biases. Because they personally have succeeded and feel some level of acceptance and inclusion, many assume the same is true for everyone who works hard and does a good job. In trying to gauge where the organization is along the Path, it is important to make sure that many voices are included in the diagnosis to get as accurate a picture of the organization and its culture as possible (see Figure 1).

Stage 1: Exclusive Club

Most of today's larger organizations started as small, entrepreneurial, monocultural entities. Often the founder(s) hired family members, classmates, neighbors, people they knew or people with whom they felt comfortable. In some of these Exclusive Clubs, the sign was up, "No X Allowed," or the sign was down but all knew not to

hire people who were different from the founders. In addition to who was allowed into the circle, those early members' styles and preferences often had an outsized effect on the organization in the long term. The organizational culture and its HR and management policies reflected the needs and experience of the founding members and the early employees. Their approach and ways of interacting, working and doing business was institutionalized as "the right way." Vestiges of those early policies and practices still impact many organizations today, not always in a formal way, but in how people interact or the unwritten rules for how things "really" get done.

Exclusive Club organizations are rarer these days, but still exist. For example, some organizations still are anti-gay, lesbian, bi or trans people; and the military, until recently, would discharge members who have or develop a physical disability. Clearly, Exclusive Club thinking still exists in the larger society and comes into our organizations. Exclusive Clubs can still be found in teams and other subunits in organizations, "We prefer people like us, it makes everything work better." The rules are tailored for them and their preferences (Figure 2).

Figure 1. Distribution of Organizations on the Path to Inclusion

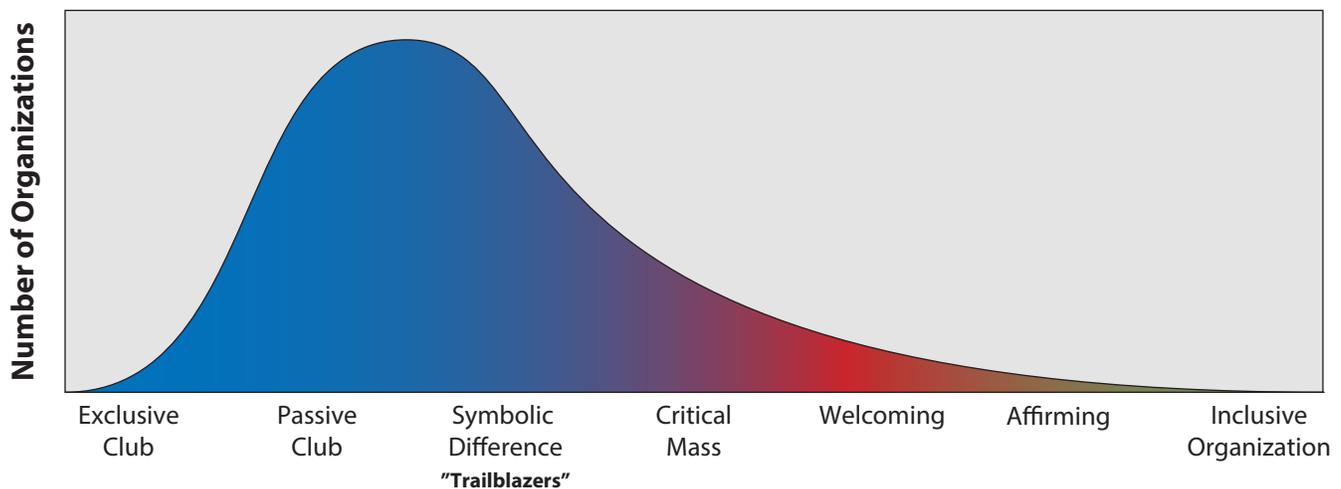
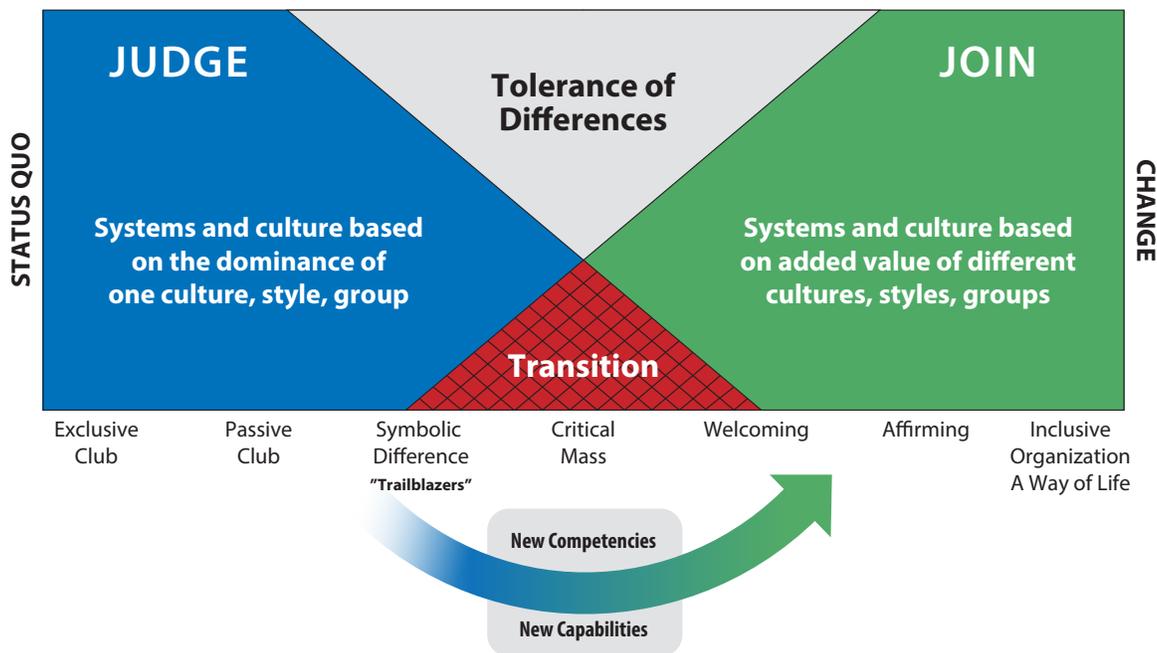


