

Rethinking Organizational Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

A Step-by-Step Guide for
Facilitating Effective Change

Edited by

William J. Rothwell, Phillip L. Ealy
and Jamie Campbell



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Overview: What's in a Name?

William Brendel

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Why We Chose Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I)

The acronym DE&I does not come without debate. Compelling cases exist for adding terms such as “Justice” (National Health Foundation, 2021), “Belonging” (McGregor, 2019), “Accessibility” (American Alliance of Museums, 2021), and “Engagement” (The National Council, 2020). Some also suggest changing the order of terms, placing “Equity” or “Justice” in front of “Inclusion” or “Diversity.” Though definitions vary depending on the source, DE&I continues to be the most prevalent terminology in professional associations, including the Organization Development Network (2021), Association for Talent Development (2021), the Society for Human Resource Management (2021), and the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (2021). It is also widely referenced in management literature, including the *Harvard Business Review* and *Forbes*, and consulting outlets like Deloitte (2021) and McKinsey & Company (2021). According to a recent Indeed.com job search, over 4,344 positions in the United States include “DE&I” in their titles (2021). Therefore, to be consistent and relatable, we have adopted the acronym “DE&I” for this book.

How We Collectively Define DE&I

The authors of this book also agree that although our definitions of DE&I differ slightly – as is to be expected – what is universal to them all is the intentional, organization-wide effort to restore, cultivate, and sustain *humanity* at work. Humanity is an anchoring term that implies diversity, equity, and inclusion, and a host of related synonyms: compassion, kindness, fairness, charity, and generosity. Humanity is also something we all innately share, belong to, and it bears a sacred responsibility to improve, protect, and celebrate at work. As we utilize the term DE&I, our meaning differs little from the definitions provided by the outlets noted above.

Customizing Your Naming Convention

Given the sheer number of histories, cultures, and languages throughout the world, arriving at a single acronym that conveys DE&I would, paradoxically, require a certain discrimination, inequity, and exclusion. Even the relatively small number of contributors to this book, who hold much in common, must sacrifice some of their preferences for consistent terminology. You will undoubtedly face the same challenge. Because OD practitioners value learning and collaboration as part of successful change efforts (Yoon et al., 2020), your organization can benefit by using this naming opportunity as:

1. An object lesson that invites employees to enter dialogue around the definitions, associations, relevance, and intersectionality of these terms.
2. A continuous improvement endeavor that leaves space for additional reframing and renaming as new research and organizational discoveries are provided.
3. A chance to translate these terms from statements in employee handbooks to generative questions that encourage experiential learning, professional growth, and genuine acceptance.

To assist you with adopting, creating, or revising your terminology, we offer the following “DE&I Kickoff Naming Tool” (see Overview Addendum Tool 1), which includes helpful framing, questions to discuss, and a decision-making framework. The following tool presents the ideal facilitation; however, we realize that due to pressures and unique differences in your organization this may not be possible.

OVERVIEW TOOL 1: KICKOFF TOOL FOR CHOOSING AND DEFINING TERMINOLOGY

OVERVIEW

This meeting is your *kickoff* to an ongoing process of dialogue, consensus building, appreciation, and ownership of DE&I efforts across all levels of your organization. Your objective is to convene a diverse group of internal stakeholders to suggest, reflect, refine, and decide upon the title/acronym associated with your DE&I efforts.

1. **Select Your Participants:** Invite a diverse group of representatives from your executive leadership team, including the CEO, Human Resources, Employee Resource Groups (ERG), high-potential emerging leaders, Training & Development, and other individuals who have formal or informal influence. Ensure that your group has as much diverse representation as possible.
2. **Prepare Your Slides:** Ask participants to email you their personal understanding of the terms “Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.” Ask them to describe the core concepts, observable behaviors, and feelings associated with each word. Also ask that they send additional words you should consider for your official title/acronym and have them define these as well. Review participant submissions and create a handout that lists all keywords in the order of their frequency. Place a star next to descriptive words used by professional associations. Create a second slide with blank columns under the headings “Primary Terms,” “Secondary Terms,” and “Change Initiatives.”
3. **Facilitate Dialogue:** Discuss and sort terms in the following way:
 - a. **Primary Terms** are those you will utilize in your title; begin with the terms diversity, equity, and inclusion.
 - b. **Secondary Terms** are more specific behavioral- and change-oriented, and may be more suitable for your vision, mission. Discuss whether any terms on your list are synonyms, antonyms, or are part of the definition of diversity, equity, and inclusion. If any of your words are not directly related to diversity, equity, and inclusion, consider adding them to your list of Primary Terms.
 - c. **Change Initiatives** are words that are associated with primary and secondary terms but imply larger strategic objectives. Align these with primary/secondary terms.

