

Open Hearth

Our research indicated that having a supportive organizational culture is essential to under-represented women feeling welcome and performing in leadership roles. Our findings also indicated that while existing leaders have good intentions with respect to creating more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible organizations they are unsure as to what that really means and how to operationalize the required changes. With this challenge in mind, we engaged a team of under-represented women to help us design a tool to help existing leaders think about and map their organization's transformation toward being a more diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible culture (DEIA).

The resulting tool captured in the image below, uses the metaphor of building and nurturing a fire as the associated elements mirrors those that need to be considered when transforming organizations to reflecting a more DEIA culture. For example, a fire involves a purpose (why – heat, cooking, aesthetics) and a spark to start. Leaders also need to decide on the purpose and importance of transforming their organizational culture and what measure(s) will be needed to ignite the change. A fire also requires fuel and air to sustain its flames. Leaders need to consider how they will nurture and sustain the momentum of their transformation or it will stall or die and the previous legacy values and behaviours prevail. Co-opting those with the lived experience can be a useful way to design change initiatives that really address the barriers impacting under-represented women's path to pursuing and flourishing in leadership roles in the organization.

A fire needs shelter from external elements and some form of protection to not harm those around it. Leaders need to be sensitive to the fact that change is not easy and requires some personal risk—taking by some and patient adaptation by many. Measures are required to ensure that those orchestrating the changes are protected and backed through bumpy learning road where mistakes are likely to occur. Those impacted by the changes need support as they give up their old practices and learn new policies and behaviours. While there are often casualties with changes, meaning some will struggle and leave, you want to ensure the requisite talent pool is enhanced not diminished with the changes.

Fires leave a legacy in the form of ashes that can both remind us of past fires but also serve to rekindle new fires. Organizational cultures have legacies as well and need to be understood when considering and orchestrating changes. Fires need a firekeeper(s) to watch over and to nurture the fire and water to ensure the fire does not get out of hand. Enlisting and backing change champions is important to sustaining the transformation. As mentioned earlier, those with "lived DEIA experience" should be involved in shaping the new culture. There is a dynamic element to fires where feedback, learning, and responses are required.

It is also useful to think about the value, both expected and unexpected, that can come from sharing a fire experience – the story telling, learning, new ideas, understanding and fun – much like when you create a supportive organizational culture – a lot of great things happen when your talented people are engaged.

We have shared a few ideas to illustrate the value of how this tool could help leaders chart and navigate their transformation to a more DIEA culture. The fire metaphor can yield many useful change insights. Leaders can find/develop and use their equivalent “fire” elements to customize to their organizational context.

