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HCM Trends: Workforce Dynamics
Catalyst to Conversation - Diversity & Inclusion

August 28, 2020

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BENEFITS REDEFINED

"Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space lies our freedom and power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and freedom".

Viktor Frankl

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DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Events shaping our country today including the #MeTooMovement, Black Lives Matter, the disparate impact of Black and Latino populations affected by COVID-19, the Supreme Court decision in BOSTOCK v. CLAYTON COUNTY, GEORGIA recognizing sexual identity within the LGBTQ community as a protected sexual discrimination class bring a reality of the truth that an honest appraisal of diversity and inclusion in the workplace should occur.
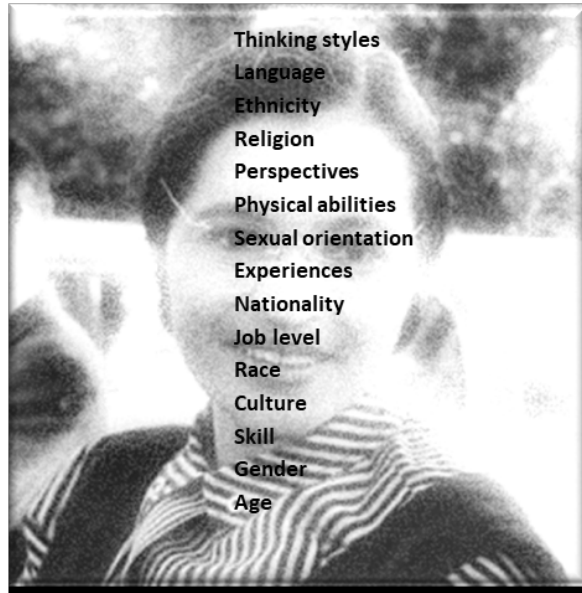
Diversity refers to the traits and characteristics that make people unique. Diversity is as age-old as humankind. Differences occur in man vs. woman, nationality vs. nationality, religion vs. religion, race vs race, developmentally or physically disabled vs. able-bodied and youth vs. the elderly and in every other way that makes each of us so uniquely designed.

Inclusion and the challenges brought about by our various natures are just as ageless as diversity. Our opinions carved within us by our experiences are so vast and varied that they can cause us to discriminate against each other instead of working towards common goals.

History and present circumstances show that in daily living, humans seem to work against our differences instead of celebrating them.

When it comes to the workplace where we are hired to work together for the common good of driving the business mission forward, we are often at odds with those who we perceive differently. We find that discrimination can occur in every stage of employment including hiring, performance management, pay equity, peer relationships, and supervisory management practices. For the workplace, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) defines inclusion as *"the achievement of a work environment in which all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully, have equal access to opportunities and resources, and can contribute fully to the organization's success."*

PROTECTION AGAINST DISCRIMINATION

The ability of those in the workplace to create an environment in which discriminatory treatment of others who are different is so widespread that federal/state and local laws exist for the protection of those who are discriminately treated. Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII), was originally enacted to protect employees against discrimination for race, color, national origin, and religion.

Title VII has been amended and other laws passed to add further protection from discriminatory treatment. The following laws are enforced by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and make it

> *"…illegal to discriminate against a job applicant or an employee because of the person's race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy, gender identity, and sexual orientation), national origin, age (40 or older), disability or genetic information. It is also illegal to discriminate against a person because the person complained about discrimination, filed a charge of discrimination, or participated in an employment discrimination investigation or lawsuit."*

- Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (Title VII)
- The Pregnancy Discrimination Act
- The Equal Pay Act of 1963 (EPA)
- The Age Discrimination in Employment Act of 1967 (ADEA)
- Title I of the Americans With Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA)
- The Civil Rights Act of 1991
- The Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act of 2008 (GINA)

In general, most employers are covered by the EEOC if they have 15 or more employees. However, state laws exist which cover employees with less than 15 employees and may offer additional protection as well.

It is a fact that discrimination still occurs. Charges filed (as shown below) to the EEOC show that positively the number of complaints is down but the facts also show we still have a long way to go to eliminate discrimination in the workplace.

	FY 2015	FY 2016	FY 2017	FY 2018	FY 2019
Total Charges	89,385	91,503	84,254	76,418	72,675
Race	31,027	32,309	28,528	24,600	23,976
% of total	34.70%	35.30%	33.90%	32.20%	33.00%
Sex	26,396	26,934	25,605	24,655	23,532
% of total	29.50%	29.40%	30.40%	32.30%	32.40%
National Origin	9,438	9,840	8,299	7,106	7,009
% of total	10.60%	10.80%	9.80%	9.30%	9.60%
Religion	3,502	3,825	3,436	2,859	2,725
% of total	3.90%	4.20%	4.10%	3.70%	3.70%
Color	2,833	3,102	3,240	3,166	3,415
% of total	3.20%	3.40%	3.80%	4.10%	4.70%
Retaliation - All Statutes	39,757	42,018	41,097	39,469	39,110
% of total	44.50%	45.90%	48.80%	51.60%	53.80%
Retaliation - Title VII only	31,893	33,082	32,023	30,556	30,117
% of total	35.70%	36.20%	38.00%	40.00%	41.40%
Age	20,144	20,857	18,376	16,911	15,573
% of total	22.50%	22.80%	21.80%	22.10%	21.40%
Disability	26,968	28,073	26,838	24,605	24,238
% of total	30.20%	30.70%	31.90%	32.20%	33.40%
Equal Pay Act	973	1,075	996	1,066	1,117
% of total	1.10%	1.20%	1.20%	1.40%	1.50%
GINA	257	238	206	220	209
% of total	0.30%	0.30%	0.20%	0.30%	0.30%

In addition to the laws regulated by the EEOC and state-specific laws, other federal laws exist including those governed by the Department of Labor that protect against discrimination for those in military, wage and hour practices, Family Medical Leave (FMLA) and those employers receiving federal financial assistance or holding federal contracts and subcontracts.

