



## The Diversity Journey

*From Awareness to Integration*

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In most medium to large organizations today, there is at least an awareness of the importance of diversity and treating people with fairness and respect, regardless of their gender, age, race, religion, sexual orientation, and other physical attributes. In one 2017 study, over two-thirds of executives rated diversity and inclusion as an important issue.<sup>i</sup> We should give thanks to the many diversity professionals who have implemented programs, hiring standards and training to get us here.

However, most would agree that we need to do more to increase awareness in all members of our organizations, and that even then, awareness is only the first step in the diversity journey. We need to go beyond awareness to visible, measurable action that honors diversity, every hour of every day.

### The Two Factor Model of Diversity

One way to understand diversity and what it means to advance to the next

level is to use the **Two-Factor Model of Diversity™**. The first key factor is Maintenance and the second factor is the Growth.

### Factor 1 – Diversity Maintenance

In the Diversity *Maintenance* mode, the focus in an organization is on *avoiding the negative*. This includes:

- Avoiding unfair hiring practices
- Eliminating discriminatory promotions and terminations
- Ensuring fair reviews
- Guaranteeing equal learning and development opportunities
- Eliminating discriminatory pay practices
- Ensuring fairness in job enrichment and growth opportunities
- Eliminating all forms of harassment



Eliminating these detrimental and unethical practices is vital not just to the health of an organization but also the integrity of the enterprise, not to mention avoiding the painful legal implications of compliance violation.

### Understanding How We Got Here

One might think in this modern age that the previously described discrimination is rare but unfortunately it is not, and there are neuroscientific reasons for this. To survive in prehistoric times, our brains functioned to quickly assess a person or situation to determine if there was a threat to our safety – one that we needed to act on immediately (fight or flight). There was no time to analyze because we would have been eaten alive if we stopped to think and assess. For better or worse, we have inherited this neurological wiring.

Consequently, even today, our ancestral brains tend to **put people in boxes**.

Furthermore, we **place these boxes on shelves with labels**, and it often happens so fast we are often not aware of it.

At work, we sometimes consciously, and often unconsciously box and shelf the people around us. There are two groupings of shelves on which we place these boxes - the upper *Inside the Circle* shelves (us, people like me, or people I like and trust), and the lower *Outside the Circle* shelves (not us, different, somehow not as good as other people).

As professionals, when we box and shelf others, particularly on the *Outside the Circle* shelves, we often don't say anything to anyone and may believe we are keeping our impressions to ourselves, but we're not. *The way we think and feel about others dramatically influences our behavior towards them.*

This defines how we interact with them in seven ways:

### Our Beliefs about Others Influences our Behavior

	People Inside the Circle	People Outside the Circle
1. Time	▪ Give them more time	▪ Give them less time
2. Information	▪ Share more information	▪ Share less information
3. Feedback	▪ Give more and better feedback	▪ Tend to give less quality feedback
4. Resources	▪ Informally share more resources	▪ Informally share fewer resources
5. Opinions	▪ Ask for opinions more often	▪ Don't value their opinions
6. Decisions	▪ Involve in decision-making	▪ Ask less for input on decisions
7. Inclusion	▪ Generally, value & include them	▪ Value them less, exclude them more

## Sabotaging Performance

Boxing and shelving others are at the root of many discriminatory practices, and can show up during hiring, terminating, promoting, developing, reviewing and a host of other activities.

There is also a more insidious and negative impact that often goes unrecognized when we box and shelf others, and that is the direct impact on their performance and ability to contribute to the business. Operationally, people who have less access to management, less quality feedback, have less information to do their jobs, and have access to fewer resources, all have the odds stacked against them and have a *more difficult time performing their jobs*.

Psychologically, they can feel like *the outsiders*, knowing that the informal and formal leaders (and consequently others who take their cues from leadership) don't value them as much. As a result, they can feel demeaned, disrespected, and must work that much harder at maintaining their self-esteem and confidence. They're also at risk of creating self-doubt which causes them to second guess themselves and negatively impacts how they work.

