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Awareness, Empathy, and Intention: Creating Constructive + Responsive Structures of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

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Awareness, Empathy, and Intention: Creating Constructive + Responsive Structures of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

by

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Abstract

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) are three concepts widely understood as integral to positive organizational development. In a capitalist world, these notions are purposefully ignored or superficially discussed for financial and social gain. Prioritizing empathy, compassion, equity, and inclusion as worthwhile endeavours resist those tokenizing and disingenuous systems. This thesis explores the current perfunctory treatment of DE&I in organizations and examines how to incorporate intentional and human-centered values into organizational culture through intersectional thinking, applied empathy, and organizational storytelling. Recognizing lived experiences and personal narratives as equally valuable to quantitative data, this study entrusts both the individual and the organization with a responsibility to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

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<u>Introduction</u>

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) are three concepts that have long been touted as necessary for positive organizational change and development. In our current moment, these concepts become even more of an imperative if we wish to create organizational cultures that are rooted in respect, empathy and compassion. Although it may seem as though diversity, equity and inclusion are intuitive concepts, systems of oppression and histories of imperialism have changed their meanings depending on societal contexts and norms. It is therefore important to define these terms and understand how they play a role in not just the larger, organizational sense, but also the individualized, identity-centered experience. UC Berkeley's Division of Equity and Inclusion has developed comprehensive definitions that best encompass the wide-reaching perspectives of these concepts and align with what I explore in this thesis. These definitions are gleaned (and grammatically/contextually modified) from their Strategic Planning toolkits (Gillis and Scharf, 2015):

- Diversity
    - The variety of personal experiences, values, and worldviews that arise from differences of culture and circumstance. Such differences include race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, language, abilities/disabilities, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, geographic region, and more.
- Equity
    - The guarantee of fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while at the same time striving to identify and eliminate barriers that have prevented the full participation of marginalized groups.
- Inclusion
    - The act of creating environments in which any individual or group can feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued. An inclusive climate embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions so that all people can fully participate and actively contribute.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are obviously three different concepts, but they are generally combined as one. Most often, diversity is upheld in a tokenizing manner as equity

and inclusion are pushed aside or neglected. These differences are important to disaggregate, as foregrounding their nuances determine whether or not an organization is successful in creating effective DE&I practices. With these definitions in mind, I analyze contemporary literature about DE&I, frame New Zealand's early childhood education curriculum as a foundation for intersectional thinking, elaborate upon the invaluable role of empathy and storytelling in shaping DE&I, and analyze two global organizations' diversity reports and evaluate their practices.

Literature Review

Current literature about DE&I exists in two main contexts: education (specifically early childhood and higher education) and the workplace. In this literature review, I will examine the progression of the attitudes toward DE&I, from idealizing self-development in early childhood education, preparing for capitalist globalization in higher education, and eventually, a transactional outlook in the workplace and larger organizations. Exploring these core themes will help me lay the foundation for a more holistic approach to DE&I that allows for more intentional, internalized changes in thinking and mindset rather than the continuation of externalized and disconnected ad hoc training. Furthermore, this analysis will help me understand former DE&I initiatives that have been unsuccessful and allow me to offer better solutions.

Early Childhood Education:

Early childhood education is the first area in which DE&I appears as a significant topic, emphasizing how developing a sense of self in relation to the world rather than in isolation provides a foundation for effective communication and a sense of agency within a child's identity. "[The] process of subjectification," Robinson and Jones-Diaz (2005) argue, "is crucial to an understanding of the different perspectives or 'truths' that we take up as our own ways of looking at the world; these 'truths' become the foundations of our judgements of and interactions with others in the world" (17). The acknowledgement of the significance of how a child is initially socialized is present in almost every text. A child's initial learning environment and the adults within have an immense responsibility in shaping the child's thinking and behaviour. "Children from early ages constitute, perpetuate and negotiate normalizing discourses around their identities, and are actively regulating not only their own behaviour accordingly, but also that of others around them"

(5). Looking at identity through the symbol of a tree, Borkett (2018) offers another

perspective. The fixed aspects of our identity are represented by the roots that then shape

certain characteristics that become our trunk, our stabilizer (appendix i). The remaining

aspects of our identity are seen as leaves that

> represent aspects of your identity that may evolve, develop and change as you go
> through life and could relate to attributes and skills that may be developed…trees
> change colour and leaves blow away, which may illustrate the changing identities as
> people grow through life and illustrate the fact that parts of our identity are always
> evolving (96).

This visualization is particularly helpful in highlighting the aspect of DE&I that is heavily

emphasized in the educational context: the fluidity of identity. This concept of a fluid, ever-

changing identity suggests that children, at this very formative age, can be taught to build

relationships and engage with others who they acknowledge as different from themselves.

This helps develop not only awareness of self, their own cultures and identities but also

empathy, adaptability, resilience, humility, and a myriad of other traits that exhibit

compassion and inclusion (Global Competence Matrix, 2015). Cultivating a growth mindset

from an early age based on inclusive practices during childhood nurtures empathy and

compassion rather than static identities or a narrow-minded worldview.

A successful example of intentionally inclusive early childhood education is in New

Zealand's *Te Whāriki* curriculum. Anchored by indigenous Māori conceptions of childhood

and the symbol of the traditional woven *whāriki* mat (appendix ii), the curriculum weaves

the "principles" of empowerment, holistic development, family and community, and

relationships with the "strands" of wellbeing, belonging, contribution, communication and

exploration to create a representation of the *whāriki* mat upon which children can stand as

valuable and *valued* contributors to their society as they grow up (Ministry of Education,

2017). The *whāriki* encourages a manner of intersectional thinking—the metaphor of weaving can become portable to cultures that don't have this specific cultural reference. By not only acknowledging the indigenous knowledge of the country but also making it a foundational framework, New Zealand exemplifies nuanced, culturally sensitive, empathetic and equitable integration of knowledge into a national structure. Similar to Borkett's tree of life example, *Te Whāriki* understands the fluidity of identity and how that shapes one's worldview. It also encourages a similar growth mindset and emphasis on holistic development and the role of the adults in a child's life in building self and cultural awareness. *Te Whāriki* is a radically inclusive and empathetic in a way that should be applied to DE&I structures, therefore I frame it as a foundational text and elaborate upon its key points in the following chapter.

Higher Education:

As the research transitions into higher education, we see that the elevation of more sensitive, intuitive characteristics and behaviours in the literature on childhood give way to a more "practical" and macro-centered application of DE&I. "These issues are not about changing individuals; they are about changing the institutions and structures that make identities salient and, as such, they are deeply connected to the ways in which individuals interact and institutions function" (Smith, 4). DE&I thus becomes a part of how a university or institution not just retains students but accommodates for a changing world. "In the USA and South Africa, the language of transformation, the demographics of the countries, and the national necessity to engage diversity seems to be moving institutions (albeit unevenly)

to framing diversity as an institutional and national imperative" (Smith, 162). From a

student's perspective, Winkle-Wagner and Locks (2014) argue that

> The economic imperative of going to college, and including all groups of people in college, is compelling from the vantage point of returns on incomes...the idea that one's economic advantage could lead to intergenerational wealth means that entire groups of people could be uplifted. Or, on the contrary, if particular groups are left out of college, the result is likely to be longstanding negative effects on the life chances of those groups across generations (178).

