

# RE-DEFINING “DIVERSITY”

## The Iceberg Model

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### **Background to the Model**

Initiatives focused on what is now called “Diversity and Inclusion” began in the 1960’s as a direct result of the Civil Rights Movement. A main intention of The Movement was to open institutions and structures to include the total population, and its talent pool. Until the passage of the Equal Employment Opportunities Act in 1964, it was legal for corporations and nonprofit agencies to discriminate in the hiring and promotion of people of color and of women --- as well as persons with disabilities, gay people, older workers and other non-traditional employees.

The first organizations to undertake training to sensitize the workforce to cultural differences happened when the first wave of African Americans moved into jobs from which they had previously been barred.

### **Early Focus on Race**

In 1967, Polaroid Corporation initiated its first “Cross Cultural Seminar” --- designed to prepare its all-white management force for the first African American managers. The focus of that and other early Diversity Training was on issues of race. In subsequent decades, the focus expanded to include issues of gender, sexual identity, ability and age. The initial drivers of this training were the new federal, state and local laws requiring “Affirmative Action.” Training was considered one of the key elements of Affirmative Action programs.

### **The Iceberg Model**

The new definition of “Diversity”, articulated by one of our clients --- Shell Oil – is as follows:

***“All the ways we are different and similar --- both seen and unseen.”***

The Iceberg of Differences, a model which conveys this new definition, suggests that the whole person is now the focus of training, of programs, of activities under the umbrella of “Diversity”. In the past, the focus was solely on what’s “Above the Waterline”. What’s below the Waterline is now seen as just as important as what’s above it.

The early diversity training was designed to increase sensitivity and awareness to the conditions that affected African Americans, Latino and Latina people, Asian Americans, women, persons with disabilities, etc. The focus, therefore, was on those characteristics that lie above the Waterline in the Iceberg model, those characteristics that are most visible. This was a limited, exclusive, focus that was necessary during the 60’s, 70’s and 80’s as the initial impact of cultural changes began to be felt by institutions in the United States.

In contemporary training --- increasingly called Diversity & Inclusion Training, or even more simply Inclusion Training, the internal, hidden material we all carry within is as significant as the visible,

external characteristics. This includes life experiences, personal and professional values, class, education, work style, family, personality style (Myers-Briggs Type Indicator), religious beliefs, politics, job function, position in the organization. What formerly was a narrow focus has broadened to the point of total inclusion. Advanced programs on Diversity and Inclusion today --- in both the private sector and in nonprofits --- are conducted from a perspective that includes the issues of every person in the workforce.

### **Strengthened Diversity Programs**

This has been achieved while maintaining a focus on race, gender and other traditional differences. In fact, this expanded definition of “Diversity” actually strengthens the ability of organizations to address issues of race and gender. Here’s why: Today, all of the variety of differences that employees bring to the workplace matter. So every employee has a reason to learn about the impact of human differences on the work environment. Issues faced by white men, who frequently viewed diversity programs as focusing on the needs of people of color and women, are now included. As white men feel more welcome, they become motivated to support diversity programs --- and are doing so in large numbers. This has greatly strengthened Diversity Initiatives, and brought a more holistic philosophy and practice to them.

By focusing holistically on the entire employee body, this new definition also has changed the basic motivation in organizations for engaging in Diversity

Initiatives. As barriers fall and workplace relations are strengthened, performance and productivity increase and the ability of an organization to understand and serve a diverse community and marketplace also increase.

The evolution from Affirmative Action to Diversity & Inclusion is consistent with the values of Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. and other leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. Rev. King believed that each of us has an inherent capacity to empathize with people who are treated unjustly. He believed that the barriers to equity are eliminated when people make deep connections with each other and experience the power of their interconnectedness. He described human interconnectedness as a “fundamental reality”. The new definition of “Diversity” follows Rev. King’s philosophy in that it honors all of the human differences we bring to the workplace and assumes that individuals will act to right wrongs when given a chance.

### **Alignment with the Civil Rights Movement**

In addition to being effective in building high performance teams and creating institutions that are sensitive to increasingly diverse markets and communities, the new definition of “Diversity” is therefore fully aligned with the original intent of the Civil Rights Movement and its founders: To create a more open society in which all people are fully valued and there is equal access for all.

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# Definition of Diversity

## The Iceberg of Differences



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