Figure 2. The Path to an Inclusive Organization



Stage 2: Passive Club

The Passive Club has a facade of being open, welcoming and friendly, but the reality is who is allowed in the club is very selective. There are levels of welcoming, acceptance and inclusion and many Exclusive Club attributes remain. Just because you are there and people work with you does not mean you are fully included and acknowledged. There is a narrow bandwidth of acceptable behaviors and people are not allowed to bring their differences. So, although someone might feel welcomed, there are limits that affect how much individuals can bring and how they are seen. Passive Clubs often pride themselves on “not seeing differences,” which translates into policies and procedures that reflect their monocultural origins and continue monocultural bias. Hiring processes, performance management systems, family leave policies, benefit plans and promotion opportunities favor those who fit in with the founding or leadership group in appearance, style, and behavior.

In a Passive Club, the desire for or requirement of “culture fit” is often a means of maintaining the status quo. There is a narrow bandwidth of style,

appearance, and acceptable behavior—and a Judging Mindset is applied to everything that falls outside of that bandwidth. Those in the dominant group (or most like that group) often assume their way is the “only way” or the “right way.” They judge other approaches as not as good as theirs or not good enough to “get it.” “Fitting in” often has more to do with style or approach and much less to do with competency or results. Part of the Judging Mindset and culture of the Passive Club is a strong “sink or swim” culture in which trust must be earned and there is little benefit of the doubt given to others. When something goes wrong, the cultural norm is to seek out and assign blame versus understand and address the root cause of problems.

There is an assumption by the dominant group that this is “our organization” and often there is a question about letting “outsiders” in. People are hired based on networks that reinforce the Passive Club. Friends and family members are most welcomed. People often comment on the positive nature of being the same and sharing a similar approach to problem solving and decision making. Anyone who is outside the team or different from the norm is viewed with suspicion and

must hide that difference. Passive Clubs often use vendors and partners who continue to reinforce sameness.

