

Getting Uncomfortable

Getting D&I right: a qualitative risk approach

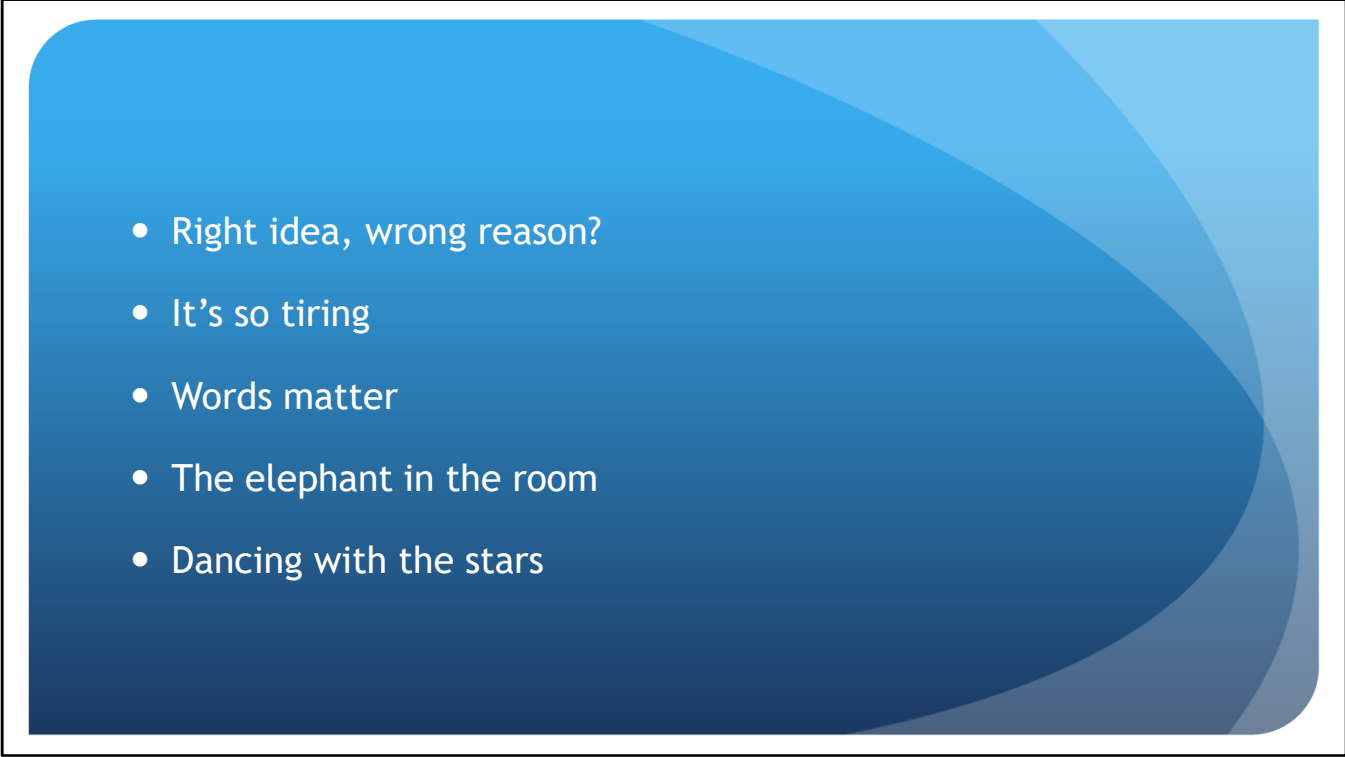
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11/7/2019 CascadiaJS



Libby is comfortable. Way more comfortable than when I found her in a Seattle shelter after she had just been shipped up from an over-capacity shelter somewhere in Texas. She might be a hurricane dog. She definitely dislikes rain.

- 
- Right idea, wrong reason?
 - It's so tiring
 - Words matter
 - The elephant in the room
 - Dancing with the stars

Just a rough outline that preserves a little mystery and intrigue.



Reason #2: \$\$\$

We usually think of the business case as the most justifiable reason to pursue Diversity & Inclusion (I use D&I as the catchall conceptual term even though this presentation makes a key point that we need new words because words shape our thinking).

