"This dramatic shift in how people work together, coupled with the renewed, intense focus on social justice is creating new demands for addressing issues of inclusion, diversity, racism, and inequality in organizations today."

No Going Back . . .

Raising the Bar on Addressing Inclusion, Diversity, and Systemic Change

By Judith H. Katz and Frederick A. Miller

Abstract:
If you like change, these are the times to be living in! Organizations and our society has been unfrozen, and organization development has a significant opportunity to make substantive change. The bar is being raised on organizations and their leaders to lead differently, to engage differently, and to change the very nature of work and organizations. Nowhere is this more important than in addressing issues of inclusion, diversity, the isms, and inequality.

In this article we identify organizational responses to Black Lives Matter and the current reality for People of Color. We identify the role of OD practitioners as key partners in the change process and how OD can assist organizations in taking bold steps... transformational steps to accelerate change.
Keyword Search Indicators: Diversity, equity, inclusion, and OD; Black Lives Matter and OD

Welcome to 2020-2021

If you like change, these are the times to be living in! Organization Development (OD) could not ask for a more fertile and momentous time to apply our skills and knowledge of organization change. As Peter Vaill (1989) described in his book, *Managing as a Performing Art*, we are living in permanent white water.

Many factors have unfrozen our organizations and society, but COVID-19 and the murder of George Floyd being witnessed by millions are the most significant for many individuals and organizations. The virus forced many into seclusion, threatening not only their livelihoods as tens of thousands of businesses shuttered, but also threatening their lives. The murder of George Floyd catalyzed demonstrations and riots and left many people unable to make sense of what was happening in the world around them. It prompted many people to reassess their view of the world, especially related to the Black experience. It has forced many organizational leaders who historically did not take a public stand to speak up and speak out. All of this has created fertile ground for change and for OD. We in the OD community have a significant opportunity to make substantive and fundamental systemic change.

There is no going back and refreezing in the near future. The bar has been raised on organizations and their leaders to lead differently, to engage differently, to get different. From re-imagining service delivery models to shifting operations to meet new and unexpected demands to embracing remote/virtual work for many rather than a few, most organizations are operating in ways they never thought possible. This dramatic shift in how people work together, coupled with the renewed, intense focus on social justice, is creating