This dynamic has been well researched and is called the *Self-Fulfilling Prophecy* and known by researchers as the "Pygmalion Effect"; what people with authority believe about someone affects how they interact with them and

therefore impacts their performance. Negative beliefs influence authoritative behavior in a way that deteriorates performance and influences the leaders to unknowingly sabotage employee performance.

## Protected Classes and Beyond

Self-fulfilling prophecies can drive bias and the discrimination of people in protected classes such as women, people of color, older people, people practicing different religions, people with different sexual orientations, and people with physical limitations. However, these filters can and do affect many people *beyond* those in protected classes. Examples include:

- Competent employees with visible past performance problems; the infamous bad mark on their record
- Team members who have openly disagreed with leadership
- Short or overweight people
- People for whom English is a second language, have an accent, or who speak slowly
- People who think differently than those in authority<sup>ii</sup>

In fact, research on cognitive personality styles shows that people who have a style that is in opposition to the style of their manager are at risk of finding themselves in conflict with and/or disconnected from the manager more often than others, and therefore

at risk of being put on the outsider shelves of "not like me".

For many people, in these situations, they find themselves struggling to achieve results and reach their objectives. They may have the potential or may have been top performers in other settings, but in these situations are like a racing car that has been fitted with poor tires, a clogged-up engine, running on only half its cylinders, has reduced steering capability, and substandard fuel. They may not even cross the finish line and if they do its often in last place.

When people are in this mode, they report they are operating at a lower level, not on track, not in the groove; operating from their *lower* self. When managers and teams spend more time operating from their lower selves, the organization struggles to reach its objectives and achieve results.

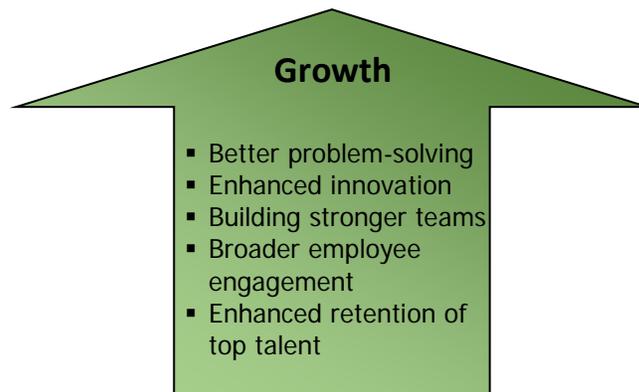
For this reason, all the efforts to train people in surfacing what researchers call "implicit bias" is vital for an organization to undertake when they are in the

Maintenance mode. Transforming implicit bias requires a change in mindset, sometimes difficult to achieve but nonetheless important, and can be done through the right training which facilitates mindset change, along with perseverance over time.

## Factor 2 – Diversity Growth

The second factor in the two-factor model is ***Growth***. In this mode, the focus is on *leveraging the power of diversity to optimize organizational performance*. This includes such factors as:

- Leveraging diverse thinking for better problem-solving
- Using diversity to enhance innovation and creativity
- Building stronger teams by having more diverse team makeup
- Broader employee engagement
- Enhanced retention of top talent



This is the Growth mode because it drives the growth of people and business outcomes. Operating in this mode is like driving a well-tuned race car with a powerful engine, firing on all cylinders, with hair-trigger responsive steering, and equipped with the best racing tires and the most powerful fuel. This car is in the best position to win the race.

When we run a business in the Growth mode, managers and team members report, like top performing athletes, that they are operating at a *higher level, in the zone, at their personal best*; in other words, working from their *Higher Self*.