BUILDING A DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION CULTURE

The EEOC requires that employers have a policy which promotes Equal Employment Opportunity such as the following:

Equal Employment Opportunity

The Company is an equal opportunity employer. We will extend equal opportunity to all individuals without regard to race, religion, color, sex (including pregnancy, sexual orientation, and gender identity), national origin, disability, age, genetic information, or any other status protected under applicable federal, state, or local laws. Our policy reflects and affirms the Company's commitment to the principles of fair employment and the elimination of all discriminatory practices.

Is a policy enough though? To have a policy and proactively provide *and* support a positive culture that embodies a workplace where people want to work is what is required to embrace a diverse and inclusive workplace. Why is this?

The current generations in the workplace are looking for holistic positive workplace cultures. Terms like *mindfulness, thriving, well-being, and peak employee experiences* are adjectives that are being used to describe a 21st- century workplace culture that symbolize an employer of choice.

	Traditionalists	Baby Boomers	Gerneration X	Millennials	Gen Z
	20th Century				21st Century
Work is...	• An Obligation • A long term career	• An exciting adventure • A Career • Work and the retire	• A difficult challenge • A contract • Just a job	• A means to an end • Fulfillment • Flexible work arrangements	• Multi-taskers • Entrepreneurial • Technology driven • Promotes individuality

An employer can have a considerable amount of control when implementing marketplace solutions for creating these positive environments conducive to attracting and retaining employees, such as a robust compensation package, an effective onboarding process, a continuous performance management system and employee engagement tools. Yet all this is worth nothing if an employee is being discriminated against or their contributions are not valued. A policy centered on inclusivity practices is the next step. A sample policy is provided as follows:

Commitment to Diversity

The Company is committed to creating and maintaining a workplace in which all employees have an opportunity to participate and contribute to the success of the business and are valued for their skills, experience, and unique perspectives. This commitment is embodied in company policy and the way we do business and is an important principle of sound business management.

Yet again, a policy without management support of non-discriminatory and inclusive behavior in all workplace practices is a recipe for employer liability. The goal of the EEOC is to (1) make the victim whole including any loss of pay and/or benefits i.e. restoring to a position that they would have been in had the discrimination not occurred and (2) stop any further discrimination from occurring. There may be instances if the discrimination is found to be intentional that punitive and compensatory damages may be assessed. These damages can vary depending on the size of the employer.

EMPLOYER SIZE	EEOC LIMIT OF DAMAGES*
15-100 employees	$50,000
101-200 employees	$100,000
201-500 employees	$200,000
more than 500 employees	$300,000

*In the case of age discrimination, liquidated damages may be assessed equal to the amount of back pay awarded the victim.

EMPLOYER BRANDING

An employer should also consider the untold damages to the brand of the company. An organization's brand is its reputation in the community including how that business is viewed as an employer.

In today's social media world, the brand of an employer can make news and its reputation be harmed in a moment with just the push of the video button on a cell phone camera. Not only is the news immediate but also widespread. Damages to an organization's reputation and revenue can take the form of:

a. loss of customers,
b. high turnover rates,
c. stress-related medical claims,
d. workers compensation injuries for lack of presenteeism, and
e. inability to recruit qualified candidates.

The liability, damage to company reputation, and loss of revenue should be sufficient reasons for having a culture that embraces diversity and inclusion and not forgetting the fact that this is the right thing to do.

WHAT IS COMPANY CULTURE?

A company's culture is the environment that is built around values, interactions, traditions, behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes. The culture is set by the C-Suite, which should impact all levels of the company and be a part of the assessment process for all decisions made by the company including all employment practices.

A positive work culture engages the employees to move forward, cooperate and collaborate with management and each other and feel motivated to come to work each day prepared to give the best of their skills to drive forward the mission of the company.

Benefits of A Defined Positive Culture	Benefits of Employee Retention
✓ Employee Engagement	✓ Meeting Business Goals
✓ Talent Attraction	✓ Improves Production/Customer Continuity
✓ Retention	✓ Increases Institutional Memory
✓ Impacts Health & Welfare	✓ Limits Recruiting, Onboarding and Training Costs
✓ Increased Performance	

Employers can weigh the costs of their ability to attract and retain employees by evaluating their hiring costs. A study by the Society for Human Resource Management states that the average cost to hire an employee is $4,129, with around 42 days to fill a position.

- An average company loses anywhere between 1% and 2.5% of their total revenue on the time it takes to bring a new hire up to speed.
- It takes 50-60% of an employee's annual salary to find a direct replacement.

The costs of recruiting for a new position vs. turnover are even higher due to the subjective costs attributed to the loss of an employee.