From the above discussion, we can see that the tone has shifted from nurturing personal

development and enhancing community and coalition-building as a positive trait to almost

a survivalist, pragmatic approach. Undoubtedly, these sources must press upon the moral

imperative of DE&I at a human level, but it no longer sits as a priority, as success or

endurance in a globalized, capitalist world is a more urgent need to be met.

Furthermore, an institution can manipulate the moral imperative, by way of

overlooking historic and systemic inequalities and injustices by diluting the meaning of the

word 'diversity', simply repeating and propagating the term without actual, intentional

change or acknowledgement of the conflicts that can arise with heterogeneous thinking at

the institution (Ahmed, 53). Ahmed explains how "diversity has less negative connotation,

providing a cushion, that diversity, at least for some practitioners, is a starting point, a way

of getting through people's defenses" (66). She goes on to highlight the dangers of this

manipulation, when institutions make diversity a superficially "feel-good" concept, with

celebrations, consumption of traditional foods and performances, etc. Ahmed elaborates:

> Diversity thus participates in the creation of an illusion of equality, fitting in with the university's social mission: the idea the university has of itself as doing good ("the great benefactor"). Diversity can allow organizations to retain their good idea of themselves. It also creates the individual as the proper object: if diversity is what

individuals have as individuals, then it gives permission to those working within institutions to turn away from ongoing realities of institutional inequality (71).

These kinds of interactions and inefficient structures in higher education pave the way for other iterations of perfunctory engagement with DE&I in the workplace, often without any criticism. Creating an illusion of equality is ultimately self-serving for institutions. This inadequacy perpetuates a very superficial understanding of DE&I and rather limits its implications in people's lives. Instead of providing a lens through which people can share their experiences, build community, empathize, institutions give it a cursory and token cover. The power to create better, more human-centered responses and solutions to needs that may arise are simply overlooked.

Workplace:

The second context in which an abundance of research has been conducted is at the workplace. The main arguments state that although DE&I should be seen as a moral obligation, it is ultimately an organizational development tool and business imperative. For many older organizations, DE&I wasn't inherently a part of their culture; rather, it was a response to legislation like the Civil Rights Act in 1964 or the UK's Sex Discrimination Act of 1975. Of course, now equal opportunity is a legal requirement, but that history of DE&I not being organically incorporated into organizational cultures still influences the way the conversation is held about the topic. Sweeney and Bothwick (2016) highlight Affirmative Action in the USA and national quotas for disabled people in countries like Germany and Spain as legal obligations to which organizations respond with DE&I initiatives.

Along with responding to the law, another motivation is a business's bottom line; "…if your competitors are making more of a success of D&I, arguably they will have the higher performing teams, produce more innovative products and attract a bigger share of the market" (Sweeney and Bothwick, 3). Companies seek to reach a broader customer base, so they find it important to have a wide variety of backgrounds, experiences and identities in the organization to be able to understand as many consumer perspectives as possible. This leads to a stronger marketing strategy, for "[c]ompanies that are internally diverse will be more effective in understanding their increasingly more diverse customer/client base and probably make fewer ethnicity-related public relations blunders. A public relations advantage consists of being seen as a company that 'does diversity well'" (Hays-Thomas, 13). Hays-Thomas goes on to list justifications for diversity management through the business case perspective: resource acquisition, better problem solving, more creativity & innovation, greater systems flexibility. These are all definitely valid and accurate reasoning, as a great deal of data corroborate these statements, ensuring that diversity can always be a profitability boost for many companies and organizations.

Lacking from this conversation, however, are the concepts of equity and inclusion. "The Inclusion Dividend: Why Investing in Diversity & Inclusion Pays Off" by Mark Kaplan and Mason Donovan (2013) frames these missing ideas once again through a business framework. The justifications that Hays-Thomas introduces reappear in Kaplan and Donovan's book, as they write with a irkingly masculine tone about how "[c]ompanies are in business, first and foremost, to make a profit" (27) and "[t]he business case should prove a decrease in expenses or an increase in revenue" (50). The latter statement is particularly interesting, as it ignores the idea that an organization, on a fundamental level, should have

some increased expenses to sustain their D&I initiatives, rather than provide inefficient structures that aren't able to (or encouraged to be) maintained.

Remaining Questions:

After delving into the scholarship surrounding the structures of diversity, equity and inclusion in education and the workplace, it has become clear that the discussion around this important framework is extremely volatile. The focus on shaping a child's thinking in the literature on early childhood education provides foundational knowledge and environments for them to grow into thoughtful, empathetic, community-oriented members of society. This loses traction in higher education, as DE&I becomes a step on the path to financial stability. Institutions of higher education tend to outwardly express their commitments to the concept, diluting the meaning of the term and leaving marginalized students to attempt to make tangible change. Those students, however, are ultimately focused on their education and future stability. To have to fight for your institution to include your identities and genuinely commit to your identities so that you can feel like you belong in the place is forced, inauthentic and undue labor, as the infrastructure itself is flawed. This translates further into corporations and the workplace where DE&I 's transactional nature becomes abundantly clear. It is seen as an advantage to an organization's public relations, a practical contribution to the business, and more than anything, a calculated business move that can be leveraged and strategized for higher profit. When it comes to organizational frameworks of DE&I, human-centered, empathetic elements get pushed to the side. Thus, it is imperative to determine how to restructure

DE&I work and more importantly, how to fill in the gaps in the current literature to think about this topic from a nuanced and human perspective.

This research has raised the following questions: What happens in the formative years of a person's life between early childhood and higher education in regard to their engagement with DE&I in their learning/living environments? How do attitudes toward DE&I shift over the course of a person's life? Why do they shift? What would structures of DE&I look like in the workplace if they were framed to support individual development, community-building, and narrative-sharing? How can business development through DE&I be reframed so as not to be transactional and "profitable"; rather, centered on an empathetic, compassionate organizational culture that prioritizes *then* influences the function of the organization?

For this study, I have relied on a close reading and analysis of the various texts, as detailed in the literature review. In that review, I examined the progression of attitudes toward DE&I, from idealizing self-development in early childhood education, preparing for capitalist globalization in higher education, and eventually, the transactional outlook in the workplace and larger organizations. It became apparent that there is a significant gap in the discussion and analysis of DE&I in the world. The range of discussion spans from educational frameworks to organizational & business development. With literature varying so drastically, there is ample opportunity for genuine, empathetic, and nuanced conversation around and implementation of DE&I practices. Unfortunately, these are too often overlooked and left unconsidered.