Intervening in Passive Clubs. Many organizations see hiring people who bring differences as the first step in any effort to be more diverse and inclusive. But in an Exclusive or Passive Club, addressing diversity with a recruitment program does not make sense as an initial strategy. Bringing in “diversity for diversity’s sake” at this stage without addressing the culture often breeds resentment. The assumption is that new people were hired only for their difference and they are treated as outsiders.

The work at this stage is to start increasing the flexibility of the organization. Often, there is a wide range of job satisfaction and engagement within the Club and some team members are unhappy with how they are treated, despite the fact that they are “in.” Many feel restricted by the norms and quality of interactions or feel they have more to contribute than the organization is willing to acknowledge. This is an opportunity for people to understand that changing organization policies, practices, norms and interaction patterns does not lower standards and

does not negatively impact individual or organization performance; it in fact enhances performance and people's commitment to the organization. At this stage with those changes beginning to occur there is often the beginning of an understanding that flexibility and some human difference in people is not "bad" for the organization and this realization sometimes opens the door to move to the next phase of the journey to being a more inclusive and diverse organization... Symbolic Differences.

Stage 3: Symbolic Difference

Over time, most organizations expand their membership—at least nominally—to include some people who differ from the founding group or leaders of the organization. But the legacy of the Club remains and the organization itself can be highly resistant to change. There may even be a toxic nostalgia with people holding on to a re-imagined, false version of the past that they see as wonderful and without limitations. In Stage 3, Symbolic Difference, the opening of its doors to outsiders may be a symbolic gesture toward diversity, but the organization's norms, systems and processes remain anchored in the culture, behaviors and practices of old. Even if newcomers are recruited out of a genuine recognition of the need for greater diversity and what it offers for performance, newcomers are still expected to leave most or all of their differences at the door.

Newcomers to the organization who do not "fit in" often receive feedback and signs that they are not "right" and need to change, even long after they are "new." They constantly bump into cultural barriers and biases that keep them from doing their best work. Those who can't or won't make the necessary adjustments and accommodations to fit in tend to stand out; they often don't stick around very long. The price of survival is high—people make themselves smaller to avoid standing out, keeping their talent and ideas to themselves, swallowing frustration at the lack of recognition, smiling and ignoring insensitive comments and bias

Roles that Trailblazers must play

A job description for an organizational trailblazer would probably un-nerve the average applicant. Following are some of the job's requirements:

- More than competent to do the job.
- Able to fit into the organization and its culture.
- Willing to take responsibility for making other members of the organization feel comfortable.
- Willing to accept the spotlight and the visibility of being the only one or one of a few of their "kind."
- Able to represent their identity group.
- Capable of disproving colleagues' preconceptions about members of their identity group.
- Willing to accept and work to overcome colleagues' discomfort.
- Able to deal with constant questioning as to whether the job was attained because of competence or difference.
- Serves on committees, task forces and public appearances related to their identity (none of which is in their job responsibilities).

and leaving large parts of themselves "outside," so others can feel comfortable. The cost to the organization is also high as people are unable to do their best work and contribute all of what they were hired to do, leading to reduced engagement and productivity and possibly turnover, lost time and value, and additional hiring efforts.

The more people bring differences to the organization and learn to blend in, the more they are welcomed. Many in the organization will pride themselves on not seeing differences and remain unaware of the biases they, others, or the organization at large holds. Differences are avoided, or even when some differences are recognized, they are minimized in favor

of a "we are all the same" mindset. This mindset often punishes those who bring a different perspective, style or background to the table, and hampers the collective from doing its best work. The organization is still underperforming its potential and may not be seeing all the challenges and opportunities before it.

As a result, there is no leveraging of diversity, since the very talents and perspectives for which newcomers may be hired are suppressed in response to the organization's discomfort with those styles or approaches (e.g., communication, dress, problem-solving).

