



Conder & Company

"It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept, and celebrate those differences."

Audre Lorde



Article

The Chemistry of Difference – A new paradigm for inclusion

As businesses emerge into a new normal, the fight for survival will be determined by a set of key differentiators

Just as chemical substances are made up from different elements so are humans, and we are often not aware how our different ways of thinking and acting cause reactions in others.

We know that diversity has the biggest impact on business performance - not just the big six such as gender and race but diversity of thought and behaviour. Being equal does not mean being the same. Similarly, our experience shows us there is no longer one type of person who is successful in a specific business. Research by the Institute of Massachusetts and Carnegie Mellon University found that it is not the IQ of individuals on a team that has the biggest impact on business performance but diversity and in particular how gender diverse the group is.

We all know from our chemistry lessons that chemistry is the study of different elements and the changes they undergo in reaction to other elements and substances. Just as chemical substances are made up from different elements so are humans, and we are often not aware how our different ways of thinking and acting cause reactions in others. I have called this '*Chemistry of Difference*'. ©'

As businesses emerge into a new world, the fight for survival will be determined by a set of key differentiators.

A new paradigm for inclusion

Businesses with D&I at the forefront of their strategy could be in the fittest shape to survive.

We know that balanced teams are better at solving complex problems, managing risk, and spotting new opportunities. Inclusion will also be critical for fostering innovation and agility. An inclusive culture can be a powerful driver of resilience as inclusive leaders value different perspectives: this creates more of a sense of belonging, and people who are included feel a deeper alignment to the organisation and its purpose. Furthermore, in today's virtual world, high-performing virtual teams will be those who are able to facilitate people to collaborate effectively and where leaders show understanding, appreciation, and compassion to their teams.

So, there has never been a better time for D&I leaders to have a fundamental role in leading their organisations through this crisis.

When we feel excluded, it's bad for wellbeing: it hits the same part of the brain as when we feel pain. Deloitte research showed that 61% of respondents thought that they were 'covering' (Erving Goffman 1963) in some form. This is when people feel they can't be themselves. When Google conducted a study aimed at understanding what makes their teams effective, the results showed the number one factor for team success is psychological safety. Neuroscience also shows us that lack of inclusion can trigger a psychological threat and stress response resulting in people not performing at their best. This causes organisations to miss out on the enormous talents and potential of people who are different. Some of these differences are particularly impacted by gender, others are not.

Are you aware of the gender lens?

In my new paradigm for diversity, I talk about tendencies not traits which does not mean that all women have a particular tendency or that men don't have this tendency at all or that we can't have the tendencies of the opposite sex or that there is no overlap between genders.

The gender influenced tendencies simply mean that there is a difference between the average tendency of a man and the average tendency of a woman. We know that some of these differences create havoc in our homes and in the office.

When we feel excluded, it's bad for wellbeing: it hits the same part of the brain as when we feel pain.

**Naomi Eisenberger, PhD,
at the University of
California, Los Angeles**

"Deloitte research showed that 61% of respondents thought that they were 'covering' " (Erving Goffman 1963) in some form. This means people feel they can't be themselves.



A new paradigm for inclusion

People of different genders notice things that the other gender may not see. If you wear glasses, then you understand how difficult it is to see things clearly without them.

All the information is there, but without your glasses, it might as well be invisible to you. Looking at the world without a gender lens can be a bit like swimming without goggles or reading without glasses. This is important because this is not just about personality but working styles and even the way people speak. We put value judgements on them and there is a large body of research that shows we rate someone more positively if they are like us. As the saying goes 'like attracts like' or 'birds of a feather flock together' - we feel more comfortable with people like ourselves.

Many inclusion programmes typically do not focus on the specifics of understanding how differences show themselves in everyday work situations. Importantly, many of the differences are related to how we go about our work rather than specific traits, including: how we process information, different styles of communicating with and leading others; solving problems, assessing risks and making decisions; managing conflict and stress.

