



**BUSINESS
SCHOOL**

MANAGING THE BUMPS IN THE DEI JOURNEY

**A whitepaper by
The Centre for Excellence in Strategic Talent Management,
and Great Place To Work**

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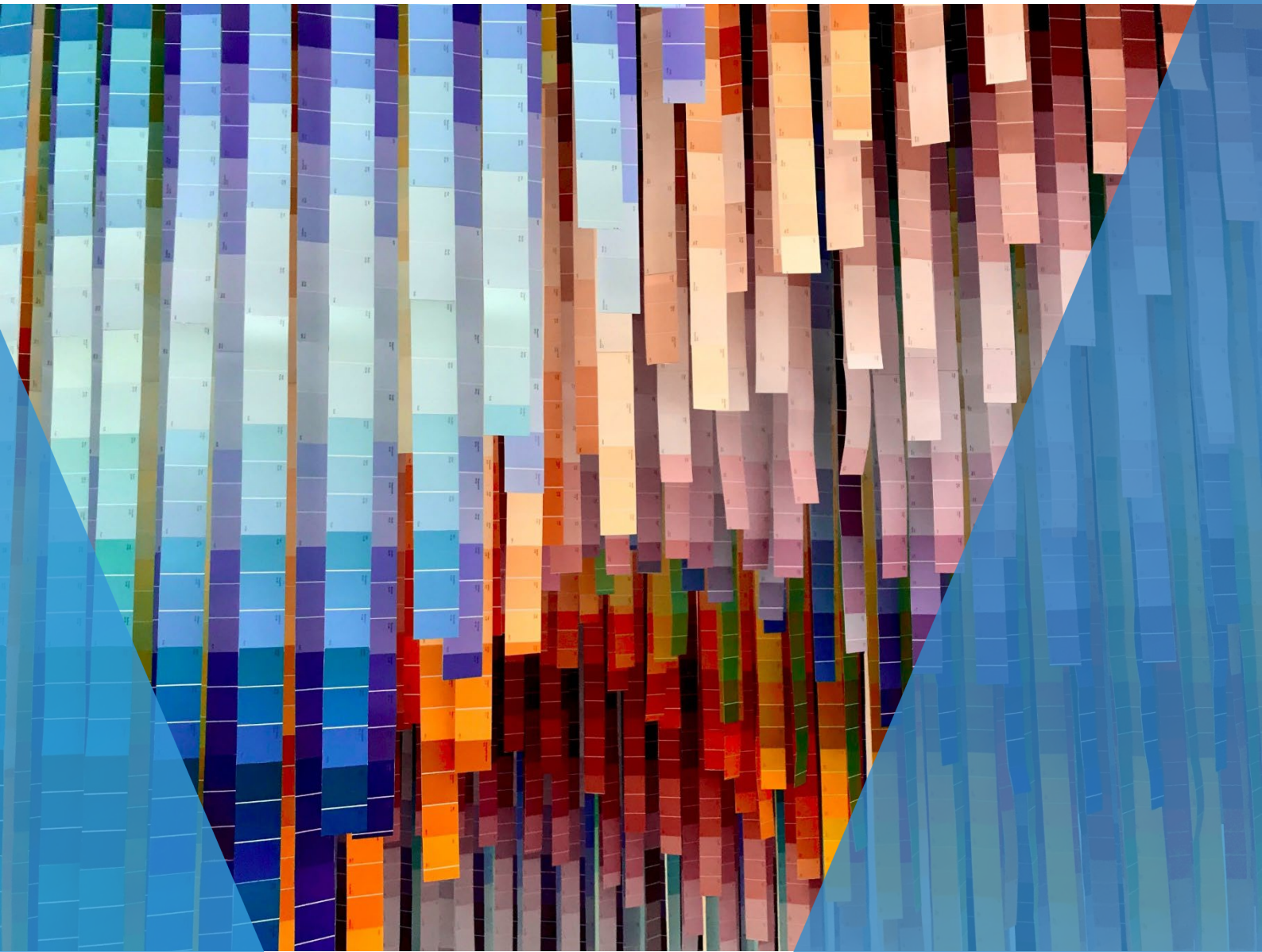
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Diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) are some of the most discussed topics when talking about the current workforce in our societies. We see cases going from unconscious bias and discrimination in the recruitment process to bullying and harassment in the workplace. Despite the abundance of literature on DEI, many organisations are left wondering where to put their focus in the first place. This whitepaper contributes to deciding which interventions are your best bet for increasing workplace diversity, equity and inclusion.



