Approaches Used for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion:

Working Toward Belonging

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Introduction

The COVID-19 pandemic, the Great Resignation, the #MeToo movement, and other race-related incidents and subsequent rallies, including the passing of George Floyd, have all sparked a growing concern for employee-employer relations and an increasing recognition of the value of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). In support of DEI efforts, some organizations are actively working to create workplaces that respect and celebrate diversity, provide equal opportunities, and resolve systemic inequalities. Additionally, based on specific objectives, many employers embrace diverse viewpoints, nurture inclusive cultures, promote fairness and equity organization-wide, and use various approaches to address DEI. Some organizations promote DEI-related education and awareness to ensure employees comprehend the significance of diversity, equity, and inclusion. They also provide employees with training sessions, workshops, and other resources that help them understand various perspectives, biases, and the impact of systemic inequalities. Employers focused on DEI want to address issues immediately to maintain and support their diverse work cultures since individuals who do not feel included are more likely to leave the organization (Leanin & Mckinsey et al., 2022).

The 2023 Career Optimism Index® (COI), researched and published by the University of Phoenix Career Institute®, found that employees are hopeful; however, their hope was grounded in their trust in themselves, not their employer. The COI (2023) reported that nearly 70% of workers feel their employers should provide more opportunities for growth via training opportunities for new skill acquisition; 74% of employers are concerned about their internal turnover rate, with 54% claiming turnover continues to increase annually. Denning (2018) identified organizations reverting to hierarchical management tactics and found that many

organizations exacerbate turnover with false promises of innovative and team-friendly workspaces.

One method organizations should focus on to support their staffing models and team productivity is diversity initiatives. According to McLeod et al. (1996) and Forsythe (2006), organizations with successful DEI initiatives may experience increased success in recruiting, employee retention, and work output as heterogeneous groups outperform homogenous groups and report higher levels of job satisfaction among their members. This paper focuses on common DEI approaches leaders might implement to help mitigate turnover, reduce open positions, and assist with recruiting efforts from diverse, heterogeneous groups, a paradigm shift from DEI to DEIB-Belonging, concluding with a final recommended approach.

DEI Approaches to Ethnicity and Race Fairness

Two well-known approaches to organizational diversity include the colorblind approach and multiculturalism (Kung et al., 2023; Rios & Cohen, 2023; Stevens et al., 2008). The colorblind approach attempts to remove differences related to race, ethnicity, and culture from the workplace (Jansen et al., 2016; Stevens et al., 2008). The multiculturalism approach supports focusing on group differences (Jansen et al., 2016; Stevens et al., 2008).

Colorblind Approach

The colorblind approach touts the importance of equalizing employees by ignoring cultural differences or attempting to replace the differences of all groups to make one identity (Stevens et al., 2008). Stevens et al. (2008) posited that some organizations go so far as to structure and provide incentives and rewards for workgroups with effective non-minority-

minority collaborations. In other words, some organizations reward workgroups for ignoring their demographic differences.

Rewarding colorblind ideologies and actions likely create scenarios wherein organizations lose distinctive and unique viewpoints, and the heterogeneous advantages identified by Mcleod (1996) may be diminished. Jansen et al. (2016) found that in organizations using the colorblind approach, individuals should be treated equally, and group differences should be disregarded when making decisions such as employing new employees or promoting current organization members. Even though group differences should not factor into this strategy, majority members are more representative of the organization than minority members creating a disparity in the environment wherein minority members do not feel they belong.

Multiculturalism

Multiple ethnic, racial, religious, and cultural groups coexist and are accepted within a single society; this is multiculturalism. It is frequently associated with policies and practices that promote diversity and the recognition of various cultural identities, thereby nurturing understanding and tolerance between cultures. Multiculturalism promotes the notion that individuals can maintain their distinct cultural identities while contributing to the broader culture of society. This is frequently observed in societies where immigration plays an important role, blending diverse customs, languages, traditions, and beliefs. There are instances where "multicultural" and "intercultural" are used interchangeably. However, Arasaratnam (2013) asserted there is a distinction between both, as these two terms are frequently used in the literature concerning cultural diversity. Although these terms appear synonymous, their distinction is limited to their semantic meaning and literary usage. "Multicultural" refers to

cultural diversity in a specific context, whereas "intercultural" describes an exchange or interaction between cultures or cultural perspectives.

