

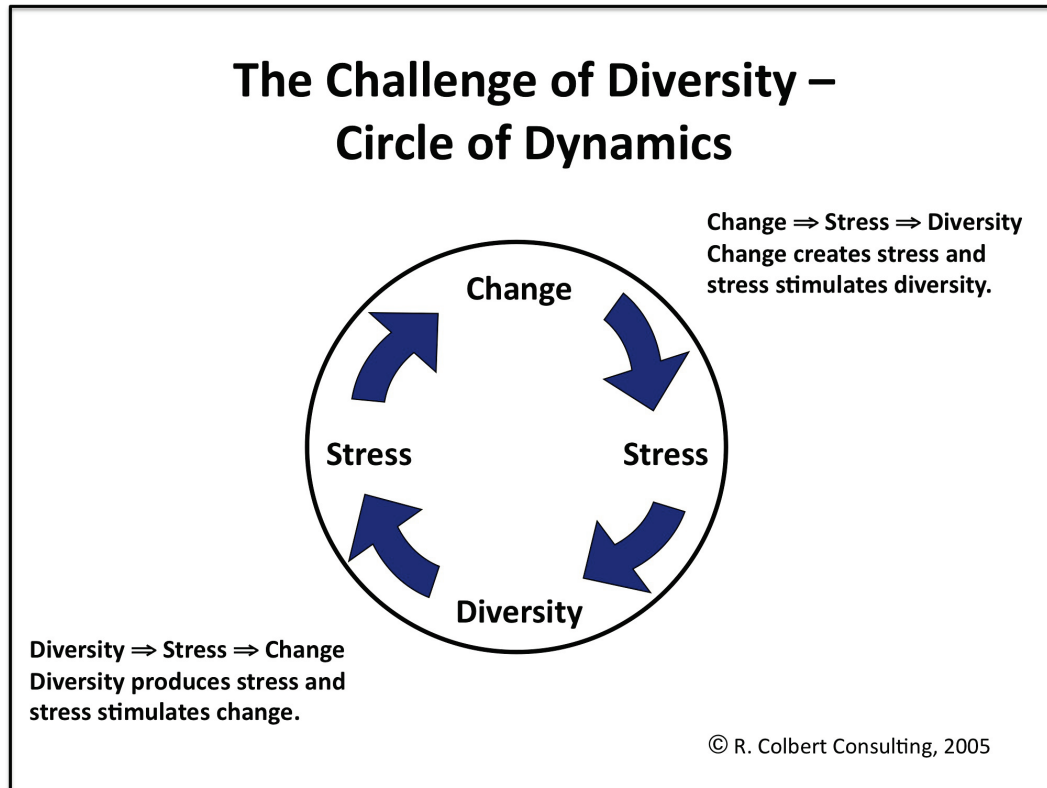
Diversity Dynamics – Factors That Influence Our Appreciation for One Another

When we picture successful diversity, it's easy to visualize a tapestry of people engaged in sharing and discovery of others' views and experiences. We can also imagine an environment where great learning arises from the variety of thoughts and ideas. As diversity leaders, we often assume that greater diversity produces positive outcomes – if not today, in the foreseeable future. In general this rings true, but we've all experienced roadblocks and setbacks that have derailed meaningful diversity progress. Time and again, these barriers have limited our achievements.

There are dynamics that drive diversity outcomes – in both positive and negative directions. It is wise to examine these drivers that determine the course of diversity efforts. By recognizing and remaining vigilant to diversity dynamics, we can introduce tools that accentuate positive outcomes while mitigating negative ones. As I have shared, diversity implies change. Change and diversity, in turn, have their own effects – they create stress and tension. Our responses to stress and tension are shaped by our perception of the likely benefits we will or won't receive. Nevertheless, we require stress and tension in our lives; it's essential for human creativity and action.

This is easy to comprehend using the example of physical exercise. When we exercise, the exertion of stress and tension on our bodies results in stronger muscles, bones and circulatory systems. However, we also recognize that excessive stress and tension can lead to physical injury when exercising, leading us to apply moderation to our regimen. In addition, there are times when we feel lethargic and unwilling to embrace the stress and tension of exercise. These realities help us maintain balance and discipline in our approach. The key is to minimize circumstances of either too much or too little stress and tension.

Similarly, when engaged in diversity efforts, we must manage stress and tension for optimal results. The following diagram illustrates how stress and tension are stimulants that produce a cyclical pattern: change creates stress and tension to stimulate diversity, while diversity produces stress and tension to stimulate change. Stress and tension are the constants. For successful diversity, it is important to introduce dynamics that increase stress and tension, but it's just as important to establish them in a healthy and sustainable manner. Accordingly, it is imperative to consider the upsides and downsides of these dynamics.