Trailblazers. In many organizations, addressing the issue of diversity has

Hallmarks of the Exclusive, Passive club and Symbolic Difference Stages

- People feel pressure to fit in.
- People fear speaking up.
- Relationship-driven culture, where "who you know" is more important than "what you know."
- Cliques are common; you trust the people closest to you.
- Denial of differences is considered a virtue ("we don't see differences here").
- Hard for outsiders to learn the rules— it's sink or swim to prove yourself.
- A strong Judging Mindset: trust withheld, people labeled, no benefit of the doubt, relationships are more important than processes or outcomes.

meant bringing in one or two members of a different identity group. Although referred to by some as “tokens,” these “firsts” are true trailblazers. In order to blaze a trail for themselves and others like them, they must make many sacrifices. Those in the prevailing culture rarely see or understand their sacrifices. The next generation may not give the trailblazers credit or support for the burdens they have borne and may even disapprove of their sacrifices. Instead, they may condemn the trailblazers for acquiescing to the prevailing culture and not doing enough for change.

In addition to excelling at their jobs, trailblazers are expected to represent the entirety of their identity group (e.g., all women, all people with disabilities, all Asians). Citing “successful” trailblazers as examples, organizations often feel they have made great strides in their “diversity journey.”

However, few organizational trailblazers get to their desired destinations. Some burn out, give up and leave; some struggle through their entire careers feeling isolated or lacking sufficient organizational support, and some achieve success, but at great personal cost. Most are blocked and have to settle for less than their potential and less than the organization hoped for when it hired them. Many choose to stop fighting and try to find comfort where they can.

Champions. In most organizations, trailblazers are hired due to the efforts of a champion for diversity from the traditional group who decides to break the rules. By challenging the status quo, champions often find their popularity, motives and loyalties questioned, and sometimes their careers jeopardized. In fact, champions are trailblazers in their own right. They may not appear different from the founding and traditional group, but their behaviors and commitment to stepping outside of the norm and bringing in greater diversity make them stand out. Like trailblazers, champions are often criticized and their risk-taking

efforts to change the organization are not fully appreciated.

Intervening at the Symbolic Difference Stage. In a Symbolic Difference organization, a recruitment program focused on increasing diversity makes sense if leaders and team members understand the price new members must pay to be trailblazers in the organization and mitigate those challenges. Ensuring trailblazers’ success might entail assigning them to managers who are champions, or at least known to provide an enabling and supportive environment for their team members so the trailblazer has the potential to do their best work.

Many organizations fail to understand or appreciate the needs and experiences of trailblazers. Often, they are not even clear who their trailblazers *are*, let alone how to support them. Without support systems in place and managers, policies and environments that understand the complex role they are expected to play in creating a more inclusive and diverse organization, the rate of attrition for trailblazers is high. Even with support systems, it can be very stressful to be an “only” or one of a few. However, the best support for trailblazers is *more trailblazers*.

In many Symbolic Differences organizations, creating Employee Resource Groups (ERG) is an important step in providing a safe place for people who are different from the founding or traditional group. Leadership must play an active and key role in sponsoring and engaging with Employee Resource Groups to learn about the barriers that exist and ways they can take action to address barriers, bias and provide greater support (Katz & Miller, 2020).

Moving past the Symbolic Differences stage requires taking a hard look at an organization’s culture and expectations. Barriers to true performance and ability to contribute need to be honestly assessed and removed if the organization is going to be more inclusive and diverse. Leaders should also begin to consider

which elements of the culture they want to preserve and which need to change. Some elements of the “traditional” environment may be important for success and to maintain the “essence” of the organization, while others are merely relics whose time has actually passed. For instance, many organizations often pride themselves on having a sink or swim culture. Unfortunately, the more different you are, the harder it may be to swim.

Stage 4: Critical Mass

At this stage, the organization starts creating a work environment in which those who are different from the traditional or dominant group in style, approach and/or identity can bring more of who they are and how they can make a difference through their actions. It isn’t enough to create meetings or work processes that accommodate a range of difference—the entire work environment is beginning to understand that it significantly needs to make change to adapt to the range of needs, styles and expectations that come with a diverse workforce. This means extending greater flexibility to those already present in the organization, e.g., someone feeling okay to wear their hair differently than the majority, leave early to be with their children, work different hours, support a cause that is not one of the usual ones for the organization or recognizing a style that is different than others.