4. **Finalizing Your Acronym:** Before deciding on your acronym, discuss the following:
 - a. **Vision and Mission:** Discuss whether any terms are critical to your organization's mission; it may be worth including these in your Primary Terms list. For instance, "Accessibility" is particularly important in healthcare and education. If you are a social justice organization, consider including the word "Justice" in your acronym.
 - b. **Global Meaning:** Discuss how well each of your terms translates in different parts of the world. Even if you are not a global organization, the chances are that you have a multicultural workforce.
 - c. **Order of Terms:** Decide on the order of primary terms used in your official title/acronym. Order conveys importance. Reflect on your dialogue for guidance on your final decision.

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Chapter 1

Facilitating Transformative Learning

William Brendel

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The violets in the mountains have broken the rocks.

–Tennessee Williams

Moving Mountains

“It’s like moving a mountain!” I’ll never forget those words shared by one of my favorite clients, the first Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer in his organization’s history. He fought for every inch of progress in his first two years. Like Atlas, he carried the entire weight of this noble cause for his organization since no one else seemed to care as deeply. His position, which reported directly to the CEO, seemed doomed from the start. No lever seemed large enough to nudge the organization’s policies, systems, and culture in the “right” direction. So, he turned to bigger devices, including provocative organizational assessments and training sessions that addressed problems head-on and handed employees “foolproof” practices they could use when they returned to work. This direct approach should have made things crystal clear! By now, employees should know why they have a moral obligation to change and could use simple tools handed to them on a silver platter.

However, the hardening of hearts continued. Rumors spread that his approach was offending employees and backfiring. Reports of racial insensitivity, bias, and sometimes overt discrimination seemed to be on the rise. Everything my client had ever learned about management theory, training delivery, and behavioral conditioning only seemed to escalate the problem. When every tool at one’s disposal fails, it may be time to step outside of the paradigm in which they were created. What if my client’s metaphor of moving mountains with the right shovel, drill, or bulldozer were replaced with the imagery of a steady gardener, planting seeds – small questions, invitations, and intriguing reflections – which, with the help of some skillful tending, sprout roots on their own? What if these roots could reach their *own* depths, like a field of violets, collectively permeating the bedrock of systemic racism, exclusion, and in DE&I?

This inside-out, self-directed process is the central feature of *Transformative Learning Theory* (Mezirow 2000), which would suggest that leaders focus less on levers and more on how they position the fulcrum; in other words, the way they balance their leadership approach, power, agency, and action. Transformative Learning is a theory that calls all employees,

beginning with DE&I leaders themselves, to accept and transform the way their anxieties, assumptions, attachments, and awareness impact change.

Chapter Overview

Following a brief reflection on the current state of the DE&I in the United States, followed by an overview of Transformative Learning Theory, this chapter will walk you through five steps, which I utilize with great success as both the CEO and principal consultant at the *Transformative Learning Institute*. I share these approaches and their tools freely and encourage you to integrate them with your work so that it works best for you. At the conclusion of this chapter, I will bring these steps to life with a real client case. One caveat that accompanies any step-by-step approach is that transformation is seldom linear or permanent. Depending on how far along your organization is in creating conditions for Transformative Learning, you may find that some steps are less critical than others. Some may require revisiting. Some will call for extra care and additional phases of discussion and reflection. However, each step requires continuous devotion. This five-step approach assumes that DE&I initiatives can be considered only “transformative” when employees move beyond mere compliance and *authentically* embody change. The following outline describes the frameworks, tools, and transitions between each step.

1. ***Establish and Encourage Mindfulness Practice***

Develop an everyday practice that includes nonjudgmentally noticing how your assumptions, anxieties, and attachments drive your interpretations and behavior.

2. ***Balance Your Leadership Approach***

Take and administer the *Balanced Leadership Inventory* (BLI) to your closest DE&I allies to understand and identify areas of imbalance in learning, leadership, strategy, organizational design, and employee engagement.

3. ***Identify and Reflect on Sources of Imbalance***

For each area of imbalance indicated on the BLI, facilitate the *4 Lines of Inquiry Tool* to critically reflect upon ways your collective assumptions, anxieties, and attachments may be hampering your DE&I efforts.

4. ***Assess Transformative Learning Agility***

Administer the *Transformative Learning Agility Assessment* (TLA) to teams outside of DE&I who will help you transform different pockets of

your organization. This will establish a baseline for understanding the team's potential to collectively transform their assumptions, anxieties, and attachments.

5. ***Prime Transformative Dialogue***

Finally, depending on the lowest scoring items on the TLA, utilize the *P.R.I.M.E.* approach to set the stage for transformative dialogue within each team, which includes encouragement and coaching around permeability, reflectiveness, inclusion, a measured approach, and emotional capability to change.

The Current DE&I Landscape

If you currently find yourself stumbling or even causing additional anxiety through your DE&I work, you are not alone. The story I shared above is more common than you might think. To understand the necessity of the steps I will present, consider the following. U.S. companies now invest close to US\$ 8 billion per year on DE&I (Kirkland and Bohnet 2017), a fixture in 234 of the S&P 500 companies, which presents current job seekers with over 46,000 open positions (Glassdoor.com 2021). Unlike traditional organizational functions, the center of gravity for DE&I spans beyond the organization, including racial tensions and surreal flashpoints that pervade society. As a discipline, DE&I struggles to stem the voluntary attrition of minorities who feel suffocated by the silence of their colleagues.