Cost	Recruiting	Turnover
Administrative Time	✓	✓
Posting Job	✓	✓
Background Checks & Testing	✓	✓
Onboarding	✓	✓
Training	✓	✓
	8 to 26 weeks to achieve full productivity	
Loss of Productivity		✓
Lost Engagement from Other Workers		✓
Customer Dissatisfaction		✓
Reduced or Lost Business		✓
	50-60% of an employee's annual salary to find a direct hire	Turnover up to a total of 90-200% of an employee's annual salary

Source: The True Cost of Hiring an Employee in 2019 by Mile Živković on May 22, 2018

To summarize the workplace from 2 perspectives the employee and the employer, the goal for each, even with different objectives can work in harmony with a supporting culture.

Conversations **employees** are focused on:
- *Physical Wellness*
- *Financial Wellness*
- *Emotional Wellness*
- *Social Wellness*

Conversations **employers** are focused on:
- *Expense Management*
- *Risk Mitigation*
- *Increased Productivity*

Employees goal is to have career, community and cause

Employers goal is to have a sustainable culture

THE DIVERSITY & INCLUSION CULTURE

How does a company promote and support diversity and inclusion in the workplace? It is prudent to first take a look at the demographics of the organization as it sits today.

1. C-Suite recognizes that an organization's greatest asset is its employees
2. Employee retention is a proper mindset
3. Consumer loyalty is critical to business growth
4. C-Suite commits to EEO in all business practices
5. Evaluate the company diversity and inclusion dynamics in the present moment
   a. What is the staff ratio based upon EEO demographics?
      i. Hiring
      ii. Promotions
      iii. Pay practices including hiring and raises
   b. What is the EEO demographic make-up of my applicant pool for each geographic location?
   c. What is turnover and related cost ratios?
   d. What are employee perceptions of company policy and practices?
   e. What are the EEO demographics of the company consumer/customer base?
   f. Evaluate corrective counseling for trends in:
      i. Consistent Supervisors/Department
      ii. Reasons for poor performance
      iii. Employee responses
   g. What programs are in place supporting diversity and inclusion?
      i. What employee engagement involvement exists for developing, promoting, and reviewing?
      ii. How is success measured?

Secondly, employers should understand the motivating factor or **bias** that exists in each of us that causes us to work against each other in the workplace instead of moving the goals and objectives of the forward through the work we do individually and as a team.

WHAT IS BIAS?

Bias is defined as prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, usually in a way considered to be unfair. Bias can exist in one of two forms explicit and implicit.

Explicit bias is when the individual is aware of their behavior, their prejudices, and attitudes. This type of bias requires very consciously made negative or positive behaviors. Explicit bias typically shows itself when we feel threatened. For example, when the World Trade Centers were destroyed by terrorism, certain people reacted by discriminating against Muslims. Fearing that they were threatened by the Muslim religion vs. an extremist movement, explicit bias negatively overtook attitudes, and behaviors.

Showing itself in the workplace, explicit bias can be easily ascertained and stopped. Employers should have and adhere to a zero-tolerance policy for harassment and discrimination. This policy should include an investigation process that is prompt and thorough. Recognized behaviors should be immediately stopped. Training should be conducted annually for all employees with supervisors having additional training regarding their role in monitoring workplace behaviors.

Additionally, having an opportunity for conflict resolution in the workplace can empower employees to respectfully work conflicts out one-to-one. Yet also having an open-door policy to management is also required so that employees who cannot resolve conflicts can quickly move up the chain of command.

Employers who need to develop such policies can turn to their Benefit Advisors for Human Capital Management resources and tools.

Implicit biases are considered social perceptions and intuitions that influence our understanding, actions and decisions, attitudes, and stereotypes towards others in an unconscious manner. This form of bias is triggered involuntarily and without the knowledge or awareness of the individual. This type of bias can present itself both in a favorable and unfavorable manner.

Feelings of discomfort and judgment are created by implicit biases that are hidden in our conscious when considering characteristics such as race, ethnicity, age, and appearance. Unfortunately, we all have hidden biases that are lodged deep within. These biases develop throughout a person's lifetime and start at a very early age. By way of personal experience along with both direct and indirect messaging in various forms, implicit bias is developed and forged into our existence.

The Kirwan Institute provides a few characteristics of Implicit Biases.

- Implicit biases are pervasive. No one is immune to them, even people with sworn commitments to objectivity such as judges.
- Implicit and explicit biases are related but distinct mental constructs. They can both exist at the same time and reinforce each other.
- The implicit associations we hold do not necessarily align with our declared beliefs or even mirror viewpoints we would openly approve.
- We generally tend to hold implicit biases that favor our ingroup, although research has shown that we can also carry implicit biases against our ingroup.
- Implicit biases are malleable. The implicit biases that we have created can be slowly unlearned through a variety of debiasing techniques.

Understanding why it Matters

Implicit biases instantaneously benefit certain groups while disadvantaging others. These biases may be harder for employers to identify than explicit bias. These biases can be present in various aspects of conducting business thereby significantly and negatively affecting diversity in multiple ways.

EFFECTS OF IMPLICIT BIAS

In the workplace, subtle implicit biases can have an impact on how people are chosen for jobs or elevated and promoted to advanced positions. Being aware of the existence of these biases and striving to minimize them can help organizations in their hiring and promoting practice. The following chart highlights some of the most prevalent forms of implicit bias found in the workplace.

