Best Practices for a Creating an Equitable, Diverse and Inclusive Organization

BEST PRACTICES FOR
CREATING AN EQUITABLE, DIVERSE & INCLUSIVE ORGANIZATION

3) ENSURE DECISIONS SUPPORT EQUITY & INCLUSION AND BENEFIT FROM DIVERSITY

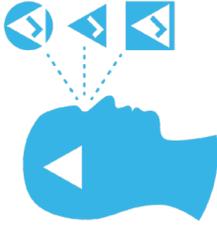Use consultative decision-making processes
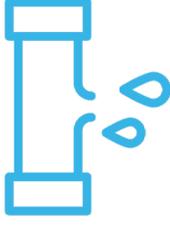
Commit to and invest in transparency

Make diversity, equity and inclusion metrics part of your core business intelligence

2) ADDRESS "INVISIBLE" (TO SOME) BARRIERS TO FAIRNESS, EQUITY & INCLUSION

Invest in all-staff bias literacy, structural competency & bias-prevention skill training

Assess and address bias-leakage in formal and informal policies & procedures

1) BUILD AND MAINTAIN THE ESSENTIAL FOUNDATION

Promote psychological safety/growth and learning culture

Develop and disseminate a multicultural equity, inclusion and diversity philosophy

Expect and reward openness to diverse perspectives, ideas, and ways of doing things

Inclusive Leadership Skills & Practices

Growth toward an inclusive and equitable organizational climate is a continual process and is not achieved all at once. However, significant improvements can be made fairly rapidly.

Strategic Recommendations

Below are a series of steps that organizations can take to move toward your diversity, equity, and inclusion goals. Some of these can be implemented immediately, and some are part of a continuous growth process.

1. Adopt and Promote a Learning and Growth Culture

2. Create and Communicate a Positive Multicultural Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Philosophy

3. Review Formal and Informal Policies and Procedures for Systemic Bias

4. Strive for Breadth and Depth of Diversity at All Levels of the Organization

5. Commit to and Invest in Transparency

6. Invest in Capacity-Building at All Levels of the Organization

7. Create Innovation through Open and Free Expression of Diverse Ideas and Perspectives

8. Make Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Metrics Part of Your Core Business Intelligence

1. Adopt and Promote a Learning and Growth Culture

People thrive when they feel safe and valued. Make sure your organizational culture is psychologically safe for growth and learning.

A learning and growth mindset for inclusion, equity, and diversity is an understanding that:

→   It is possible to change our attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors.

→   Bias is not inevitable; we can take steps to prevent biases from impacting us.

→   Interactions with people who are different from us are opportunities to learn; they are not tests of our ability to be unbiased.

Mistakes or failures do not mean we are bad people. It simply means we are humans, fallible but capable of change. Mistakes give us the opportunity to discover better approaches and behaviors and are an essential and necessary part of growth.

Creating psychological safety through a learning and growth culture is essential to creating a positive diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) climate. Without creating safety for learning and making mistakes, DEI initiatives run the risk of backfiring and making things worse.

Working with people who are different from us can be challenging. For many people, it is more than difficult – it feels threatening. Having a growth and learning mindset reduces this feeling of threat. It makes learning new skills less difficult, reduces anxiety, and increases interest in interacting with people from different social, demographic, cultural, and generational groups and backgrounds.

Many people are afraid of appearing biased toward other groups. This fear reflects a performance orientation, which increases anxiety, avoidance, and even hostility. To thrive, employees need to feel safe to make and learn from mistakes, including those made during interactions with people who are different from themselves.

Organizations and individuals with a learning and growth orientation are more comfortable with new ideas and diverse perspectives and ways of doing things.

While a learning and growth mindset is a crucial part of creating a healthy climate for inter-group interactions and learning, it **goes well beyond that in beneficial effects**.

ACTIONS

Lead by example.

Organizational learning and growth mindsets must begin with top leaders. Because few of us were raised with a learning and growth mindset, this can be a developmental opportunity for top leaders that will likely increase their well-being and create benefits in every aspect of their organization. It is also an opportunity for leaders to serve as role-models for growth and lifelong learning, fostering a learning and growth mindset across all levels of the organization. Support and encourage leaders at all levels of the organization to promote this mindset in their teams through capacity-building workshops, talks, meetings, and company-wide communications.

Examine all actions, policies, and procedures through a learning and growth lens.