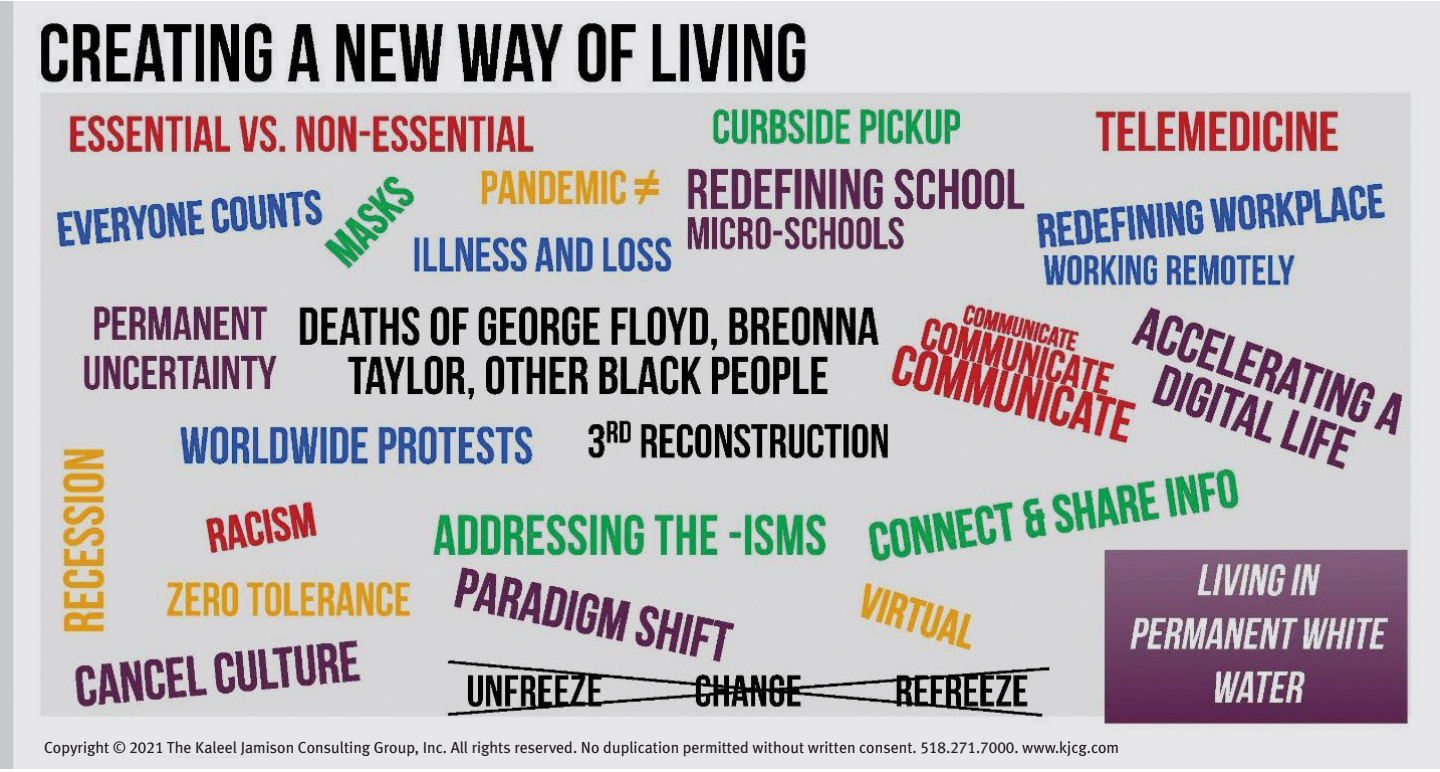

Figure 1: Creating a New Way of Living

new demands for addressing issues of inclusion, diversity, racism, and inequality in organizations today.

This moment holds the promise of a possible Third Reconstruction in the United States (Codrington III, 2020; Ravanona, 2020). The first Reconstruction came after the Civil War; the second was a result of the protests and riots of 1964–68 that led to additional Civil Rights laws. Now we are in another moment to accelerate and experience transformative change. Our organizations and their leaders must take actions to move beyond performative statements of support to truly address systemic change. In this article we focus on the needed organizational responses highlighted by the Black Lives Matter movement and the current reality for People of Color and all people in organizations. We will identify the role of OD practitioners as key partners in the change process and how we in the field of OD need to assist organizations in taking **bold steps... transformational steps** to accelerate change.

The COVID-19 Pandemic Strikes—A New Way of Living

2020 was a year like no other. The onset of Covid-19 brought unprecedented change to our lives, our organizations and our society. Many of us have been living through lock downs and a different rhythm to our lives to stay healthy and safe. Early in the pandemic, the forecasts of hundreds of thousands of people dying had many people reverting to the most basic of Maslow's (1943) hierarchy of needs—our physical and physiological safety, in which even a trip to the grocery store felt like a life-risking act. People and organzations have been dealing with change and disruption that isn't simply beyond a scale they ever imagined, but also highly volatile and dynamic, with conditions and knowledge shifting weekly, if not daily.

As a result of the pandemic, we are experiencing not only a national but a global crisis (See *Figure 1: Creating A New Way of Living*.) In the United States, we have a recession that continues to impact many lives. Many businesses are struggling, if not folding. People are being permanently laid off and portions of the safety net, such as the United States' Payroll Protection Program (PPP), moratoriums on paying rents and evictions, expanded unemployment insurance, are being debated by Congress and even if extended will end in several months.

The pandemic has created a paradigm shift (Barker, 1992) that we cannot ignore and in which many aspects of our lives have gone back to zero. As Joel Barker indicated in describing paradigm shifts, "When a paradigm shifts, everything goes back to zero." In many ways, the pandemic has accelerated the changes that were occurring in society and in the workplace. Many of these changes will be the new way of life. Our organizations and our society will not revert to the "way it was." We have found a new definition of "hero" as we celebrate the relentless commitment of nurses, doctors, hospital staff, bus drivers, and maintenance workers to name a few. We are seeing a redefinition of what an "essential" worker is as front line workers in manufacturing are needed on the job to keep plants running while most corporate staff work remotely. We have seen a massive shift to remote work, even in many organizations where previously it was thought impossible to work that way. Many children are being educated remotely, redefining school and how to structure education. Parents are finding ways to creatively educate their children, creating pods in which several families join together as a work-around to the limitations of remote learning. And people are creatively finding new ways to do daily tasks. Curbside and non-contact pickups have become more and more

the norm. Telemedicine, once resisted by doctors and insurance companies, now is commonplace. Theatre, religious services, birthdays, funerals, weddings, many daily activities and special occasions are now being held virtually—again once unthinkable by many.

The degree of flux and change is significant. No one is untouched by this reality. As one CEO we work with said, "We are living in permanent uncertainty." Five-year or even yearly strategic plans are impossible or, in many cases, not worthwhile to pursue. We are living in "permanent white water" as Vaill (1989) so aptly described. Many of us are accustomed to periods of change and turbulence—white water. But when you go down the rapids, the assumption is that there will be some white water and then stretches where waters calm down before you reach the next set of rapids. Today, we find we are in one set of rapids and even before completing that set, the next set is upon us. All of this calls on organizations, leaders, and individuals to be resilient, creative, agile—to adapt and adapt again in this permanent state of change and uncertainty.

