

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion as a Human Resource Discipline

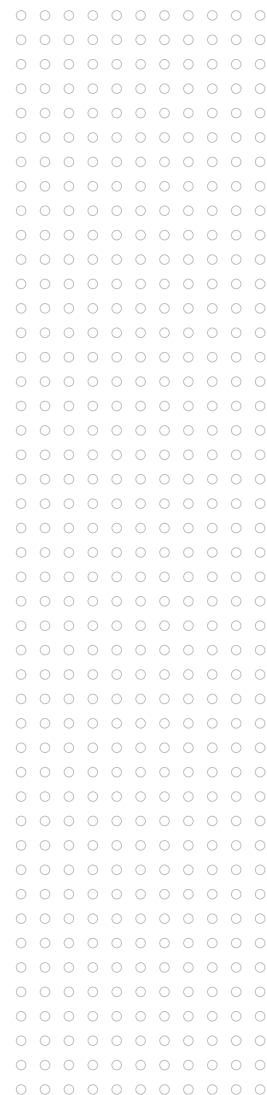
Across the United States, an organization’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) efforts have historically been led from the Human Resources (HR) department. Why?

- In the US, diversity started as a compliance activity. With the advent of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), HR was responsible to annually count and report employees in categories established by the EEOC. HR was also tasked with developing and reporting on Affirmative Action (AA) plans.
- As EEOC complaints were filed, HR did the investigations, partnered with legal counsel to resolve issues, and implemented remediation measures. Human Resources is responsible for many functions, policies and processes that served as EEO/AA remediation efforts. From recruiting to leave policies, from development programs to job descriptions, Human Resources has been able to influence how a company reacted to legal requirements.

DEI has evolved to be a discipline within Human Resources, often with formal positions and informal advocates. In fact, in several large companies today, DEI has evolved into its own function with the Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer reporting directly to the CEO (while working closely with the Chief Human Resource Officer and the HR team). There are new opportunities to have an impact on corporate culture, community affairs, product development, and marketing – the list endless. There are three attributes needed to be effective in any DEI role.

1. KNOW THE PEOPLE

Many Human Resource professionals pride themselves on relationship-building. This trait is essential in the DEI field. It requires listening for needs and learning individuals’ uniqueness. It means leading with transparency and demonstrating sincerity through actions. Additionally, relationship-building must be extended to every corner of the company. DEI effectiveness and success requires securing buy-in of formal and informal influencers – from executives to front-line employees, seasoned managers to new-hires.



2. KNOW THE BUSINESS

DEI initiatives undergo the same evaluation and scrutiny as any other strategic endeavor a company undertakes. Be prepared with the same level of detailed business analysis, goal alignment, tactical planning, stakeholder analysis, resource management and metric reporting. To have impact, DEI initiatives must go beyond just the feel-good measure. Know what is important to the company and ensure DEI initiatives support business outcomes. There is a strong business case for having a diverse workforce in terms of increase in revenue, innovation, and improved customer experience. Being able to link how DEI will make a difference in your organization is key.

3. KNOW THE TOPIC

There is a growing body of literature discussing how the differences we all bring (based on gender, race, disability status, educational level, and more – i.e., the cumulation of our individual experiences) affect the ways people interact with each other, with companies, and even with products and services. Additionally, there is new understanding of the brain science surrounding inclusion and exclusion. To build an inclusive and equitable environment requires culture change and it requires systemic change. HR practitioners interested in the DEI space should have strong change management capabilities and know how to look at the various people systems that may need to change to support and reinforce an inclusive culture. Lastly, it is important to be aware of history, the current societal climate, the evolving regulatory landscape and the subject matter thought leaders.

Careers in the DEI discipline have plenty of opportunity to make an impact, especially in today's climate. There are organizations and individuals eager to not only learn more about DEI concepts, but to also act. DEI professionals are being called upon to educate, lead conversations and chart a path forward. With some experience and leadership mentoring, an ad-hoc advocacy role can evolve into a bona-fide leadership position. Now is a great time to learn more about DEI and explore what DEI can mean to your organization and your employees.

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