As I have explored in the literature review, the transactional nature of DE&I in organizational structures is harmful to marginalized identities as people from those identities try to develop a sense of belonging. In this chapter I focus on the practices of self-development as a means of fostering sincere DE&I. The reframing is rooted in New Zealand's Ministry of Education's early childhood curriculum, entitled 'Te Whāriki: He whāriki mātauranga mō ngā mokopuna o Aotearoa Early childhood curriculum.' Using this curriculum as a foundational text, I explore how the cornerstones of this early childhood education are integral to understanding how to change current DE&I practices for the better. Crucially, the curriculum highlights that fundamental empathy and respect must be reciprocated in order to cultivate authentic engagement and inclusion. DE&I aren't three separate concepts haphazardly thrown into Te Whāriki in order to fulfill a certain image or social pressure. All three are entwined and inherent to the document based on New Zealand's history. The 1840 Treaty of Waitangi mandates the elevation of Māori culture

and traditions in a way that doesn't exist in other colonized nations. The bilingual nature and institutionalized honor given to the Māori in the country influence this early childhood curriculum intuitively.

The current *Te Whāriki* document has been updated since its creation in 1996, after decades of engagement and feedback from teachers, guardians, and other people involved in shaping young children's education. Before delving into the main concepts of the curriculum, there are a few Māori definitions that ground the text and are important to understand. *Whāriki* (appendix ii) is a traditional Māori woven mat, symbolizing the foundation upon which children in New Zealand can stand as valued contributors to their societies as they grow. *Kaiako* "includes all teachers, educators and other adults, including parents in parent-led services, who have a responsibility for the care and education of children in an ECE setting...this document uses *kaiako* because it conveys the reciprocal nature of teaching and learning, which is valued in this curriculum" (Ministry of Education, 7).

This holistic definition of *kaiako* as anyone who shapes the learning of a child is particularly relevant. It both emphasizes the Māori conception of education and knowledge-building, as well as the understanding that learning happens for young children from all people and contexts, whether inside or outside the classroom. Another key term is *mana*, meaning "power of being and must be upheld and enhanced" (18). A person's inherent power and authority is recognized as something that should be acknowledged and cultivated. Developing those traits in a child allows for them to do the same in others around them. The final, more logistical term interspersed in the document is *whānau.* *Whānau* is the extended family or family group of a person, including those who are blood

related as well as friends who may not have ties kinship (Maori Dictionary, 2019). Acknowledging the significance of these extended relationships helps define the learning environment as more expansive and interconnected than just the finite classroom setting.

The educational *whāriki* weaved "principles" of empowerment, holistic development, family and community, and relationships with the "strands" of wellbeing, belonging, contribution, communication and exploration (Ministry of Education, 10). By not only acknowledging the indigenous knowledge of the country but also making it a foundational framework, New Zealand exemplifies nuanced, culturally sensitive, empathetic and equitable integration of knowledge into a national structure. Out of the nine principles and strands, in this chapter I explore empowerment, holistic development, belonging, contribution, relationships, and communication. These concepts are the most outwardly applicable to organizational frameworks of DE&I, so it is imperative to discuss how they are constructed in New Zealand's early childhood education context. The order in which I discuss these elements of *Te Whāriki* moves from the larger environment to the self and finally to the wider community, reflecting a process in which one absorbs knowledge from their context, reflects on their own, and makes changes and builds upon their learning by creating inclusive and equitable communities.

Firstly, the document posits that the sense of autonomy and value a child possesses is developed in an empowering context. "...[C]hildren have agency to create and act on their own ideas, develop knowledge and skills in areas that interest them and, increasingly, to make decisions and judgments on matters that relate to them" (18). Enhancing self-confidence in this way encourages children to develop their identity in a respectful setting, one in which they are valued for their unique knowledge and experiences. Furthermore,

"perspectives on empowerment are culturally located, hence *kaiako* need to seek the input of children and their parents and *whānau* when designing the local curriculum" (18). Developing an empowering learning environment hinges on the collaborative nature of cultural knowledge.

To see this in a document that sets the tone for how children perceive the world is incredibly critical. Specifically, having *kaiako* "seek the input of children" suggests that the child themselves can shape their pathway of education, consequently approaching it from an intuitive perspective rather than one imposed upon them by the adults in their lives. This is inexplicably tied to the concept of equality. Rather than seeing a child as inferior or ignorant, the curriculum places equal weight on their thoughts, needs, and actions. With this resilience-encouraging and identity-affirming learning environment, a child becomes an adult with an innate confidence in their identity. Hence, they provide avenues for others to feel the same way about theirs, rather than having to fight for a place of their own to find a sense of self in their identities, expending energy on that and leaving little room to help uplift others.

When looking at the principle of holistic development, *Te Whāriki* incorporates indigenous Maori notions of the self with scholarship from the field of education. Building upon the principle of empowerment, holistic development poses a "child as a person who wants to learn, the task as a meaningful whole and the whole as greater than the sum of its parts" (19). By placing importance on the whole, both task-wise and student-wise, the curriculum emphasizes the idea that the individual is multifaceted. Moreover, those many facets of a person are valuable in contributing to the larger society that they are a part of,

that their unique experiences are important to the growth and development of the world around them. The document highlights the intertwined parts of self, as follows:

> Human development can be thought of in terms of cognitive (*hinengaro*), physical (*tinana*), emotional (*whatumanawa*), spiritual (*wairua*), and social and cultural dimensions, but these dimensions need to be viewed holistically, as closely interwoven and interdependent. For Māori the spiritual dimension is fundamental to holistic development because it connects the other dimensions across time and space (19).

By centering Māori knowledge of the distinct yet interconnected elements of the self, it is abundantly clear that this understanding is imperative to shaping the educational and personal pathways of children in New Zealand. The classroom context is not distinct from the questions children may have about their identities—instead, it is the space to inquire about what they may encounter or think about. The focus on holistic learning does not create delineations of what education can or cannot provide for a student, rather it is fluid and moulded by the students' needs themselves.

Another core strand in the curriculum is belonging. A sense of belonging increases a child's confidence and ability to find meaning in new experiences. Belonging can seem like an intangible idea when trying to describe an emotion or experience. However, it is something crucial to building DE&I into any culture. "Children are more likely to feel at home if they regularly see their own culture, language and world views valued in the ECE setting" (31). Being and feeling represented contributes to confidence and commitment, whether it be in the early childhood classroom or a larger organizational setting. Moreover, the note that "*whānau* feel welcome and able to participate... in curriculum decision making" (31) can be translated and reflected to the organizational landscape. As the overseers and caretakers of the organization's culture, leadership and human resources

teams should be tasked with collecting feedback, observing the existent culture, and providing space for dialogue in order to better shape a culture to make folks feel that they belong. The majority of people in an organization should contribute to the decision-making process regarding the frameworks of DE&I can be implemented in the culture, as they are the ones with firsthand experience and feedback as to what is currently successful. The larger group sees the organization from an insider's perspective, whereas the leadership sees it from a bird's eye view. That big picture view can sometimes obscure some of the most important details.