While the business case may have been sufficient as a sole reason in the past, recent social trends see companies/entities operating in a more attached way with society (see Gen Z topic later). In other words, it may be time to consider the conceptual possibility that the pursuit of financial success, if not just slightly lower in priority, might be thought of as a secondary priority. This is commonly seen in people's personal values (purposeful work first, money second) but admittedly is still rare in the business world.

Economic Return, Innovation

More women executives can boost ROI

+34%

Mixed-gender patent teams cited more often

+35%

https://www.diversitybestpractices.com/sites/diversitybestpractices.com/files/attachments/2018/08/building_the_case_for_di.pdf
<https://hbr.org/2019/09/research-when-women-are-on-boards-male-ceos-are-less-overconfident>
<https://hbr.org/2019/03/when-and-why-diversity-improves-your-boards-performance>
https://www.ncwit.org/sites/default/files/resources/2012whoinventsit_web_1.pdf

We are familiar with the business case.

Evidence continues to mount from the early days when counting women on executive boards was seen to correlate with a likelihood for stronger economic performance. Studies are now exploring numerous causes and phenomena that include traits such as women bringing a more holistic risk analysis perspective.

In the innovation space, patents (and research papers in general) do not specifically gather gender demographics or countries of origin. Databases of name frequencies and gender association allow for good estimates of gender from names alone. The finding is that mixed gender teams create patents with higher citation counts (a proxy for value and inventive contribution). All it takes is for at least one member to be female to see these advantages. I haven't found any research yet that goes to the level of detail of actual proportions of women vs. men on invention teams and the correlation of those numbers with citations.

Productivity, Retention

Engaged employees more productive

+43%

Whole-self employees chance of leaving within a year

-42%

Hay Group

https://www.diversitybestpractices.com/sites/diversitybestpractices.com/files/attachments/2018/08/building_the_case_for_di.pdf

Harvard Business Review, 2017

<https://hbr.org/2017/02/diversity-doesnt-stick-without-inclusion>

The term engagement has been used for a number of years as another measure of the success of a company culture in sustaining employees who feel like they want to have a stake in a company. One source defines employee engagement as a workplace approach resulting in the right conditions for all members of an organization to give of their best each day, committed to their organization's goals and values, motivated to contribute to organizational success, with an enhanced sense of their own well-being.

A variety of factors also contribute to the decision to leave a company. The freedom to bring one's whole self (which is sustained even further when one is appreciated for bringing one's whole self) is also a proxy for those factors.

BUT: diversity \nRightarrow \$\$\$*

*Diversity does not causally imply value creation

- Diversity's relationship to value is complex
- Prerequisites
 - Foundational priorities/culture of equity and safety
 - Emotional maturity and empathy skills
- If equity is really your motivation, why aren't you driving D&I into lower paid roles?

<https://medium.com/swlh/the-business-case-for-diversity-is-a-sinking-ship-d7a42d61f884>

<https://medium.com/fearless-futures/the-business-case-for-inclusion-is-bankrupt-lets-disinvest-9acf15f44121>

<https://medium.com/@lilyzheng308/your-organization-is-doing-diversity-inclusion-backwards-d97160c12868>

To date, the research only says that companies that score well against various D&I metrics can increase their likelihood of improving performance. Direct causal relationships remain elusive but the correlation is overwhelmingly strong.

Recent research finds ethical values and interpersonal skills as necessary conditions for a D&I program to be successful in its aims. That makes sense: immature and toxic emotional behaviors will quickly destroy a company culture.

One of the articles raises a profound idea: that individuals and organizations deeply question their motivations. If you claim that equity is your motivation, why don't you drive D&I with the same gusto into the janitorial staff? I can imagine justifications that might argue that D&I creates inefficiency in what is typically an ethnically or linguistically homogenous staff. This is an argument that would have been made decades ago in any white collar industry.

The realities of earnings-focused businesses make it difficult to fully realize the best of your motives. Such hurdles can be overcome but it is a struggle to be at the forefront of that change. If you aren't having success creating the institutional change you'd like at every level within your organization, passions could be directed outside in the company's name. You can also make intentional choices in your suppliers in terms of their internal practices and identity, eg choosing minority and women owned businesses or demanding D&I evidence as a part of a support proposal.