When individual contributors/managers operate from their **Higher Self**, they:

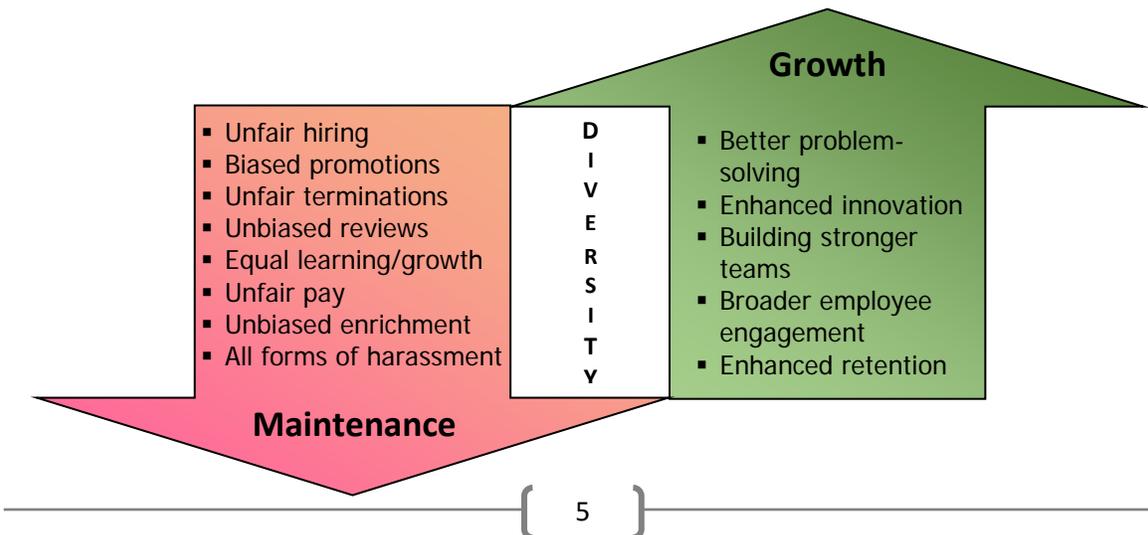
1. Are more focused and balanced
2. Persevere in the face of obstacles
3. Communicate and collaborate more effectively
4. Are more creative and resourceful
5. Maintain self-awareness while also being situationally-aware
6. Stick to their values while being adaptive to change

7. Think clearly while also tapping into their intuition
8. Take care of themselves while also acting for the well-being of others
9. Are courageous while managing risk thoughtfully
10. Are engaged, proactive and get more done

When leaders, teams and individuals spend more time operating from their Higher Self, the organization enjoys measurable outcomes, better business results, and visible progress towards strategic objectives. In short, they operate at higher levels of performance. But how do we get there?

Organizations must learn how to focus on both the Maintenance and Growth modes at the same time. That being said, a focus on Maintenance will eliminate the negative which, as have been expressed before, is vital and necessary, but we need a paradigm shift to activate the Growth Mode.

### Two-Factor Model of Diversity™



## Unity in Diversity

To activate the Growth mode, we need to see the **Unity in Diversity**.

We must recognize and honor *the spark of humanity that exists in all people*. This spark is at the root of intelligence, the source of our creativity, the energy behind our drive to achieve, and is that which unites us all as human beings. This spark animates us and is at the core of the human experience.

When we seek first to recognize, honor and respect this spark in all people, we will then practice inclusion, fairness and respect not because it is an executive mandate but rather because we know it to be the right thing to do. Then we can unite the collective organization around a goal that is bigger than any one individual.

We need to see the *Unity in Diversity* - that which binds us together but celebrates our differences. This is truly leading from the Higher Self because it aims to recognize that same Higher Self in all people.

If in a dark room you try to beat the darkness out, you won't get very far. If instead you bring in a light, the darkness disappears. We need to stamp out bias – the darkness - but focusing solely on bias elimination doesn't go far enough. In fact, there is some evidence that if not carefully managed, focusing on bias elimination can have negative outcomes such as reinforcing stereotypes<sup>iii</sup>. Alternatively, operating in the Growth mode represents the

*positive approach to diversity and inclusion.*

To harness the power of Unity in Diversity while leveraging the value of divergent thinking calls for radical ways of thinking and acting; it demands *radical inclusion*.

## Radical Inclusion™

To enable organizations to operate in the Growth mode, we need leaders, managers and teams to demonstrate Radical Inclusion, characterized by five practices:

### 1. Practice Integrated Inclusion

When an organization communicates the importance of diversity, it naturally follows that it will reinforce the practice of inclusion. That being said, only 12% of organizations report they have developed inclusive cultures.<sup>iv</sup> Espousing diversity without visibly practicing inclusion is like buying a luxury car and then leaving it in the garage and never driving it. Inclusion is what makes diversity real. Inclusion reaps the ROI in diversity. How?

