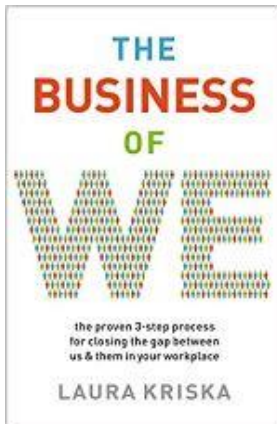


PM WORLD BOOK REVIEW



Book Title: ***The Business of We***

Author: **Laura Kriska**

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Reviewer: **Dr. Marjorie Anne Fox**

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Introduction

This book is a powerful and timely argument for institutions to re-examine their corporate culture, and in many cases to make fundamental changes. It offers a system called WE-building as a solution to what the author calls *Us versus Them* gaps that are caused by identity-based cultural differences.

Many companies now have programs and policies designed to recruit diverse individuals, to train people from diverse backgrounds to work together and to prohibit discrimination. Unfortunately, implementation often falls short because the programs are superficial, reactive, and not effective. Despite the programs, most organizations still lack a diverse and inclusive workforce. Many organizations still approach diversity by reacting to complaints, lawsuits, and negative publicity instead of proactively working to institute a culture of diversity, equality and inclusion.

Overview of Book's Structure

The book is divided into three sections. Section one defines and explores the challenge facing institutions today. Is diversity viewed as a problem to be solved or as a valuable resource that can be leveraged for success? The 'problem' approach creates *Us versus Them* gaps. There is typically a homogenous group in power (historically white and male) which Ms. Kriska calls the 'Home Team.' People who want to succeed in an organization (and be part of *Us*) are required to conform to the norms of the home team. People with different norms are categorized as *Them* and are often marginalized and excluded. The 'valuable resource' approach seeks to close gaps by creating a culture of equality and inclusion through WE-building.

Section two explains the process of using WE-building to close *Us versus Them* gaps. The three steps of the process are: fostering awareness, self-assessment and taking

action. Everyone must become aware that the definition of normal behavior differs across cultures. The particular gaps affecting the team or company must be identified. Awareness involves the accumulation of facts and firsthand experiences that include both visible and invisible data. The data are regarded as being like an iceberg. A few items (such as language, clothing, and food) are easily visible, but there are a host of assumptions, values, and beliefs beneath the surface. The invisible data are usually critical in determining norms.

Once awareness is established, the team should complete the self-assessment instrument, a set of ten questions that have yes or no answers. Each participant takes the assessment privately, and scores themselves by adding up the number of yes answers. Those with higher scores are less likely to have problems interacting with people from other cultures. Results for the group are collected anonymously and evaluated. The assessment provides valuable feedback for selecting action plans to bridge the gap and for redrawing the lines of belonging so that more people become part of *Us*. The final step is to create a gap closing action plan that's proportional to the seriousness of the gap that needs to be closed. Ms. Kriska provides a WE-building solutions worksheet as a tool for brainstorming and assembling a list of potential, actionable solutions. Participants can then prioritize the ideas and select the best solutions.

Section three contains suggestions for moving forward. Moving forward requires overcoming resistance and apathy. Many people find change uncomfortable and resist it. This is particularly true of changes in the *Us versus Them dynamic*. Clinging to familiar patterns of thinking and behavior are huge barriers to WE-building, but these barriers can be overcome through meaningful actions expressed as policies, communications, and behavior. Creating and maintaining a WE culture is an ongoing process because apathy and resistance never entirely disappear. Members of the 'home team' should take the lead in creating a culture of inclusion. They are at an advantage because their norms are dominant and they know the territory, the language, and the visible and invisible rules. They should take actions to expand the definition of WE to include everyone in the organization.

Highlights

WE-building is the proactive, deliberate effort to establish commonality and connection. Successful WE-building impacts every measure of business success positively. It increases profitability and innovation, improves communication, and creates an early warning system to forestall complaints, lawsuits, and media crises.