Critical Mass is achieved as there are not only greater numbers of individuals who are different from the founding group, but also allies and partners from the founding group included who understand how important becoming a more inclusive, diverse and equitable organization is to organizational success. Developing an imperative for becoming more inclusive and diverse is critical to helping organizational members understand why there is a need for change. As a part of that imperative, it is essential to identify how all people will benefit from having a more inclusive and diverse organization. Unless the organization’s leadership and membership can clearly see that a change

in mindsets, behaviors and culture serves their own self-interest in addition to being for the good of the organization, the change will not come about. Self-interest remains the strongest motivator for and against change.

As an organization continues to add members who are different from the original group, many things begin to change. The old, monocultural norms and ways of operating no longer fit, but there are often no new standards and procedures to take their place. If the Path to Inclusion was a chain reaction, this is the point of Critical Mass. As more people who differ from the traditional culture join, there can be an increased understanding of the need to accept different perspectives, styles and approaches. At the same time, members of the traditional group may feel threatened. Suddenly, they are called on to interact with, and see themselves in competition with, a broader range of people. They may believe they have fewer opportunities and resent that the rules are changing. They may deny that barriers exist and act in ways to protect the status quo. Complaints of favoritism, “reverse discrimination” or lower standards can be common. However, this also is an opportunity for members of the traditional group to find greater freedom within the organization and to express their own range of diversity. As some members begin seeing the need for the organization to change, they come to recognize that leveraging diversity and creating a more inclusive culture includes them too and there is benefit to an environment in which there is greater acceptance for a wider range of styles and approaches.

A word of caution: The Critical Mass stage is a precarious time for organizations that have committed themselves to diversity without committing to strategic culture change. Amid the conflict, chaos and upheaval of Stage 4, the “good old days” look particularly good. Efforts may fail, stall and suffer from backlash; many may be scaled back or abandoned. The organization may experience a revolving door as the diversity that the newer people

Hallmarks of Welcoming Stage

- Different points of view and experiences are beginning to be actively sought.
 - Systemic barriers and bias are being examined.
 - Managers and leaders are developing new capabilities to lead, manage and support an inclusive and diverse team.
 - HR policies and practices are beginning to change to support a range of cultures, styles and groups.
 - The organization has a clear plan, direction and accountabilities to create a more inclusive and diverse organization tied to organizational performance.
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represent leaves because the organization is not moving far enough or fast enough along the Path. Without a commitment to culture change and strategy for achieving it, turning back or going much slower seems easier and safer.

Intervening During a Stage of Critical Mass. Merely increasing diverse representation is not enough to change the organizational culture. Without strategic intervention, increasing diversity without changing ways of working and clarifying the rules for success, the challenges of Stage 4 will devolve into chaos. The old ways no longer work, and new norms, values and standards of competence have yet to be clearly defined to replace them, or have been incrementally changed in ways that are not sufficient to support the new culture and what is needed for the new organization to thrive. Leaders at all levels may find this period of transition the most challenging on the journey to inclusion. Kaleel Jamison (founder of The Kaleel Jamison Consulting Group in 1970) often talked about how “change in the middle looks like failure.” Leaders must be vigilant to lead through this stage or else the organization may become a revolving door for talent and retreat to the familiarity of the Club and Symbolic Difference.

Despite the challenges, this is the stage where real culture change can begin to take place—not just on the surface, but in the systems, mindsets and behaviors that define the organization. Leaders need to maintain a clear sense of purpose and direction and stay committed to the goals of leveraging diversity, ensuring equity and agency (acknowledging and

removing barriers and bias) and creating a culture of inclusion. They need to continue to outline a clear imperative for why the change is critical to organizational performance and success and to articulate the considerations they began in the Symbolic Difference stage about what to preserve and what to change into a clear “FROM→TO” culture vision—FROM where the culture has been TO the new, desired state. This FROM→TO enables people to have a clearer picture what success looks like and of the desired organizational direction, outcomes, expectations and accountabilities.

