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A catalyst for connection

Diversity at Work

How to cross the diversity divide

How to Cross the **Diversity Divide**

The topic of diversity, equity and inclusion has once again taken center stage. Sure, DEI in the workplace isn't a new discussion, so what's left to talk about? And have we gotten to a point where we need a little less talk and a lot more action? If so, what does that action look like and how can strong company leaders effectively put these ideas into practice?

In this Ropella White Paper, we'll take a look at where we've come from, where we are now as a whole, and how you and your leadership team can make a truly diverse and inclusive workplace a reality, even if you operate in a traditionally non-diverse industry. We'll also make the case for why it's so important not only for your people, but for your profits as well.

How Has Workplace Diversity Evolved?

In 1964 the landmark Civil Rights Act made it illegal to discriminate based on race, color, religion, sex, national origin, and later sexual orientation. The Equal Employment Opportunity Act was later supplemented with legislation prohibiting discrimination based on age, pregnancy, and disability. Then in 1987, Secretary of Labor William Brock commissioned a study of demographic and economic trends that were laid out in his landmark book, "Workforce 2000 - Work and Workers in the Twenty First Century." Some would say this was the birth of what has been called the "diversity industry." Although it would appear that workplace diversity has been well-entrenched in American corporate culture for many years, reports of a serious lack of gender diversity shook Silicon Valley in 2008, and a lack of ethnic diversity in STEM continues to be a major point of concern for any industry relying on STEM expertise. In a 2016 article, Harvard Business review reported that equality in the workplace is in-fact not improving and cited sev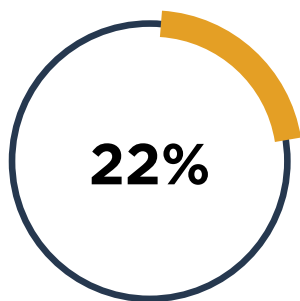eral high-profile discrimination lawsuits, statistics, and speculated on reasons why diversity programs are failing. Each year, DEI issues get much more needed attention but progress still remains slow.

Despite slow progress for DEI initiatives and recent widespread civil unrest, HR Technologist predicts that the following trends will give way to greater inclusivity in the workplace in 2020 and beyond: Diversity will be a business model, not just part of company values; "Male Allies" programs will gain more popularity; Candidates with criminal records will demand fair and equal attention; Job descriptions, employee communication, and other HR content will be worded more sensitively; All recruitment tools will be diversity recruitment tools. While looking at our collective history and predicting future developments in the DEI landscape is helpful, the deeper questions remain - how can I, as an individual in a position of leadership, ensure that my company provides a space where all of our employees feel safe and included and where other diverse leaders want to work?

Why Is It Important to Invest in Diversity and Inclusion?

For DEI e orts to be successful, they have to come from a place of empathy and company leaders must believe in creating a culture that is inclusive and celebrates diversity because it's the right thing to do. That said, research proves overwhelmingly that diverse companies outperform non-diverse companies when it comes to profitability and the higher the representation, the higher the likelihood of outperformance. The reason for this could be that a diverse workforce is known to drive innovation, change and growth, and inclusivity enhances culture and brings out the best in each individual. When one demographic is dominant in an organization, minorities (whether that means ethnicity, religious a liation, gender, nationality, age, sexual orientation, or lifestyle) may be afraid to o er new ideas or disagree with the majority, leading to "groupthink" and stifling innovation. Research shows that companies who have a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion have 22% greater productivity, 39% higher customer satisfaction rates, and 27% higher profitability overall. So, the business case for DEI is strong and we know it's the right thing to do, but creating and maintaining a culture of DEI can be tricky.

22%

22% greater productivity

39%
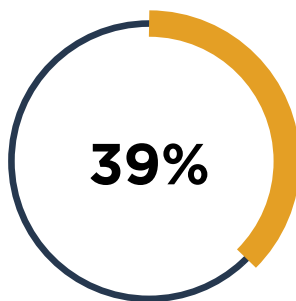
39% higher customer satisfaction rates

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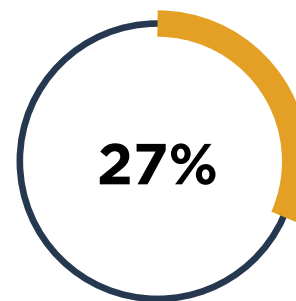
27% higher profitability

I Want to Promote DEI at My Organization, but How?

Building a Diverse and Inclusive Leadership Team

In his best-selling book, "Good to Great," author Jim Collins states that the best executive leaders do not figure out where to drive the proverbial bus and then fill it with the right people, but rather, "they first got the right people on the bus (and the wrong people off the bus) and then figured out where to drive it." Many CEOs are concerned that their investments in DEI are not getting a return and are therefore a waste of resources. One of the main reasons for this is not having put the same level of importance on finding the right person to manage this as they would for other high-level positions. In a worst-case scenario, someone is randomly selected and tasked with heading up DEI initiatives in addition to their current workload. Whether you choose to have a Chief Diversity Officer, Chief People Officer, or your CHRO takes the lead on the diversity initiatives, having the right people in charge of the program will mean the difference between success and failure.