This moment we are living in today has the potential to address the legacies of slavery and the inequities embedded in all of our major systems: education, health care, housing, employment, judicial system, and the environment. The impact of this awareness and call to action is being felt not only in our communities and society, but inside organizations. Every organization has had to take a hard look at how they have chosen to respond and what stance they are willing to take. As another CEO with whom we work said recently, "You used to want to make sure that as a leader you were neutral. Today, that no longer is acceptable. You must take a stand and let your people know where you stand on social issues."

All in the Same Water, But Not the Same Boat

One of the stark realities of the pandemic has been the impact on different communities. It is clear that communities of color and the elderly have been most profoundly impacted (Chowkwanyun & Reed, 2020; North, 2020; Sandoiu, 2020). The pandemic has revealed the inequities in our health care system and its disparate impact on Black, Brown and Indigenous people. We often say, "We are all in the same water, but not in the same boat." In fact, some people don't even have a boat or a life jacket or a piece of wood to hold onto. Some are clearly drowning, with few resources to support them and no opportunity to isolate themselves to avoid COVID-19, while others maintain privilege and access to resources and care and are able to work while safely quarantined. Some can even jump to the front of the line for testing and for the vaccine, not because of their need but because of their one-up status in society.

In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, another reality is upon us. As many communities were in lock down and people were trying to figure out how to engage in a safe way, there was an event on May 31, 2020 that shook our nation and the world. The 9 minutes and 29 seconds of George Floyd's murder was captured for the world to witness. The protests that took place around the world spoke not only to the murder of one person, but the injustices to Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) in the United States and around the world. The outpouring of reaction gave voice to acknowledging the impact of centuries of colonization and unjust treatment, from the experience of Aboriginal people in Australia and Maoris in New Zealand to the experience of migrants in Europe. It included outrage in white as well as BIPOC communities who could not remain silent about the murder of George Floyd and the countless other Black people who have been and continue to be killed by the police. The Black Lives Matter movement opened the door wider to the possibility of real and significant change and unleashed a torrent of young and older people of all social and economic identities and colors who are no longer willing to tolerate the legacy and current reality of racial injustice. This moment we are living in today has the potential to address the legacies of slavery and the inequities embedded in all of our major systems: education, health care, housing, employment, judicial system, and the environment. The impact of this awareness and call to action is being felt not only in our communities and society, but inside organizations. Every organization has had to take a hard look at how they have chosen to respond and what stance they are willing to take. As another CEO with whom we work said recently, "You used to want to make sure that as a leader you were neutral. Today, that no longer is acceptable. You must take a stand and let your people know where you stand on social issues."

An Opportunity for Transformation: Never Waste a Crisis... the Pandemic and Greater Awareness of the Plight of Black and Brown People

Addressing the pandemic has brought some surprises for organizations. One is how quickly many of them were able to pivot. As Lewin (1947) notes about the change process, when systems are unfrozen, there is the opportunity for significant change. A case in point is Nielsen Corporation. At the start of the pandemic, CEO David Kenny reported that when he came to Nielsen 18 months earlier, he was not supportive of remote work. When the pandemic hit and working remotely became necessary, he was able to see it differently and he now

ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSES TO RACISM AND STRUCTURAL INEQUALITY

Do nothing	Make a Statement	Make Some Changes	Make Systemic Change
• Addressing issues seen as too risky, a political statement • Hope it will go away • No mention of Black Lives Matter (BLM) or racism within organization	• Public statements of support • Contributions to foundations, organizations, HBCUs (Historically Black Colleges and Universities), etc. • Performative activism (window dressing) • Focus on external community, not actions to be taken within organization	• Provide resources so that managers can support Black and Brown employees • E-Training or short education • ERGs (Employee Resource Groups) or DEI Councils carrying the bulk of work • Facilitate sessions focused on critical conversations regarding race • Talk about White privilege and bias • Focus on hiring • Limited resources allocated • Little leadership accountability • Some incremental change	• Strategic culture change intervention: internal and external • Honest diagnosis of current state • Connect effort to mission, vision, and strategy • Focus on culture, policies, and practices to support system change • Implement new competencies • Performance measures and accountabilities for individuals, leaders, and functions • Significant investment of time, money, people, resources

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4

Figure 2: Organizational Responses to Racism and Structural Inequality

supports it. He was clear that what was needed was significant and bold change, not incremental steps (PBS Newshour, 2020). The pandemic has accelerated many changes that organizations were considering or starting prior to the pandemic. Many have had to pivot and pivot quickly.