Ensure that your organizational policies and practices reflect and support a growth mindset. Ask: "Will this approach reinforce psychological safety for learning and growth? Will this encourage inquiry and transparency? Alternately, does this approach convey judgment? Will it increase employees' perceived need for self-protection?"

Ensure your organizational language reflects a learning and growth mindset.

The language used by organizations in emails, on websites, and in promotional materials can shape workplace norms and expectations. Evaluate all of your communications through a growth mindset lens. See below for examples of messages that promote a growth and learning mindset.

EXAMPLES OF KEY MESSAGES THAT PROMOTE A GROWTH AND LEARNING MINDSET:

→ "We are a learning organization committed to continuous growth. We focus on enhancing our capacity to learn, grow, and change, both as individuals and as an organization. Mistakes represent welcome growth opportunities. They guide us and show us where we can learn and improve."

→ "We believe in treating everyone fairly and with respect. What we believe consciously and what we feel and do unconsciously can sometimes be two very different things. Despite our best attempts to rid ourselves of prejudices and stereotypes, we all have them because we've learned them – either consciously or unconsciously – by virtue of growing up in American culture and society. For most of us, these biases are still with us and can influence our beliefs and behavior, even if we consciously reject them. Fortunately, human minds, beliefs, and behaviors can always grow and improve."

→ "Our current limitations in working with people who are different from us are not inherent failures. They are our 'growing edge' the path to our next level."

CAUTION

Bullying and other socially undermining behaviors such as intimidation, humiliation, and exclusion are antithetical to psychological safety. Workplace bullying is incredibly damaging to individuals, teams, and the organization

overall. Research also shows that it can result in lower-quality health care and more medical errors. Rooting out bullying is the first step to creating a psychologically safe organizational climate.

→ Communicate and enforce a zero-tolerance policy toward bullying.

→ Clearly and comprehensively define what constitutes bullying behavior.

→ Increase capacity to identify and interrupt bullying by investing in training for supervisors, managers, HR staff, and top leadership.

→ Review formal processes for investigating and holding people accountable for bullying behavior.

→ Provide supportive services to targets of bullying.

"In a growth culture, people build their capacity to see through blind spots; acknowledge insecurities and shortcomings rather than unconsciously acting them out; and spend less energy defending their personal value so they have more energy available to create external value. How people feel – and make other people feel – becomes as important as how much they know." ~Harvard Business Review

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2. Create and Communicate a Positive Multicultural Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Philosophy

Your organization is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Make sure everyone knows it.

A multicultural diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI philosophy explicitly recognizes and values contributions from all groups, majority and minority. Studies show that an explicit multicultural DEI philosophy, when prominently displayed, referred to, and reinforced by leadership:

→ Makes minority group members more comfortable sharing and contributing their diverse perspectives.

→ Increases the engagement of historically undervalued groups, including women.

→ Makes majority group members feel included in DEI priorities, leading to greater support for such efforts.

The findings of the Inclusive Climate Assessment revealed a significant opportunity for growth in employee

perceptions of COPC's commitment towards DEI. Growth in this domain can begin with the development and widespread, consistent endorsement of COPC's multicultural DEI philosophy.

ACTIONS

Develop an organizational diversity, equity, and inclusion statement.

Make sure that the statement reflects and upholds COPC's mission and values. See below for tips on creating a DEI philosophy.

Endorse it enthusiastically and often.

Leaders at all levels of the organization must explicitly endorse and communicate the philosophy through multiple channels.

Make it visible.

Post your DEI philosophy prominently and in multiple locations. Both employees and patients will benefit from seeing your multicultural DEI philosophy.

Make it matter.

Center COPC's DEI philosophy in organizational decision making. Be clear about how decisions were shaped by DEI considerations.

TIPS FOR CREATING AN EFFECTIVE DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION PHILOSOPHY

1. ## Include everyone. A common mistake is to create a philosophy that suggests a positive DEI climate only benefits some employees. Make it clear that a fully inclusive and equitable organizational climate benefits everyone.

2. ## Make it your own. While it is good to look at examples from other organizations, creating your own philosophy collaboratively with members of your organization ensures that everyone feels ownership of and commitment to the philosophy.

3. ## Get feedback. Ensure all employees (minority and majority group members) report feeling included when they read/hear drafts of the philosophy. Ensure the philosophy resonates with people from across the organization, particularly those who currently feel less included.