TYPES OF IMPLICIT BIAS, DEFINITION, EXAMPLES, WAYS TO AVOID THEM

Type of Bias	Definition	How Bias can Be Present in the Workplace	Methods to Avoid Bias in Hiring Practices
AFFINITY BIAS	Also known as similarity bias, this is the tendency people have to connect with others who share similar interests, experiences and backgrounds.	When hiring teams interview someone they like and who they know will get along with the team, it's usually due to shared similar interests, experiences, and backgrounds, which if hired for, does not help your team grow and diversify. Even though similarities should not automatically disqualify a candidate, they should never be the deciding factor.	Making note of shared similarities with the candidate to differentiate between attributes that may affect the interviewer's judgment is acceptable. Yet look for the solid skills, experiences, and qualities that would be an addition to your team as a 'culture add' rather than culture fit.
CONFIRMATION BIAS	The inclination to draw conclusions about a situation or person based on personal desires, beliefs, and prejudices rather than on unbiased merit.	In hiring, confirmation bias can play a harmful role at the start of the process, from reviewing a resume to forming an initial opinion of the candidate based on qualities like their name, where they live, went to school, etc. These opinions can follow into the interview process and interviewers can generate questions to confirm the initial opinion.	To prevent this type of bias it is important to ask standardized, skills-based questions that provide each candidate an equal and fair opportunity to stand out.
ATTRIBUTION BIAS	When you try to make sense of or judge a person's behavior based on prior observations and interactions with that individual.	When hiring, attribution bias can cause hiring managers and recruiters to declare a candidate unfit for the job because of something unusual on their resume or unexpected behavior during the interview.	Candidates tend to be nervous about an interview and they may answer a question unusually. Rather than assume a candidate is unfit for a job based upon a first response answer, asking clarifying questions will help to have something potentially misperceived clarified.
CONFORMITY BIAS	Acting like the people around them regardless of their personal beliefs.	When as a team, a candidate's application materials are reviewed and the interview is held together, conformity bias can cause individuals to sway the opinions within the team to select a candidate that matches the opinion of the majority. This can may cause the team to miss out on an excellent candidate because individual opinions become muddled in a group setting.	After a team interview, have them individually write down and submit their individual opinions separate from the team immediately after the interview ends. This allows impartial opinions to be shared.
THE HALO EFFECT	Placing another person on a pedestal after learning something impressive about them.	The halo effect can come into play at any stage of the hiring process. Learning that a candidate worked at a high-ranking firm or graduated from an elite school may create the Halo effect.	When reviewing applications only consider the candidate's skills and experience as it compares to the others.

Type of Bias	Definition	How Bias can Be Present in the Workplace	Methods to Avoid Bias in Hiring Practices
THE HORNS EFFECT	Viewing another person negatively after learning something unpleasant or negative about them.	The opposite of the halo effect, the horns effect can cause hiring teams to weed out candidates based on a trait that is averse to the team's preferences. This could be something like their previous work experience, working at a place that did not hire the interviewer. Such traits may alter the interviewer's perception of the candidate even though it is a factor that may not be relevant to the current role.	If the interviewer has a negative feeling about a candidate, take the time to figure out exactly where that 'gut feeling' is coming from. Make sure it's not something superficial or insignificant that shouldn't affect the candidate's chance at the role.
THE CONTRAST EFFECT	When comparing two or more things that there is a propensity to exaggerate the performance of one in contrast to the other.	This is one of the most common types of bias in the recruiting industry, it can be easy to over compare one applicant to the next to determine which one is better than the other.	Create a structured applicant review and interview process, this will allow for fair and equal comparisons.
GENDER BIAS	Preferring one gender over another gender	Statistics show that men are normally the preferred gender and are given preferential treatment over women in the workplace; a man is 1.5x more likely to be hired than a woman.	Conduct blind screenings of applications, excluding information revealing their assumed gender, such as their name and interests. Set diversity hiring goals & practices. Compare candidates strictly on skill and merit.
AGEISM	Having negative feelings about another person based on their age.	Ageism affects older people more often than younger people. 58% of workers start noticing ageism when they enter their 50s. Employers tend to value younger talent more and more, which makes it difficult for older adults to change careers, find jobs, or move up in their careers.	An Employer should create a policy that prevents age bias along with hiring goals to promote and foster age diversity when recruiting new talent.
NAME BIAS	Judging and preferring people with certain types of names	One study found that white names receive 50% more callbacks for interviews than Black American names. Applicants living in nicer neighborhoods also receive more callbacks for both White and Black American names. Another study found that Asian last names are 28% less likely to receive a callback for an interview compared to Anglo last names.	Omit the candidate's name and personal information (email, phone number, and address) from their application materials. Firms can assign candidates a number or have a third-party team member hide this information for the hiring team until the candidate arrives for an interview. This will ensure that hiring teams are selecting candidates based on their merits.