The discussion of belonging ties closely with the strand of contribution. To make valuable contributions, children need to develop responsive and reciprocal relationships with *kaiako* and with other children.

> It is through interacting with others that children learn to take another's point of view, empathise, ask for help, see themselves as a help to others and discuss or explain their ideas. Children's contributions to their wider communities may occur through direct participation or virtually, through the use of digital and other technologies (36).

Creating a space in which all people feel comfortable sharing their experiences and ideas is necessary to facilitate thoughtful and meaningful reflections and feedback. The distinction of the variety of ways people can contribute, from digital and virtual to direct involvement is also important to note. The careful consideration of those methods and how they may affect people's access needs helps create a learning environment that includes everyone. The curriculum also points out that "respect for others, the ability to identify and accept another point of view, and acceptance of and ease of interaction with children of other genders, capabilities and ethnic groups" (37). Genuine contribution is a means to not just

build empathy and stronger communication skills, it is also a way of building community among those with whom we may not have initially connected.

In *Te Whāriki*, the principle of relationships goes beyond the fundamental notes of respect, reciprocity and engagement. The text encourages *kaiako* to create environments in which strong relationships can be established and knowledge can be shared.

> Cultural tools are both material and psychological. They can be as various as a map, a word or a gesture. *Kaiako* recognise that increasing ability to access, understand, and use cultural tools expands children's participation in and contribution to their world (21).

Recognizing the impact of cultural tools, whether it be Māori customs or anything else a student may bring to the table, helps create a testing ground upon which students can share their ideas and develop them further (21). Furthermore, it is the *kaiako*'s responsibility to facilitate this kind of relationship-building and encourage sharing cultural practices and communication styles in order to better understand others and expand the kind of contribution a child can make.

Examining this through the lens of organizational culture, it is important to see how these concepts align with creating a culture of inclusion and empathy. Beyond the perspective of DE&I providing avenues for profitability and good PR, an organization should pay special attention to how this framework can enhance relationship-building both internally and externally. Leaders, the *kaiako* of the organization, have the responsibility of facilitating environments of genuine and beneficial relationship-building and constantly evaluating those environments to develop them further. Having employees that are comfortable enough with their colleagues to brainstorm and share ideas beyond the scope

of work and make connections with unexpected clientele due to a work environment that encourages that experimentation and trust is invaluable.

The final strand, the one that is most easy to extrapolate to a myriad of contexts, is communication. One of the distinctive qualities of *Te Whāriki* is the emphasis on the bilingual student. The indigenous language, *te reo Māori,* is respected and used in the classroom to encourage students to be comfortable in both national languages. It also leans into communication beyond spoken language, involving "traditional storytelling, arts and legends and of humour, proverbs and metaphoric language [that] can support children from some communities to navigate between familiar and less familiar contexts" (41). Focusing on different kinds of communication, whether it be non-verbal, visual, or symbolic, allows for different cultural contexts to interact. These interactions lead to comfort with the unfamiliar, more nuanced dialogue and interactions, and most importantly, a desire to engage with new and unknown perspectives. In the early childhood education context, it makes clear sense as children are more likely to engage with, understand, and learn from creative communication through stories. Focusing on storytelling is particularly interesting to the case of building DE&I in organizations, though. This very same methodology can be applied to organizational frameworks, as that connection to narrative-based communication taps into an individual's empathy and more nuanced understanding of others' experiences. The significance of empathy and storytelling will be further discussed and analyzed in the following chapter.

Deconstructing seven of the most pertinent concepts in *Te Whāriki* has brought to light the way in which radical empathy and inclusion can guide and shape organizational DE&I. The principles and strands of empowerment, holistic development, relationships,

belonging, contribution and communication are each relevant to building valuable early childhood learning environments. Moreover, the fundamental significance of Māori thinking, language, and traditions in the curriculum proves the strength of incorporating indigeneity and moving toward a post-colonial restoration of crucial knowledge. *Te Whāriki* has helped elucidate the need to translate empathy and narrative-based frameworks of DE&I to the wider organizational context. The personal growth, socially and mentally, that comes from fostering an environment of inclusion as well as working and being in one, should be an organizational priority.

What's Missing + Filling in the Blanks

In a cultural landscape where "productivity" and "efficiency" are defended as the most integral elements of any group, it is imperative to take a step back and analyze how effective those concepts are in developing sustainable, supportive, and inclusive organizational development (Grey, 2013). At the crux of that development are diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) structures that should be embedded in the culture and impact the organization's decision-making processes. Storytelling and narrative-sharing provide a significant addition of community, trust and expression in an organization. Furthermore, it is a tool to build empathy and mutual understanding, especially in contexts with many different experiences and perspectives. In this chapter, I discuss the necessity for empathy and storytelling to be at the core of any DE&I framework that is introduced to an organization. I first analyze a popular tool for DE&I development in organizational culture. Then, I elaborate the impact of empathy as a trait that can be personally developed and how that translates to the organizational context. Then, I discuss how empathy is intertwined with storytelling as a method of community and connection building.

A popular tool for DE&I measurement is called the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). Created in 2003 by Dr. Mitchell Hammer, this 50-item questionnaire "assesses intercultural competence—the capability to shift cultural perspective and appropriately adapt behavior to cultural differences and commonalities" (Hammer, 2003). It has been used by US government agencies, large corporations like Microsoft and General Electric, higher education institutions and more. This quantitative tool compares a self-perceived competency score with the developmental competency score, the latter of which is the result of the questionnaire. The inventory then analyses the discrepancies between those two scores, determining whether you have under or overestimated your intercultural

competency and provides a custom intercultural development plan for your progress. This is an important tool for a preliminary assessment of an organization's DE&I practices. However, it faces limitations and should not be seen as the primary source of feedback or change.

In my analysis of this tool, several limiting factors have emerged. First, the inventory must be administered by someone "qualified" by the company to do so. The result is to truncate accessibility to organizations that can afford expertise. The goal, however, should be a widely available tool that encourages continuous learning and feedback so that organizations of all sizes, in any industry can make strides toward DE&I. Second, the dry, quantitative, metrics-based inventory fails to account or provide space for any qualitative data to supplement the objective questions. If organizational culture is about the ostensibly intangible—values, symbols, and lived experiences—then a quantitative approach cannot access these elements, and if it does, it does so without nuance. Third, the inventory was developed in the United States and is primarily utilized within this particular country. This US-centric scope is very limited and does not translate well; it cannot be applied internationally or to unusually structured organizations. Furthermore, the fixed structure of the questionnaire and development plans do not allow organizations to customize the questions based on their specific needs or feedback, so the results from the inventory can be relatively ambiguous.