Multiculturalism requires continuous work and dialogue, particularly in addressing systemic bias and discrimination and navigating the challenges that cultural differences can present. It involves an ongoing process of learning, comprehending, and valuing the cultural nuances of all citizens. The integration of multicultural perspectives within educational systems is frequently employed as a means to foster comprehension and appreciation for diverse cultures. This can encompass the pedagogical practice of imparting knowledge to students regarding the historical, linguistic, traditional, and value-based aspects of diverse cultures. As globalization becomes increasingly pervasive (Ritzer, 2011), the capacity of states to suppress or eradicate cultural differences will continue to deteriorate (Arnett, 2002). Simultaneously, majority groups within states appear to have a persistent yearning for "simpler times" for their communities, even if they are merely imaginable.

Multiculturalism incorporates demographics, ideology, and policies about cultural diversity; as such, it is an essential concept to revisit as we progress further globalizing era (Leong & Liu, 2013). Wolsko et al. (2000) found that White Americans working in organizations promoting multiculturalism reported higher levels of stereotyping in their judgment of status-differentiated groups. According to at least one study, Black workers do not favor multiculturalism since it emphasizes differences in contrast to other approaches that celebrate or appreciate group members' similarities (Rios & Cohen, 2023). Many recent studies, however, indicate that multiculturalism is more effective at creating harmony and equity between underrepresented racial and ethnic groups and reducing prejudice and discrimination than the colorblind approach (Rios & Cohen, 2023; Whitley & Webster, 2018). Pursuing multiculturalism

necessitates continuous effort and communication, especially in combating systemic bias and discrimination and managing the complexities associated with cultural diversity. This pertains to an ongoing process of acquiring knowledge, comprehending, and valuing the cultural subtleties exhibited by every member of society.

Multiculturalism and colorblind approaches focus DEI initiatives on race and ethnicity. Organizations may promote diversity as a goal or mission with positive intent; however, recent research has demonstrated that White employees feel more disconnected from their employer organization when diversity is highlighted as a long-term goal, while employees of color feel a lack of public or stated diversity goals is threatening (Dover et al., 2016; Rios & Cohen, 2023). The marginalization of groups for causes other than racial or ethnic distinctions contradicts colorblindness and multiculturalism while creating a work culture that is not inclusive.

A Shift from DEI to DEIB-Belonging

Organizations supporting inclusion seek out individuals from different racial, ethical, and sexual orientations to support a diverse and equitable work environment. However, once hired, some individuals face discrimination, and there is no guarantee of their full involvement in the workplace, where they can feel a sense of belonging. Belonging is a basic human need for people to feel connected, appreciated, supported, and motivated in their work, social, and personal lives. It is crucial for positive psychological and performance outcomes (Canlas & Williams, 2022; Maslow, 1943; Wilson & VanAntwerp, 2021). Psychologists Baumeister and Leary (1995) defined a sense of belonging as having interpersonal connections that are both positive and frequent and accompanied by a conviction that the underlying relational bond is caring, stable, mutual, and lasting. Maslow placed the need to belong in the middle layer of his needs pyramid,

directly following physiological and safety needs and requiring fulfillment before meeting self-esteem and self-actualization needs, making the need to belong the central component of the psychological needs theory (Shore & Chung, 2022; Wilson & VanAntwerp, 2021).

In recent years, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives have shifted their focus toward a more comprehensive approach incorporating belonging (DEIB). The inclusion of belonging emphasizes creating an environment where individuals experience acceptance and psychological safety, whereas DEI efforts primarily focus on representation and creating equitable opportunities. DEIB acknowledges the significance of psychological safety, which refers to an environment in which people feel secure being themselves, expressing their ideas, and taking risks within the workplace without fear of repercussions (Canlas & Williams, 2022). This environment creates a trusting, open culture that values different points of view and helps individuals develop a sense of belonging; thus, supporting an organization's missions and goals because employees who feel they belong are more engaged and productive (Allen et al., 2021). Organizations focused on DEI and belonging provide opportunities for employee voice, input, and participation in shaping DEI and belonging-related policies, practices, and initiatives to foster a sense of belonging.

