# REMOTE TEAMS TOOIKIT 4:
# WHAT COVID-19 CAN TEACH US ABOUT DIVERSITY.

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## What COVID-19 can teach us about diversity.

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Everyday my eyes are glued to the headlines about what companies are doing in response to the COVID-19 pandemic. From retail to the entertainment industry, corporate decision-making has real impacts on the way that people live their lives. Preliminary research already shows that COVID-19 has exacerbated inequality by revealing the socio-economic privilege associated with managing the impact of the virus.

Companies that have already invested in diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) are making smarter, more creative and more powerful decisions than companies who have not gone beyond stating their commitment to DEI. Lloyd W. Howell, Jr, CFO and Treasurer at Booz Allen Hamilton provides that ***"one of the greatest challenges is understanding the needs and circumstances of employees who themselves are diverse in all of the traditional measures, but also are affected by widely varying life, work and family conditions."*** Companies that value the range of experiences, background and identities during this pandemic stand to improve their reputation and ultimately their bottom line during and after this crisis.

Target CEO, Brian Cornell has been vocal about his desire to bake diversity, equity and inclusion into every business decision. Over the last few years, the company invested heavily in a supplier diversity program to support minority business owners. At the onset of the COVID-19 crisis, Target took steps to prioritize the needs of vulnerable shoppers by reserving early store hours to offer access to high-demand cleaning and household products. The company has also delayed expansion investments in order to protect employee salaries and health benefits.

A material commitment to DEI is critical for compassionate, complex and effective decision-making. COVID-19 is calling on corporate America to deepen its value of diversity. As we begin to imagine beyond the current crisis, this conversation guide offers a way to evaluate current COVID-19 related decisions and to consider how DEI factors into recovery and transition plans in the post-COVID-19 world.

# Conversation Guide:

## Audience:

For people managers and decision-makers looking to leverage DEI as a tool to strengthen innovative and compassionate decision making in response to and recovery from COVID-19. Ideally this conversation would be led or facilitated by your organization's HR or DEI staff. It's helpful to also have access to data from your organization's most recent [DEI/Belonging survey](#) to provide evidence or support throughout the course of the discussion.

## Objective:

This is an evaluative conversation guide to begin a dialogue about how DEI is valued at your organization, not only in the present moment but also as we begin to imagine the future beyond COVID-19.

## Time commitment:

Set aside 40 - 60 minutes. This guide works best if part one and part two can be completed in the same setting. These questions can also supplement on-going COVID-19 related decisions and communication as well as recovery and transition planning.

# Re-define diversity.

Diversity is multi-dimensional, and now is the time to deepen the institutional definition to include more nuanced aspects of diversity that aren't immediately visible to the eye. A full definition will include every stakeholder from the senior executives to new hires and every life that your business touches. With a deeper and more complex understanding of what diversity means, companies can build authenticity and develop more effective and innovative solutions.

## Questions to ask yourself.

**1.** How did you, as an individual, define diversity before COVID-19? How do you define diversity now (in the midst of COVID-19)?

**2.** How do these definitions change for different groups within your organization? How do early-tenure employees define diversity and belonging differently than senior employees? How do underrepresented groups define diversity differently from overrepresented groups?

**3.** Are there gaps in how these different groups define diversity? Why may that be?

**4.** How can these definitions be blended to create a new corporate definition of diversity for your organization that considers the complexity of your organization?

*The purpose of this dialogue is not to discredit or disprove any particular definition of diversity, but rather to help decision makers and people managers to understand that diversity is complex. Having a nuanced, multidimensional definition of diversity helps to create clarity and credibility for organizations looking to engage with all the identities, backgrounds and experiences to foster a more creative enterprise.*

# Re-define impact.

The consequences of COVID-19 are highly dependent on identity, lifestyle, socio-economic status and a variety of other factors. These same factors will affect how we transition after the threat of COVID-19 has passed. Introverts are experiencing something very different from extroverts and parents and caregivers different from their kids. White collar workers manage the virus very differently from service and hospitality workers. Have you considered the impact of your organization's COVID-19 related decisions on key stakeholders, both in and outside the company? Have you considered how your organization will support varying experiences and identities as we begin to transition back into a physical workplace? Organizational policies that consider the diversity of human experiences have the opportunity to not only do the right thing but to sustain their business and reputation.

## Questions to ask yourself.

**1.** Based on the definition created in part one, what communities are (under)represented at your organization? How do things like tenure, title, and talent level impact (under) representation of various groups?

**2.** In the context of COVID-19, how have your company's responses impacted these groups? Are some groups impacted more than others? Why would that be? (e.g. How is diversity & equity factoring into layoffs and pay cuts?)

**3.** Moving forward, what can be done to consider the impact of COVID-19 related decisions on various underrepresented groups at your organization? Are there ways to mitigate or prevent decisions from impacting one group more than another?

**4.** How can recovery and transition plans evolve, taking into account the diversity of experiences with COVID-19? How can expanded definitions of DEI impact the way we return to work after COVID-19?

*The purpose of this dialogue is to add a level of consideration for underrepresented or minority groups who are often overlooked or underweighted when it comes to business decisions. As COVID-19 places a strain on the U.S. economy, minority groups continue to bear the brunt of the impact. Regardless of your industry, audience or consumer, organizations must consider what their decisions say about their value of DEI both during and after COVID-19.*

# Key Takeaways for Continuing a Discussion Around Diversity and COVID-19:

### Do diversity differently.

COVID-19 will force the business world to nuance its definition of diversity to include more complex aspects of who we are and how we engage with one another, particularly as we begin to think about post-COVID19. Beyond aesthetics, find out what identities, personalities, experiences and backgrounds are represented at your organization.

*Update and expand your organization's definition of diversity by considering who and how different stakeholders have been affected by COVID-19. Share the process and the updated definition. Apply this expanded definition in the decision-making recovery planning.*

### Make decisions through a new lens.

Companies are eager to show that they understand what their stakeholders are going through. Decision makers and people managers must engage with new perspectives to reframe their own privilege and bias. Using a new, expanded definition of diversity, consider how DEI is communicated throughout your current decision-making and communications and how DEI factors into the transition back into a physical workspace. Be compassionate and equitable in your recovery plan and communication.

*Open up a space for confidential internal feedback regarding your company's response to COVID-19. Extend this space to gain insights about the ways that your organization can support key stakeholders during recovery and transition back to the physical workplace.*

> **Coronavirus is the "great equalizer" the same way that climate change is the "great equalizer," which is to say: not at all. Communities of color, lower income households and vulnerable populations are bearing the brunt of COVID-19.**
>
> - Jie Jenny Zou, LA Times.

COVID-19 is calling for change, not only in the way we live our lives as individuals but also in the way we do business. For the millions of Americans who are unemployed, for those with preexisting conditions, for those who are recovering, and for those essential and healthcare workers, COVID-19 presents a daily threat. This week many of us passed 30 days of remote work and social distancing, I am beginning to recognize the opportunity that this moment offers us to reflect and consider the diversity of experiences with this pandemic. It must change us and the way we consider and value differences. As organizations continue to manage and respond to the effects of COVID-19, they have a responsibility to prioritize diversity by taking this time to consider how they can serve the range of needs and experiences with this virus. Stand out organizations will use this moment and all that it reveals to inform prudent, innovative and equitable response and recovery strategies.

Want help developing a program, conducting training, or coaching teams and leaders for empathy? We're here to help. Just drop us a line hello@integralcomms.com