From March through the end of May 2020, many diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts were challenged to keep those issues on the table. Managers struggled with the new reality of managing in a virtual world, with some focused on how to exert greater control, using software to monitor keystrokes to know that people were working when they are at home, (Parker, Knight & Keller, 2020) to others developing new skills to manage and unleash a virtual and non-virtual workforce. Many people recognized the fragility of the moment on all levels of systems—the fundamentals of getting work done, creating high performing teams while working remotely, and a workforce in stress as people struggled to manage their family/life needs and the organization's demands. As we worked with organizations at that time, conversations often centered on one question: how do we continue to address diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) when our organization, workforce, and leaders are in survival and reactive mode? Many organizations began to downsize their DEI efforts or put them on hold; while a few visionary others saw the pandemic as an opportunity to transform their organization and culture and to really integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion into their strategy, mission, vision, and structural processes. And then on the 25th of May, George Floyd's murder and the subsequent Black Lives Matter movement, protests, and uprisings raised the bar on organizations' needing to respond to a new reality.

Black Lives Matter: A Part of the New Reality and a Continuum

Black Lives Matters (BLM) protests gave permission to BIPOC employees to be more vocal about their needs and experiences, not only in society but also inside of the organization. It has resulted in many leaders listening and acting differently. We have seen responses of organizations and leaders on a continuum from ***Doing Nothing*** in response to George Floyd's murder and the subsequent protests and outcry inside organizations to interventions designed to ***Make Systemic Change***. Leaders who are focused on systemic change are seizing this moment as an opportunity to increase their support and partner more closely with Black and Brown employees to enhance the organization. (See *Figure 2: Organizational Responses to Racism and Structural Inequality*.) As *Figure 2* suggests, some organizations are uncomfortable saying the words "Black Lives Matter" and frame it as a negative, political statement rather than one related to humanity and betterment. In one arts organization, an African American woman who was head of programming was told by her manager that the Board was not supportive of BLM and she should stay focused on business as usual. (She has since left the organization.) Fortunately, that has not been what we have witnessed in most organizations. Many organizations have responded with public statements supporting the movement and need for change that BLM and the protests highlighted and significant financial contributions and support to Black-owned businesses, HBCU's (Historical Black Colleges and Universities), foundations, and other Black causes have been the results. Other organizations have created

bold goals to support supplier diversity and change their external business partnerships. Organizations are also looking inward and identifying how they themselves need to change to better support and include Black, Brown, and Indigenous People of Color. Many of these statements however, have been more outward than internally focused. For organizations that have "made a statement," many people are waiting to see which statements have been performative or temporary and which represent a real shift in how the organization will operate in the future (Dowell & Jackson, 2020; Duarte, 2020). Other organizations have started or are increasing their efforts to ***Make Some Changes*** internally as well through actions like holding critical conversations about race and discussions of white privilege and bias. Other actions include providing resources to support individuals to take time to vote and for some to protest. We are seeing a proliferation of book discussion groups taking place inside of organizations and town hall meetings for people to gain understanding of the need for change and actions they can take and the organization will implement. Forums for managers have given them the opportunity to raise questions and concerns about how to address this critical moment of change. Some organizations are taking more proactive steps to hire a more diverse workforce. While these steps are important, they are often fragmented and not a part of a comprehensive strategic plan.

If we are to ***Make Systemic Change***, the real need is to embark on a change strategy that recognizes how racism and other forms of oppression are baked into the organization and address these and other systemic inequalities in all elements of the organization both internally and in the organization's external relations and partnerships. These organizations have had a renewed sense of urgency and energy to address issues of racism in their culture, policies, and practices and have identified how the change efforts, which might have been programmatic in the past, connect strategically to the organization's mission, vision, and strategy. Such a change effort calls upon the need for new competencies and accountabilities and is a significant investment of time, people, and resources.

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Some organizations are seizing this opportunity to examine the antecedents of their organization and/or their professional discipline. Recently, we worked with a library association that is looking at how the racism of John Dewey was embedded into the library science discipline. Other organizations are looking at the deep roots of racism in their founding. In one of our client organizations, people began looking differently at the organization's history and what messages the pictures on the wall conveyed to the current workforce. They believed displaying portraits of past leaders conveyed the longevity and rich founding of the organization, not realizing that many saw the display of all white men as a reminder of the past and present inequity and a failure to recognize the contributions of women and People of Color over all these years. Clearly, they did not indicate any vision of a diverse and inclusive organization. Although these issues may have been raised in the past, they are being listened to in a new way. White leaders, managers, and co-workers are developing greater sensitivity to the impact of racial disparities, images, and behaviors inside the organization and how they can and are impacting their colleagues of color on a daily basis. Some organizations are also looking at ways to impact their surrounding communities and make them safer for Black and Brown people. One CEO and leadership team have made it a priority to work with local police departments where the company has plants to ensure that all employees are safe and free from harassment. In the past, such actions would have been seen as outside of the purview of the organization.