Nor do such programmes build awareness about the value these differences bring to a business environment and the fact that they typically complement each other and are necessary to deliver high performance. It's of paramount importance to not just do a tick box exercise where it's easy for leadership to fall into a false sense of security and assume the company has achieved substantial progress when the reality may be that they've only taken a first step.

The power of both understanding and combining the strengths of men and women in the workplace is likely to be an important differentiator and give those organisations a competitive advantage. Sue Conder

My proposition is that although quotas and targets are helpful, generally leaders and managers are not motivated by compliance but are more highly motivated to embrace difference when they really understand how people are different and they recognise the power of difference for our business success. Research has shown that diversity without inclusion is problematic and in fact increases the likelihood of exclusion.

Most diversity programmes focus on controlling managers' behaviour. Studies show that this can activate bias rather than reduce it.

Many inclusion programmes typically do not focus on the specifics of understanding how differences show themselves in everyday work situations.....

Nor do such programmes build awareness about the value these differences bring to a business environment and the fact that they typically complement each other and are necessary to deliver high performance



Importantly, many of the differences are related to how we go about our work rather than specific traits, including: how we process information, different styles of communicating with and leading others; solving problems, assessing risks and making decisions; managing conflict and stress.

Sue Conder

A new paradigm for inclusion

People rebel against instructions that threaten their autonomy. In fact, the Harvard Business Review article “Diversity Doesn’t Stick Without Inclusion” focuses on this distinction.

“Diversity is being invited to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance” - Vernā Myers.

My observation is that inclusion without understanding the value of differences is also highly problematic.

Successful organisations in the future will need a healthy blend of different but complementary ways of thinking and behaving.

This means understanding the differences in the way people work, how they think and act in their day to day work and interpersonal relationships and how they complement each other to achieve success in today’s business environment. We need to embrace the different ways people approach business situations to fully benefit from the collective and individual strengths that people bring.

Diversity is more difficult than homogeneity and can be difficult for those that find it challenging to deal with a more uncertain and chaotic environment.

It is clear diversity and inclusion have a massive positive impact on business performance. Success through diversity of thought and behaviour is now unquestionable. Working with people who are very different to us can be challenging, however, there is tremendous power and benefit from working with people who think and behave in a very different or opposite way. According to Dr Page, author of “The Difference: how the power of diversity creates better groups, firms, schools, and societies,” the answer lies in “messy creative organisations and environments with individuals from vastly different backgrounds and life experiences.” A Boston Consulting Group study suggests that increasing the diversity of leadership teams leads to better performance, improved innovation and financial performance. *‘People with different backgrounds and experiences often see the same problem in different ways and come up with different solutions. Innovation, resilience and adaptability.’*

Gender is deeply rooted, and gender judgements are more ingrained than we think

Research by Lise Eliot, author of “Pink Brain, Blue Brain” found that little of the gender differences we see are hormonal or genetic, but rather are

Does your organisation encourage the power of different ways of thinking and acting in your teams?



The impact of gender stereotyping starts early in childhood and has a lasting influence on the way we think and behave and creates habits that may no longer be helpful to us and even obstructive to what we are aiming to achieve.

Sue Conder

Meta-analysis of hundreds of studies has shown there is no female brain or male brain, according to “Testosterone Rex” by Cordelia Fine from the University of Melbourne. Her research shows that our brains reflect the lives they have lived, not just the sex of their owners. Plasticity is now a scientific given – the brain is moulded from birth onwards until old age.