Type of Bias	Definition	How Bias can Be Present in the Workplace	Methods to Avoid Bias in Hiring Practices
BEAUTY BIAS	A social behavior where people believe that attractive people are more successful, competent, and qualified.	Studies found that people perceived more attractive than others (both men and women) earn higher incomes than others perceived less attractive. This is based upon a belief that attractive people are viewed as more social, happy, and successful.	SHRM suggests that to avoid beauty bias, companies should create structured recruiting and interview processes so that the hiring team will be able to compare applications and interviews equally and reduce the risk of bias. Having an initial phone screening rather than a video call or in-person interview can also help as well as utilizing unbiased technology to identify top candidates.
HEIGHT BIAS	Judging a person who is significantly shorter or taller than the socially accepted human height.	One study found that a person who is six feet tall earns roughly $5,500 more per year than someone who is five and a half feet tall, regardless of gender, age, or weight. Another study found that tall candidates are perceived as more competent, employable, and healthy, which may explain why 58% of male CEOs at major companies are over six feet tall.	Conducting blind interviews, phone interviews or video interviews will reduce the susceptibility to judge a person based on their height.

12 UNCONSCIOUS BIAS EXAMPLES AND HOW TO AVOID THEM IN THE WORKPLACE,
Bailey Reiners, August 12, 2019, Updated July 31, 2020

SUPPORTING RESEARCH STUDIES

A study of race in the labor market by Bertrand & Mullainathan revealed that applicants with white-sounding names received 50% more callbacks for interviews than those with African American names. The study revealed that employers were more responsive to resumes with Anglo Saxon names even when the resumes with African Americans names had the exact or higher credentials than their white counterparts. This racial gap was uniform across occupation, industry, and employer size.

Another study by Goldin & Rouse created a change in the hiring practices of the symphony orchestra. In the 1970s & 80's it was very difficult for a female musician to receive a position in the orchestra no matter the skill level; at that time women were only 5% of the orchestra body. As a way of testing for gender bias, the method for auditioning was changed. The new method required the use of a screen to conceal the gender of the person auditioning. Using this method women had a 50% higher chance of advancing from the preliminary round. This practice led to the increase between 25%-46% in the number of female hires.

MOVING FORWARD

Organizations seeking to make permanent and impactful changes within their culture will need to create different methods in selecting, hiring, promoting, and embracing diversity and inclusion. Implementing practices that reveal your workforce's unconscious bias is a starting place to establish a baseline.

Does implicit bias exist in your workplace? One place to start looking is at employee behavior. Even though generally all people are good and have great intentions, unconscious, implicit bias may exist and need to be revealed for change to take place. Since 1998, over 20 million people have taken the Implicit Association Test, (IDT). This test can reveal if people have an implicit bias toward members of specific groups, which are usually seen as "the others". For example, the test has revealed hidden biases such as 80 percent of the test takers had a negative bias against the elderly, and 75 percent of both whites and Asians were shown to have a positive implicit bias for whites in comparison to blacks.

A second step is to look at company practices. Collecting data and obtaining feedback can be very beneficial in determining whether there are any forms of bias across the workplace. Utilizing data permits an employer to evaluate the culture fairly and not from a singular viewpoint. Data can reveal patterns hidden from the unseen eye. Supporting demographic data as discussed previously will aid in determining whether biases either explicit or implicit exist in human capital management practices.

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS AFFECTS HUMAN CAPITAL DECISIONS
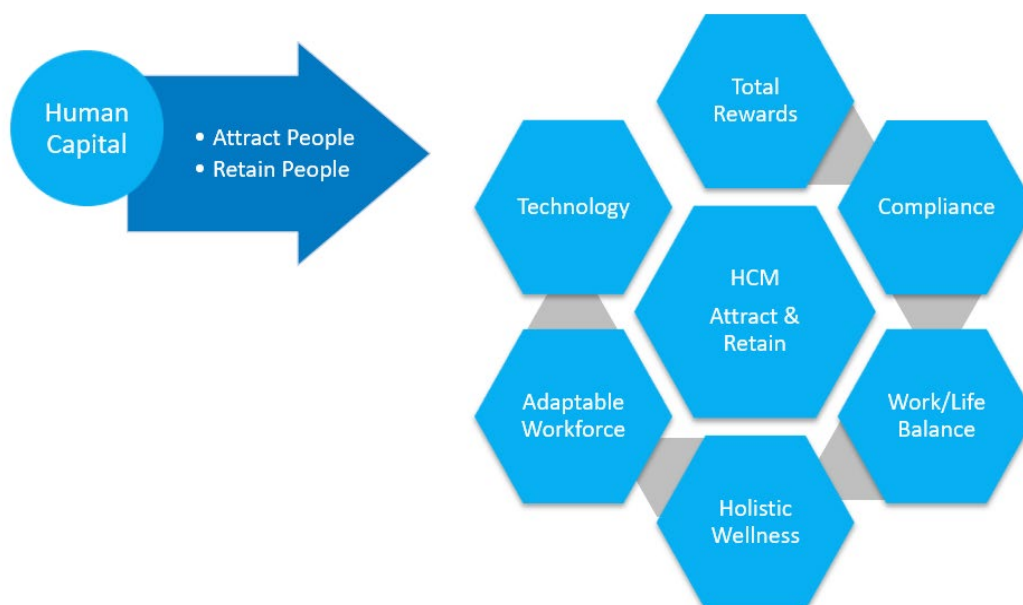
CHANGING PERSPECTIVE

An important practice that an organization can implement into their diversity and inclusion program is to engage all levels of the organization in self-examination. Paying attention to times when interacting with, planning to meet, or collaborating with individuals or groups that are different from themselves, individuals can carefully reflect, discern, and change if their viewpoints are impeding their decision-making processes.