Finally, the most significant limitation is that the inventory places the burden of DE&I awareness and development on the individual rather than the organization. Instead of looking systematically at the larger factors that may limit an individual's intercultural competency, it suggests that substantial change will come from individual development.

From the discussion of *Te Whariki* in the previous chapter, it is clear that individual

development occurs in a broader institutional context; thus, structural change within the

organization's culture is critical—and this aspect is downplayed to a fault in the inventory.

Additionally, the IDI's definition of intercultural competence remains disconnected from

any actual historical, political, or social understandings, thus making it very vague and

ineffective relative to diversity of people's experiences and identities.

In sum, the IDI is a helpful tool in the initial assessment of an organization's attitude

and knowledge toward DE&I. It remains, however, insufficient in its scope and ability to

grasp a more comprehensive picture of an organization's culture. To expand the breadth of

a development tool like the IDI, it is important to lean into the qualitative information. As

discussed in *Te Whāriki* in relation to students, instructors, guardians, and community, it is

critical to embrace as many relevant perspectives to establish that holistic, integrated

culture for DE&I to succeed. The most effective method of doing so is putting empathy at

the forefront of organizational decision-making and development.

Although empathy at first seems like an intuitive characteristic to be upheld in an

organization, the conventional focus on objective progress easily detracts and distracts

from this important concept. In *Applied Empathy*, Michael Ventura (2018) deconstructs the

ways centering empathy is beneficial to the function and development of a variety of

organizations. Although the text is grounded in his company's design, strategy case studies

and personal experiences, he sets forth several interesting notions about empathy as a key

element to any successful organization or decision. By putting empathy first and examining

situations from a variety of perspectives, you open up dialogue and "discover distinct

insights" (28). Asking questions of those you are serving and understanding their needs

from as many points of view as possible lays a foundation for a more effective and genuine solution. In this case for better DE&I, organizations should be asking questions of every employee as to how they experience the culture, they ways in which they may or may not feel included or that they belong, how they may or may not feel supported in the culture and what they'd like to see changed. Of course, this is a very superficial line of questioning, but it is the organization's responsibility to refine those questions and align them with their own mission/vision and create an environment where people feel comfortable sharing their honest answers.

Ventura posits a model called 'CLEAR' to elicit genuine group reflection and propose solutions for problems. Check In, Lead with Data, Emotion, Agreement, Resolution are the five steps of this feedback model. First, there is a 'check in' to confirm the right time and space for the conversation, then 'lead with data' to present the objective facts first, share 'emotions' so everyone can express their feelings about the situation, discuss an 'agreement' that aligns with everyone's distinct points of view, and finally, find a 'resolution' that provides a foundation for forward movement that incorporates all of the responses collected (206). This concept connects closely with some of the strands and principles of *Te Whāriki,* especially communication, empowerment, and belonging. Most obviously, the CLEAR method facilitates direct communication which fosters a comfortable environment for honest and vulnerable dialogue. Feeling heard and being seen in an institutionalized way empowers folks to not only be more engaged in their organizations but also work to continue improving and developing it. The sense of ownership that arises from feeling that you belong brings forth a dedication to sustained change and continuous

improvement and dialogue. Before any DE&I structure is implemented, these elements must be embedded in an organization's culture in order to effect ongoing change.

Ventura also introduces seven archetypes of people in any organization: The Sage, The Inquirer, The Confidant, The Seeker, The Convener, The Cultivator and The Alchemist. Each embody traits such as being a grounding presence, curiosity, fostering connections, experimentation, deep listening, boldness and commitment to growth. This model is particularly interesting as it can be seen as an element of inclusion, being aware of the variety of personalities and work styles within a group. While these archetypes aren't necessarily applicable to all types or organizations or work cultures, they provide a lens through which to analyze the individuals within an organization's culture. They also point to the fact that the leaders of organizations must facilitate an environment in which these types of working personalities can mesh well and be successful in their goals.

In order for leaders to shape this kind of culture and make DE&I a part of the fabric of the organization, there needs to be "constant calibration:"

> Empathetic companies...have a true understanding of the dynamics at play on a variety of levels within the organization, and they know that great cultures are built by constantly calibrating the top-down aspects of their operations with the bottom-up feedback from the organization as a whole (122).

Leadership must be engaged in a continuous feedback loop that gauges the sense of belonging within the organization, what changes need to be made, and how best to make those changes according to what folks want to see. By centering empathy in an organization's actions, flexibility and fluidity become the norm. However, the tools that are utilized to measure or evaluate do not leave room for that adaptability.

Entwined with the concept of organizational empathy is that of organizational storytelling. Storytelling is a traditional means of relationship and community-building, sharing personal and political histories and understanding behaviours. Furthermore, it is an essential corrective measure to balance the heavily quantitative approach to DE&I development. Therefore, its qualitative traits should be heralded as an important component in shaping an organization's culture of DE&I. Janis Forman (2013) proposes a framework in *Storytelling in Business: The Authentic and Fluent Organization* to understand the benefits of storytelling. This is another way to ameliorate a DE&I landscape devoted to the quantitative approach and that sees statistics as the whole picture. The foundation of successful organizational storytelling is authenticity, which then leads to the capability of being fluent in engaging with empathy amongst other things, and finally, builds trust. This trust is the ultimate outcome, as it paves the way to achieve organizational goals and objectives (23).

> Not just about the organization alone, the story is open to the needs, concerns, knowledge, values, and interests—and even the voices—of others. This requires the storyteller, whether an individual or an organization, to begin the activity by listening (26).

Instead of imposing a certain idea or structure of what DE&I should like, leaders should listen, empathize, and engage with the wider organization to understand their perspectives before executing anything. These processes take time to develop and implement. They require organizations to step back from the rush of "efficiency" and "productivity" and reflect, spending time listening to and fostering feedback. Forman also argues that becoming fluent in the methods and craft of storytelling is key to creating something effective. Uncovering the truths by tapping into emotions and intellect, determining who

should tell the larger story, when they should tell it, and the purpose of the story, are only a few of the elements in developing the storytelling fluency (33). In the context of DE&I, these are the elements that leaders should be paying close attention to when members are sharing their individual stories. If people from marginalized or underrepresented identities share their narrative, whether it is something positive or negative, leadership should be fluent in understanding that story. They should strive to understand why that person or group is sharing that story, why at this time, what purpose are they trying to fulfill and why they chose whatever method they used to convey their story. If people *don't* feel comfortable sharing their experiences and stories, leadership should consider all of those elements from the opposite perspective: Why not? This is a key takeaway for organizational leaders. What is it about the organization that precludes willingness to share, or what makes members reluctant? Starting from structural/contextual explanations rather than individual attributes, leaders must assess the environment they cultivate and make efforts to improve the culture by eliciting multiple voices and viewpoints.