The potential impact of DE&I on organizational performance is enormous, but it still breathes an experimental air, which in some pockets is turning stale. Look no further than Google, which invested over US\$ 264 million into DE&I in 2014 and 2015. By 2019, black employees still comprised just 3.3% of their workforce, with only 2.6% holding leadership positions (Newkirk 2019). Deloitte's 2019 State of Inclusion Survey reveals a shortcoming of a more insidious nature: even though 73% of employees feel comfortable addressing bias in the workplace when they perceive it, only 29% stand up in the moment on behalf of themselves or their coworkers (Cooper and Horn 2019). To make matters worse, Gallup reports that the gender gap has barely advanced over the last decade (Miller and Adkins 2016). These findings could not be more frustrating for DE&I leaders who often feel stuck with no real alternative levers for moving the needle.

Five Steps toward Transformative Learning

While many powerful definitions have surfaced over the past four decades, I would like to first offer my favorite academic definition, followed by my own definition, which has proven helpful in the practical sphere of DE&I. According to Dean Elias, Transformative Learning involves “the expansion of consciousness ... facilitated through consciously directed processes such as appreciatively accessing and receiving the symbolic contents of the unconscious and critically analyzing underlying premises” (Elias 1997, 1). Three practical processes that one might derive from this definition include a person’s ability to influence awareness (theirs or others), observe features of emotion and cognition without self-judgment, and reflect upon the validity and helpfulness of these features.

Transformative Learning involves shifting, expanding, receiving insight from, and applying awareness helped by mindfulness practice and other contemplative approaches (Brendel, Samarin, and Sadique, 2021). that focus awareness on assumptions, anxieties, and attachments; particularly those that yield outcomes that stand in contrast to our stated values and intentions. The more we bring these features of mind into the foreground of awareness and without judgment, the less likely we are to over-identify with our beliefs and the more likely we are to reflect critically upon them without the hindrance of guilt, bias, or self-cynicism. If we adopt this transformative paradigm, the job of a DE&I leader is not to prescribe or inculcate solutions but rather to invite and guide employees through a process of self-directed practices to identify and examine unhelpful, self-preserving beliefs; in *their own words*, developing creative and meaningful solutions, and taking charge of leading change themselves.

Step 1: Establish and encourage applied mindfulness practice

Our everyday language and behavior are often propelled forward automatically through the tacit momentum of our assumptions, anxieties, and attachments. Without clarity, these 3 As will instinctively affect the way you frame and guide employee learning, leadership, strategy, design, and engagement (Figure 1.1). Therefore, the first step in transforming DE&I is to dive inward, cultivating an awareness of your specific 3 As by applying mindfulness practice, which is defined as an “awareness that emerges by paying attention on purpose, in the present moment, and without judgment” (Kabat-Zinn 2003,

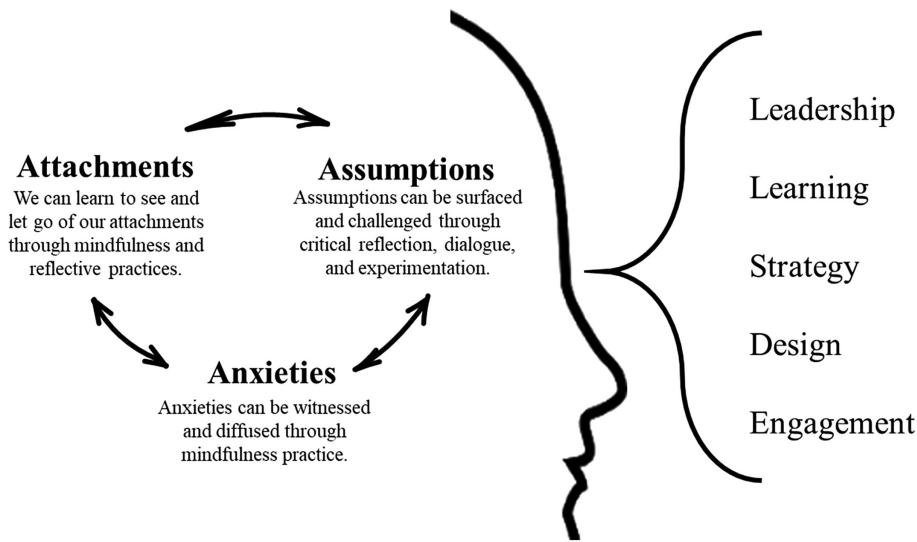


Figure 1.1 The 3 As of DE&I leadership. The author has incorporated this assessment with the permission of the Transformative Learning Institute, LLC.

145). To make this definition practical in the space of DE&I, your first (and continuous step) is to practice paying attention to your anxieties, assumptions, and attachments with intention, in each of your present-moment interactions, and without judgment.