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THE CONTEXT OF DEI

Many organisations strive to create a positive work experience with exceptional consistency across employees. This means they promote a workplace culture that is welcoming to everyone – no matter who they are, what they do, who they love or what identity they carry.¹ According to Glassdoor data shared by SHRM, DEI-related job openings have risen by 55% since mid-2020.²

Before that time, diversity, equity and inclusion (today called DEI, earlier known simply as 'diversity') was considered a sub-domain or sub-task of the HR profession. Given the fact that this topic did not receive full attention in the business context, generations of HR professionals have built their careers with no formal knowledge, training or experience in DEI.³

But before embarking upon the practices that the DEI officer can put in place, it is important to clarify what the different terms mean:

Diversity

Diversity involves being mindful of differences such as age, gender identity, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, or disability status. Diversity is the 'mix'.

Equality

Equality describes the promise of equal access to opportunity, advancement, support and reward for all.

Equity

Equity fulfills the promise of equality. It means that everyone really receives fair treatment and has equal access to opportunities.

Inclusion

Inclusion of diverse individuals in the workplace is achieved by providing support, access to information, a sense of belonging and job security. Inclusion makes the 'mix' work.

Figure 1: DEI defined by Gasnier, A., Jereczek-Fossa, B. A., et al. (2022)⁴

In practice, we see most organisations adopting the term 'DEI'. Lately, the acronym DEIB – diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging – is also popping up. The shift from DEI to DEIB has been highlighted as a growing trend in 2022. On the one hand, you have practitioners who claim that DEI = B; they see DEI as a formula (and steps taken) to create the desired result of 'B', which stands for belonging. You also have practitioners who claim that being diverse, equitable, and inclusive is not enough to create an environment that maximises human potential. Workers also need to feel that they belong in the workplace, and this would require another set of actions.

Before creating your diversity plan, it is important to look at your organisation in its context. Using one organisation's DEI initiatives as a model for your own organisation may not result in the same, desired outcome. When talking about 'context', we often think of factors such as location, industry, organisational size, legislation, and demographical groups. But when designing DEI practices, we often forget to specify the organisation's internal culture around DEI. More specifically, do people feel at home in your organisation? Are diversity actions already underway? How diverse is your talent pool in the recruitment process now?

Organisational cultures around DEI can be identified by the 4 categories defined in Robert Livingston's book *The Conversation* (2021)⁵:



Regardless of the current DEI maturity in your company, you will need commitment and buy-in from all levels to progress successfully towards a more inclusive work climate.



THE (LACK OF) BUY-IN FOR DEI AND HOW TO CREATE A POSITIVE TURNAROUND?

For any DEI initiative to work, you need buy-in from your middle and top management. This is no surprise given the many responsibilities management has that directly impact the level of diversity, equity and inclusion in an organisation – such as hiring approach, performance reviews and promotion decisions. A lack of commitment from middle management can lead to the failure of DEI initiatives.

Some middle managers might lack commitment just because they do not believe in DEI. Most, however, do see the merits of being more diverse and inclusive, but they are not committed to these initiatives. In the following sections, we take a closer look at the misconceptions behind management's lack of commitment, and how to remedy this to get them on board.

DEI IS NOT A PRIORITY

From middle management's point of view, DEI initiatives are often seen as distractions from the effective running of the business.⁶ If this reason strongly resonates with your management, show them that organisations investing in DEI have proven to make more money, have a higher rate of innovation, and have more engaged employees.

CUSTOMER LOYALTY

Research shows that brands that invest in diverse and inclusive marketing strategies build stronger relationships with their customers. In a survey by Adobe, 38% of the respondents said they are more likely to buy products and services from brands that show diversity in their ads, and 34% have abandoned buying products from a company because they do not feel their identities are represented in the advertisements or actions.⁷

TALENT ATTRACTION

A study by the job board Monster showed that almost two-thirds of employees (62%) would turn down a job offer if it came from an organisation that did not explicitly support diversity.