The overarching objective for this focus on storytelling is to give equal weight to these stories relative to the statistics and quantitative data when developing DE&I practices in an organization. Although Forman's book centers storytelling as a business's branding tool and bottom-line booster, the deconstruction of how storytelling can be utilized as a framework is especially relevant to developing and enhancing organizational DE&I. The following chapter examines two company's annual diversity reports and their relationships to empathy and storytelling in their DE&I structures.

Case Studies

For many organizations, the publishing of an annual report or another kind of evaluation of their DE&I practices is an essential element of attracting and/or retaining new employees and clientele. The annual report is a tool for large organizations to not only project their successes and areas of improvement as an act of public maturation but to also assess and plan for forward movement. In this chapter, I compare and contrast the annual DE&I reports of two globally influential companies with distinct brands and organizational cultures: Google and Microsoft. These organizations have leadership teams devoted to DE&I development, under Chief Diversity/Diversity & Inclusion Officers. Furthermore, both define how society interacts with technology, the internet, and the wider world around them. Google and Microsoft have the opportunity to shape how the world engages with diversity, equity, and inclusion with their influence, so it is imperative to analyze how they currently do so. I first summarize the structures of each company's annual diversity report from 2019 and main takeaways they have highlighted. I then examine the reports against the arguments for more empathetic and narrative-based DE&I that I have outlined in the previous chapters, determining the efficacy of these reports and how they could be improved.

Google:

Google is a multinational technology and Internet-based service company renowned for their unique organizational culture. Their flexibility, dedication to learning and growing personally and organizationally, and openness are now guiding factors to how other organizations develop their own cultures. A part of this has always been diversity and inclusion. In their "Google Diversity: Annual Report 2019", Danielle Brown (Vice President, Employee Engagement) and Melonie Parker (Global Director of Diversity, Equity &

Inclusion) begin by noting that this is the company's first diversity report in five years. They note that their methodology has changed since 2014, as they "count multiracial people as a member of all the racial categories they identify with" (6). They also acknowledge that gender isn't binary and point to their new demographic data section which includes those who identify as non-binary. This is an important note as they indicate that their data on inclusion goes beyond the limited mandates of the US Equal Employment Opportunity statements and better encompasses the identities of Google employees.

The report begins by blatantly stating that "diversity, equity and inclusion are business imperatives for Google" (4). This transparency is admirable, as it proves that Google does not try to obscure their purpose of DE&I. However, the lack of holistic perspective on their work impedes upon any empathetic and sustained development. The introduction also presents three key points that influence the rest of document, lessons that DE&I leadership at Google have learned since their last annual report:

1. Systemic change is sustainable change
2. Data power progress
3. Leadership accountability matter (5).

While these concepts are important, it is interesting to see which are emphasized and elaborated upon throughout the report. Data and analysis are the main substance of the diversity report, as Google highlights a myriad of graphs and tables detailing the percentages of hires based on binary gender and race and ethnicity, those demographics in technology vs. non-technology roles, in leadership roles, and attrition (how many employees leave annually). They highlight the trends and patterns of these demographics, pointing out that "in the U.S., representation of Black+, Latinx+, and Asian+ employees increased by 0.3 ppt, 0.4 ppt, and 1.7 ppts, respectively, while the representation of Native

American+ employees remained stable" (13) or "over the last five years, the percentage of women in leadership globally has increased from 20.8% to 26.1% (+5.8 ppts)" (15).

Also within this report is a qualitative analysis of Google's inclusion efforts. Ranging from business and product to the wider community, the diversity report illustrates how inclusion is incorporated internally and externally. Inclusive design and engineering training as a part of employee onboarding and online crowdsourcing encouraging feedback for better inclusivity are two ways that the company includes DE&I in their business and products and their role in the wider world. Refining cameras to better capture different skin colors or developing AI operating systems to intentionally avoid stereotyping and hate speech (21) are amongst this work. Furthermore, the internal focus on DE&I is upheld by employee resource groups, which provide employees a space with peers of the same or similar identities. These groups include Gayglers (LGBTQ+), Disability Alliance, Women@Google, Greyglers (older employees), Inter-belief Network, Black Googlers Network, etc. There are 15 groups in total and each have global chapters across Google's offices. They serve as the main structures of internally sourcing DE&I events, workshops, and learning, alongside the Women's Leadership and State of Black Women summits and local community connections to develop pathways for women and Black and Latinx folks to enter the tech industry (23). The presence of the employee resource groups and other initiatives at Google prove that there are concerted efforts being made to support marginalized or underrepresented identities in the space, together with their work to improve access and inclusion on all fronts.

Although Google's report emphasizes positive forward movement for the organization in their DE&I work, notable shortcomings also come to light. First and

foremost, there is a heavy emphasis on the quantitative results of hiring, workforce, and attrition. This data and trend analysis acts as the grounding elements of the document, leaving little room for the analysis of the qualitative trends in Google's DE&I development. It would beneficial for the report to share the insights from individuals involved in the employee research groups or the development of inclusive design and engineering workshops. With personal narratives and experiences brought to the forefront, the tangibility of Google's DE&I would become clearer and could explain some of the missing nuances and details from the sweeping summaries of the initiatives they chose to share in the document. While there could be access to organizational storytelling within the company through conferences, workshops or other events gone unmentioned in the report, the fact that so much weight is placed on the numbers of the identities included or increased in the company speaks to how Google must allocate some of that focus on the less numerical aspect of DE&I to access another, more holistic layer of organizational development.

Microsoft:

Microsoft, a software and hardware development company, is another force in the technology industry. Their "Diversity and Inclusion Report 2019" likewise begins with a letter from Chief Diversity Officer Lindsay-Rae McIntyre describing ongoing DE&I goals and the culture "rooted in a growth mindset and a commitment to diversity and inclusion" (3). She emphasizes this mindset as something that influences every action within the organization, not just leadership. This distinction is particularly important as it defines DE&I as an integral part of the company beyond the business imperatives, in contrast to

Google. The format of the document is also particularly helpful, as there are links to further reading of the various initiatives they introduce in all of their subsections.

In the report, numerical data and analysis are the first descriptors of DE&I, highlighting the trends over the years. This includes statistics such as "since 2016, we've seen a 56.4% increase in women executives, and the number of women executives in technical roles has almost doubled in three years, a 95% increase" and "In the US, the number of Asian employees (a group that comprises more than a dozen ethnic groups) has grown 11.0% overall, including an 18.0% increase in the number of Asian directors" (13). The distinction of the US context—compared to Google's assumption of the US as the main location—and the note that the Asian demographic includes many ethnicities are small but significant details. This demonstrates a genuine embodiment of inclusive language and commitment to understanding that there are important nuances that often go unnoticed even within the realm of DE&I.