Implementing a thought process, P.A.U.S.E. similar to that below derived from Cook, Ross Inc., which emphasizes, *"The more we know people for who they are, the less we treat them as what they are"*. With this perspective, dynamic and influential conversation, systemic growth, and transformation can be initiated.

P.A.U.S.E:

- **P**ay attention to what's happening, beneath the judgments and assessments.
    - When we pause and look at what is happening, we have an opportunity to discern between an event and our interpretation of that event.
- **A**cknowledge your reactions, interpretations, and judgments.
    - You create the opportunity to recognize your interpretation as just that an interpretation. As soon as you notice an interpretation, as an interpretation, you have shifted to a higher level of awareness.
- **U**nderstand the other possible reactions, interpretations, and judgments that may be possible.
    - Sometimes when we meet someone they may say or behave in a manner that is foreign to us. Remember there may be several reasons that an individual may act differently than what is considered a social norm. A few reasons to consider are cultural differences, nervousness, or they may be facing a personal challenge that you are unaware of. Therefore, before judging a person's behavior try looking at all the possibilities that will help to reinforce any misidentification.
- **S**earch for the most constructive, empowering, or productive way to deal with the situation.
    - Ask yourself some questions, "Should I make an assumption based on my initial reaction?" or "Should I pause and get to know them a little better before I make a conclusive decision?" and "What is the best way to manage the situation?"
- **E**xecute your action plan.
    - Act according to your above assessments.

By reshaping the workplace discussion from only discrimination and "protected classes" to a focus on equal treatment, respect, and sound judgment, an organization can begin to analyze, identify, and challenge hidden biases in every aspect of the employment life cycle.

Realignment

Cook & Ross further share that to realize and create just and equitable systems within the organization requires acknowledging and combating discrimination that rises against people identifying with any group that is considered a part of *"the other"* by the dominant group. It is natural to gravitate to those that we easily connect with. In the workplace, this can hinder the collaboration of teams by creating an environment of employees being isolated within like groups. However natural this pull towards the familiar may be it can create a very limited knowledge base and diminish the impact of the experiences of groups outside the known realm. Therefore, employers should learn to expand teams to include diversity in thought, ideas, and people.

Offer customized unconscious bias education

Bias education and training is not a one size fits all scenario. Knowing that separate operational areas have distinct cultures, needs, and requirements, along with many different levels of client engagements offers insight for more individualized training. The educational programs should be designed to fit the various areas within each organization. Being just as diverse as the multiple communities within the organization, diversity and inclusion training should encompass the strengths and deficiencies within all levels of the organization.

Support activities that encourage positive images and experiences of members of non-dominant groups, make it a cultural thing:

- Build environments where a variety of views are appreciated,
- Develop multifaceted teams and create procedures and guidelines that compel associates to treat each other with dignity & respect, in lieu of political correctness, and
- Consider eliminating names, pictures, or other identifiers & qualifiers that can reduce equity and inclusion in decision-making.

Creating a community of mindfulness, where the workforce is mutually committed to supporting each other at tackling bias will be an extremely important facet within any organization. With these inclusive constructs, organizations can discover undercurrents that were previously hidden. Locating unknown biases allows teams to open new productive ways of engaging in life-changing dialogue around issues that may be a struggle to speak on.

Reduce guilt and increase responsibility

Identifying bias in the workforce may leave employees feeling guilty over how their perceptions can cause their words and actions to negatively impact another. A person's response to feeling guilty is never positive, it can be very damaging to an individual or the group. Guilt is what most people experience when they feel as though they have done something wrong. In deconstructing bias, guilt is ineffective and should not be the intent of the employer. Empowering employees instead to embrace awareness and acknowledging they have the ability and responsibility to change behavior.

Employers can promote individual accountability in their Diversity and Inclusion program by having employees pledge to positively drive forward their behavior. The CEO Action for Diversity and Inclusion has developed the following pledge:

I pledge to check my bias, speak up for others, and show up for all.

How can you ACT ON the pledge?
- I will check my own biases and take meaningful action to understand and mitigate them.
- I will initiate meaningful, complex, and sometimes difficult, conversations with my friends and colleagues.
- I will ask myself, "Do my actions and words reflect the value of inclusion?"
- I will move outside of my comfort zone to learn about the experiences and perspectives of others.
- I will share my insights related to what I have learned.

CONNECTING TO THE COMMUNITY

We have talked about the issues, looked at ways to identify bias, and evaluated ourselves in the process. So now what? What do you do with this information and realization? It is time to put it into practice and formulate a plan. It is time to connect to the community.

What does connect to the community mean? In breaking down the community involvement discussion, there are four key points employers need to think about:

- Who are you appealing to?
- What is your goal, or your mission?
- What resources are available for use?
- Who will develop, and execute or initiate your plan?