TALENT RETENTION

In a study by Deloitte, 23% of the respondents indicated they have already left an organisation during their career for a more inclusive one. This includes 30% of the millennial respondents.⁸

INNOVATION

There is a statistically significant relationship between diversity and innovation outcomes. Organisations with above-average total diversity, as measured by 6 dimensions of diversity – migration, industry, career path, gender, education, and age – had 19% points higher innovation revenues. Industry, nation of origin, and gender had slightly larger effects. Investing in DEI means that you can benefit from a broader spectrum of perspectives, creativity and innovation, which can help drive the business forward.⁹

HIGHER EBIT MARGINS

Organisations with above-average total diversity had an average of 9% points higher EBIT margins. Industry, nation of origin, and gender had slightly larger effects.

In addition, it's important to create opportunities for advocacy. Middle managers should be role models that help their employees understand the priority of DEI and how it fits within their organisation's culture and values.

DEI INITIATIVES RESTRICT AUTONOMY

Many DEI approaches are obligatory across all layers of the organisation. As a result, managers feel that these initiatives are forced upon them and limit their autonomy. When it comes to rules concerning autonomy, people have the tendency to rebel against them. Therefore, presenting DEI initiatives differently can increase buy-in from management. Several companies have gotten consistently positive results by presenting initiatives in a way that promotes autonomy. These organisations engage managers to commit themselves to solving the DEI problem by recruiting them as 'DEI change agents'. They do not force managers to take bias-reducing training, but personally invite them to participate on a voluntary basis. Some even ditch training altogether and focus on increasing their on-the-job contact with diverse groups.¹⁰ Mentoring is a way to engage managers: they can teach their protégés on the job and sponsor them for key training and assignments. Mentors invest their time and effort in helping their protégés to develop and advance in their career. These mentors then slowly come to believe that their trainee deserves these opportunities, whether they belong to a majority or minority group. That is what we call cognitive dissonance – “Anyone I sponsor must be deserving” – and clearly reduces their biases.

DEI CONCERNS OTHERS

Talking about DEI initiatives makes people conscious of the social groups they belong to. In the case of majority group members, this can result in the belief that the initiatives do not concern them, and they might feel uncomfortable speaking up for others.¹¹ Management participation in DEI initiatives can be increased by communicating that their participation is appropriate and that their say on the matter is appreciated. Additionally, have them think of a situation where they have experienced exclusion or inequity or seen this happen to one of their loved ones. In that way, emotions will arise and lead to some sense of personal investment in the cause.

DEI ISSUES ARE PERSONAL AND SENSITIVE, AND THEREFORE BETTER LEFT UNTOUCHED

People often do not feel comfortable asking about something that might relate to someone's religion, disability, or sexual orientation. However, when managers avoid issues related to DEI, the result can be micro-aggression: side-lining certain social groups rather than openly approaching issues affecting them.¹² Encourage managers to openly address diversity issues in their team. Moreover, fostering psychological safety is essential to promoting inclusion and calling out unhelpful or unacceptable behaviour.

STORYTELLING WORLD WIDE TECHNOLOGY

WWT first started off with listening sessions, in which employees frequently shared compelling and heartfelt stories. Because of its huge success, the organisation decided to do something with these stories. When personal experiences are met with open minds and a willingness to understand, WWT says they can create an atmosphere that encourages storytelling. For them, storytelling is a powerful tool that can spark change. All employees can submit stories and videos, essays, poems, artwork, and many other media. The DEI team works with interested storytellers in the organisation to guide them. Their stories are submitted and shared through an internal SharePoint page that now has over 4500 views across the organisation. Storytelling creates an atmosphere that communicates that DEI does not always concern 'others' but rather everyone in the organisation, no matter how sensitive the topic might be (2022).



THE NECESSITY OF DIVERSITY TRAINING

Diversity training has been around for a long time and is one of the most implemented DEI initiatives. But is it effective? How we interact with each other is based on 3 aspects: our knowledge (what we know), our attitude (what we believe), and our behaviour (what we do). Diversity training positively impacts all 3, but in different ways.¹³

Before launching a training, first listen to your employees. Understand their current experience and environment. Do they feel heard? Do they feel included? Do they feel safe to be themselves at work? You can measure equity by asking questions such as: "Are you treated as a full member here regardless of your position?"¹⁴ or "Are people here treated fairly regardless of their age/race/gender/...?" or "Can you be yourself around here?" Strong DEI plans focus on closing the gaps that exist. This requires seeking a deep understanding of the current state by listening and gathering insights on the employees' experience and needs.