CAUTION

Avoid a "colorblind" diversity philosophy, a prominent, although often unspoken, approach to diversity. The basic idea underlying a "colorblind" diversity philosophy is:

→ Group differences should not matter, so we should ignore them.

→ If we stop pointing out differences, then fairness and equality will ensue.

→ Representative comment: "I don't see race, I see people."

Since race, gender, and other categories do significantly affect peoples' experiences, a "colorblind" philosophy is not only unrealistic but may communicate that diversity is not respected or valued in the organization. Indeed, research has shown that a colorblind philosophy has negative consequences for all employees, because it:

⇢ Increases bias and decreases the inclusion climate

⇢ Increases stress and burnout

⇢ Decreases cognithive performance

3. Review Formal and Informal Policies and Procedures for Systemic Bias

Large organizations are built on a foundation of both formal and informal policies and procedures. Ensure yours reflects and upholds your organizational values.

Organizational systems – the formal and informal policies, practices, and procedures of an organization – shape all aspects of the workplace climate. Ensuring that systems are equitable and inclusive is one of the most crucial actions an organization can take to advance equity and inclusion.

Research has shown that many organizational policies and practices can inadvertently result in the inequitable distribution of resources and opportunities across the workforce. While inequitable organizational structures negatively impact all employees, employees from historically and socially disadvantaged groups are more likely to experience structural barriers to engaging and advancing at work. This is most often due to "bias leakage" in organizational systems policies and practices that inadvertently advantage employees from some groups while disadvantaging those from others.

Many bias leakage points are not readily apparent and are frequently built into policies and practices that have been in place for long periods of time. Historically, many workplace systems were designed to meet the needs of a relatively monolithic workforce. However, as workplaces become increasingly diverse, identifying and addressing bias leakage points in formal and informal policies and procedures will greatly strengthen all aspects of organizational functioning, including organizational equity and inclusion. As an additional benefit, proactive steps will reduce an organization's risk of legal sanctions and bad publicity.

ACTIONS

Audit formal policies and procedures.

Undoing systemic bias requires that formal policies and practices be evaluated for both direct and indirect impacts on organizational equity. Consider all relevant policies, including hiring and promotions, professional development, evaluations, disciplinary actions, and benefits and compensation. Ask: "Does this policy or procedure unfairly disadvantage certain groups of employees? Does it create a barrier to full engagement for some employees and not others?"

Evaluate informal procedures and norms for bias leakage points and shortcuts.

Subjectivity creates room for bias. Bias leakage occurs when people have the opportunity to make subjective (and thus potentially biased) decisions. Bias leakage can happen when rules and procedures are not well established or are not enforced 100% of the time. Look for instances where people are making subjective judgments of others and their work. Pay close attention to organizational procedures without established protocols or those that are prone to shortcuts. When bias leakage points are identified, develop protocols to reduce subjectivity in organizational decisions.

Invest in Human Resources staff capacity.

Ensure you have enough staff to oversee fair processes and build staff capacity to limit unintended bias leakage through evidence-based training.

DID YOU KNOW?

→ Hiring and promotion shortcuts can be found in any organization, but are most prevalent in new organizations, organizations under stress (e.g., in the midst of a pandemic), and/or organizations experiencing rapid change or growth. The informal practice of turning to the people we already know, trust, or whom we relate to most easily (i.e., those most similar to us) to fill positions is a very common and understandable human tendency. In the short run it can reduce decision-maker uncertainty and anxiety and takes less immediate time and effort. These practices are especially common when psychological safety is low.

→ While taking shortcuts is understandable, shortcuts in hiring and promotion processes put you at serious risk for less-effective decision-making, lower efficiency, higher costs, and gaps in problem-solving resources. It also gives tacit permission for the same at other levels of the organization, making it more difficult for Human Resources staff to enforce existing fair policies.

4. Strive for Breadth and Depth of Diversity at All Levels of the Organization

Your employees are committed to making their organization the best place to work and get health care in America. Make sure everyone has the opportunity to lead.

A truly diverse organization hires, retains, and promotes a diverse workforce at all levels of the organization, including top leadership. Even if an organization has a diverse workforce overall, a lack of diversity at the leadership level can significantly undermine equity and inclusion. Employees feel included when they see others like them represented at all levels of leadership.

Diverse leadership is critical for organizational equity and inclusion, but reaches beyond that as well. Research shows that diverse leadership gives organizations a competitive advantage, including better financial performance, greater innovation, and more success attracting and retaining top talent.