“Diversity Fatigue”

Somewhere in the 90s the term “diversity fatigue” emerged.

This was after a number of years trying to implement D&I when training alone was thought to be adequate to capture the promised economic gains and virtues. Over a decade of training efforts were seen to have only made marginal gains and a general disdain and exhaustion had developed around repeated training efforts.

My key observation here is that you can tell people why and how to behave differently, but until you overcome emotional resistance (fear), little change will result. From pithy quotes to consumer buying research, it’s been noted that we make decisions based on emotion and rationalize them with logic. Note that the reasons for resistance may be hard for an individual to elucidate even if they’re honest with themselves, and the reasons may be intentionally or unintentionally obscured with rationalizations if they aren’t self-aware.

Consider Gen Z as guidance

Teens who want forms/profiles to offer more than Male | Female

59%

Expect brands to post social opinions

60%

Pew Research Center, 2019

<https://www.pewsocialtrends.org/2019/01/17/generation-z-looks-a-lot-like-millennials-on-key-social-and-political-issues/>

Ad Week, 2019

<https://www.adweek.com/brand-marketing/gen-z-is-shaking-up-gender-norms-and-brands-need-to-be-dialed-in-as-priorities-shift/>

If the conventional practice of training and giving people reasons to pursue D&I aren't working well enough, what can we do differently?

We could teach civics, emotional intelligence, etc. and fill in what many people failed to learn in their formative years. We can also turn to the reality of demographic change as both a business survival reason and to find something aspirational.

Gen Z is just entering the workforce now. This is a very unique generation. They have different views of wealth and financial institutions because many endured the destruction of families during the mortgage crisis; their experience is a variation on the experience of depression-era children. They're the first generation to be digitally connected since birth; they have a unique view of privacy, openness, and virtual community. They have a strong social justice streak; they expect the entities they associate with, buy from, and work for to share their values openly. They have the power to create their own digital reality and bypass the traditional force of corporate messaging.

This is the workforce that is entering your workplace now. As with every new generation, they have much to teach.

Words Matter

An evolution of terms

tolerance
(exclusion)
1500s

diversity
1948

inclusion
1980s

belonging
2016



Segregation----integration
1930-----1954

→ Time

Abt Associates and United Nations
<https://www.thinkinclusive.us/inclusion-exclusion-segregation-integration-different/>

Terminology in the D&I space has evolved. Terms introduced in the past were likely the best that could be conceived at the time, the best that were ready to be accepted, and optimistically believed to be an adequate solution. Steady improvements in the ease of moving ideas and people has driven the conditions under which D&I must perform to previously unimagined levels both in terms of diversity of communities and the rate of change within each individual community.

Inclusion started getting close with the effort to break down exclusionary walls while still allowing people to retain their individual and sub-community identity.

“Belonging” is the latest term. It may simply seem like a new word of the day, it is quite different than inclusion. Inclusion allows for the institutions doing D&I to control the process, the investment, and how progress is measured. In Belonging, there’s a shift of agency to the affected communities who get to decide when they feel a sense of belonging.

This is a radical conceptual shift of authority but similar to other shifts that have happened in society. Some communities have reclaimed formerly derogatory terms and restored them as badges of pride or principle. In gender identity, the dignity to choose one’s gender identity has begun shifting to the individual (irrespective of an arbitrary decision made by a doctor decades ago or the opinion of a random person on the street).

My home city of Bellevue recently changed signage on their still-segregated restrooms in all city facilities. The M and W symbols are still there but a new sign says “You are welcome to use the restroom consistent with your gender identity.” Authority is delegated to the affected community. This disempowers vigilantism and all laws around conduct remain in effect.