Mindfulness practice creates mental elbow room required to surface, reflect upon, and change our behaviors in “real time” without experiencing a threat to our identity. It creates a distance from which we can see and let go of unhealthy attachments regarding control. Creating this space is necessary if we are to respond thoughtfully, rather than react. It is a movement from clenching one’s hands to opening them, which makes it more likely that you and other employees will genuinely apologize for an unfounded comment we have just made, allow ourselves to be persuaded by others in dialogue, let go of a great idea and bear witness to what another person is saying, act with grace when attacked, and to forgive others. Absent such awareness, DE&I practitioners are also susceptible to developing and leading an approach to change fraught with imbalance. To remind yourself of what to be “mindful of,” keep this 3 As framework handy and take purposeful pauses as you read through the remainder of this book. Observe and embrace what “comes up” for you, without judgment, and examine whether the way you orchestrate meaning around DE&I may be unintentionally hampering the goals you and your organizational allies have set for yourselves.

Observe Your Anxieties

Driven by uncertainty and the feeling of losing control, anxieties comprise a mix of fears, nervousness, and physical distress (Spielberger 2013). We are more likely to react than respond to anxieties and their stress because they compel us to recoil, fight, or even freeze (Maack, Buchanan, and Young 2014, 117–27). At the individual level, anxieties often result in a self-referential “what’s-in-it-for-me” orientation, status quo seeking language, and stubborn avoidance behaviors. Anxieties may also stem from the fear of speaking up, reinforcing a negative stereotype through one’s own behavior, or causing general discomfort around race conversations (Kent 2021).

Noteworthy interactions between an anxious individual and their social environment must also be mindfully observed (Bandura 1988, 77–98). Left unaddressed, group anxieties can suddenly escalate as they attract and feed off each other (Parkinson and Simmons 2012, 462–79). This can cause defensive organizational behaviors (Fennessey 1962, 470–1), including turf wars, political subterfuge, scapegoating, and even sabotage. Research has demonstrated that when threat is anticipated, individuals adhere to a *Conservatism Bias*, in which they take a “better safe than sorry” approach, which manifests in self-censorship (de Jong and Vroling 2014, 22–43). It is also responsible for a walk-on-eggshells attitude that prevents transformative dialogue that can lead to fundamental improvements in DE&I.

Notice Your Assumptions

Assumptions include orienting views or perspectives about one’s world. Combined with anxiety, assumptions drive our interpretation of reality and provide us with an operational anchor for how we see ourselves, others, and what is within or outside of our control. As we accumulate memories from experience, assumptions cluster into belief systems reinforced from within but also by those we surround ourselves with. In this way, we seek the opinions of like-minded individuals (Oswald and Grosjean 2004). This powerful feature of organizational life is just one manifestation of *Confirmation Bias* (Nickerson 1998, 175–200), a psychological mechanism that selectively observes and interprets information, so it validates preexisting beliefs.

Assumptions and anxieties ride on interpretations of the past. *Negativity Bias* also presents an enormous challenge to Transformative Learning in the DE&I space. Negativity Bias refers to the way individuals pay attention to, and remember, negative experiences over neutral or positive ones, which

leads to narrow-minded first impressions and decision-making (Hilbig 2009, 983–6). When repeatedly exposed to judgment, Negativity Bias is even shown to decrease an individual’s belief in their abilities (Müller-Pinzler et al. 2019, 1–15). To transform hearts and minds, DE&I leaders must simultaneously address anxieties through a compassionate lens while also subtly inviting individuals to seek porosity in their assumptions: enough as to warrant critical reflection. Maintaining this level of balance within both the DE&I practitioner and their stakeholders is essential to Transformative Learning.

Let Go of Your Attachments

What Conservatism, Negativity, and Confirmation Biases share is their affinity for ego, gained or lost from the perspective of “I, me, and mine.” For this chapter, I define attachment as any fixation with specific assumptions, anxieties, memories, and narratives, particularly those that revolve around unsatiated needs of ego and control. Attachments make critical reflection difficult because they are often an obsessive, ruminative quality of mind that makes it difficult to assume different perspectives and entertain alternative beliefs. Similarly, they make genuine dialogue difficult because they excite a grasping and clinging quality of mind, which leads to an unyielding “my way or the highway” mindset, often at a great cost. Attachments also manifest in the escalation of commitment, whereby an individual has poured so much energy and time into a project that even though all signs suggest they should stop what they are doing, they continue to the detriment of the organization (Brockner 1992, 39–61).