ACTIONS

Invest in inclusive leadership development and capacity building.

Build internal capacity for leadership through training and mentoring. Few leaders have had the benefit of truly evidence-based training on inclusive leadership and characteristics of organizations with positive DEI climates. You can be a leader by addressing this gap.

Remove structural and interpersonal barriers to leadership.

Examine the current career paths of diverse employee groups in the organization. Ask: "What are the obstacles that are getting in the way of leadership opportunities for people who are currently underrepresented in leadership?"

CAUTION

Avoid the zero-sum fallacy of diverse leadership. Organizational initiatives to increase leadership diversity can sometimes be a source of anxiety for people who are currently in leadership positions and those who are members of groups that are currently well-represented in leadership. This is because of zero-sum thinking, in which one person's gain is falsely perceived as the cause of another person's loss. Focus on expanding inclusion in leadership and on actions that benefit the organization overall.

DID YOU KNOW?

Even when applying the same criteria, a large body of evidence shows that we perceive White people and men to be more qualified than people of color and women, even when they have equal qualifications. Even when people try to be objective, research shows that we are more likely to notice the strengths of White and male applicants, and are more likely to notice female and racial or ethnic minority applicants' weaknesses.

5. Commit to and Invest in Transparency

Build trust and engagement through transparency.

Transparency and perceptions of fairness are often linked. Even when policies and practices are equitable in outcomes, a lack of understanding and awareness can lead to skepticism and mistrust.

When employees have full knowledge of organizational challenges and the options being considered to address those challenges, they are more likely to accept the final decisions even when they disagree with them. It is tempting to put a positive spin on reasons for decisions and changes, but it is actually less effective than telling the truth.

Transparency can help employees feel that "we are all in it together," a critical factor that can ease the inevitable challenges of adapting to new circumstances. A transparent work environment also leads to greater trust, and trust in an organization is paramount to its success. Further, clear and transparent criteria for decisions make unintentional bias leakage less likely.

Transparency starts at the very top. It's up to company leaders to maintain open communication and keep employees fully in the loop.

ACTIONS

→ Review communication processes and mechanisms to promote greater transparency.

→ Establish bidirectional modes of communication between leadership, administrators, and frontline workers.

→ Create systems for providing input on organizational decisions.

→ Create procedures for sharing full and honest information and reasons regarding policies, procedures, resource allocation, or changes that affect employees.

→ Invest in communications and your communications team. Timely information prevents rumors and misunderstandings and increases employees' sense of "being in the loop."

→ Ensure that everyone has equal access to key information. Make relevant/important documents available to all employees.

→ Ensure that employees have the information they need when they seek it. Often information is provided through email or other dissemination mechanisms and gets lost, so that employees later feel they may not have received the information they needed. Consider establishing a searchable web portal that has clear information about all issues, decisions, and changes. At minimum, provide the specific decision or change, the expected impact of the decision, and the major reasons for the decision. Consider also providing the alternate options that were considered and why they were discarded, and the sources of information that were used to guide the decision process. Ideally, the description of information sources will include the strategy used to collect input from employees affected by the decision.

6. Invest in Capacity-Building at All Levels of the Organization

Your employees value diversity and want an inclusive and equitable climate for all. Give them the knowledge and tools they need.

We advise investing in additional evidence-driven training that will build on and strengthen any existing training approaches through best-practices applications that are specific to the daily lived experience of employees. Invest in providing learning experiences tailored to role.

ACTIONS

Create shared capacity for inclusive and equitable interactions through all-staff training.

WHAT CAPACITIES SHOULD YOU GROW?

ALL STAFF TRAINING. All organizational members need a common, shared understanding of both visible and invisible factors that contribute to a positive climate for inclusion, and the specific behaviors and strategies they can use to support full inclusion with their coworkers and in their teams. You are already moving toward this

by providing organization-wide perinatal care providers foundational e-Learning. Consider deepening learning through additional self- study, more advanced eLearning, and targeted facilitated workshops, especially for patient care staff in order to ensure full equity and quality of patient care.

LEADER TRAINING. Leaders must understand the nature and impact of the inclusion and diversity climate at their organization. They must also be armed with a toolbox of best practices and skills to promote inclusion in an increasingly diverse world. Consider additional in-depth interactive workshops and inclusive leadership coaching to deepen inclusive leadership skills and make your galvanization an industry leader in DEI.