So what are the diversity dynamics to which I refer, and what are the upsides and downsides to be managed? I have developed a model that categorizes these dynamics into assortment and assembly. Both are described below.

An assortment encompasses being different and dealing with difference. When successful, a good assortment includes a variety of individuals mixed and matched to produce a full experience or outcome. Whether our perspective originates from being different or dealing with difference, there are pros and cons that can drive dynamics in opposing directions.

An assembly encompasses personal and group identities. When successful, a good assembly brings together individuals to produce a unified and amplified force. The desire to maintain our individuality while belonging to a group can drive dynamics in opposing directions.

With diversity initiatives, assortment and assembly dynamics produce opportunities and challenges that impact human interaction. Over the years, we have done much to assert positive diversity outcomes, but we have done little to acknowledge negative outcomes. In assortment dynamics, those who are different can feel misunderstood or unaccepted. Those who deal with difference can struggle to understand, or feel burdened to accept what they have difficulty

understanding. These downsides must be managed and mitigated.

In assembly dynamics, individuals can resent compromising their individuality or independence for the sake of the group, while the group can resent individuals who put their personal needs ahead of the group's needs. Likewise, peer pressure can influence individuals to do things that hurt or disregard others not respected by the group. We often see this played out in competitive situations when one group is matched against another. As with assortment dynamics, downsides must be managed.

Assortment and assembly dynamics and their potential effects are exhibited in the subsequent matrix.

Diversity Dynamics in the Community and Workplace		
Assortment	Pros	Cons
Being different	• Unique perspectives • Multiple roots – immersion in more than one culture • More noticeable strengths	• Unfamiliar surroundings / possible isolation • Repeated stereotyping • More noticeable weaknesses
Dealing with difference	• More decision inputs • More experiences to appreciate and learn from • More “feelers” into surrounding community and marketplace	• More complicated decisions • Difficulty reconciling differences • Unknown variables – more perceived risk • Blind spots to personal biases
Assembly	Individual Dynamics	Group Dynamics
Individual vs. group identity	• Need for safe surroundings • Desire for recognition • Desire for acceptance • Desire for growth and fulfillment	• Need for similar goals and objectives – team spirit • Desire and ability to work well together – teamwork • Desire to protect clan

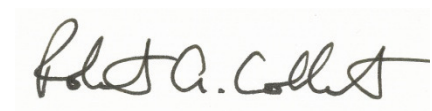
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We expect diversity to lead to greater capabilities and wisdom for the collective, stemming from the wealth of available talent and perspectives. This success is cultivated by creative stress and

tension, which only happens when diverse persons are appreciated and their voices are heard. However, as discussed, stress and tension can be perceived negatively or be unbalanced at times. By recognizing the underlying dynamics, and managing the downsides as we embrace the upsides, we create stepping stones for more inclusive communities and workplaces.

My hope for this newsletter issue is that we continue to look deeper at the effects of diversity. By examining diversity issues from the standpoint of assortment and assembly dynamics, we can better address barriers that limit our ability to accept others. When true diversity is achieved, we will see ourselves embracing the thoughts and dreams of one another.

Should you have questions or comments regarding this newsletter, please contact me. If you find my thoughts intriguing and would like to hear more about my approach and methods, I welcome your inquiries. If you would like someone added to my distribution list or want to unsubscribe for future additions, please reply to my e-mail address.



R. Colbert Consulting



Presenter and workshop facilitator:

Robert Colbert has over 30 years of experience in the corporate world. He began his career in public accounting, continued into the private sector of Corporate America, moved into the non-profit sector, and subsequently became a business consultant. During his career, he's had assignments in audit, finance, corporate development, technical sales, marketing and non-profit operations. His educational credentials include a BA from Minnesota State University, Mankato and an MBA from the University of Minnesota Carlson School of Management. He is also a CPA and holder of

a U.S. patent. In addition, he teaches tai chi in the Minneapolis community and currently serves on two non-profit boards: Cammack Marshall Fund for Children, and Freedom Train, Inc. His approach to diversity was developed and honed from experiences he and many others faced during their time in the private and non-profit sectors. His basic premise is that human beings struggle with change and variation; challenges that impede our ability to accept and value one another. To build sustainable diversity, our challenge is to find answers to an overlooked question, "How do we compensate for the human condition as it contends with change and variation."