“D&I v4.0”

You’re succeeding
when the least-included enjoy a feeling of

belonging

Harvard Business Review, 2017

<https://hbr.org/2017/02/diversity-doesnt-stick-without-inclusion>

GQR, 2019

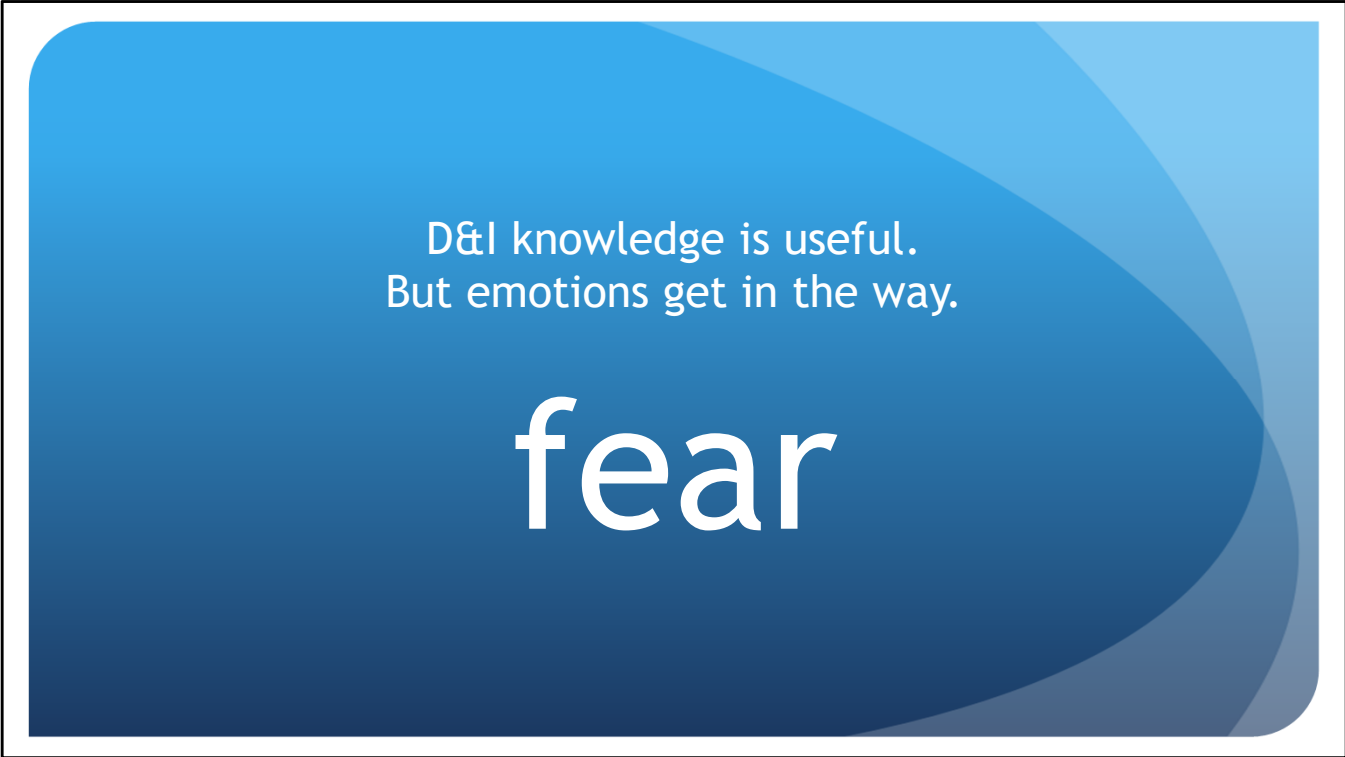
<https://www.gqrgm.com/belonging-the-next-evolution-of-diversity-and-inclusion/>

In the latest incarnation of D&I, the intention of Belonging is central to efforts and metrics.

There may be yet another more meaningful term that emerges after some number of years have passed. As with past models, this latest one is significantly shaped by the limitations of English and the words available to us. What’s interesting is that no one considered the value of this word decades ago even though it has been around forever.



Let's Get Uncomfortable



D&I knowledge is useful.
But emotions get in the way.

fear

As mentioned before, knowledge is important. The rational mind has to be on board.

But resistance to the types of change that accompany D&I are ultimately rooted in various kinds of fear. (Fight and Flight fear responses both imply the preservation of a familiar status quo).

Fear is inherent to the workplace

- Silence / “groupthink”
- “Covering” (an identity or trait)
 - “Code switching” (changing speaking style)
- Bias (confirmation, unconscious, cognitive...)
- #MeToo

Harvard Business Review, 2019
<https://hbr.org/2019/09/the-metoo-backlash?>

Our livelihood is on the line at work. Fear is inescapable and makes change more difficult. Fear of judgment, exclusion, or disapproval permeates the workplace because these relate to employment and pay.