Attachments, particularly to selfhood (Van Gordon et al. 2018, 892–6) and the need to have a distinct organizational identity, can lead to a great deal of personal suffering in the face of DE&I, including depression and even self-loathing. Some have said that “All beings are addicted to existence, addicted to being, being something” (Amaro 2021, 1). Even when we learn of ego attachment, the temptation to stand out as superior to one’s peers can be irresistible. One of the deepest forms of attachment is *Unconscious Bias* (Ross 2020), which includes automatic mental associations and preferences for or against one group or thing instead of another. In the workplace, unconscious biases produce innumerable organizational inequities for traditionally marginalized populations, including a decreased likelihood of being hired, mentored, presented with growth opportunities, considered for promotion, included in informal networks, and rewarded fairly for performance.

Step 2: Balance your DE&I leadership approach

If you are new or well-versed in change initiatives that aim to improve upon DE&I, the five areas of imbalance introduced below may seem strikingly familiar. As DE&I practitioners are compelled to engage resistance in a balanced fashion (Wasserman 2008, 175–200), I define imbalance as a strong preference about how change *should* be led, which stems from the 3 As and demand a more egoic and controlling approach. The areas in which these imbalances arise include *learning*, *leadership*, *strategy*, *organizational design*, and *employee engagement*. To address each area in the assessment below, I use the metaphor of planting, cultivating, and tending to flowers. At first, this may sound like a soft solution to a hard problem, but later in this chapter, you will be introduced to a case that demonstrates how patience, nonjudgment, and trust can break their way deep into the bedrock of an institution, rendering systemic forms of oppression untenable.

EXHIBIT 1-1: BALANCED LEADERSHIP INVENTORY

OVERVIEW

When it comes to leading DE&I efforts, the need for psychological safety and control can vary widely between individuals. In some instances, our anxieties, attachments, and assumptions inform strong preferences for the way DE&I leaders approach organizational leadership, learning, strategy, design, and engagement. The following assessment is designed to raise awareness and help you reflect upon your own preferences, their origins, and impact on DE&I efforts. The results of this assessment can inform the way you address your own areas of imbalance by comparing them to the case study and testing the *4 Lines of Inquiry* tool.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. For each set of statements listed below, circle the number that most closely resembles your approach. Example: When it comes to leading DE&I efforts, to what degree do you Correct versus Cultivate? If you lean entirely toward “Correct,” circle the number 1. If you lean entirely toward “Cultivate,” circle the number 5. If you lean mostly but not entirely toward “Correct,” circle the number 2. If you lean mostly but not entirely toward “Cultivate,” circle the number 4. If you find yourself doing both in equal measure, circle the number 3.

2. Next, assume a bird's-eye view, noting which of the five areas reflect your strongest preference(s), and jot down the anxieties, attachments, or assumptions that you suspect are behind these preferences. What evidence (observations, behaviors, communications) suggest that biases (Negativity, Confirmation, and Unconscious) are reinforcing your anxieties, attachments, and assumptions.
3. Finally, using a different shape (square, star, or check mark), indicate the preference of your stakeholders. Note how similar or different they are from yours. What evidence (observations, behaviors, communications) would suggest anxieties, attachments, and assumptions that would drive imbalance on their part.

Correcting	Leadership	Cultivating
A preventative orientation in which DE&I creates mandatory processes, policies, and recourse that prevent employees from making mistakes	1 2 3 4 5	A promotional orientation in which DE&I promotes and celebrates change as growth opportunities driven by employees
Preaching	Learning	Planting
A prescriptive approach in which DE&I assumes the role of expert who must prescribe a specific language, set of mental models, and behaviors for DE&I work that must be taken without question and adhered to	1 2 3 4 5	A facilitated approach in which DE&I assists employees in developing their own language and critical thinking capacity by planting simple questions, engaging narratives, and challenging employees to seek deeper meaning in the unique context of their lives
Upending	Strategy	Inviting
A provocative approach in which DE&I speaks truth to power through agitation, critiquing established norms, and compelling employees to accept blame for systemic racism and in DE&I	1 2 3 4 5	An accepting approach in which DE&I gives unconditional positive regard to all employees, with an invitation to enter difficult conversations to the extent that individuals are emotionally prepared to do so

Centralizing	Design	Spreading
An exclusive approach in which DE&I is concentrated in a department, center or individual, that oversees and drives all DE&I work, which creates a dependency upon their knowledge, skills, expertise, and resources. Anxieties revolve around structure and hierarchy	1 2 3 4 5	An inclusive approach in which DE&I is seen as a vibrant, interdisciplinary hub supporting learning and innovation offshoots that directly infuse DE&I knowledge, skills, and abilities into local strategies, norms, and decisions
Judging	Engagement	Tending
A deficit orientation in which DE&I focuses on identifying and communicating problem areas	1 2 3 4 5	An appreciative approach in which DE&I tends directly to employee hopes and growth opportunities while honoring positive changes (both big and small)

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Step 3: Identify and reflect on sources of imbalance

Unlike other business functions, DE&I may reach its heights by generating more questions and motivation from *within* than answers and requirements from above. Slow and steady growth from within has always been key to deep and lasting change. Sometimes the roots of real change run into stubborn obstacles but instead of wasting time trying to break through, DE&I leaders must themselves practice patience and open-mindedness. With the right guidance, these roots will seek their depth, and faster than you might expect. Inquiry is essential to Transformative Learning, because it can drive a fundamental shift in the way things get done, why we do them in the first place, and how we view our roles, behaviors, mindfulness, agency, and efficacy.