It is important for leaders and change agents to remember that meaningful change does not require a majority or even a large percentage of the organization’s people; it can be guided by a small but sufficiently committed core group—a Critical Mass—with a credible voice within the organization. Engaging and enrolling 10-15 percent of the organization—the right 10-15 percent of people: new people, champions, allies, influencers, leaders and advocates—is enough to shift the culture. This group needs to be aligned with the “TO” state and well-versed in the new mindsets and behaviors needed to support and prosper in a higher performing, inclusive culture that leverages it diversity.

Working on leadership competencies is also critical at this stage. Leaders need to develop a Joining Mindset and inclusive behaviors to effectively hire, lead, support and engage a more diverse organization and create an inclusive environment. Leaders need to be held accountable for effectively engaging and partnering

across differences. As the diversity of the organization increases, developing new and broader communication and conflict resolution skills becomes a necessity for everyone.

Stage 5: Welcoming

As an organization enters the Welcoming stage, it becomes apparent that mere “tolerance” for difference is counterproductive. Tolerance, after all, implies that there is a “right” way and those who subscribe to it must allow or “put up with” differences. Though they might endure differences, those differences are still seen as “wrong” or not as effective as their way of doing it. As the organization begins to develop new structures, norms, values, procedures and rewards that tap the added value of diversity, tolerance gives way to Welcoming—an active acceptance and expansion of what is “right” that is an important precursor to a truly inclusive environment.

This is the stage at which a Joining Mindset becomes more common. People are leaning into new behaviors and experimenting with how to move from a judging to a joining culture. Rather than seeing others who are different with suspicion or as a problem or wrong (whether because of identity or even just their membership in a different business unit), they are seen as having something of value to offer. Joining means letting go of the past and mistrust of others and being ready and willing to build a new way of interacting. Having a Joining Mindset means people understand their biases and actively work to address them. Rather than judging others, they give people the benefit of the doubt. When differences in perspective arise, people are curious and able to explore and learn from others.

Integral to the Welcoming stage is recognizing the presence of systemic barriers and discrimination. The organization and its people are able to clearly see—some for the first time—the need for a systematic effort to not only level the playing field so all people have equitable footing, but raise the playing

Hallmarks of Affirming Stage

- People of all backgrounds feel a sense of agency—the organization belongs to all members, not one group.
- People see more of themselves reflected in the various dimensions in the organization (all levels of leadership; key roles; art work; and physical plant).
- Skills in effectively engaging across differences are expected of all: team members, managers and leaders.
- A joining mindset is more the norm – there is an expectation that others bring value, trust is assumed and people are given the benefit of the doubt.
- People work effectively within their own teams and across the organization; silos rarely exist.
- There are more and more examples of how being inclusive and diverse is achieving higher performance.

field for everyone to support higher individual, team and organizational performance (Miller, 1994). All aspects of the organization are beginning to be examined to identify the structures, procedures and norms that impede people’s ability to contribute. People find it safer to speak up about obstacles to inclusion and the organization finds it easier to recognize and address those issues (Miller & Katz, 2018). This is the opportunity to truly redefine and transform the organization, how it operates, and how it treats and engages people.

The Welcoming stage is more than just being friendly. In fact, many Passive Clubs can feel welcoming and friendly. In the Welcoming stage, there is greater acceptance of differences and a willingness to understand and address differences from the other person’s vantage point. As differences are truly sought after and welcomed, it becomes possible to see the vast array of life experiences and uniqueness each person brings with their identity. People begin finding multiple ways of connecting with each other. Instead of sticking to culturally defined or stereotyped interactions or fear-driven avoidance, people find areas of commonality and common ground. Mindsets shift and people see differences as normal and positive rather than something to be avoided or diminished. There is an openness to unearthing, examining and addressing the biases

and barriers that are baked into the organization as artifacts of a past time.

Intervening During the Welcoming Stage.

