



## **The Diversity Journey**

### **Part 1: Identifying Your Motivation and Vision for the Journey**

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Before we talk about the diversity journey, let's define diversity. The Kaleidoscope Group definition includes three components. An organization is diverse when:

- Diverse representation exists at all levels.
- Differences are valued in the way people work together.
- People processes are fairly and equitably managed.

So, with those principles in mind, how do you begin the journey? The first step is to ask, "What is my organization's motivation for embarking on this journey?" There are three potential responses:

- **"Fashionable"** would be one response — The organization wants to "check off a box" or at least be identified as having done something in regard to pursuing the effort.
- **"Reactive"** would be another response — This category usually consists of those organizations that are taking action in response to some type of challenge, barrier, or possible legal action. They have begun to address diversity in an effort to protect the organization and to create a more inclusive environment.
- **"Proactive"** would be the third response — This group understands the business implications of diversity. They begin with an end result in mind. Although they don't have all the answers, they realize that a highly valued, more diverse workforce will drive performance and enable the company to meet or exceed its goals.

No matter what the motivation for beginning the journey, it is imperative that your organization begin with the end results in mind. You must have a clearly defined, well-articulated Vision of Success that details how the diversity process will impact your organization's overall productivity, profitability, and creativity. A shared vision that is strongly supported by top management will create the potential for employees at all levels to demonstrate a commitment to diversity.

As an organization begins the journey, it will encounter different reactions to the diversity process. Some will be "excited," others will be in "limbo," while the remainder will resist the efforts.

- The "excited" group will respond by saying, "Wow, about time! We've needed this for a while; I'm glad we're finally pursuing it."
- Those in "limbo" will say, "Okay, we're normally pursuing some customer service, quality, or performance management program. This is just the next in line on our 'good thing to do' or 'flavor of the month' list."



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- The resistant group will react by saying, “Now they’re going to start hiring unqualified people,” or “Qualifications won’t mean much anymore. It’ll be much more about who you are versus how you perform.”

It’s important to realize that these reactions will exist no matter how well you prepare for the journey, and that no amount of effective communication will stop them. You must expect them and be prepared to address them.

So how can your organization pursue the diversity journey in a way that will respond positively to these varied reactions? What do these groups need to see to appreciate the value of diversity?

- The “excited” group will embrace the value of diversity when they see workplace issues being addressed and tangible changes occurring within the organization.
- The “limbo” group will begin to see the value of diversity when meaningful business results are identified. They begin to see that this process is not simply “a nice thing to do,” but that it can really help the organization become more productive, innovative and profitable.
- The resistant group comes on board when diversity is broadened beyond what might be deemed traditional dimensions (e.g., race and gender), and when they begin to see that they too are included. Diversity cannot be a “win-lose” proposition; it must be a “win-win”— a win for the individuals, a win for the organization — and all differences must be valued.

Finally, you must continue to bear in mind that diversity is a journey that takes time and a sustained effort. The culture of your organization was not created overnight. Patience is required to create a culture that will effectively include everyone. It may take one year, two years, or maybe more; but you must persevere. Begin your diversity journey with this in mind, and you will be well-prepared to create a process that will add value for all and positively impact your organization’s bottom line.