

Birds of All Feathers

Doing Diversity and Inclusion Right

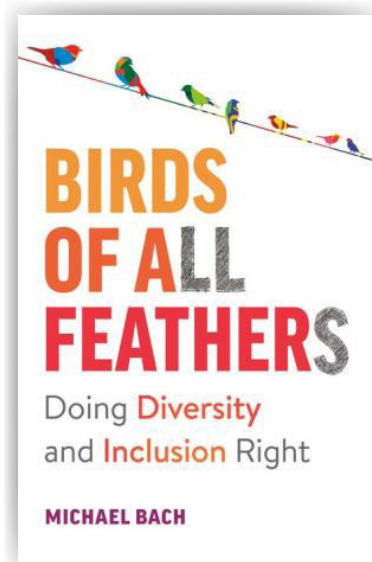
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KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Social justice isn't the right way to take on the diversity and inclusion problems plaguing our society. Instead, leaders must think creatively and innovatively to address the challenges underrepresented groups face.
- Diversity and inclusion can't occur by accident. Leaders must form clear, deliberate strategies by defining their business cases; assessing the current status of diversity, inclusion, and equity in their workplaces; defining tactical steps to drive change; executing plans; measuring their progress; and repeating the process.
- Rather than focusing exclusively on diversity in the hiring process, leaders must also commit to fostering diversity and inclusion among their current employees and leaders to help everyone feel safe, respected, and welcome in the workplace.
- Diversity and inclusion efforts require everyone's commitment, not just people who belong to historically underrepresented groups. Men, straight people, nondisabled people, white people, and others who belong to a "majority" categorization must recognize their roles in supporting others, encouraging their progress, and advocating for change alongside them.

OVERVIEW

Diversity and inclusion efforts are more than "the right thing to do." Real efforts are good for nations, organizations, and the individuals who inhabit them. In **Birds of All Feathers**, Michael Bach shares his observations on what diversity and inclusion mean—and can mean—in our society among people with different sets of morals and values. He explores models that employers can use today to effect change, foster respect and equity, and ensure every member of a workplace can find a comfortable place to inhabit.

D&I DEFINED

Before taking on a conversation around diversity and inclusion, it's important to work through the vocabulary that's necessary for productive dialogue to occur. The following terms are important to define:

- *Representation* describes or portrays a person or item as "being of a certain nature." The quality is often something that can be counted among people, in that people either have the characteristic or don't.
- *Diversity and inclusion*, sometimes called "human rights and equity," has two objectives: to ensure that everyone has an opportunity to belong and to take steps to support their sense of belonging.
- *Human rights* encompasses the rights people are entitled to without discrimination. Most definitions protect against discrimination based on nationality, residence, sex, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, language, or another status.
- *Equity* affirms that people should be fair, impartial, and able to experience fairness and impartiality from others so they can have the same opportunity others enjoy to succeed. It differs from *equality*, which is defined as treating everyone the same way, and focuses more on supporting people how they need to be supported to ensure a level playing field.
- *Accessibility* describes whether something can be reached or entered by others. It accounts for common barriers to access, which may be physical, institutional, societal, or conversational.
- *Accommodation* is defined as the ways in which agreement, settlement, or compromise is reached so that each person attains what he or she needs or deserves to achieve equity.
- *Intersectionality* describes how race, class, gender, and other social categorizations apply to people and create "overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage."
- *Visible minorities, racialized people, or people of color* describe people who aren't white, in part to call attention to the unique challenges they face.
- *LGBTQ2+* attempts to cover the range of sexuality or gender that people may identify with beyond heterosexuality.
- *SWAM*, standing for straight, white, able-bodied man, describes people who are generally thought to be more advantaged than people from other groups.
- *Diversity fatigue* describes the exhaustion organizational leaders may begin to feel when working toward diversity and inclusion goals over the long term.
- *Reverse discrimination* describes the process of favoring individuals who belong to commonly discriminated-against groups over others based on that categorization alone and not their ability to perform.
- *Bona fide occupation requirement*, often abbreviated BFOR, is a requirement of a job that can be defined as essential, even if it runs contrary to legally protected human rights. Examples may include speaking English to work in a customer-facing role, having a driver's license to drive a bus, or having to wear a hard hat on a job site when your religion calls for you to wear a turban.
- *Privilege* describes an advantage or immunity that's available to a specific person or group of people. Male privilege, white privilege, straight privilege, and socioeconomic privilege are commonly cited examples.

THE MODELS FOR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

There are two models for diversity and inclusion:

1. The *social justice model*, generally regarded as ineffective, promotes that SWAM members must lose for an underrepresented group to gain. It calls upon privileged people to take responsibility for the sins of their ancestors by conceding power willingly and ignoring their own self-interests.
2. The *creativity and innovation model*, which is more effective, embraces new ideas that help leaders address the ever-growing challenges underrepresented groups face in ways that will be long-lasting and impactful rather than punitive against privileged groups.

THE BUSINESS CASE

Before forming a plan for diversity and inclusion in your organization, consider the “why” and let that reasoning serve as the bedrock of your strategy. Try factoring the following elements into your why statement:

- *People*. Acknowledge how diversity and inclusion will benefit the well-being, engagement, and productivity of your employees.
- *Customers*. Recognize that a diverse, inclusive workforce mirroring the diversity of your customer base and community will help your organization understand who it serves, what they need, and what matters to them.
- *Brand*. Understand that the appeal of your organization will improve among job seekers and stakeholders who weigh diversity and inclusion among other important factors in their selection criteria.