President JFK made poor decisions because his cabinet was a bunch of yes men. Lessons from that experience have led to meeting practices that welcome alternative opinions and ensuring that all voices are heard.

Covering and code switching are examples of trying to fit in and not attract potentially negative attention. Even very successful people are covering something.

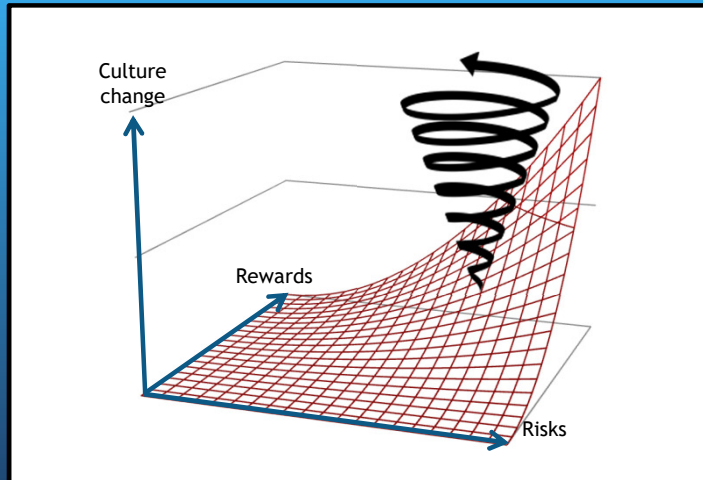
Various forms of bias are also rooted in fear. Our brains create filters to deal with the constant flood of information that we are unable to cognitively process. These filters act automatically and with a primary aim to keep us alive or safe.

The recent #MeToo movement (in which women shared on social media their experiences of physical or moral violation) also exposed other types of fear. Both men and women reported that they expected men to hire or work with attractive women less often in order to find safety under new and unclear “rules”. Women also experienced fear in simply coming out with their experiences and in these and other repercussions.

The risk metric

Creating belonging requires risk-taking by all.
It's hard.

Visualizing the relationship



Workplace culture can evolve toward inclusion/belonging when emotional risks are rewarded

Forbes, 2019

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/janicegassam/2019/03/31/5-reasons-why-diversity-programs-fail/#3d13e3bc637d>

Knowing that people are uncomfortable with change or afraid of speaking/acting out in new ways suggests that leadership has a major role in enabling that change.

It requires a number of interrelated behaviors and expectations. It starts with people taking uncomfortable risks—getting uncomfortable. But to also have leadership create the space and the safety for such change. To sustain those efforts, it requires recognition/reward of some fashion to gel the new culture.

A Harvard Business Review article from 2016 referenced elsewhere in this material describes a simple example of all of that being captured in a simple incentive. Researchers found it was ineffective and actually counterproductive to simply tell managers to hire more from underrepresented communities. The permission and the incentive were simultaneously created in a system that made each manager's hiring progress visible to other managers along with rewards to recognize the best efforts. Managers were still expected to abide by all laws but this created some competition and a conscious reminder that managers could choose to hire individuals with more unique collections of skills and traits (because it's now encouraged, and because they understand the rational reasons) rather than default to the traditional safe criteria (which would only perpetuate the status quo). It seems to me that managers who fail to respond to this structure are some combination of uncompetitive, uninterested, or resistant—which is good to understand as well.

Take Risk (at all levels)

- Leadership/management:
 - Openly set intentions
 - Role model risk-taking and create safety
- Everyone:
 - Get uncomfortable
 - Choose to be better than your biases

Jennifer Brown: Inclusion, Diversity, the New Workplace, and the Will to Change (2016), How to be an Inclusive Leader (2019)

Risk must be taken at all levels.

Most importantly, leadership from the top must make the values and intentions clear and demonstrate those with personal actions, especially uncomfortable ones, to show others that it is safe to proceed on their own.