In contrast, individuals who do not feel a sense of belonging in the workplace may exhibit self-defeating behaviors, such as anger and sadness, which can negatively impact future opportunities for belongingness and worsen performance (Canlas & Williams, 2022; Wilson & VanAntwerp, 2021). Belongingness encourages people to bring their whole selves to work, allowing them to express their genuine identities without confronting discrimination or bias. Employees with a sense of belonging also feel encouraged to contribute to the organizational

culture and decision-making while acknowledging their insights and perspectives that can help create an inclusive and community-focused environment (Shore & Chung, 2022).

Strategic Planning and Execution

Numerous examples of DEIB initiative failures are grounded in employee coercion and organizational HR policy when senior managers have not strategically planned DEIB actions with employees (Hellerstedt et al., 2023). Organizations initiating or developing DEIB plans should use strategic planning and execution tactics, including committees and task forces, and fill task force seats with employees from all organizational levels (Hellerstedt et al., 2023; Stevens et al., 2008). DEIB task forces should be charged with creating a strategic roadmap guiding DEIB initiatives over a more extended period rather than emulating the generalized practice of quick HR policy development and implementation. Orton (2022) suggested that strategic planning might take three to five years to develop, implement, and refine.

At the center of strategic planning and DEIB initiatives is the necessity for employees to have a stake in the planning, delivery, and follow-up required for success. Hellerstedt et al. (2023) posited that successful DEIB initiatives require a fundamental shift to value-based thinking versus heavy policy management. To guide value-based thinking, organizations must develop coalitions of employees willing and able to change the organizational practices of procedural justice, status inconsistency, and distributive justice (Hellerstedt et al., 2023; McCalla, 2015). Fairness practices related to employee evaluations and reviews, equal pay, recruiting, training access, and effective leader-follower communication are necessary to form value-based DEIB strategic plans.

The first challenge for an organization without a DEIB program is to start the planning (Stevens et al., 2008). Organizational leaders expecting key performance metrics and results

grounded in headcounts and ROIs should realize that DEIB is hard to measure. Leaders must realize DEIB requires organizational purpose; therefore, DEIB requires leaders to have purpose and intentional effort. Until organizational leaders empower their teams to foster inclusive, psychologically safe workspaces that prioritize continual learning, growth, and progress, the ongoing pursuit of DEIB objectives will yield subpar outcomes and amplify employees' sense of inequity, unfairness, isolation, and exclusion.

Employee resource groups (ERGs) are employee-led, voluntary organizations that bring together people with similar identities or interests. These groups provide a forum for employees to interact, support one another, and advocate for diversity and inclusion-related issues. ERGs can foster a sense of belonging and assist organizations in identifying and addressing the specific requirements of various employee groups.

Conclusion

Some workers resign from their positions without having a backup plan because of unfavorable working conditions, low pay, or a sense of unfairness in the workplace (Bruner, 2021). Teams with unfilled, available jobs are overworked and understaffed (Denning, 2018). Through leadership commitment and accountability, organizations can promote DEIB. Leaders play a crucial role in creating an inclusive work environment by establishing the tone, demonstrating inclusive behaviors, and holding themselves and others accountable. This accountability includes incorporating DEIB objectives into performance evaluations and reviewing progress regularly. Organizations should collaborate with external partners, community organizations, and DEIB experts to acquire insights and learn best practices. Beyond the organization's borders, building partnerships and engaging with the larger community can increase understanding, support initiatives, and cultivate a sense of belonging.

McCalla (2015) found that organizations should develop and support procedures and practices that protect all employees' psychological safety regardless of their status or risk level for marginalization. One method to start toward ensuring employees' psychological safety is organizational encouragement of cultural competence and sensitivity among employees, fostering an environment where diverse cultural backgrounds, traditions, and perspectives are acknowledged and respected while fostering open communication, empathy, and comprehension across diverse teams. DEIB is an ongoing process, and organizations should emphasize continuous learning and improvement (Goods et al., 2023). Practical diversity training can help reduce the likelihood of workplace discrimination and other human resource violations (Langford, 2017). Organizations should remain current on DEIB research, trends, and strategies and alter their methods accordingly, including regularly evaluating and refining DEIB initiatives to ensure their continued relevance and efficacy.

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