A new paradigm for inclusion

the result of small differences, combined with various social and developmental pressures turning into more noticeable tendencies. Brain scans prove differences are inconclusive between men and women. Meta-analysis of hundreds of studies has shown there is no female brain or male brain, according to "Testosterone Rex" by Cordelia Fine from the University of Melbourne. *Her research shows that our brains reflect the lives they have lived, not just the sex of their owners. Plasticity is now a scientific given – the brain is moulded from birth onwards until old age.*

Yet most research suggests that men and women do differ in some important tendencies which many researchers believe comes from an early experience rather than being innate. *The impact of gender stereotyping starts early in childhood and has a lasting influence on the way we think and behave and creates habits that may no longer be helpful to us and even obstructive to what we are aiming to achieve. Sue Conder*

If we do something many times, it will become automatic and we learn habitual ways of responding even though some of the behaviours and thoughts may have become outdated and we tell ourselves a story about them that is no longer in our best interests. The research by Cordelia Fine demonstrates that, not only does it impact behaviour and how we think of ourselves but also how we get rewarded and punished within a social contact context with repeated action.

Gender difference research shows that there are some common styles used among women that often put them at a disadvantage in the workplace compared to the styles that are more common in men. This same is true if men are not behaving according to the expected norms of their gender.

Using different styles can also result in misunderstandings that put those with a different style from the majority at a disadvantage.

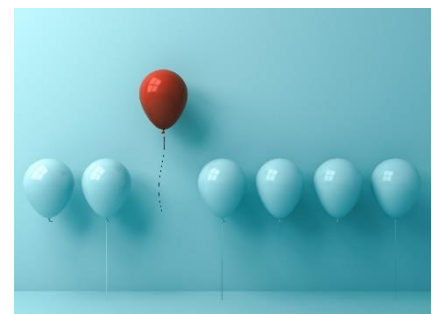
Chemistry of Difference MODEL - 10 ELEMENTS OF DIFFERENCE ©

This Chemistry of Difference model is based on research and hundreds of stories recounting the experience of women and men in the organisational context. It's inspired by my belief that crucially it's not that one approach is inherently better but maybe better in a specific situation and overall in combination differences are complementary and extremely powerful for a business as well as motivating for people when they feel accepted and valued for who they are.

Metaphorically speaking, I have compared differences in the way people think and behave with chemistry. Just as chemistry describes different elements, the human mind contains different characteristics that react when they come into contact with other elements. Similarly, there are changes that take place during a reaction with other substances, as



Just as chemistry describes different elements, the human mind contains different characteristics that react when they come into contact with other elements. Similarly, there are changes that take place during a reaction with other substances, as happens with the characteristics of people.



Neither is right or wrong, some work better in certain situations and in combination they are extremely powerful for business success.

Are your leaders and teams making errors of judgment about people who are not like them?

A new paradigm for inclusion

happens with the characteristics of people. This refers to the differences between the elements of the mind, the characteristics of how we think, feel behave and speak and how we react when faced with elements that are different to our own. Some of the aspects of this model relate to what has been described as second-generation gender bias, embedded organisational practices that are hard to spot. A Harvard Business Review article from 2013 suggests 'it creates a context—akin to "something in the water"—in which women fail to thrive or reach their full potential' which is explored in Women Rising: The Unseen Barriers by Herminia Ibarra, Robin J. Ely and Deborah M. Kolb.

The **Chemistry of DIFFERENCE**®

MODEL

Decision making

Influence

Followership

Fellowship

Elevation

Relationships

Engagement

Negotiation

Communication

Expertise

The **DIFFERENCE**© model of gender influenced tendencies:

Decision making – making decisions and managing risks

Influence – influencing others

Followership – people focussed leadership

Fellowship – status and relationships with others

Elevating – enhancing visibility of self and others

Relationships – relationships building and networking

Engagement – engaging and collaborating with others

Negotiation – negotiating and conflict management

Communication – communication strategies

Expertise – technical mastery and operating strategically

Would you like to be a more inclusive leader who can fully engage your whole team, increase your understanding and appreciation of both masculine and feminine approaches to work, and how the strengths of both can drive retention and your bottom line?