The Four “Ifs”

To guide transformation around the five forms of imbalance described above, a DE&I professional can practice guiding employees, leaders, and teams across four lines of inquiry. Each line of inquiry addresses one or more of the 3 As. By first identifying areas of imbalance and then guiding employees, leaders, and teams through these lines of inquiry, DE&I professionals can help to collectively restore a balanced, inclusive, self-directed, consensus-driven, and sustainable approach to change. For each line of inquiry, I include guiding questions that can be asked in a variety of ways depending on the language common in your organization. Modify these questions as needed, so you and your colleagues comfortably identify their assumptions, anxieties, and attachments around DE&I.

“If ... then ...”

“If ... then ...” provides a nonthreatening way of simply describing, clarifying, and reflecting upon taken-for-granted assumptions around your current processes. The goal here is to verbalize assumptions and surface logic between causes and effects. You will know you are asking the right “If ... then ...” questions if the answers should seem obvious and not worth asking. These questions are asked in the spirit of a beginner’s mind and are an attempt to level set – particularly when a process that has always seemed to work is failing. To get started, complete the following sentence: If I am to succeed as a DE&I leader, I must _____.

- a. When did you first recognize the value of this approach?
- b. What would you compare this approach to and why?
- c. How might the outcomes of this approach be described differently by various stakeholders?
- d. Do you believe the results will be sustainable?

“As if ...”

“As if ...” builds upon previous descriptions of basic process assumptions by challenging the premise behind them. The big question is whether you have

framed the problem or solution properly. It also creates a space for questions about individual differences, marginalization, and creating unfair advantages. This is the space where you can expect to surface assumptions about ego and control. Complete the following sentence: As if these approaches are the most effective or appropriate means for _____.

- a. Could individual differences make this approach easier for some and more difficult for others?
- b. Does this approach unintentionally marginalize, disenfranchise, or put anyone in an otherwise uncomfortable position?
- c. Which does this approach not address or serve well?
- d. How might those with formal power be seen to benefit from this approach?
- e. Does this approach address symptoms rather than root causes?

“What if ... ?”

Next, enter the space of anxieties and attachments by asking questions in the spirit of a thought experiment, so you are curiously wondering aloud if the assumptions and anxieties you have so far explored may be producing unintentional negative consequences. These thought experiments follow the “What if ... ?” line of inquiry. Complete the following sentence: What if this approach unintentionally _____?

- a. How does this approach impact personal responsibility?
- b. What are ways this approach might backfire?
- c. Could this approach reinforce some problems it purports to solve?
- d. Is there any possibility this approach might create new anxieties that make fundamental change even harder?
- e. Are we framing any assumption in a dualistic (either/ or) versus flexible (both/and) manner?

“If only ...”

As you move through the first three lines of inquiry you will notice that a shared desire to “fix” or “test” your way of doing things gains steam. The

goal of “If only ...” is to expand awareness (i.e., transcend our assumptions, anxieties, and attachments) to reframing, revising, eliminating, or supplementing specific characteristics of your approach. It is also a space where you ask yourself how you now look at your Self in new ways. How must I not only change what I am doing but also viewing myself. With careful practice, you, and those you have guided through these four lines of inquiry, are ready to plan and test the way you have reframed both objective and subjective reality surrounding DE&I. Complete the following sentence: If only we could (actually) change _____.

- a. What are the ways that we can address the deeper anxieties and attachments not readily changeable through this approach?
- b. What are the ways to help this initiative take on a life of its own while also remaining consistent with our DE&I vision?
- c. What can we do to balance both technical and organic aspects of the change we seek?
- d. What inherent paradoxes exist and how can we enable our employees to appreciate and utilize them as additional sources of insight rather than frustration?
- e. What personal attachments and anxieties have surfaced that are present and potentially responsible for other forms of imbalance?

**EXHIBIT 1-2: TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING
AGILITY SELF-ASSESSMENT**

To complete this assessment, rate how much you agree with each of the following statements when it comes to your experience with discussions you have with colleagues around strategies that center on DE&I. Key: **1 = never; 2 = sometimes; 3 = about half the time; 4 = most of the time; 5 = always**

1. When I share my views, I also genuinely suggest that my perspectives may be incomplete and ask for feedback.	1	2	3	4	5
2. When I share my assessment of a situation, I also genuinely suggest that my perspectives may be altogether incorrect and ask for feedback.	1	2	3	4	5

3. When I hear a perspective that makes me uncomfortable, I first turn inward and examine my own anxieties, attachments, and assumptions.	1	2	3	4	5
4. When I find myself forming a somewhat negative judgment about a colleague, I consider whether I may be subconsciously attributing something to her or him that I really don't like about myself.	1	2	3	4	5
5. I help others explore their own assumptions more often than I actively examine my own.	1	2	3	4	5
6. I tend to speak in a definitive fashion (This is how I see things, I believe this, People should ...), more than an exploratory fashion (I wonder if, Is it possible that, Perhaps I am wrong about ...)	1	2	3	4	5
7. I am confident that my understanding of who I am is more complete than incomplete.	1	2	3	4	5
8. When it comes to working in a group setting, I believe that there is neither "good" nor "bad" ideas, only thinking makes it so.	1	2	3	4	5

The author has incorporated this assessment with the permission of the Transformative Learning Institute, LLC.