- Inclusion results in *leveraging more diverse thinking* about problems and solutions. To differentiate a business in a competitive market, instead of practicing conformity, winning enterprises distinguish themselves through differentiated solutions
- More diversity and inclusion leads to increased responsiveness to changing customer needs and

greater access to new market segments<sup>v,vi,vii</sup>

- Inclusion leads to **higher levels of company performance**<sup>viii</sup> based on research specifically indicating that inclusive cultures are<sup>ix</sup>:

<b>2X</b> - Twice as likely to achieve financial targets	<b>6X</b> - Six times more likely to be innovative
<b>3X</b> - Three times as likely to be high performing	<b>8X</b> - Eight times as likely to achieve better business results

- Inclusion leads to higher levels of a sense of belonging and feeling valued, which predictably results in higher levels of employee *engagement and talent retention*<sup>x,xi</sup>
- Cognitively diverse teams solve problems faster than teams of cognitively similar people<sup>xii</sup>

### *The Negative Pull of Efficiency*

With an ever-increasing focus on productivity, some managers *minimize the number of people* they involve in business activities in the name of efficiency. The saying, "Too many chefs in the kitchen" can be often heard in the corporate hallways, but this represents a fundamental misunderstanding about inclusion. Smart inclusion focuses on accessing and leveraging *diverse perspectives, thinking and input*. It does

not aim at having a maximum number of people *managing* efforts.

Therefore, Radical Inclusion encourages managers to go farther than "normal", to involve others and make the short-term efficiency tradeoff for the longer-term business gains from diverse thinking. Those managers who lead businesses that leverage diversity connect with a variety of people in their organization to obtain diverse and potentially unpopular views so they can broaden their understanding of the landscape in which they operate.

Given the complexity of today's business environments and ecosystems, failing to obtain diverse perspectives is akin to wearing blinders while running a race. Leaders who practice inclusion have a vision of the larger landscape, internally and externally, and therefore can more adeptly navigate ecosystem complexity.

### *Inclusion Integration Plan*

Radical Inclusion represents *integrating inclusion into daily business activities*. Consequently, formal or informal leaders need to have an *Inclusion Integration Plan* which defines a business objective and the types of diverse viewpoints you want to obtain, why, when, and how. The plan can be in a variety of formats and should answer these questions:

1. What is the business need, problem, or situation in which you will benefit from diverse thinking and input?
2. How might diversity of thought help you in this situation?

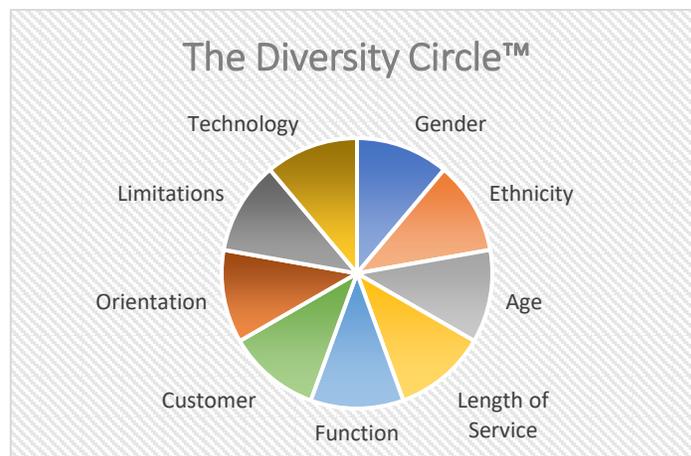
3. Into what diverse perspectives would you like to tap?
4. Who are the people or groups you can reach out to that represent those diverse perspectives?
5. In what ways will you connect with these people?

A tool that acts as a checklist for identifying diverse perspectives is *The Diversity Circle™*. Not every perspective is needed on all business issues, and sometimes people from diverse groups might not have different perspectives. It's up to the organizer to make that determination and the *Diversity Circle™* helps to systematize one's thinking.