The Role of OD in the Change Process

1. *A New Paradigm is Needed*
   As OD practitioners, we have the opportunity to play a critical role in this window of accelerated change and heightened attention to issues of racial inequality and injustice. Now is not the time to be holding back the possibility of significant change. We have a responsibility to raise the bar on our client systems and challenge them to take bigger and bolder steps. The window of change is here and we must assist our clients to be brave and take the actions needed for a leap in organization transformation. In this unfrozen moment we have the opportunity to accelerate those changes that have been underway and those that the organization may not have been ready to implement. As a firm, during the last several months we have been very fortunate in terms of the volume of calls we have been getting. Often

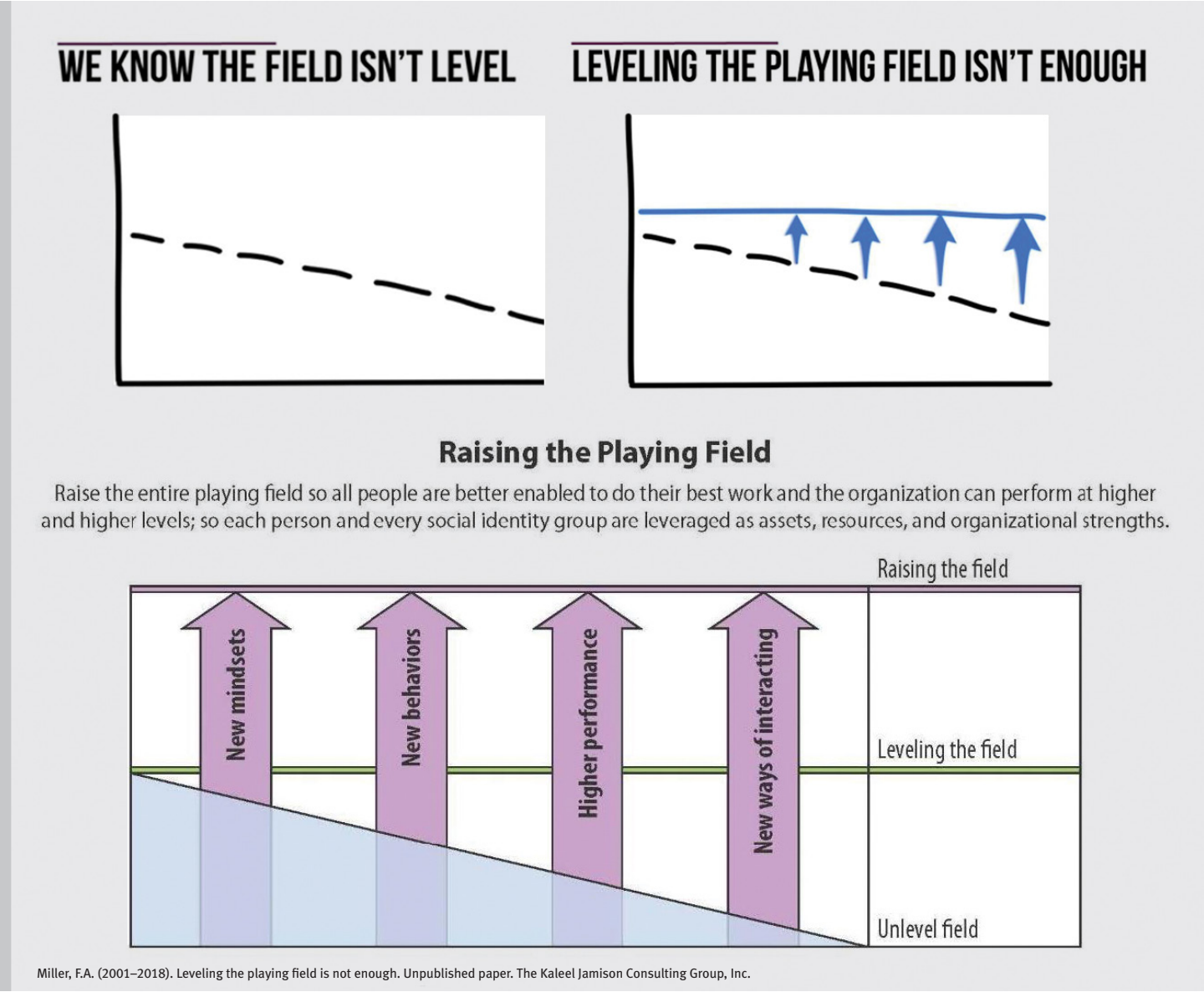


Figure 3: Raising the Playing Field

these calls are for a workshop on bias or facilitating a conversation about privilege, or understanding racism. We have said "no" to work that we believe is not comprehensive enough, or in which we don't see true commitment on the part of senior leaders. As OD practitioners, we *all* have an opportunity in this moment to raise the bar higher and to push organizations and their leaders to a higher level and more comprehensive culture change.