Even for companies who do have a more diverse workforce, it can be difficult to cultivate a culture that consistently develops inclusive leadership. C-suite leaders set the tone for the whole organization and must be truly invested and committed to creating a culture that promotes openness, equality, and fairness when it comes to promotions. All managers must be accountable and all staff must be included in the vision of a safe workspace that is free from bias and discrimination. If top leaders in the organization are obviously just going through the motions and implementing DEI programs because they have to, and it's not coming from a place of empathy, that will be evident to all of their employees and initiatives will likely fail. On the other hand, when leaders embrace DEI initiatives, talk openly about why it's important to them, and show excitement, this attitude will influence their employees to do the same and will serve to successfully build a diverse and inclusive culture for years to come.

Fostering a Culture of DEI

Creating a culture that truly values diversity is not easy, but it is possible. Building the right leadership team is everything! A culture that is open and inclusive to people of all ability levels, races, genders, backgrounds and lifestyles is something that must be nurtured and pruned over time. No employee should ever have to fear being judged, harassed, or even fired for being who they are. Every employee should trust that all leaders in the company will evaluate them fairly. When employees do not believe this and are afraid to open up to or build relationships with their leaders and peers - it impedes their work and is a major drain on innovation and team building. If the leaders in a company are not 'walking the walk' on diversity, building a culture of inclusion (and thus, innovation) will be impossible.

Investing in DEI

Another reason DEI initiatives don't succeed is that leaders are hesitant to invest in them financially. It's easy to say that you support equality, and we've seen many companies come forward and make strong statements against discrimination, but as the old saying goes, "put your money where your mouth is." The amount of money you're willing to invest in DEI initiatives shows whether you truly see a lack of diversity as an existential threat to your business, or whether you're just doing it because it's the "right thing to do."

Once you've come to the conclusion that a lack of diversity poses an existential threat to your organization, there is no looking back. And, you'll do whatever it takes to avoid that threat, just as you would for anything else that would threaten the future success of your company. Making statements about your beliefs and guidelines on DEI and investing in advertising that message is great - but if it really matters that much - your level of commitment to investing in resources will be the 'proof in the pudding." As a top leader, you can't afford to invest resources into anything that doesn't affect your bottom line. You must be very clear on why you are investing in DEI in the first place. Is it because you need to mirror your customer base? Is it because you need access to top talent (including from under represented groups)? Will your DEI efforts result in greater innovation, team-building and expansion? Or are you just doing it because everyone else is and because it seems like the right thing to do? If your leadership team feels strongly about this and is committed, sufficient investment will not be an issue.

Gender Diversity in Male Dominated Industries

Having worked with clients in traditionally white male-dominated industries for over 35 years, it's common for our clients to come to us with the question that keeps them up at night - how can I attract and hire more talented experienced female leaders and/ or people of color to my team? This can be tricky, but the good news is that once you do add a strong female role model to your leadership team, she will help you attract more, and the same goes for other diverse groups. But a prerequisite is creating a culture where men and women are equal - where all ideas and achievements are given equal merit. A family-friendly culture where all communication is appropriate and professional and where men are not only supportive of hiring women but are champions for them. And it can't just be a push from HR to hire more women, all hiring managers must consistently give objective consideration to female candidates.

REAL EXECUTIVE FEEDBACK

Executive Search expert Patrick Ropella, Chairman and CEO of The Ropella Group, offers this valuable advice,

"For my clients who come to me to help them find diverse candidates and are struggling with gender parity in their organizations - I advise them that they must be willing to look outside their specific industry and hire for skills, experience and cultural fit rather than industry-specific knowledge. Then be willing to train them in your industry."

Besides, if they are well experienced, remember that everything they know now, they learned on their path to success. They can learn what they need to be successful working for you too. Hiring and purposefully developing female talent within your organization is necessary for future success, so as tough as it may seem in male-dominated industries - it is possible and you have to make it happen. Make a commitment and start now.

Hiring for **DEI**

Recruiting

We know that creating a diverse, equitable, and inclusive culture is a must for any future-focused company. Especially if you're in an industry that is traditionally non-diverse. We get it - understood, this may sound like pie in the sky. There is a clear place to start though - it all starts with your recruiting efforts, which may require some fresh, new, creative,'out of the box' thinking. If you do things the way they've always been done, you will likely end up with the same kind of candidates you've always had. A good place to start is your employer branding. Incorporating images that portray a diverse workforce and weaving inclusive

language into your messaging (including website career pages, hiring advertising, and/or position descriptions) will go a long way in showing that your organization values DEI. Another suggestion is to advertise your position on job boards that are specifically targeted to diverse job seekers. Including real stories from current employees during the recruitment process can serve to reinforce that your company fosters a diverse and inclusive culture. These stories can show potential candidates the reality of your workforce and how you value each individual for their unique talents and qualities.