Benefit from interactive webinars and masterclasses

Gain a fresh perspective on the value of diversity and the role it plays in shaping successful organisations. We use a proprietary framework called 'DIFFERENCE' © to help leaders and teams embrace new ways of working. Fundamentally, the DIFFERENCE model focuses on creating awareness and understanding of how people think and behave differently so that they can embrace these differences and appreciate how they are complementary. On a personal level, this programme can boost tolerance, acceptance and understanding which will lead to richer relationships and higher team performance.

Metaphorically speaking, I have compared differences in the way people think and behave with chemistry. Just as chemistry describes different elements, the human mind contains different characteristics that react when they come into contact with other elements.

Some examples from the model

Let's take decision making. Research shows that men are more likely to isolate an issue and find a solution more quickly whereas women are more likely to set issues in a broader context. Anita Williams Woolley of Carnegie Mellon University found that women have a greater tendency to be collaborative and request other opinions. If people are not understanding the benefits of the different styles they can react negatively and see the opposite tendency as avoiding making the decision or deciding too quickly. Either can be judged negatively if the person has the opposite tendency.

If we consider influencing, research shows that women are more likely to seek a win-win outcome to preserve existing relationships and reduce



A new paradigm for inclusion

conflict. Women are more likely than men to engage in conflict resolution behaviour, perspective taking, creating solutions, expressing emotions and reaching out. According to Davies, Capobianco & Kraus's 2010 study "Gender differences in responding to conflict in the workplace", male leaders are rated more highly on behaviours consistent with their cultural stereotype as more assertive and task oriented than women. *Either style can be seen by the other from a negative position rather than recognising the value each style can bring to a situation.* Audrey Nelson and Claire Damken Brown's study on gender communication found that women choose conflict avoidance strategies because they do not want to be seen as aggressive or confrontational. The opposite style may be considered too provocative and create issues in relationships.

A new paradigm for diversity is imperative

It's not easy to work with people who are different to us. If we are more open in embracing that difference, we may also want to experiment with more of the opposite behaviour than that which comes naturally to us. It's about choice. It's not expected that the opposite of your preferred style will become natural or the norm for you, but it may give you a wider repertoire of ways of thinking and behaviour.

Organisations do have a style as a norm (often male style interaction) which means those with different styles are often not seen as equal and can be at a disadvantage. We should challenge ourselves to explore the differences we are particularly sensitive to and think about our emotional reaction to them as well as our judgments. The styles are not a matter of right or wrong. The paradigm now is to recognise the unique ways in which different people (men and women) approach business situations, make decisions and lead and manage teams. This results in a broader definition of what good looks like and embeds the idea that differences complement each other in their thoughts and actions.

Questions

1. *Does your organisation encourage the power of different ways of thinking and acting in your teams and how the different strengths drive your bottom line?*

2. *Are you embracing a large range of different perspectives and experiences to give you the necessary innovation and agility to move forward?*

3. *Are your leaders and teams making errors of judgment about people who are not like them?*

4. *Do your leaders and managers really understand how to embrace the different ways men and women think and behave?*

5. *Would you like to be a more inclusive?*



About the author

Sue Conder is a former Deloitte Partner and business leader, with 25 years + in organisational change consulting and leadership development and as a business psychologist, supporting executives and their teams to embrace the people dimension of success in life and in business. She delivers webinars, masterclasses, workshops and coaching for executives and for leaders and their teams.

She is the founder of Conder & Company who believe in the power of 'company' and bring together a large network of accomplished professionals. What unites Sue and those with whom she works in partnership, is a shared philosophy on the importance of wellbeing and how individual success contributes to organisational success.

They come with years of practical business experience and with evidence-based frameworks and tools, which take into account both the complexities of business and importantly an understanding of working with people's mindsets, emotions, behaviours and motivations. This enables individuals to gain personal success and wellbeing so that they can also perform at the highest levels.

To find out more about their ethos and approach, get in touch with Sue Conder on letstalk@conder.co or visit www.conder.co