Action:
A paradigm shift is needed in how organizations think about diversity, equity and inclusion. The goal is not to just level the playing field to ensure that those who have experienced discrimination now experience what themajority group experiences. Instead, organizations need to raise the playing field to a higher level of performance for everyone. Yes, the lower end of the slope must be addressed, but that alone is insufficient for real change. This new paradigm means that everyone needs to change and calls for new systems, new processes, and new competencies for interacting. (See *Figure 3: Raising the Playing Field*.)

2. *More Than Hiring*
In response to the demands for change, many organizations have gone on a hiring frenzy. And while many are taking stock of their workforce and where they have gaps, the reality is that they need to do much more than bring in greater representation. In fact, recruiting new people who bring differences into an organization culture unprepared to include them and allow them to contribute, develop, and succeed might be the most harmful action they can take.

Action:
Know where the organization is along the Path to Inclusive Organizations (see *Figure 4: The Path to Inclusive Organizations*) (Katz & Miller, 1995) and target interventions accordingly. OD practitioners should conduct a

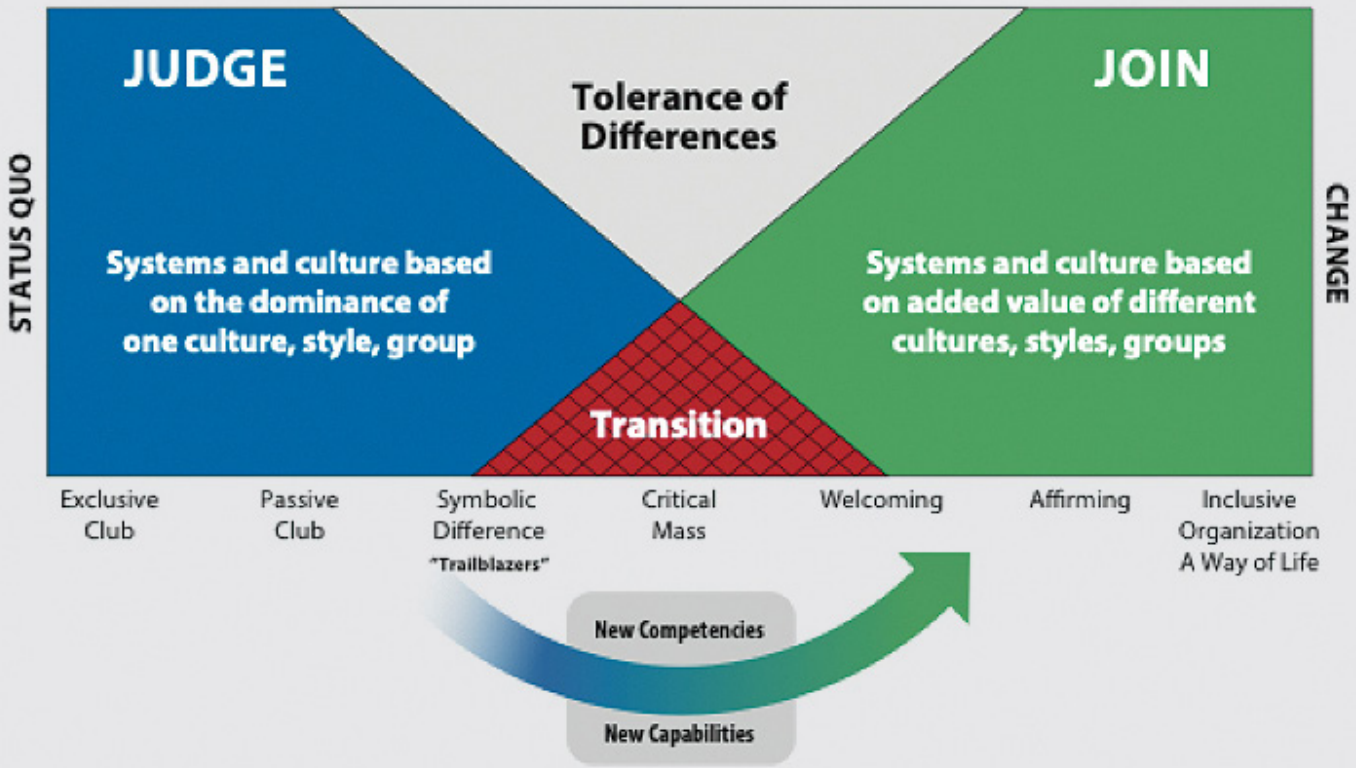
FIVE JOBS OF TRAILBLAZERS

1. Do your job exceedingly well; constantly prove yourself
2. Be the voice for your identity group—serve as a representative on diversity councils; be in the spotlight
3. Make others feel comfortable
4. Educate others
5. Be a mentor to others from your identity group; assist with recruiting and outreach