78%
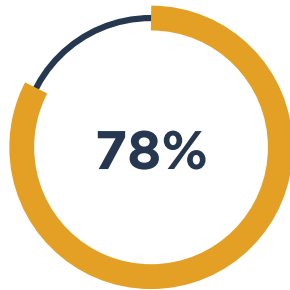
of employers focus on diversity to **improve company culture.**

62%
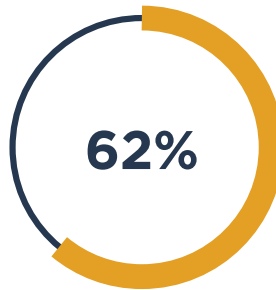
of employers state that diversity **improves company performance.**

49%
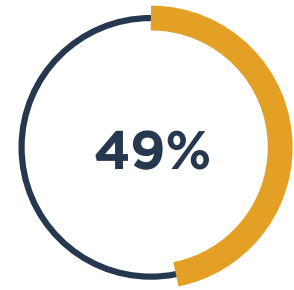
27% higher profitability

*results from LinkedIn's Global Recruiting Trends Survey

Interviewing

Implicit biases are not only commonly present in white males, we all have these unconscious biases that affect our beliefs about others, and actions towards them. These biases can cause hiring managers to make unconscious assumptions about their candidates, leading to non-diverse hiring choices. Uncovering, understanding, and accepting these biases is the first step. First, it's important that the interviewer has a firm grasp on his/her own personal biases before seeking to uncover them in potential hires. These days, implicit bias training opportunities are readily available and getting this training for your entire leadership team is a great place to start. Selecting a diverse hiring team is a key component to ensuring a thoughtful, fair and open hiring process that encourages a wide range of diverse candidates.

It's also important to ask each interviewee the same questions. While behavioral interview questions (i.e. "Tell me about a time when...") have become the gold standard in interviewing, they can also serve to exclude those who don't have similar life experiences. However, unbiased behavioral interview questions shift the focus from specific college or work contexts, which perhaps the candidate was not privileged enough to experience, into a more situational and real life experience that truly showcases their character and potential. The ultimate goal of these questions should be to gauge how a candidate approaches conflict, solves problems, and interacts with people who have differing beliefs and/or diverse characteristics.

Onboarding

Hiring diverse talent is a big step, but it doesn't stop there - the experience that they have in the workplace will determine whether they stay with your company long term and flourish in their role. The onboarding experience is the perfect opportunity to align your new hires with your company culture and immerse them in your mission and values. Highlighting why your company is committed to DEI and what their role is in fostering this should be a crucial role in your onboarding process. Lever offers some great ideas on how they include DEI in their onboarding experience:

- Define what diversity and inclusion means for your company
- Include a diversity and inclusion onboarding session

- Train people managers on how they can be diversity leaders, too
- Coach the existing team on how to change to include new hires
- Empower your people managers to be diversity and inclusion leaders, too.
- Inform new hires about your company's Employee Resource Groups
- Build a mentorship program

However you choose to incorporate these ideals into your onboarding process, just know that new hires who feel a sense of belonging and know that they are accepted and treated fairly are more likely to be strong, long-term assets to your company and help you reach your goals.

Fostering **Inclusive Leaders**

Now that you've successfully recruited, interviewed, hired and onboarded diverse talent - what's next? Fostering inclusive leaders by focusing on advancing diverse talent into management, executive and board roles will be crucial to maintaining continuity with your DEI efforts. Obviously, if an individual does not have the inherent qualities and potential for leadership, you can't force that, but you can offer equal opportunities for mentorship, training, and leadership development and implement honest and fair promotion practices.

In the end, your DEI efforts will be successful in direct proportion to your level of commitment to the process. Knowing that this is a long game and DEI goals are not achieved overnight, start by setting realistic targets and timelines and hold yourself and your leadership team accountable. Don't expect your Human Resources leader, or any one individual to be responsible for all things diversity. Instead, place your core leadership team at the heart of your DEI initiatives. Start with a genuine assessment of where you stand on all kinds of diversity - even things you don't personally agree with- only then can you see clearly what it will take to create a truly diverse and inclusive culture. Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook, said, "We won't unlock the full potential of the workplace until we see how far from equality we really are."

While we've come a long way in terms of workplace diversity, a recent study shows that up to 3 in 5 employees in America say they have witnessed or experienced discrimination of some kind in the workplace. It's a long road, but a truly diverse, equitable and inclusive company culture is possible. Not only is it the right thing to do, it is absolutely worthwhile and crucial for your company's continued success in the modern economy.

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Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook

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