We-building must begin with the leaders, who should internalize the fact that diverse individuals may have many alternative definitions of the right way to do things. Leaders should model policies, communications and behaviors that build bridges across cultural gaps. They should encourage employees to discover existing common factors and work to create shared experiences that can become areas of commonality.

Leaders can establish new norms of inclusion by expanding their own definition of WE to include everyone in the organization.

Everyone has felt like a *Them* at some point in their life. Since everyone knows how awful that felt, each of us also knows what to do about it. Take daily actions to be welcoming and create a sense of inclusion and belonging for those currently in a *Them* position.

Organizations are most effective at closing *Us versus Them* gaps when leaders are involved as de factor directors of diversity, when the number of diverse decision makers is increased, when cultural data are part of the organizational conversation and when everyone engages in self-reflection. Leaders must hold conversations about identity factors such as age, sex and race and be willing to have difficult discussions. There need to be measurable goals for hiring and promoting non-home team employees, and DEI goals need to be tied to overall business goals.

Highlights: What I liked!

I have actively embraced diversity since the age of five. I have explored varying cultures and campaigned for equality and inclusion in several ways. Experience has taught me that equality and inclusion among diverse people begins with relationships based upon mutual trust and respect. Mutual trust and respect also appear to be the foundation of WE-building. Initiatives are effective in closing cultural gaps if they (1) help people build trust and (2) cause a greater, more diverse number of people to feel that they belong. The quality of execution and the individual commitment of all parties will determine whether results are poor or excellent. WE-building creates a culture for getting it right.

The focus on differences in identity should be replaced with a conversation about shared or common factors. Individuals should actively seek to identify commonalities and share information about themselves that might be invisible. Good topics to promote inclusion include food, the arts, sports, travel, pets, and the current geographic location. A key to crafting effective initiatives is establishing a diverse decision making and planning team. The home team may have the best of intentions, but often lacks the viewpoints to create a truly inclusive program.

Who might benefit from the Book?

Anyone interested in building a culture of diversity, equality and inclusion within their organization should read this book to overcome misunderstandings and conflicts generated by differences in identity and to replace them with cooperation and cohesion. Throughout the book, the author provides practical methods and tools, as well as numerous examples and illustrations of her major points. She makes a strong case for the benefits of DEI, identifies many of the common pitfalls, and provides clear instructions for positively transforming an organization's culture.

Conclusion

The book concludes with a call for all institutions, public and private, to embrace a new paradigm, the paradigm of WE-building. WE-building can be facilitated by people Ms. Kriska defines as ‘culturally fluid.’ Culturally fluid people have the ability to see and understand multiple perspectives. They relate well across cultural boundaries and are therefore adept at widening the borders of inclusion and creating a sense of belonging in more people. People who grow up in a household that encompasses multiple identities are naturally culturally fluid. But any of us can become culturally fluid by working through the three steps of awareness, self-assessment and deliberate action to accumulate insights and firsthand experiences with people who are different. We will then be positioned to facilitate the new paradigm based on WE-building within our organization.

For more about this book, go to:

<https://www.harpercollinsleadership.com/9781400216802/the-business-of-we/>

Editor’s note: This book review was the result of a partnership between the PM World and the [PMI Alamo Chapter](#). Authors and publishers provide the books to PM World or directly to the PMI Alamo Chapter where they are offered free to PMI members to review; book reviews are published in the PM World Journal and PM World Library. PMI Alamo Chapter members can keep the books as well as claim PDUs for PMP recertification when their reviews are published. Chapter members are generally mid-career professionals, the audience for most project management books.

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About the Reviewer



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Dr. Marjorie Anne Fox has more than 20 years of experience in practicing and teaching strategy and project management. She has served as the strategy lead for Aveda Corporation's largest distributor, taught at several major universities, and assisted numerous consulting clients. She is a lifelong advocate of diversity, equality, and inclusion. A respect for cultural differences is at the heart of everything she does. She received her PhD and MBA from Tulane University, and her bachelor's degree from the University of Maryland. She is CAPM certified by the Project Management Institute (PMI).

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