The quantitative section of the report also leans into qualitative research, as it describes some of the DE&I related statements employees must evaluate on the company's annual survey. These statements include:

- I can succeed in my work group while maintaining my own personality and style.
- I feel like I belong on my team.
- My manager cultivates an inclusive environment and diverse workforce by valuing and leveraging employees' differences and perspectives (19).

By creating a focus on belonging and the role of leadership in nurturing that feeling in the work environment, Microsoft demonstrates that the 88% of employees that agree with

those statements are in an environment that is more wholly engaged in DE&I. The report even acknowledges that there are efforts to better understand and help those who do not share those sentiments (19).

The qualitative analysis of Microsoft's report distinguishes three main goals: "building new roads to bring new recruits to tech", "cultivating communities of support at work", and "maintaining and infrastructure that fosters inclusion" (21). For the first goal, the report features, amongst other things, the disAbility hiring initiative and the LEAP program that creates a foundation for people with nontraditional backgrounds to enter tech. They also incorporate "spotlight on…" sections, sharing the experiences of individuals who have been a part of these programs or have stories to share. These spotlights continue throughout the rest of the report and bolster each initiative or objective introduced. For the second goal, the eight employee resource groups with executive sponsorship are outlined as well as the myriad of more informal employee networks. Beyond race/ethnicity, sexuality, ability, and other identities, the Families resource group stands out as it supports and hosts events for those with traditional and nontraditional families. This expansion of what is included in one's identity is particularly interesting as it establishes a sense of fluidity that tends to disappear when having to identify yourself within an organization.

Crucially, the report also features a section on "Storytelling to Drive Change" (27), explaining the monthly Q&As with the CEO, all staff meetings, and more that happen internally to facilitate dialogue. Exemplifying the very purpose of this thesis, the report states, "such personal stories can help illustrate important concepts like covering and allyship, providing relatable examples of how people can show up in a thoughtful way to

support the inclusion of others" and shares the story of an employee who found support and community at work. The variety of benefits afforded to employees based on their various needs and the role Microsoft plays in "making diversity and inclusion a priority within our ecosystem" (33) are also elaborated upon. By sharing future goals and ongoing initiatives in its conclusion, Microsoft's annual report demonstrates an organization moving forward with DE&I in a sustainable way.

The motivations of Google and Microsoft commitment to DE&I were clear from the very outset of each annual report, determining the format and content of the subsequent pages. Google's report only corroborated the notion of a bottom-line focused organization creating limited DE&I structures. It is extremely valuable that an organizational document like Microsoft's report, pays close attention to the very language used in describing ongoing development and illustrates the innumerable places in which empathy and storytelling can be incorporated into DE&I work. Although not central to their initiatives, the fact that Microsoft even acknowledges the significance of storytelling in their company's development exemplifies the power of emphasizing these qualitative aspects in DE&I development, whatever organization it may be.
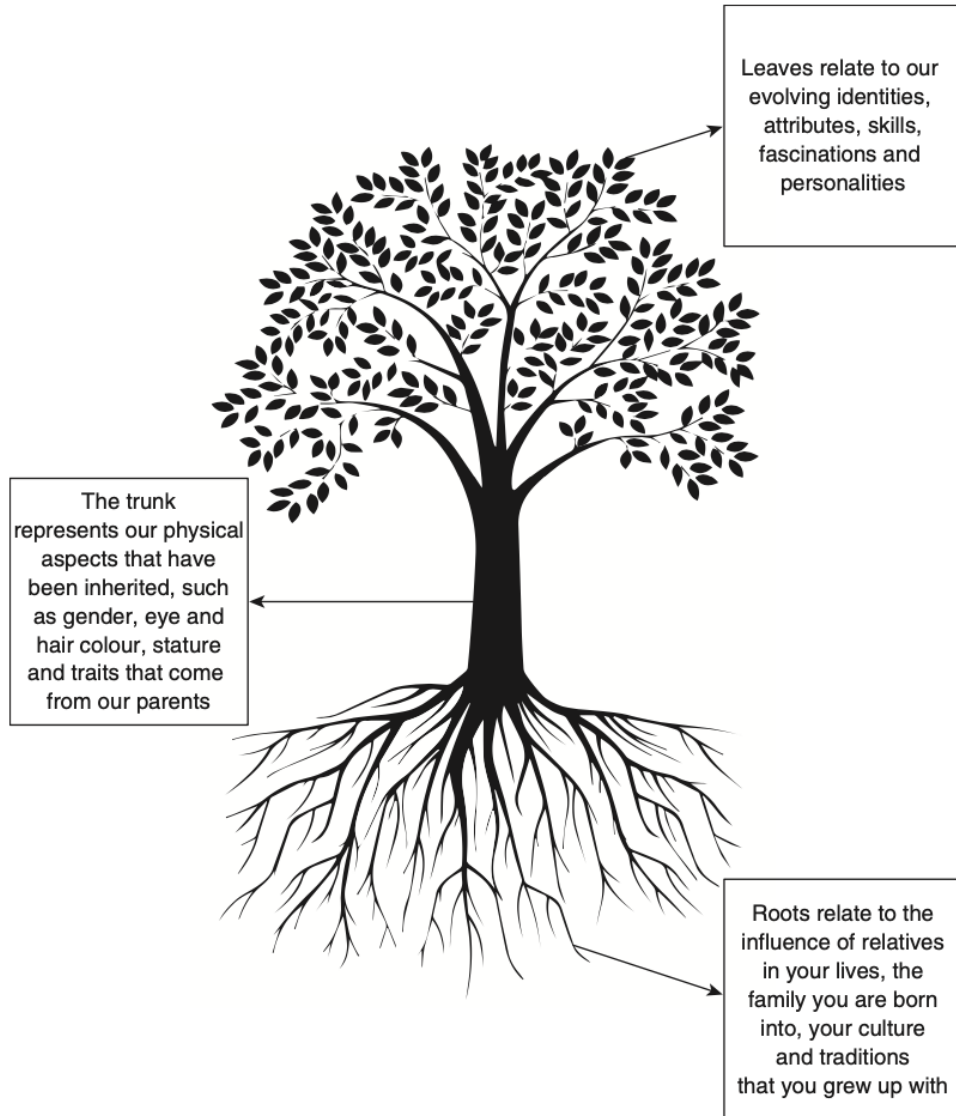
Conclusion

In this thesis, I have argued that organizations are obliged to create authentic and sustainable engagement with diversity, equity, and inclusion through empathy and storytelling. Organizations must give these seemingly intangible, qualitative elements equal weight to quantitative data to better understand and develop their organizational culture. At present, many fall short because they limit their focus to what is visibly "diverse", not actually producing environments that are truly inclusive and equitable. This shapes how the organization itself influences their stakeholders and their wider ecosystem. After examining the current scholarly landscape, the transactional nature of DE&I in organizations demonstrates how far we are from compassion in cultural development. I delved into *Te Whāriki* to understand a more holistic perspective on weaving empathy into the very fabric of one's values and frame of thinking. Then, I explored the benefits of applied empathy and storytelling as a part of an organization's DE&I analysis. Finally, I analyzed this argument through the lens of two global technology company's diversity reports, uncovering deeper insights into potential changes to the current DE&I landscape.