The circle is divided into several categories associated with the following questions to determine if a perspective is diverse enough to warrant input on a specific topic:

- **Gender** – will people of *different genders* have a different point of view on this?

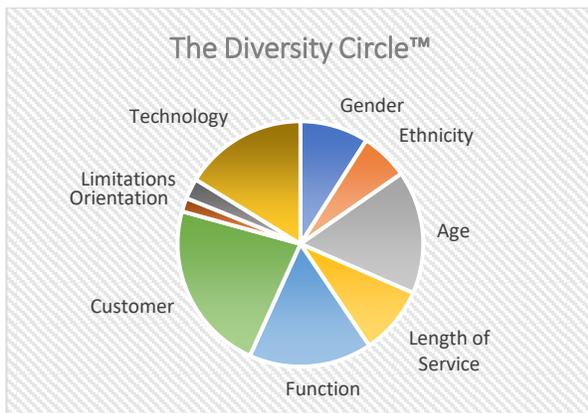
- **Ethnicity** – might people of *color/different heritages* have diverse perspectives on the topic?
- **Age** – may people from *different generations* have different views?
- **Length of Service** – might people of *different LOS* see the issues differently?
- **Function** – will people from *different business functions* see different angles on the topic?
- **Customer** – will we benefit from exposure to the *customer perspective* in this area?
- **Orientation**– will people with *different sexual orientations* have diverse views on this?
- **Limitations** – might people with physical limitations have different views?
- **Technology** – may our technical partners see different angles on this topic?



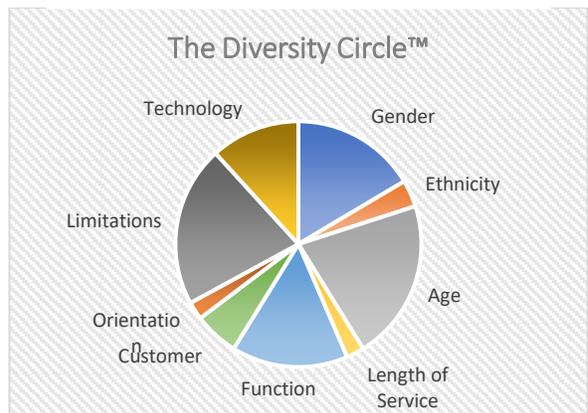
Different business needs require different types of diverse input. For example, if leadership was seeking input on the development of a companywide business strategy, the Diversity Circle might look like the image on the left, with an emphasis on getting input from a range of age groups particularly to capture the Millennials and Gen Z perspective, people who have history with the business, different business functions, people who are tuned into the customer, and technology partners who might have significant contributions on strategy.

In contrast, if the organization wanted diverse input into a corporate move to a new location and workspace, the circle might look like the one on the right, with an emphasis on getting input from both men and women about the potential new location and commuting, generational input on the work space design, functional input on how the office design might impact cross-departmental collaboration, and ease of access for people with physical limitations.

Input on Business Strategy



Input on Corporate Move



With clear intent, a well-developed Inclusion Integration Plan, and the commitment to involve others thoughtfully and in a way that demonstrates value and respect for others, the business will have the accelerant it needs to prosper.

*Tech-Supported Radical Inclusion*

In today's distributed environments in which decision-making is being pushed down the organization<sup>xiii</sup>, to reach

people effectively, it only makes sense to use technology. Technology can accelerate inclusion to:

- Balance involving others with the need to be efficient
- Hear many voices in real-time communications
- Uncover patterns and themes
- Communicate with people in different locations and time zones

Without technology tools, it's more difficult to hear the sometimes-softer voices, and to honor and value the distinct views of others. At the same time, it's important to recognize when a face-to-face interaction (real or virtual) is warranted, using the human touch to emphasize the importance and value of the other person's input.

## 2. Authorize Safety Zones

Expressing a diverse viewpoint requires you have the right people involved, but it also requires that the business environment is accepting of those diverse perspectives. There is nothing that will shut down inclusion more quickly than a manager or opinion leader who criticizes someone for a divergent point of view.

