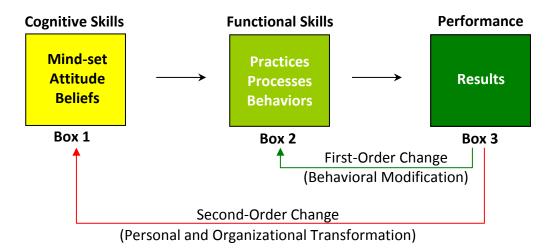# EQUITY, EQUALITY, AND INCLUSION©

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In order to understand how to create a meaningful strategy for achieving an *inclusive culture*, we must first understand the meaning, in-depth, of three critical concepts—*equity, equality,* and *inclusion*. If they are not clearly defined and explored in terms of their unique application to a corporation, an organization, or a society, then we will continue to flounder in our attempts to achieve an undefinable goal. For example, if a goal is not defined in a way that is clearly understood, not action-oriented and measurable, then it cannot be achieved— especially if it's a goal involving both a *transformation* in individual and organizational mind-set (consciousness) as well as significant *change* in the organization, its practices, and behaviors.

If the end-state is inclusion, the first realization we should have is that the process resulting in success must include *cultural transformation*—an *irreversible change* in the consciousness of the organizational culture. *The fundamental difference between change and transformation is that change is reversible and transformation is irreversible*. Change is *external* and transformation is *internal*. The fundamental differences in these two concepts are illustrated by State of Mind diagram Innovations created in 1985.

According to this diagram, practices, processes, and behavioral interventions involve first-order change and transformation in mind-set involves second-order change. The revealing feature of this diagram is that most organizations have applied most or all of their efforts in Box 2. This is where *equity* (to be defined below) resides. However, unless the activities in Box 2, significantly affect the belief structures (or the organizational consciousness) in Box 1, then transformation will not occur. In this sense, I would suggest that 60% to 70% of what we want to occur takes place in Box 1.

The question relating to the previous statement is measured in Box 3—**RESULTS**. However, the quality of the questions, measurement procedure, and skilled interpretation of a cultural transformation survey *and* subsequent assessment are necessary. The focus is on the transformation of both conscious and unconscious exclusionary individual and collective programing and corresponding practices, rather than simply a computation of inauthentic behaviors, in order to achieve confirmation of transformation or not. These results and interpretations should be complemented by a formal or informal assessment of those impacted negatively most by exclusion. The value of the latter, if conducted rigorously, confirms or challenges the value of the survey as well as the interpretation of the survey results—and by association, the recommended interventions.

With this introductory discussion, let's explore the three titled concepts of this white paper—Equity, Equality, and Inclusion.

EQUITY

As referenced above, I will be using the following definition of equity (from the Internet):

> *EQUITY* IS THE QUALITY OF BEING FAIR AND IMPARTIAL: FOR EXAMPLE, "EQUITY OF TREATMENT, ACCESS, AND OPPORTUNITY"

Synonyms include: fairness, justness, impartiality, objectivity, etc.

I would suggest the actions and behaviors in Box 2 are a ***reflection*** of equity as a *way of being* sourced from Box 1—more specifically, an intention to create a culture that functions consistent with the synonyms cited above. Intention, in

terms of inclusion, is measured in Box 3 by achieving declared goals which typically include the following interventions: recruitment and retention; employee development; coaching and mentoring; promotion and advancement; visible opportunities; and, of course, unquestioned leadership commitment for the achievement of a diverse, multicultural workforce. There are also other measured activities as well as innumerable ways of reflecting inclusion, unique to an organization, which combine to define an *employee-supportive culture.*

As a general rule, all measurements are demographically collected, analyzed, and interpreted. Followed by whatever recommendations are appropriate. The question is why, after more than 17 years, is there *not* an organization on this planet that can claim, it has achieved inclusion to the point where it has reached "maintenance mode?" The answer is in Box 1, which contains authentic states of being, such as: *sensitivity*; *understanding*; *commitment*; *intention*; *support*; and most illusively, *equality* as a dominant organizational consciousness. This statement illustrates the power of the subliminal organizational culture or consciousness in determining the infrastructure for inclusion to become a reality.