<https://www.cnet.com/news/at-t-ceo-randall-stephenson-defends-black-lives-matter/> is the story behind AT&T's CEO Randall Stephenson who spoke of the rewards of his own risks in admitting his shortcomings and having come to an understanding of Black Lives Matter. The video of a speech he gave to an AT&T ERG audience of 2000 is in this article. The speech was bootlegged out of the AT&T-only conference but the external response was so positive and the internal changes so transformative that the employee was recognized at the next annual ERG conference. It resulted in numerous sanctioned employee group efforts stimulate challenging conversations. In the Seattle area I borrowed from internally published best practices and the materials at KUOW's "Ask" initiative to create a series of facilitated 1:1 speed-dating style conversations such as "ask a person of color", "ask a caregiver", "ask across generations", with employee affinity groups usually taking the lead to gather their community members and make them available to participate. These are usually met with initial skepticism and trepidation by participants but the response is always immensely positive afterwards.

Rewards

- Recognize efforts
- Comfort of whole-self visibility
- Energy of purpose/passion
- Celebrational culture of authenticity

Jennifer Brown: Inclusion, Diversity, the New Workplace, and the Will to Change (2016), How to be an Inclusive Leader (2019)
Harvard Business Review, 2016
<https://hbr.org/2016/07/why-diversity-programs-fail>

The rewards are pretty self-explanatory.

Open and public recognition (both inside and outside a company) speak to the commitment of leadership. For example, many companies have been making human interest videos or commercials that include employees who are ethnically, religiously, and gender diverse and who enjoy the support to be themselves openly at work.

The psychological costs of covering even one trait that is feared to be job-threatening are high. The covering leads to reduced productivity and degrades physical/mental health. Whole-self visibility brings everything along with it—one's full identity, energy, passions, and more. Many companies successfully tap into these energies directly through employee affinity groups that give outlets for valuable and visible external community work as well as furthering the culture of inclusion inside a company.

Pulling it off

Some recommendations from among dozens
of contemporary strategies

Just scratching the surface though...

- Recognize that you're fighting fear
- Cultivate empathy, EI/EQ (e.g. through storytelling, advanced experiential training)
- Make space for and reward authenticity
- Let communities define success; respect need for affinity, safety
- Understand Gen Z (and what will come soon after)
- Measure outcomes and sentiment

DiversityQ, 2019

<https://diversityq.com/why-empathy-matters-in-business-1004007/>

Forbes, 2017

<https://www.forbes.com/sites/forbescoachescouncil/2017/01/20/11-strategies-for-achieving-a-more-diverse-and-productive-work-environment/#5e2c43b574d0>

This is a very short list. Every author and consultant has cut their own unique slice through the complex space of psychology, laws, business practices, etc. and applied their own lens.

Core to the ideas I've covered today are idea that you must recognize the big elephant in the room of fear and that rational reasons alone won't move you very far.

The ability to absorb these concepts and reapply them depends on a core value of empathy and ethics. I've always made the argument that engineering only exists because of the need to serve people and we have to keep that value in mind.

The idea of making (safe) space for people to practice their inclusion and belonging efforts must be a key leadership goal. That includes role-modeling and recognition.

In the spirit of belonging, affected communities have a key voice in gauging success. But these communities have a history of being excluded and they need affinity spaces for safety and to capture ideas for improvement as they test the transition to a more inclusive culture.

Gen Z has useful vision to share. And they will represent more and more of the workplace.

The image features a rectangular frame containing a blue gradient background. The gradient transitions from a dark blue on the left to a lighter blue on the right. Overlaid on this background is the text "Let's dance" in a bold, yellow-green font. The text is centered horizontally and vertically within the frame.

Let's dance

- Tolerance: being allowed to buy a ticket to the dance
- Diversity: seeing different people at the dance
- Inclusion: being invited by someone to the dance
- Belonging: everyone knowing the dance wouldn't be the same without you

This is a favorite analogy of mine. I originally heard it with the Tolerance/Diversity/Inclusion terms. In 2016 I heard the AT&T CEO add Understanding. At the same time D&I best practitioners added Belonging.

The purpose of the analogy is to remind everyone that there are viscerally different experiences at the school dance and they roughly align with what can be achieved with each of the terms used during the evolution of D&I efforts. If you think tolerance, diversity, inclusion, etc. are all the same and if you're doing one you're doing all of them, it's not true.

At the risk of making the analogy too cumbersome, I'm considering a 5th term along the lines of "Understanding: knowing how to dance in someone else's style" (not just your own)

Video of the band story
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6dpqBVCEcKI>

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