Sometimes the shutdown comes in the form of direct critical statements such as, "I'm surprised to hear you say that", or "That's not how we do things around here." Other times the shutdown might be subtler, such as, "We tried that, and it did not work", or "That's a good idea but we don't have the time or budget for that." In either case, the unintended message from the leader is, "I don't really value what you've said."

Consequently, the sometimes-unspoken response from the participant is, "I'm a fool for opening my mouth", or "Wait and see if I will offer an idea the next time you ask." Furthermore, these punitive reactions to diverse perspectives have a "vicarious negative reinforcement" impact on others who witness the interaction and conclude for

themselves that it's also not wise to speak up.

To support inclusion, managers need a mechanism that enables people to safely share diverse perspectives openly<sup>xiv</sup>. In Japan, it was traditional to go out for a drink with your boss if you had a concern you wished to express, and it was easier to do in an informal after-work atmosphere. In effect they created a "safety zone" to speak openly.

Safety zones don't give people permission to speak unprofessionally, be nasty, or rant in an unfocused manner. They do however create a space in which people can discuss unpopular points of view or divergent ideas without getting them shot down prematurely. Some managers work at having a 24/7 open environment but that doesn't mean that their team members feel safe to speak up, especially if they had bad past experiences. Consequently, especially if the team operates in a hierarchical, critical less-than-forgiving organization, or one that has a low tolerance for even honest mistakes, there may be a need to authorize safety zones.

Safety Zones can take the form of:

- *Times set aside* in team meetings to express perspectives openly
- Agreements to have specific conversations in which *raw unrefined ideas are acceptable*
- A *separate space* for divergent conversations
- A *key word*, accepted by all, that triggers a safety zone

To authorize safety zones, managers and team members must each have a role:

### Safety Zones

Managers Must:	Team Members Must:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be patient with unrefined ideas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Make points calmly, respectfully and professionally</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Accept viewpoints that are different from their own</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Do what they can to communicate fully but also efficiently</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be open to points of view that differ from the senior leader perspective</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Help others see why their point of view should be considered</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Be willing to help team members articulate ambiguous concepts</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Support insights with data/facts when appropriate</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Encourage others to research diverse ideas to add to the idea's credibility</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understand that not all their input will be acted upon and not be discouraged from giving future input</li> </ul>

It is only when employees feel safe to express divergent views that inclusion can successfully be integrated into daily work life. There are in fact several innovation tools that support creating safety zones such as the POINT tool<sup>xv</sup> and De Bono's Six Thinking Hats.

### 3. Clarify Coworker Uniqueness

Diversity program-effectiveness research indicates that people need to experience a sense of belonging to feel valued and be willing to express their views. Similar research indicates that feeling part of the organization can sometimes lead to the tendency to conformity and acting as part of the whole, which can suppress the expression of divergent perspectives. Consequently, the sense of belonging must be counterbalanced by the recognition of the uniqueness of each person and how they can leverage

that uniqueness to make contributions to the business.<sup>xvi, xvii</sup>

In addition to the previously discussed diversity factors, each person is truly distinct and has their own *constellation of uniqueness*, based on such variables as their:

- Work experiences
- Strengths
- Skills and Knowledge
- Past successes and shortfalls
- Training and Education
- Personality styles
- Personal experiences, interests and group affiliations

This is what makes them unique and a potential goldmine of insights if leveraged at the right time and place, but not every area of uniqueness will be

pertinent to all business situations. Consequently, the manager's role is to:

1. Understand the constellation of uniqueness for each team member
2. Know when and how to access their insights
3. Understand when and with who to group team members for divergent creative solutions
4. Reinforce team members for contributing to a greater cause

A *Uniqueness Interview* helps to understand someone's constellation of uniqueness. The interview should fulfill these objectives:

- Surface the constellation of uniqueness for the person being interviewed
- Jointly determine the different potential applications of their unique insights beyond their current daily work
- Understand how the person would most like to, and is most able to contribute, given their current job and workload

With this knowledge in hand, combined with a sound Inclusion Integration Plan, the organization is in the best position to leverage the unique talents and strengths of its managers and team members.

