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WORK

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion: How to Start & Keep Going

By Dr. Robin Kelley

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Companies with strong DE&I principles tend to exhibit:

Improved Team Performance

Creativity and Innovation

Learning and Organizational Development

Effective Problem-Solving

Better Decision-Making

Greater Productivity

Improved Organizational Reputation

Greater Financial Success

Larger Market Share

More Extensive/Diverse Talent Pools

Researchers found in a study of 40 companies listed on the Fortune 1000 list that there is a significant relationship between employees' perceptions of the company's leadership, the organization's inclusiveness, and the level of organizational diversity. The study connected an organization's desire to create a diverse, equitable, and inclusive organization with *hiring and developing* leaders who are dedicated to the principles of DE&I.

An organization's ability to establish and maintain a diverse and inclusive work environment is highly dependent upon its leaders. While there are various organizational structures formed to address diversity, equity, and inclusion, it is clear that leadership is a crucial component. Leaders drive organizational goals and strengthen organizational culture. Leaders oversee and manage organizational change. The fundamental core of diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workplace is organizational change and, more precisely, cultural change, which requires leadership.

Rarely will grassroots approaches to DE&I result in sustainable strategies. Leaders are needed to move an organization towards effective diversity, equity, and inclusion strategy. Here's how they can get started.

1. Create a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Plan.

This plan should include strategies to ensure an inclusive workplace climate and include recruitment, retention, professional and organizational development, cultural competence, and external and/or customer relations. The plan must align with the overall mission and vision of the organization. Additionally, the strategic plan should include specific definitions of diversity, equity, and inclusion. *The DE&I strategic plan serves as the road map.*

2. Survey all members of the organization.

Climate surveys are critical for understanding the organization's baseline DE&I needs, and for construction of a strategic DE&I plan. Administer

regular surveys to employees either annually or every two, three, or five years. Provide transparency of results in a report that lists aggregate data as well as detailed information, and regularly communicate what the organization will do in response to the results. *Employee surveys provide insight, information and learning from the voices in the organization.*

3. Develop extensive DE&I programs and initiatives. For example, create the following programs or initiatives: interfaith prayer spaces, speaker series, lunch and learn programs, annual DE&I conference(s), community outreach programs, inclusive restrooms, and DE&I film series. Create programs to bolster the organization's benefits offerings such as: dual-career programs, employee recognition programs, partner accommodations, relocation assistance, outplacement programs, work-life balance, and wellness programs. *Make sure to implement processes for shared decision-making and employee feedback.*

4. Create a structured search process. Implement search processes to eliminate bias and to increase the diversity of search pools. Use scenario-based interview questions to assess candidates' critical thinking, cultural competence, ethical decision-making skills, etc. *Include a DE&I related short essay question on all applications to signify the importance of DE&I in your workplace culture.*

5. Create a comprehensive search committee training program. Hiring managers and search committee members should receive training that covers EEO compliance, implicit bias, and strategies for increasing diversity. Challenge search committee members to actively diversify the recruitment pools. Consider the formation of the search committee. *Diverse search committees result in more diverse recruitment pools and hires.*

6. Write position announcements with a DE&I focus. Write position announcements to state the organization's DE&I values and highlight positives in the surrounding community.

7. Revise job descriptions. Audit and assess all job descriptions, adding a statement that the company supports DE&I. Check job descriptions for gender-neutral pronouns like "he or her" or "they." *Include DE&I professional obligations on job descriptions such as training, reading, or other professional development opportunities.*



8. Create and revise policies to include DE&I.

Create an inclusive language policy to encourage the use of language that avoids the use of certain expressions or words that exclude particular groups of people such as gender-specific pronouns (e.g. masculine pronouns), or not addressing people by their preferred names. Create work-life balance, wellness, anti-discrimination, and anti-harassment, training, recruitment and retention, and promotion policies. *Review and revise current policies and procedures to include DE&I and set a schedule for reviewing and updating policies.*

9. Acclimate new employees at the organization to DE&I.

Implement new employee orientation sessions that introduce employees to the organization's DE&I values and/or share an interactive DE&I presentation to touch upon ways in which the organization strives to maintain a diverse and welcoming workplace.

10. Utilize performance management strategies.

Leaders' and employees' performance review session should include specific diversity, equity, and inclusion engagement indicators or self-assessment questions that are listed on the performance plan at the beginning of each evaluation cycle. *Conduct 360 degrees performance evaluations on stated diversity, equity, and inclusion indicators or questions and share results.*

11. Leadership diversity retreats. To insure that the DE&I program achieves long-term success, conduct professional development programs for organizational leaders on various diversity, equity, and inclusion topics (e.g., unconscious bias, micro-aggressions, cultural competence), on an annual or biannual basis.

12. Provide opportunities for all employees for career advancement.

Cultivate the development of knowledge, skills, and abilities of all employees, and in particular, career development for employees with diverse and underrepresented backgrounds. As the workforce becomes increasingly diverse, organizational development, career development, and training practices must include DE&I strategy. *The program should consist of professional development initiatives that are closely tied to career mapping plans.*

13. Develop high potential leaders with structured programs and mentoring.

Assign mentors to facilitate mentoring relationships, and mix and match mentors and protégés from majority and underrepresented groups. Create leadership development programs where employees work with multidisciplinary groups on large scale organizational projects or plans as part of their leadership development process. *The organizational mentoring and leadership development programs must support the unique backgrounds and experiences of the diversity represented in the workforce.*

For DE&I to be sustainable imperatives, organizations must develop metrics and assess the results of all programs, initiatives, and actions executed. Leaders must, through the DE&I strategic plan, clearly define DE&I goals as well as objectives and standards for measurement. DE&I sustainability requires commitment and dynamic approaches. The key to overall success is to plan, implement, measure, assess, and then revise if necessary.

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