When an organization reaches the Welcoming stage, it is critical to create a “pull” scenario for culture change by building effective partnerships and teams that are living and practicing new inclusive mindsets and behaviors. This can be accomplished by aggressively working with pockets of readiness (parts of the organization ready to move faster than the larger organization) and publicly rewarding business units that have adopted and show results from inclusive practices. Publicly sharing the results of practicing inclusive behaviors that drive higher performance often incentivizes others to learn and live the behaviors since they see and experience the increase in individual, team, pairing and organization performance. At the same time, it is necessary to aggressively enhance organizational understanding, appreciation and tapping of the knowledge diversity can afford. Organizations must also remove bias and barriers in systems and processes and ensure that the systems and policies are aligned and supportive of an inclusive, diverse and equitable organization.

The Welcoming stage is also an ideal time to begin to integrate the concept of diversity into the overall business planning process, especially in areas such as market analysis, supplier resources, vendor qualification, recruitment, training,

leadership development, community relations and strategic alliances with other organizations.

Stage 6: Affirming

As an organization moves along the Path to Inclusion, it shifts from a Welcoming stage to one that is Affirming of differences. People of all backgrounds are beginning to feel not only a greater sense of belonging in the organization, but also a greater sense of the organization belonging to them—a sense of agency. People who were different from the founding or majority group now see themselves reflected in substantive ways at most levels of leadership. HR and management systems and processes are being transformed to eliminate biases and barriers and ensure they support all members. There has been a shift from the dominant group in a monocultural organization seeing the organization as theirs and diverse hiring as inviting “others” in to one where there is now a mindset about the need for and added value of different cultures, perspectives, styles and groups. The organization has worked hard to improve aspects of its functioning and it is vigilant about maintaining equitable policies and actions. People are learning new skills and developing new competencies to effectively engage in a diverse, high performing workforce. A Joining Mindset permeates the culture and people see each other as partners and assume trust as a starting point for interactions. There is an assumption that others have something of value to offer and there is explicit encouragement for people to make problems visible, bring different perspectives and experiences to solve problems. Even the physical environment—pictures on the walls, artwork, etc.—reflect greater diversity on many levels. People can cite examples of how a more inclusive organization is bringing value to organizational performance.

Intervening During the Affirming Stage.

At the Affirming stage, the organization is deeply immersed in significant systems changes to ensure its culture, policies

Hallmarks of Inclusive Stage

- People are able to bring their full work selves to the workplace.
- The organization actively encourages and welcomes people to contribute different opinions and points of view.
- The organization has a performance-driven culture, where knowledge and ability matter most.
- People form dynamic and diverse teams.
- Trust is a given.
- Differences are seen as additive and productive.
- The mindsets and behaviors for success are explicit and the organization supports people in adopting them.
- The organization has an interactive culture, where an array of points of views come in contact with each other.
- People experience Interaction Safety.
- People have the competencies and capabilities to adapt to different cultural contexts.
- People share a joining mindset: see others as partners, differences as an asset, and extend trust and giving the benefit of the doubt are commonplace.
- HR and Management systems support diverse cultures, styles and groups.

and practices and ways of operating acknowledge and reflect the need for and added value of different styles, cultures and groups. Diverse groups of people are brought together to create and assess those policies to ensure that they promote the culture that is needed for greater inclusion and diversity. New competencies, capabilities and accountabilities for engaging and working effectively on and across diverse teams are being integrated into performance measures. The lens of inclusion and diversity is no longer applied only to hiring and talent management—it is incorporated into all aspects of the business.

Stage 7: Inclusive Organizations: Inclusion as a Way of Life

In this stage, the organization is experiencing the benefits of the cultural transformation. There is a shared mindset of joining and seeing others as partners to be valued (Miller & Katz, 2002). The organization has many examples of how greater inclusion and diversity unleash people’s talents, resulting in higher individual, team, pair and organization performance and also greater innovation and creativity. People feel free to speak up and make problems visible and decisions are made with diverse voices

Why inclusion is important

In the words of organization leaders...