EQUALITY

The definition equality (from the Internet) is the following:

EQUALITY **IS THE STATE OF BEING EQUAL, ESPECIALLY IN STATUS, RIGHTS, AND OPPORTUNITIES: FOR EXAMPLE, "AN ORGANIZATION AIMING TO PROMOTE AND PRACTICE RACIAL EQUALITY."**

Synonyms include: fairness, equal rights, equal opportunities, justice, etc.

According to the State of Mind diagram, equality is a "state of being," or it is in Box 1. It is an inclusive part of one's personal consciousness, which often goes beyond one's mind-set, especially where imagination, passion, and commitment to excel are involved. It is a broader dimension of selfhood, which borders on or includes a spiritual dimension. The latter is simply one's self-perception from where authenticity, commitment, and responsibility are sourced.

The point I am driving toward is that the actions and activities listed in Box 2 above can only be achieved where authenticity exists. Equally important is that equality, as described in Box 1 as *a state of being, cannot be granted by another individual or words on a piece of paper*, but is internally derived, and becomes "real" when an individual takes ownership and the corresponding responsibility that comes with that ownership. Behaviors consistent with sense of personal ownership are the essence of empowerment.

As stated above, equality cannot be granted by statements on a piece of paper. Statements may illustrate an objective, goal, or condition which is desired, but does not validate an individual's equality. That **not** to say that written statements and vocal declarations are not helpful and supportive, they certainly are, especially when they are followed by actions and behaviors that significantly influence those who are reluctant to take a stand. Validation more easily comes from within an individual in a supportive, safe environment and not from a scorecard.

The reason I suggested that a state of being equal often includes transcending the mind is because, human equality is not *validated* by race, color, wealth, education, lineage, sex, etc., which are all criteria created by selective belief structures and often accepted by those considered to be inferior. Human equality *is* a birthright, inherent in each individual—and does not require performance, achievement, or validated human-created criteria. It simply requires ownership and its corresponding sensitive, supportive, and empowering behaviors. For most of us, this not as easy as it sounds, because of centuries of hardwired programming of accepting external criteria created by others.

If an individual who feels treated unfairly and assumes ownership of his or her inherent equality and proceeds to adopt behaviors and objectives underpinned by responsibility, accountability, and proactiveness, his or her life and performance will transform. The most difficult part of living true to this statement is transforming one's self-perception—whether the transformation involves inferior or superior to human being.

INCLUSION

Finally, we come to the point of defining inclusion.

INCLUSION IS AN EMPLOYEE-SUPPORTIVE WORKPLACE WHERE ALL EMPLOYEES EXPERIENCE EQUITABLE OPPORTUNITY FOR PERSONAL SUCCESS; AND TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE ORGANIZATION'S SUCCESS.

Inclusion is determined by the dominant conscious and unconscious beliefs that influence most the authentic practice of the synonyms associated with equity and equality. It's important to understand that an excellent survey for measuring inclusion begins with a comprehensive and effective definition, because that is what one is attempting to measure before the fact, not after the fact. The definition should permeate the entire cultural infrastructure in terms of its functional operation.

Employee-supportive involves an individual's mind-set, activities, and behaviors in an inseparable way. Mind-set is a combination of one's prejudices and commitments, reflected by discriminatory and inclusive behaviors, and the net results of the two, in practice; integrated with others in the organization. An excellent survey and assessment will sort these out. At present, the most popular intervention for addressing prejudices and biases is training involving unconscious/implicit biases—with widely varying impact, depending on the skill of the facilitator and the receptivity of the group for in-depth exploration and introspection. On-the-job learning is probably *the* most effective means of invalidating counterproductive belief structures that have no basis in reality, such as the inferior/superior dyad, which requires the conscious and/or unconscious participation of *both* individuals. If one authentically disengages as a result of personal transformation, the repetitious cycle is no longer active.