thorough diagnosis to understand and pinpoint where the organization is on The Path and to develop a strategy for sustainable change. What is the right intervention given where the organization is on The Path? Recognize that hiring people into a culture that is not prepared to include them only results in a revolving door that has significant costs to the organization and individuals. And, if the organization is at a place along The Path where there are or will be trailblazers, what is the organization doing to support them knowing that trailblazers always have more jobs than their official work role? (See sidebar: *Five Jobs of Trailblazers*.) Some important considerations for moving along The Path are: What caused the suboptimization of diversity change efforts in the past? What lessons have been learned and what traps need to be avoided? How are trailblazers' efforts to change the culture being recognized and rewarded?

3. *This is Senior Leadership Team Work*
   In many organizations, Black Employee Resource Groups and other ERGs have been the voice of urgency for change and have taken on leadership that is critical to provide grassroots momentum for change. However, they cannot do it alone, nor should they be the primary driver of a major organizational transformation (Katz & Miller, 2020; Welbourne, Schlachter & Rolf, 2017).

   Action:
   Ensure that leaders see this work as their responsibility for driving organization transformation.



Adapted from "Racial Awareness Development in Organizations," 1981. Bailey Jackson, Ed.D., Rita Handiman, Ed.D., and Mark Chesler, Ph.D. Adapted by Judith H. Katz and Frederick A. Miller. The 1995 Pfeiffer Annual, Volume 2, Consulting. Copyright © 1995, Pfeiffer and Company. Originally pubblished in 1995 and reprinted by permission of the publisher. Revised in 2002, 2021. The Kaleel Jamison Consulting Group, Inc. 518.271.7000. www.kjcg.com.

Figure 4: The Path to Inclusive Organizations

Senior leaders need to understand the connection of the work on inclusion, equity, and diversity and its relationship to the business drivers—the organization's mission, vision, and strategy. Leaders need to be held accountable for the effort's success just as they would with any other strategic initiative or organizational objective. This includes the ways in which they get results, how they each create an inclusive environment within their area of responsibility, and their ability to leverage diversity for higher individual, team, and organization performance. Leaders must also ensure that all efforts for change are linked together and make sure that everyone involved in work to improve organizational performance enhances their knowledge and skills relative to inclusion, equity, and diversity so they are bringing those competencies into their change work.

The ability of leaders to tap into the energy and insights of ERG members is critical, and in this way, ERG's can play a partnership role for change. Essential to success is that ERG participation is included as an element of an individual's deliverables and performance metrics, not as something "extra-curricular." This rightly positions ERG members' efforts as working to accomplish the goals and objectives of the organization and not their own agenda.

4. *Reset What it Means To Be A Supervisor, Manager, and Leader*
As organizations face this time of accelerated and significant change, many models of leadership are outdated and no longer apply. As was seen by the shift to working remotely, many leaders and managers were not prepared to engage people as organizations move through the current challenges and the 21st century. Similarly, many white managers struggle with how to engage Black and Brown employees in terms of their concerns and how best to support their success.

Action:
Communicate a new set of expectations for what it means to be a leader to leaders at all levels, develop those competencies, and hold them accountable. These new competencies include the ability to:

1. Hire, coach, develop, lead, and manage a diverse and inclusive team;
2. Create an environment of supportive energy so that each person can do their best work;
3. Competently and confidently work across differences, including having difficult and candid conversations about race, gender, and other dimensions of difference;
4. Engage and listen to people to really hear their needs and wisdom; and
5. Create an environment of interaction safety in which people feel free to speak up and bring their thinking and "half-baked" ideas to enable diversity of thought, innovation and higher performance (Miller & Katz, 2018).

Through all of this, leaders must be aggressive in their own journey of growth and change, including learning about their biases and being willing and able to lean into difficult conversations.

5. *Tie to Mission, Vision, and Strategy*
One of the traps of many inclusion, equity, and diversity efforts is that they are stand-alone, programmatic initiatives with little connection to the organization's mission, vision, and strategy. As we saw in some organizations during the early days of addressing the concerns raised by Black and Brown people, failure to connect this work to the bottom line and to organizational performance puts it at risk of being sidelined during challenging economic times and defines it as more of a talent or human resources issue rather than one that is critical to organizational success and performance.

Action:
It is critical not only to tie the effort to the mission, vision, and strategy of the organization but to bottom line measures as well. How will a diverse and inclusive organization provide payoffs in terms of production, time to market? How will it increase quality and safety? How will it decrease human error and eliminate waste as people have the right conversations with the right people at the right time, using the right tools? How will it improve customer service? How will it support development of innovative products and services to a wider range of customers? How will it shorten response times? It is critical to connect the work to the measures that matter for the organization and share stories of success (Katz & Miller, 2017; Katz & Miller, 2013).