#### 4. Elevate Change-Readiness

We should not underestimate how different this way of operating is for an organization and the amount of change required to make this way of working a reality. Furthermore, changing mindset and behavior is particularly challenging when contradictory habits prevail.

Research on change indicates that it is not how motivated someone is that determines whether they will change but rather their *readiness* to change. Think of a one-year old child who wants nothing more than to move around, but certain cognitive, neurological and muscular-skeletal developments must take place before they are *ready* to walk. Consider a tree that if planted in the wrong time of year withers and dies versus one planted at the right time which is then *ready* to grow and blossom.

The question that change agents must ask themselves is what can be done to *escalate the readiness* of key leaders, teams and individuals to operate in the diversity Growth mode.

The Change-Ready Model™, based on behavioral science research and developed by Change-Ready Solutions, identifies five distinct levels of the readiness to change as well as stage-specific strategies to advance a person or group from one level of readiness to the next. This model is a powerful coaching tool to help another person undertake change.

## 5. Recognize Business Impact

A prerequisite for operating in the diversity GROWTH mode is ensuring that diversity and inclusion activities are *aligned with and impacting the fulfillment of business strategy and objectives*.

Too many “HR” activities seem to operate independently from the core of the business, which then contributes to perceptions of reduced HR relevance. Diversity Growth must be linked to and measure the execution of critical business strategic priorities. This includes but is not limited to:

- Understanding how integrated diversity and inclusion contributes to the *faster and/or better fulfillment of strategic goals*
- Determining how more diverse thinking and problem-solving leads to *increased efficiency and reduced costs*
- Measuring how stronger *more diverse teams outperform less diverse teams*
- Assessing how *increased inclusion impacts talent retention and engagement*
- Developing metrics that indicate the *business impact of innovation through greater diverse thinking*

## Summary

As younger people enter the workforce, there is a greater demand for fairness at work and treating all people with respect, with a reduced tolerance for unilateral decision-making that fails to gather the diverse insights of those people who do the day-to-day work and are dedicated to an organization's success.

Diversity and inclusion are our future. There is no going back. And what a lost opportunity it would be to ignore the divergent thinking of diverse groups to find new ways of optimizing the customer experience and differentiating the businesses from its competitors.

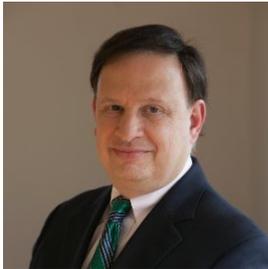
Optimal performance requires inclusive environments that celebrate instead of shunning divergent thinking, while creating a sense of belonging and feeling valued. And all of this must be operationalized integrated into daily business efforts so that Unity in Diversity becomes business as usual.

We believe that this is the next level in the diversity journey.

## About Change-Ready Solutions and Bruce Fern

Change-Ready Solutions is a specialized training and consulting firm that helps businesses lead, change and grow:

- Training to help organizations grow, and managers to lead for inclusion in constantly changing environments
- Consulting to diversity teams to integrate D&I into everyday business activities



Before founding Change-Ready Solutions, Bruce was a leader in IBM's external management consulting Global Talent & Change Center of Excellence and was the corporate VP in charge of agency leadership development for New York Life.

Previously, Bruce founded and led for 15 years Performance Connections International Inc, a training and consulting firm specializing in employee engagement, talent retention, sales, service and leadership development.

Prior to that, Bruce was on the Senior Leadership Team and the Executive Vice President of Consulting at MOHR/Blessing White, one of the nation's leading professional development companies.

Bruce can be reached at [bruce@changereadysolutions.com](mailto:bruce@changereadysolutions.com) and our website is [www.changereadysolutions.com](http://www.changereadysolutions.com).

**“ We can push down, hold back or shut out people who are different, or we can value their diverse presence as the most extraordinary business asset we have. —Bruce Fern / Principal, Change-Ready Solutions**

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## Endnotes

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