SUPERVISOR AND MANAGER TRAINING. Supervisors and managers are the front line for creating a fully inclusive and diverse organization. Therefore, they need to grow their knowledge of and capacity to implement evidence-based strategies and practices that create and maintain inclusive teams. Consider adding facilitated self-study and workshops for frontline supervisors and managers.

HUMAN RESOURCES STAFF TRAINING. An HR department that can identify, prevent, and reduce bias leakage in Human Resource processes from recruitment through retirement can be one of the most powerful tools for creating a diverse and inclusive organization. Consider facilitated workshops and supportive consulting to enable the human resources department to analyze policies and procedures for bias leakage.

7. Create Innovation through Open and Free Expression of Diverse Ideas and Perspectives

Employees want to contribute their valuable ideas and insights. Leverage this to accelerate innovation.

In a culture that welcomes free and open expression of diverse perspectives, employees feel free to fully contribute diverse thoughts, skills, and passions. They also have increased capacity for, and comfort with, positive (productive) disagreement and conflict. A work environment that appreciates diverse perspectives also encourages greater cultural humility and competence in patient care, leading to better patient experiences and improved health outcomes.

Creating a climate that welcomes free and open expression of diverse ideas, beliefs, and perspectives requires

both skill and commitment from leaders, managers, and supervisors, as well as increased employee capacity. Leaders can create change through consistently role-modeling and rewarding openness through positive debate and consideration of new ideas.

ACTIONS

→ Create multiple channels for idea sharing across levels of the organization. Ensure that these channels are symmetrical, allowing information and ideas to flow in both directions.

→ Create both public and confidential systems for providing suggestions and feedback on organizational policies, practices, and decisions.

→ Transparently incorporate ideas and feedback into organizational decision-making.

→ Enable leaders to role-model openness to diverse perspectives and ideas at all leadership levels through capacity building.

OPENING OUR MINDS

Although we are a social species, humans do not have an inherent capacity for free and open communication. We must intentionally and continuously develop our capacity to listen to each other, even when we disagree with what the other person is saying. Some specific skills to work on include:

Perspective-taking. Practice seeing things from someone else's perspective. Whenever possible, verify that your understanding of someone else's perspective is accurate.

Deep listening. Practice listening without simultaneously thinking of your response. Avoid interruptions.

Be curious. Respond to differences and disagreements with curiosity rather than defensiveness.

Weigh the facts. Challenge yourself to assess the merits of all ideas as objectively as possible.

CAUTION

Free and open expression of diverse ideas does not mean that exclusionary, biased, or discriminatory comments are unaddressed. It is essential that all individuals feel heard, respected, valued, and safe. Consistently interrupt and hold people accountable for behaviors that are discriminatory or exclusionary. Support leaders at all levels of the organization with capacity building, and ensure that your organization has effective, transparent, and objective processes for responding to discriminatory events.

8. Make Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Metrics Part of Your Core Business Intelligence

The information an organization collects determines what is visible and invisible to decision makers. Become a leader in DEI by committing to data-driven growth and continuous improvement.

Organizations use business intelligence (BI) metrics to track many processes and performance, including marketing, financial, and quality metrics. These metrics help organizations make informed, data-driven decisions, proactively identify challenges, and respond more rapidly to changes.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are just as critical to organizational performance and growth, but few organizations include DEI metrics as part of their core BI portfolio. This gap effectively leaves organizations in the dark about their progress toward their equity, diversity, and inclusion goals. Regularly assessing diversity, equity, and inclusion can effectively guide initiatives for enhancing the organizational climate and detecting issues as they arise before they become disruptive and debilitating. Such regular monitoring also communicates to employees that you prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion in its mission.

Evaluate your employee and patient data to ensure you are including measures which can identify and find solutions to organizational inequity. For example, are your hiring and retention data stratified by race and gender? Are you asking the right questions in your patient satisfaction survey to capture experiences of bias or discrimination? Remember that metrics can blind us to what is obvious, so ensure that data align with real experiences of patients and employees.

ACTIONS

→   Add DEI-specific metrics to your business intelligence.

→   Stratify all BI metrics to proactively identify inequities by race, gender, age, and other groups that have national evidence for inequalities.

→   Routinely evaluate progress using objective measures.

→   Create accountability by transparently sharing progress on metrics.

Following up with Diversity Science on our report and recommendations

Visit **www.diversityscience.org** for more information about our work and how it can support you.