THE RIGHT WAY TO DO DIVERSITY

Form your strategy for diversity and inclusion by working through the following six steps:

1. Firm up your business case with a two- to three-page document.
2. Assess the current status of diversity, inclusion, and equity in your workplace today.
3. Define the tactical steps you can take to drive change.
4. Execute your plans by taking on the right number of tasks.
5. Measure your progress through metrics and surveys.
6. Repeat the process again and again to make significant headway.

INCLUSION OVER DIVERSITY (AKA TALENT RETENTION)

Great diversity and inclusion programs start with the following objective: building an inclusive culture where diverse groups of people feel welcomed and valued for their insights and contributions. You can build an inclusive culture by focusing on four important strategies:

1. *Educate*. Encourage structured and unstructured thinking about diversity and inclusion throughout every rank of your organization.
2. *Focus on leaders*. Ensure that the members of your leadership team understands the value of diversity and inclusion and buys into why it’s needed.

3. *Communicate.* Speak to your team members clearly and frequently about why diversity and inclusion matter, how efforts will drive change, and how the organization will benefit them.
4. *Reexamine policies, processes, and procedures.* Make sure the rules you enforce are inclusive for everyone in your organization.

ATTRACTING DIFFERENCE

Take steps to ensure diverse applicants have a fair chance through the recruitment and selection processes. To start, write a job posting that's free from bias and has requirements people from diverse groups can meet. Then, get into the community and invite people from diverse backgrounds to apply. Job fairs and community events can be excellent opportunities to show your interest in supporting and embracing a traditionally underrepresented community.

DEVELOPING YOUR PEOPLE

Be sure to examine how people in your organization are tagged for advancement. Study the factors your leadership team uses to identify high-potential people and the opportunities given to that group that aren't granted to others. Like leaders of many other organizations, you may find that your processes for development aren't equitable. If that's the case, make a plan to retool your promotion criteria to help people advance according to their own plans and investments of effort.

MEASUREMENT FOR SUCCESS

Metrics are essential for knowing whether your diversity and inclusion efforts are making a meaningful difference in your organization. Three practices you might adopt are:

1. Quantifying the demographic representation of your workforce and applicant pools at frequent intervals.
2. Studying the correlations between demographics and other factors, including performance ratings, promotions, and pay.
3. Gauging the inclusivity of your organization through engagement surveys, focus groups, and one-on-one interviews conducted by a nonbiased third party.

THE KEY INGREDIENTS

Boost the diversity and inclusion of your organization by forming three essential groups:

1. *Diversity councils* consisting of strategists and executors who allocate a portion of their work time to diversity and inclusion efforts.
2. *Employee resource groups* that allow employees with a common dimension of diversity to come together for support and education.
3. *Diversity and inclusion practitioners* who are hired specifically to spearhead improvement efforts and manage change.

WHITE MAN TRUMPS ALL

When beginning conversations around diversity and inclusion, you may find leaders and employees who harbor feelings of *white guilt*, defined as shame or remorse over the legacy of racism and injustice

and how they've benefited from it. Encourage the validity of those feelings. Then, shift the dialogue to what people can do with their white privilege to benefit others. You may offer some of the following suggestions:

- Sponsor someone who's demographically different from you.
- Join or serve as the executive sponsor of an employee resource group that fosters diversity and inclusivity.
- Create space for others by helping underrepresented groups share their ideas and be heard.
- Get involved in diversity groups, even if the characteristic that aligns them isn't one you possess.
- Listen and encourage others to listen.

OVERCOMING DIVERSITY FATIGUE

Organizations that push for diversity and inclusion for a period of time can suffer from *diversity fatigue*, a tiredness that results from the mental or physical exertion that comes from pushing for change, dealing with resistance, and achieving seemingly thankless wins. This fatigue can occur on an individual or organizational level.

Individuals suffering from diversity fatigue can recharge with the following practices:

- Focus on your physical well-being with exercise and movement.
- Care for your mental well-being through talk therapy or meditation.
- Set boundaries to help you leave your important work at work.
- Rely on your professional network for support and encouragement.
- Take breaks to continue performing at your best.

Wide-scale fatigue through an organization can be remediated with another set of practices:

- Share organizational-wide updates on your initiatives, even if you don't have a big announcement to make.
- Go after initiatives that offer small wins, big wins, and wins that will have a moderate amount of impact.
- Present awards for leaders demonstrating diversity and inclusion.
- Celebrate wins of every size.
- Involve others to get them invested in your efforts.

WHAT GETS IN THE WAY?

Diversity and inclusion efforts sometimes fall short. At times, it's because of a lack of resources, a lack of leadership buy-in, or competing priorities. At other times, self-interest stops the momentum; for example:

- On an individual level, self-interest occurs as people put their own agendas above others', creating infighting among teams that should be aligned toward the same goals.
- On a community level, self-interest occurs as people rank the agenda of one group over any other.
- On an organizational level, self-interest occurs as the employer places the agenda of the business over others, including the community it serves.

Self-interest will always exist, but you can take steps to ensure it doesn't get in the way of the diversity and inclusion you're working hard to foster. Begin by:

- Building awareness of self-interest.
 - Explaining how actions promoting it can harm others.
 - Encouraging others to think through their words and actions to understand if they support what they'd like to achieve for themselves, their teams, their organizations, and their communities.
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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Michael Bach is nationally and internationally recognized as a thought leader and subject-matter expert in the fields of diversity, equity, and inclusion, and he brings a vast knowledge of leading practices in a live setting to his work. He's the CEO of the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion, an organization that he founded in 2012 with the mandate of helping to educate Canadians on the value of diversity and inclusion. Bach has received numerous awards and repeated recognition for his work. He has a post-graduate certificate in diversity management from Cornell University and also holds the Cornell Certified Diversity Professional, Advanced Practitioner (CCDP/AP) designation.

PURCHASE THE BOOK