- “Inclusion challenges our thinking, brings in fresh perspectives, raises the bar for our practices and strengthens the gene pool.”
- “It helps us tap our employees better as resources, leverage strengths better, uncover hidden talents and bring forth new/fresh ideas and perspectives.”
- “Inclusion fosters engagement and engagement increases efficiency.”
- “Our decision making is enhanced when people feel included.”
- “Leadership doesn’t have all the answers, and we need those different perspectives. There is a delivery benefit in terms of us getting different perspectives.”
- “Inclusion helps us engage our employees at a higher level, which gets them to perform at a higher level.”

being sought out and heard. People have agency and the responsibility to make everything they “touch” better by adding their street corner and unique set of skills. The organization is alive with creativity and people are making things happen. Inclusion and agency have become a way of life—embedded in all aspects of the organization and fundamental to how the organization achieves its goals.

Intervening in an Inclusive Organization. Inclusion is a process, not an end-point. It is a way of being, a way of doing business. Critical to creating an inclusive organization is the right people doing the right work at the right time with the right tools. No longer can the organization operate from the “business as usual” framework of old. As one leader said of an inclusive effort, “Inclusion changes everything—how we make decisions, who comes to meetings, how we evaluate performance and how we work together.”

Creating an inclusive organization requires addressing many of the aspects of the culture that were once seen as givens. For example, moving from an organization based on rank and tenure to one based on knowledge and abilities cannot be accomplished without a major shift in mindsets and processes.

Moving from an “I” culture that only values individual effort to a “WE” culture that acknowledges and rewards teamwork and collaboration is a major part of shifting the culture to operate with an inclusion mindset. Issues of power and privilege that are rooted deeply in society and replicated in the fabric of many organizational structures must also change to create a more inclusive culture. To achieve sustainability the organization must continually “walk toward its talk” (Katz, 1994). It must always watch for ways its behaviors fall short of its values and its FROM→TO vision and continually strive to live up to its vision and needs for the future. As the needs of the workforce, the organization’s ecosystem and other outside factors changes, the criteria for

what diversity and inclusion means within the organization must change with them.

Multiple Journeys

Even in an Inclusive Organization, when individuals of a new identity group join, the organization can move back along the Path to the Symbolic Difference stage with the newcomers becoming the next wave of trailblazers. Organizations must understand that inclusion isn’t a finite end state, but an iterative journey. With each new identity group—or new needs of existing groups—an inclusive organization must broaden its range of welcoming and increase its flexibility. The lessons learned from the inclusion of each new identity group into the organization make the next new group’s journey easier.

At any one time, an organization may have several different business units, functions or identity groups at different places on the Path. The United States Army offers an excellent illustration of this point. Considering their numbers and the success of some, such as former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Colin Powell and other current military leaders, many would say African-American men have reached the Welcoming stage or perhaps the Affirming stage in the Army. For women, however, the Army is still at the Symbolic Difference stage or possibly even Passive Club. The Army is still an Exclusive Club particularly for transgender people, whose status and ability to serve is at the whim of Executive Orders. And for people with disabilities, the Army has just begun their journey on the Path.

Fit for Speed, Flexibility and the Future

By creating an inclusive culture that leverages diversity, an organization gains greater ability to survive and thrive in a future that requires speed, vision, flexibility and the ability to solve complex problems. The one view, one approach and one way of thinking that defined organizations of old are no longer good enough for the highest levels of success.

It is time to more fully understand the journey and move faster along the Path to Inclusion.

Endnotes

1. This model, known as Multicultural Organization Development (MCO), was originally presented in "Racial Awareness Development in Organizations" (Working Paper: New Perspectives, Inc.), 1981, Bailey Jackson, Ed.D., Rita Hardiman, Ed.D., and Mark Chesler, Ph.D. See Jackson and Holvino (1986) and Jackson and Hardiman (1994). The original concept was adapted by J.H. Katz and F.A. Miller in 1986 ("Developing Diversity," The Kaleel Jamison Consulting Group, Inc.) and continues to evolve.

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