Training is the most effective intervention for increasing people's knowledge of diversity issues. Right after training, people often change their beliefs and behaviours to some extent – but as time passes, these beliefs and behaviours tend to revert to how they were before training. However, certain conditions and training design characteristics can make diversity training work better. For example, as shown in the figure below, the effects of diversity training can be amplified when it is integrated with other DEI initiatives.¹⁵

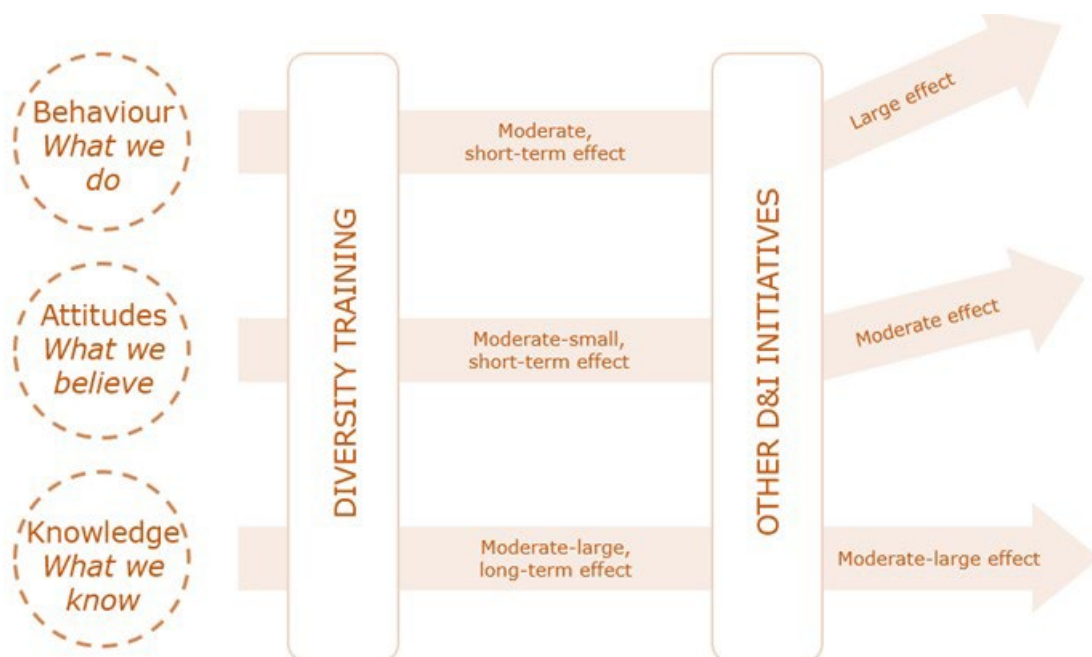


Figure 2: Other DEI initiatives amplify the effects of diversity training. Based on Bezrukova et al. (2016)

To create effective diversity training, certain characteristics or conditions must be met:

1. COMMUNICATION

As a first step, diversity training can help clarify what DEI means. This shared meaning helps facilitate the buy-in necessary to involve the entire workforce in identifying how DEI can benefit an organisation. When communicating about DEI initiatives, it is important to not frame these actions as if they are only for minorities. If you do so, you create an 'us versus them' frame and you will always encounter resistance and a low ROI. DEI initiatives need to be inclusive in themselves.

Secondly, when organising a training event, it is best to allow adequate time for participants to get to know each other and the trainer, and to allow them to discuss what they have learned amongst themselves. In addition to being exposed to new information, being able to have a conversation with others boosts behavioural change.

COURAGEOUS CONVERSATIONS HILTON

Hilton strongly believes that an inclusive workforce will make them more hospitable towards all guests around the world. For them, an inclusive culture requires an openness to learning. In addition to mandatory DEI-trainings for team members and leadership, they have introduced a programme called *Courageous Conversations*. Using employees' feedback, this programme was initiated as a proactive way to encourage and support open dialogue on complex topics, including systemic racism, unintended bias, mental health, and gender equality. Through the *Courageous Conversations* series, team members from diverse backgrounds have a safe space to speak, listen, learn, and reflect. As leaders and members across the business continue to explore these topics and hear each other's perspectives, Hilton is driving long-term change towards a culture in which everyone feels at home and part of the Hilton family. As a result of these courageous conversations, Hilton has now more than 30 nationalities working in their hotels and female staff has increased over the past year. Hilton is now organising lectures involving their Women Team Members in all positions to encourage further discourse on this topic (2022).