Taking a deeper dive into each of these points, let's look at thoughts, considerations, and ideas.
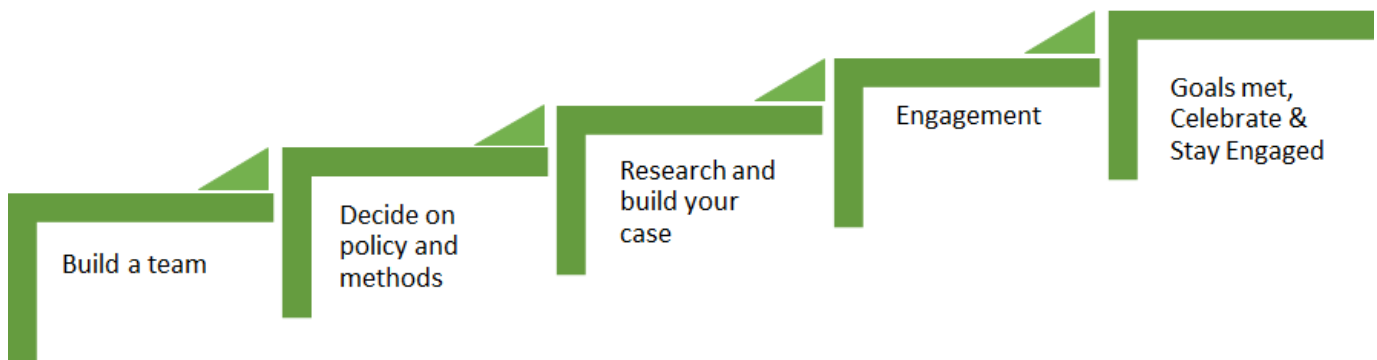
1. Who are you appealing to?

Community is defined as:

- A group of people living in the same place or having a common characteristic.
- A feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals.

As you start to consider who you are trying to appeal to within your plan, you need to evaluate the community we are talking about. Are you looking at the internal or external community? In other words, are you simply focusing on the internal office, or are you speaking of the local community as a whole? Or maybe both?

2. What is your goal, or your mission?

Status of the Community - As you look at your community, take the time to look at the current status of that community. Evaluating the current status will help determine where to focus your attention during development. One person's community can look very different from another's community. Questions to ask yourself:

- Is your community currently a group of people having a common characteristic?

- Is there a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals?

  Are you far from it, or somewhere in the middle?

- What are you promoting or suggesting?

  It is no longer enough to just say "we" support; support must be shown through our actions, and what "we" bring to the table. Your goal must encompass each of these thoughts. This means determining what makes sense for your community, what makes sense within your workplace, who is your community, and the people who make up the community.

- How do you meet and reach people where they are while having them on board with your mission?

  Employee attraction and retention – Do you want to be known as an employer of choice, who offers and exhibits diversity and inclusion for all people? What type of people are you trying to attract and retain?

- A 2017 Deloitte Volunteerism Survey revealed that 89% of working Americans believe that companies who sponsor volunteer activities offer a better overall working environment than those who do not. What sort of work environment are you offering?

- Food for thought: When you advertise job postings and state that you are an Equal Employment Opportunity employer, does the image you portray, and the process you follow for hiring, back up that statement? Or does it just check a box?

- Placement of your EEOC poster: Every employer covered by the nondiscrimination and EEO laws is required to have a poster on their premises. The placement and treatment of a simple poster stating you are an Equal Employment Opportunity employer creates an image and a message. Make sure it is the message you are wanting or intending to portray.

  - Why would you want to? - Studies show that employees are more loyal to companies who show they are concerned and involved in the community, and social issues.

  Allesandra Cavalluzzi, author, "A Million Dollars in Change: How to Engage Your Employees, Attract Top Talent, and Make the World a Better Place", points out *"Companies that are socially responsible and strong advocates of community involvement have higher levels of engagement than companies that are not actively supporting their communities. However, studies have found that fewer than 10% of midsize companies use their community involvement programs to drive employee engagement."*

  10 percent! You as an employer must decide whether you are going to be part of the 10%, or 90%.

3. What resources are available?

When talking about resources, you do have to consider financial implications. But resources also means talking about human capital, from leadership throughout all levels of employees, as well as local vendors, organizations, locations, and opportunities. Employers' best plans include ones that contribute to the community, portrays the message intended, and is effective, without hindering the bottom line.

The Deloitte study further showed that 69% of those surveyed said they are not volunteering as much as they would like to. And only 38% of respondents say their employers provide access to company-sponsored or coordinated volunteer programs.

There is a saying *"Go big or go home"* but alternatively a better approach for developing your plan may be to reference the turtle and the rabbit. Understand that this is a long-term approach and will not happen overnight. Be patient, and allow the time needed to reach your end goal. That may mean you take baby steps for implementing pieces of the plan and continuing to build upon each block, incrementally, until reaching the final vision of your goal. You must be mindful and methodical on your approach. Don't just start adding things because you think you should; you always want to add the RIGHT things to the mix, at the RIGHT time.

There is one major consideration that must be emphasized at this point. Your first resource must be the leaders within the company. To be successful and effective, leadership MUST buy-in.

A webinar hosted by Cigna's Equity and Equality Program members shared about an initiative they started, to have an open discussion about equality for all members within the LGBTQ community. Their approach started with asking for permission to hold lunchtime open discussions.

The concept behind the lunch discussion initiative was to open the conversation about how everyone may be different in their looks or preferences but to understand that everyone matters and everyone has value. The committee started by simply placing a tent card on a table within the lunchroom, and allowing open participation, from employees who were part of the LGBTQ community, along with any employees of the company.