Step 4: Assess transformative learning agility

Not everyone will be ready or capable of entering these lines of inquiry with the same acceptance, flexibility, or fervor. For some employees, assumptions, anxieties, and attachments have been formed through distressing experiences, leaving behind post-traumatic residue that makes it very difficult to address certain topics. For others, engaging in discussion around the 3 As is a well-honed skill. Therefore, respect how much we are ready and willing to engage in dialogue, and drawing from this understanding, create the right blend of questions. I have developed and utilize the following self-assessment as a baseline and follow-up measure when coaching others through Transformative Learning in the sphere of DE&I. It gauges the level and degree to which individuals maintain an open-mindedness around change.

Step 5: Prime transformative dialogue

Transformative Learning is one of the most widely studied areas of adult education, and throughout the literature (Cranton and Taylor 2011, 214–23) one must prime five dynamics for dialogue to be transformative. I remember these five areas by the mnemonic P.R.I.M.E. and rely on them when customizing and leading the transformative dialogue on DE&I issues.

1. *Permeability* refers to how much we are open to information that does not confirm our biases, including accurate and complete information and the subjective realities of others.
2. *Reflectiveness* refers to how capable we are of addressing our mental schemas, the influence of power and authority on the way we make meaning, and the relevance of power, authority, and coercion.
3. *Inclusion* refers to how much we are open to alternative points of view, which involves empathy, curiosity, and care regarding how others think and feel.
4. *Measured approach* refers to how capable we are of weighing evidence and assessing arguments objectively.
5. *Emotional capability* refers to how willing and safe we feel about seeking understanding and agreement toward a tentative best judgment that may be tested and validated further.

When forming and empowering teams to help carry out DE&I work in their areas of the organization, ask them to review and reflect on the elements of P.R.I.M.E. together. Have members brainstorm what it would look like, feel like, and sound like if the team excelled at each area. What specific behaviors, interactions, and feelings are involved? Next, bake each element into the team's norms and ask individual members to commit to developing at least one area they would like to improve. Finally, have members discuss what the technical, political, and cultural barriers and enablers are – both in the team and in the organization at large – for each component of P.R.I.M.E. After mapping these forces that help or hinder genuine dialogue, discuss and commit to ways of utilizing or enhancing each of the enablers and eliminating the barriers. Finally, encourage each team to share the processes and behaviors they develop in service to P.R.I.M.E. and share them with other teams facilitating DE&I dialogue throughout your organization.

Case Study

In less than 4 years, Briana Joyner would rise from an HR Generalist position to become the first woman of color to serve as the Director of Human Resources and earn the concurrent role of Chief Inclusion Officer at the Minnesota Historical Society (MNHS). What makes Briana's accomplishments special is her balanced approach to transforming assumptions, anxieties, and attachments surrounding DE&I work at this 173-year-old institution. Briana accomplished this in five steps, which you may emulate to balance your approach to leadership, learning, strategy, design, and engagement. Notice that while these steps do not align sequentially with the steps in this chapter, they are present and each has a multiplier effect on DE&I transformation.

1. **Becoming a Trusted Advisor and Dialogue Facilitator**

Briana first drew immediate attention to the way the traditional leadership structure unintentionally left people of different races, classes, genders, and sexual orientations disenfranchised. She was careful not to have leaders develop a dependence on her expertise but helped develop sustainable cultural competence among leadership that included higher-order acts of empathy, inclusion, and critical reflection. Part of this meant helping everyone in the organization manage a common paradox that stifles most DE&I efforts: sometimes those in charge of DE&I efforts develop an understandable sense of learned helplessness when they cannot garner the sincere attention of leaders on their first, second, third, or fourth try. Instead, Briana flipped this approach inside-out. Rather than approaching leaders as an expert who must be listened to, Briana started her journey by listening to employees, planting seeds, asking stimulating questions, praising their insights, making connections, and ultimately setting leaders on the track for building the case for DE&I from within.