HUMAN INTERACTION IS THE MOST POWERFUL MEANS OF INVALIDATING CONTERPRODUCTIVE BELIEF STRUCTURES THAT NO BASIS IN EXPERIENTIAL REALITY.

Equitable opportunity involves the opportunity to maximize one's performance. Once the opportunity is provided, the challenge is how effectively does an individual take advantage of it? What is the level of performance, with no excuses (accountability), but to view every interaction as a valuable learning experience?

In essence, inclusion must be comprehensively embedded into an organization's infrastructure and culture in order to maximize organizational performance.

THE WAY FORWARD

Given the realities of today's working environment, I would suggest that the way forward for anyone who wants to be successful and make everyone around them successful are the following *courageous* steps, by group designation.

For majority individuals, recognize and acknowledge that privilege and advantageous opportunity do, in fact, exist. Whether you feel you benefit from these or not, they are a reality that others *experience* collaterally. As ways of thinking and behaving to counter these suggestions, consider the following:

  i.   **Break Habits and Self-Confirming Patterns of Exclusion**: Consciously focus on the diversity inherent in the people you work with and push beyond your comfort zone on exclusively seeking out similarity in socialization, informal working practices, and creating workplace solutions and new ideas. Don't settle for confirming self-talk or from those around you.

  ii. **Support the Success of Others Outside of Your Comfort Zone:** Consciously create ways of supporting the success of others, as a natural behavioral pattern, while simultaneously excelling to your highest potential—rather than at the expense of others. Your success and the success of others are mutually inclusive.

  iii. **Be a Voice for Diversity—Human, Cultural, and Systems:** The most influential "voice for diversity" you can express is taking the lead in *ensuring* diverse talent in hiring, developing, and advancing, by results, not rhetoric. Assign and oversee diverse teams in terms of achieving exceptional performance. Create diverse buddy pairs, in addition to mentoring, to support each other's success.

iv. **Be Courageous Enough to Take a Stand for Inclusion:** Most of all, when you are courageous enough to adopt a mind-set of inclusion and practice behaviors of authenticity in behalf of yourself and others, you free yourself of consciously and unconsciously participating in limiting the contribution and success of your colleagues.

For minority employees (in numbers and a mind-set of victimhood):

First and foremost, become aware that equality is inherent in being human—and becomes fully expressible through responsibility and ownership. The illusion of the superior/inferior dyad is non-existent where either part of the dyad no longer exists in being and behavior. One requires the other in order to prevail.

Just as no one can grant you equality, no one can take away what is an inherent expression of who you are. It can only be abdicated when one refuses to take responsibility and ownership. Responsibility and ownership are the driving force which takes advantage of the opportunity and access provided by a system of operation—an organization, corporation, or society of people.

The mental and behavioral requirements to maximize your performance as well as the quality of life you experience, in the world we exist in today, are the following (I admit, in advance, they are not easy to adopt and practice, however, they are extremely freeing):

i. **Give-Up Completely Victimhood**: The most difficult state to "give up completely" is victimhood. Victimhood drains the energy, self-perception, and ultimately the driving force within a person—just as the "pretense of superiority" is ultimately an empty experience of living. Victimhood is a paralyzing abdication of the essence of one's personhood. Victimhood and empowerment are mutually exclusive.

ii. **Set Aside the Expectation of Fairness—for the Short Term:** The second mental state to release is the expectation of fairness. Although desirable, it is an unlikely dominant characteristic in today's highly competitive environments. Fairness is unlikely to become dominant as long as there is no serious attempt to engage cultural transformation.

iii. **Acknowledge and Accept that You Will Probably Have to Play on an Uneven Playing Field to be Successful:** Acknowledge that, in most

cases, you will be playing on an *uneven playing field in* terms of performance opportunities and expectations for success. This situation challenges you to make a decision: Either go beyond what's expected of your counterparts or perform at their level and probably not experience the success you aspire to.

iv. **Make a Choice to be Exceptional in Spite of the Challenges You Experience:** Focus your efforts on continually developing your personal and professional skills as well as quality relationships with your colleagues. Secure a coach and a mentor throughout your career. Focus on your lane and don't compare yourself with others.