The speakers impressed upon the fact that *"The leadership of the company supported us. They showed up and sat at the table with us, to show they were all-in with our initiative. And as that happened, other employees realized it was ok to join us. It was encouraged, and not discouraged."*

For any initiative, including having a diverse and inclusive culture, to take root and have long-term success within any organization, the initiative MUST have leadership buy-in, support, and encouragement throughout the process. The message from leadership must be clear and intentional. Everyone internally and externally must see that from leadership the entire way through the company, you intend to be an employer who is involved; an employer who shows action; and an employer who is accepting and welcoming of all.

Remember to look around you at what is available through your local resources and organizations. What organizations do you have, who can provide resources, guidance, and opportunities for involvement for your company and employees? Sources may be available through:

Local Chamber of Commerce

National and local chapters of Society of Human Resource Managers (SHRM)

Insurance carriers and Advisors

Regulatory organizations: Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, Department of Labor

Community programs such as South Carolina Race Equity and Inclusion (REI) Partnership. REI has created and shared a comprehensive guide for improving race equity and inclusion in the workplace

You may need a membership to access certain resources, such as through the Chamber of Commerce or SHRM but many resources are available at no or limited costs. Understand that the wheel does not need to be recreated just adapted for your workplace. Start by inquiring. Your trusted Benefit Advisor is the best place to start by them having access to these and other Human Capital Management resources.

You will need to determine what monetary resources are available. Your checklist should include:

- Evaluating your company size,
- Where you currently are within the community.
- Is the company large enough to create a budget for your plan?
- Do you need to solely rely on employee volunteers?
- Most employees want to be engaged, so get them involved.

Remember you can start small and work to bigger opportunities. No initiative or idea is too small and every step forward matters. However, without dedicated resources and a strategy, the impact you make, and having a sustained engagement, will be close to impossible. So, it must be a cohesive approach, utilizing financial, human, and other resources collectively.

In an inspiring speech to graduating college students, the actor, Denzel Washington stated, "*Just because you are doing a lot more, does not mean you are getting more done.*" The same is true here. Be purposeful and methodical.

4. Who will develop and initiate or execute the plan?

Depending on what the end goal is, you may have a combination of people involved with this part of the plan. Having a committee with representation at all levels. As already established you MUST have the backing of upper management or leadership within the company. Human Resources should have a seat at the table and can lead the charge but the company focus must go broader.

Determining what opportunities you plan to engage or participate in, will help decide upon the right person or persons to help. You may find that establishing governance for the committee will help to keep it mission-minded. Committee members may ebb and flow and new ones will be added throughout the years.

Consider having a team of employee ambassadors. In other words, having employees with hands-on roles in creating and supporting your company's objective and initiative, will create more drive and set a desire for others to join in.

Challenges with this approach include remote employees who are not on-site or employers having multiple locations. Be aware of those situations, and possibly consider employee ambassadors at each location, if possible. Or design a community sponsored project that bridges together with national organizations, so that all employees are participating in a common goal or mission.

Diversity and inclusion are essential, they are primal forces that can unite the sharpest minds to build resolutions to business, economic, and social challenges of the 21st century and beyond. Now is the time to move forward and engage with each other.

Be open and genuine. Promote the best you are as an organization. Whether you walk or run, everyone still ends up at the finish line. Just be sure you do it with everyone in the same race, together. Richard Chang, Editor at LinkedIn has stated, *"…If you go into the conversation with a mindset that you want them to succeed and have their best interest at heart, people are likely to appreciate the straight talk."*

COMPANY PLACARDS

P.A.U.S.E:

- **P**ay attention to what's happening, beneath the judgments and assessments.
  - When we pause and look at what is happening, we have an opportunity to discern between an event and our interpretation of that event
- **A**cknowledge your reactions, interpretations, and judgments.
  - You create the opportunity to recognize your interpretation as just that, an interpretation. As soon as you notice an interpretation, as an interpretation, you have shifted to a higher level of awareness.
- **U**nderstand the other possible reactions, interpretations, and judgments that may be possible.
  - Sometimes when we meet someone they may say or behave in a manner that is foreign to us. Remember there may be several reasons that an individual may act differently than what is considered a social norm. A few reasons to consider are cultural differences, nervousness, or they may be facing a personal challenge that you are unaware of. Therefore, before judging a person's behavior try looking at all the possibilities that will help to reinforce any misidentification.
- **S**earch for the most constructive, empowering, or productive way to deal with the situation.
  - Ask yourself some questions, Should I make an assumption based on my initial reaction or should I pause and get to know them a little better before I make a conclusive decision? What is the best way to manage the situation?
- **E**xecute your action plan.
  - Act according to your above assessments.

I pledge to check my bias, speak up for others, and show up for all.

How can you ACT ON the pledge?
- I will check my own biases and take meaningful action to understand and mitigate them.
- I will initiate meaningful, complex, and sometimes difficult, conversations with my friends and colleagues.
- I will ask myself, "Do my actions and words reflect the value of inclusion?"
- I will move outside of my comfort zone to learn about the experiences and perspectives of others.
- I will share my insights related to what I have learned.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Michelle has more than 30 years insurance experience. In addition to her life & health license and property & casualty license, she also holds CISR and CEBS designations. She sits on Alera Groups' Diversity and Inclusion Council, BAN's Human Capital Management Committee, and Holistic Wellbeing Committee, all of which allow her to fulfill her passion of helping people.

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