2. **Championing a Shared Leadership Team Structure**

With the trust of leadership and employees, Briana helped to move close to 2/3 of leadership decision-making, agency, representation, recognition, and access to those at the bottom of the organization chart, and simultaneously replacing them with systems that would lift minority employees into and beyond supervisory roles. By focusing awareness on the dimension of "What if?," Briana influenced the development of

three forms of leadership equilibrium demonstrated in this before and after depiction. This new structure produced five powerful outcomes for DE&I. First, it eliminated silos so inclusive teams must work together to produce shared outcomes. Second, it provided a leadership development model in which members of the Organization Development (OD) team were groomed to move into management and finally leadership positions. Third, it simplified and focused dialogue topics that relate to specific performance outcomes. Fourth, it provided vivid examples of how DE&I and business outcomes are not mutually exclusive but rely on each other. Fifth, and most important to Briana's efforts, it included a new OD capacity that systematically intervenes at the cross section of culture and performance.

Next, Briana worked with all leaders to develop the vision for this inclusive structure, which was *to cultivate and support free, full, and iterative dialogue around the alignment of vision, strategy, culture, and performance*. Ground rules for dialogue between these teams followed a formula, which aligned with the P.R.I.M.E. methodology, namely, enter communication with an open mindset, share divergent perspectives, reflect critically utilizing the shared framework, engage inclusively, appreciate individual differences, and relate empathically. To make these teams not only diverse but also inclusive and equitable, the expressed goals were to develop a nonhierarchical feedback culture; a forum for cocreated knowledge; and a collaborative learning and wisdom sharing mentality.

3. **Priming Dialogue in Self-Directed Teams**

Kurt Lewin (1947, 5–41) once said that teams are the primary unit of change in organizations because they produce a social balance. Much of Briana's success comes from decentralizing and embedding DE&I efforts in several self-directed teams, committees, and councils. She first created an overarching DE&I & Inclusion Council. She also introduced, trained, and coached diverse sets of employees in a process called "GE Workout," which breaks down structure and authority that hampers or disrupts organizational DE&I and performance. Briana championed the development of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) with an open invitation to members of the organization, followed by instruction on the process of ERG formation, and providing resources on legal implications. To balance power, rather than directing ERGs centrally through HR, they are all self-directed.

4. **Embedding DE&I in the Mission and Long-Term Strategy**

Because of Briana's ability to inspire and organize systematic change, she was called upon to help lead the development of MNHS's new long-term strategic plan. Being embedded in this process, which is often a feat unto itself for HR, left an unmistakable footprint because Briana led others to reimagine MNHS's public value proposition through its existing vision statement. This repositioned the historical society from simply being another place where artifacts are preserved and shared, to one that teaches all its stakeholders (including employees) a process of historical inquiry to steward greater critical reflection, inclusion, and empathy. MNHS is now transforming its traditional "museum authority" over history, by sharing that authority with local communities throughout MN, and ensuring that all history is treated with equal respect, dignity, and visibility. In this way, the DE&I strategy now transcends the organization.

5. **Transforming the Employee Experience**

Briana has also actively sought, developed, and institutionalized safeguards for DE&I that would permeate every phase of the employee life cycle (attraction, onboarding, development, rewards, and retention, mentoring, career trajectory, and retirement). Briana also transformed the Learning & Development arm of HR into a Transformative Learning and Development architecture. This assimilated DE&I through five pillars: Onboarding, Intercultural Competence, Transformational Learning, Employee Engagement, and Career Development. This approach cultivates self-directed learning, community learning, collaborative learning with diverse external stakeholders, cross-cultural learning, and a host of evidence-based cultural competency interventions. Transformative Learning was no longer a simple matter of support but had become an expectation of all employees.

Key Questions about the Chapter

1. You won't move this mountain on your own – a gentle and balanced approach, which invites everyone into embracing disorientation, dialogue, and experimentation and holds greater potential for successful DE&I efforts. Why?
2. Even your greatest efforts at teaching employees about cultural competencies and unconscious bias will struggle to "stick," unless you directly,

- skillfully, and patiently engage in dialogue around preexisting anxieties, assumptions, attachments, and awareness. The 3 As play a substantial role in the way DE&I efforts balance learning, leadership, strategy, design, and engagement. Can you provide an example to illustrate this principle?
3. Continuously assess and transform the way you balance leadership using the *Balanced DE&I Leadership Assessment*. Could you try one out for yourself and an organization with which you are familiar?
 4. Despite an employee's best intentions, without cultivating mindful awareness, they are likely to act upon stubborn habits of mind that inadvertently hamper DE&I efforts. Mindfulness practice is essential to Transformative Learning. Could you describe how you might demonstrate "mindfulness practice?"
 5. The way we question and answer ourselves from within largely determines how much we own DE&I change. Use the *4 Ifs Guide* to guide questions that advance and sustain this inner growth. Could you write out an example?
 6. Don't assume your employees are prepared or unprepared to transform their inner lives around DE&I. Could you assess and reassess openness and willingness to change using the *Transformative Learning Agility Assessment*?
 7. Prime your employees for transformative development by asking leaders and employees to adopt the P.R.I.M.E. approach, which introduces conditions that must be maintained for genuine dialogue, including Permeability, Reflectiveness, Inclusion, Measured Approach, and Emotional capability. How might you do that? Describe a step-by-step approach.

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