6. *It is About Changing the Whole Culture*
As change agents, we know that culture is the key to how organizations function. How the organization operates is baked into many of the overt and hidden processes that can enable some people while holding other individuals and groups back. Nothing short of a total systems change is needed. Anything less is often just moving the deck chairs around.

Action:
We know that old and even current systems perpetuate what is. Bold action is needed—taking a hard look at the culture, the formal and informal rules of interaction, and people practices that are baked into the organization's functioning. Some organizations are undertaking a rigorous review of their human resources and management processes and doing a major revamp to enhance and position themselves for the future. They are questioning many of the policies and processes that have for so long gone unquestioned, some being sacred cows. Organizations are undertaking new ways to eliminate bias, such as gender de-coding of

job descriptions and training people to be bias interrupters in calibration and talent assessment meetings. Some are doing thorough analyses of compensation to ensure equitable pay and promotion rates. Organizations with strong relationship cultures are redefining and expanding who has access to those relationships and working to shift to a partnership culture where your access to the information needed to do your job isn't dependent on who you know. Organizations that once prided themselves on their ability to execute are now rewarding people not only for delivering results but for *how* those results are delivered. While having pride in their history, some organizations are getting rid of the artifacts of the old culture that have served as barriers to many and instituting new policies and processes that create a more inclusive and equitable result for all.

7. *Engage in the Hard Conversations and Questions*
We are hearing and experiencing some hard and glaring truths from many BIPOC about the experience of inequality and racial trauma and the impact of generations of oppression in the United States and around the world. These conversations and realities are not easy to hear but important to understand as truths. Having a high performing, inclusive organization and leveraging its diversity requires authentic organizational partnerships across difference. Addressing and engaging in hard conversations is a core competency that people need to have so they can build trust and focus on the organizational challenges ahead. Being skilled at and engaging in these hard conversations must be seen as a key to building greater teams and enabling people to do their best work individually and together, leading to a more productive organization and a higher performing culture.

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Action:
If we want to create a culture in which all people can contribute, feel valued and do their best work, we need to be able to lean into our discomfort and ask and explore some difficult and challenging questions. We need to be willing to take an honest look at how people, not just as individuals, but as groups, are being negatively impacted by organization, team, or individual behavior or lack of actions. We need to identify the competencies a high performing team needs to be inclusive and leverage diversity. We need to look honestly at equity in compensation and the ways in which class is baked into our systems—are we appropriately recognizing the efforts and, more importantly, the risks that front-line workers are taking every day? Are we creating an environment in which people really matter? Are we asking ourselves how are we contributing to the kind of organization that enables everyone to address their biases and blind spots, break down organizational barriers to performance and contribution, and thrive?

Moving Forward

Fundamentally, the opportunity is available for us to create organizations where human beings count and flourish, where people feel valued and safe, and have supportive spaces to do their best work. We need to recognize not only the disparate impact of the coronavirus, but the disparate impact that the virus of racism has on Black and Brown people in our organizations every day. We need to create a place where all people can succeed. Never has there been more opportunity for us as change agents. ***This is our moment!!!*** We can assist organizations (and individuals and our communities) to take that leap into the future while addressing the issues of the past. It is time we put our life jackets on and get ready to engage and ride the rapids of the next several years. The journey is and will be challenging, exciting, and ultimately worth it as we finally move beyond the dehumanizing behaviors and limiting organizational cultures that many have experienced. We are very optimistic, especially since we know that you and others are also on this journey. Rapids ahead!

Our people diverse and beautiful will
emerge, battered and beautiful
When day comes we step out of the
shade, aflame and unafraid,
the new dawn blooms as we free it.
For there is always light,
if only we're brave enough to see it.
If only we're brave enough to be it.
From: *The Hill We Climb* (2021)
by Amanda Gorman,
Inaugural Poem

Frederick A. Miller and Judith H. Katz are CEO and Executive Vice-President Emeritus (respectively) of The Kaleel Jamison Consulting Group, Inc., named one of *Consulting Magazine*'s Seven Small Jewels in 2010. They have partnered with Fortune 50 companies globally to elevate the quality of interactions, leverage people's differences, and transform workplaces. Both are recipients of the OD Network's Lifetime Achievement Award and have co-authored several books, including *Opening Doors to Teamwork and Collaboration: 4 Keys that Change EVERYTHING* (Berrett-Koehler, 2013) as well as their most recent book, *Safe Enough to Soar* (Berrett-Koehler, 2018).

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KJCG is celebrating its 50th anniversary and is the oldest OD and Diversity and Inclusion culture change firm.

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