Based on these findings, I offer the following recommendations to support genuine DE&I engagement in organizations. In order to jumpstart this development, organizations must create roles and functions specific to DE&I. Smaller organizations, especially, must leverage human resources and talent departments to put focus on DE&I as a part of the culture. Initiatives like a diversity and inclusion committee can be a starting point for those smaller organizations to involve employees in articulating compassionate and human-centered values and core competencies. Intentional recruiting, hiring and training practices can help diversify the perspectives an organization holds, thus springboarding conversations related to their organizational model.
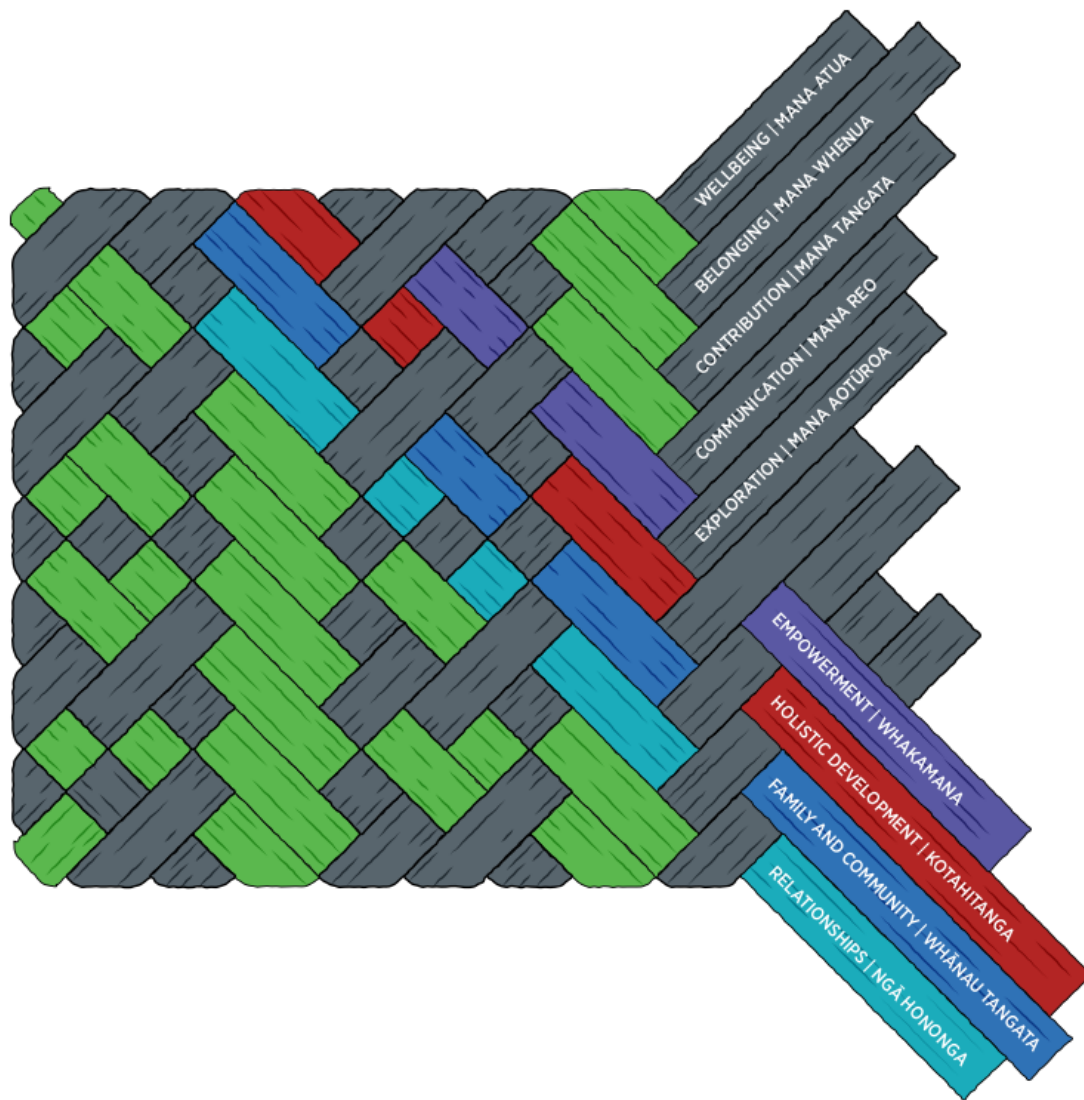
To make this DE&I engagement ongoing, organizations must create capacities for dialogue, conversations, and storytelling. These opportunities must be consistent, such as monthly share-outs, discussions with leadership, informal chats, etc. This develops a culture within which employees feel comfortable sharing their stories, providing feedback, and engaging in reflective conversations with diverse perspectives. The more these conversations happen, the more comfortable people become in acknowledging and promoting differences as assets. Furthermore, an organization can invest in DE&I by budgeting for culture just as they budget for personnel or operations. Investing in professional development, organizational tools, and inclusive work environments (with not just the physical but also the intangible) demonstrates an organization's commitment to aligning its values to its practices.

DE&I is iterative in nature. As an organization evolves, its processes must be constantly revised. The complexity of each of its individual parts and diversities make for an organization that grows. In order to prevent stagnation, leaders must take the time to reflect upon and reassess the successes and weaknesses of the DE&I structures they have in place. They must make that recalibration a norm. In a capitalist world, these notions are purposefully ignored for financial and social gain. Prioritizing empathy, compassion, equity, and inclusion as worthwhile endeavours resist those tokenizing and disingenuous systems. Recognizing lived experiences and personal narratives as valuable resources entrusts both the individual and the organization with a responsibility to genuine, responsive diversity, equity, and inclusion.

i. The Tree of Life (Borkett ,2018)

Leaves relate to our
evolving identities,
attributes, skills,
fascinations and
personalities

The trunk
represents our physical
aspects that have
been inherited, such
as gender, eye and
hair colour, stature
and traits that come
from our parents

Roots relate to the
influence of relatives
in your lives, the
family you are born
into, your culture
and traditions
that you grew up with

ii. *Te Whāriki* (Ministry of Education, 2017)

"The *kōwhiti whakapae whāriki* depicted below symbolises the start of a journey that will take the traveller beyond the horizon. The dark grey represents *Te Kore* and *te pō*, the realm of potential and the start of enlightenment. The green represents new life and growth. The purple, red, blue and teal have many differing cultural connotations and are used here to highlight the importance of the principles as the foundations of the curriculum" (11).

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