2. INTEGRATE THE TRAINING INTO OTHER INITIATIVES

Training alone is not a quick fix to creating a diverse and inclusive organisation. Training should be seen as a foundation of broader organisational change. The changes in attitudes and behaviour will more likely last after training if it is actively sustained through other DEI initiatives. Employees might see that management is truly committed to fostering inclusion, and that the training is not just a tick-in-the-box on some legal requirement. This observation might also give employees extra motivation to learn during the training and to apply what they have learned.¹⁶

3. MORE AND LONGER TRAINING

The longer the diversity training, the more effective it is. Longer training means participants have more opportunities to meet others who are different, so interactions start to feel more comfortable. A longer training period also means everyone has more time to practice. Unfortunately, many organisations see training as a one-time affair. Change is unlikely after a single training session. The most effective training takes place over multiple sessions, using different methods of delivering the material (for example, face-to-face training combined with online learning). Best results are seen when training is repeated and updated regularly throughout your employees' careers.¹⁷

4. ONE SIZE DOES NOT FIT ALL

Another important thing is that the effectiveness of training may depend on the personality of the person being trained. Some people might just be more open to training and therefore learn/change more rapidly than others. As a result, make sure the training is adapted to the person. In a world of diversity, there is no such thing as 'one size fits all'. Be sure to keep this in mind when designing diversity training.

5. FOCUS ON AWARENESS AND SKILLS

The focus of the training is also important: the most effective training courses develop both awareness and skills. In such training, participants become more aware of their own and other's cultural values and biases (focusing on knowledge and personal attitudes). Secondly, they monitor their actions and practice interpersonal skills in a way that reduces bias in interactions with diverse groups of people (focusing on behaviours).

Perspective-taking exercises involve people in reflecting on what it might be like for other people facing prejudice or disadvantage. These kinds of exercises are especially effective in bringing about lasting changes to people's attitudes and behavioural intentions for months after the training. Examples of such exercises include: imagining being in certain scenarios while focusing on how that makes you feel; or writing about the challenges faced by someone within a minority group. Participants then reflect on how their own behaviour might have been biased in the past, and how they might remedy their behaviour.¹⁸

DIVERSITY DAYS ACCENT

Accent organises diversity days, in which every employee attends the diversity training. During the workshops, panel debates and exercises, employees learn how it feels to be discriminated against and what they can do about it. All employees are immersed in different situations, in which they are given tools to approach prejudice from a different perspective. This teaches people how quickly we can be biased and how stereotypes can influence our behaviour (2022).



PITFALLS WHEN ORGANISING DIVERSITY TRAINING

Be aware that, when diversity training is designed ineffectively, it can backfire and even increase bias and non-inclusive behaviour. We highlight 3 pitfalls for diversity training and how to avoid them.

1. Seeing bias as a tattoo instead of a sticker

An important detail for awareness training is that learning materials must in no way suggest that stereotypes and psychological biases are unchangeable. To counter this pitfall, use words like 'occurs' instead of 'is'. People must understand that biases are not permanent tattoos, but stickers that can be peeled off.

2. Believing that attending diversity training excuses bias

For participants in a diversity training course, there is a risk of *moral self-licencing*. This occurs when people allow themselves to indulge after first doing something positive. People can believe that attending a diversity course can excuse prejudiced behaviour afterwards, because they have already 'proven' themselves to be unprejudiced and open to diversity.¹⁹ Communicating to employees about the dangers of moral self-licensing and how to recognise it can reduce its effects.

3. Resistance to mandatory training

Training can also backfire because it is didactic. However, we still recommend making training mandatory. People might not be in favour of mandatory training, but they may be more likely to change their behaviour following it. Voluntary training tends to only attract people interested in the topic, who already behave positively – and therefore they have less to change in the way they interact with people who are different from themselves.²⁰

When you feel that the resistance to training is high, we recommend opting for training that focuses on perspective-taking.²¹ Furthermore, having management participate in the training programmes can also have a huge impact on the employees' acceptance of the programme.²²

CREATING DIVERSE TALENT POOLS

The value of a more diverse candidate pool is nothing new to most recruiters. Attracting the best talent regardless of their background or attributes is one of the many business arguments made for advancing DEI. The current 'war for talent' means that organisations need to look further than their traditional talent pools. Diversity hiring and broadening talent pipelines was already ranked among recruiters' top priorities for 2021.²³

COLLABORATION WITH SOCIAL ENTERPRISES DURABRIK

"We perceive diversity as an enrichment to our organisation. Therefore, we welcome people from diverse backgrounds, with all of their talents, regardless of (social) origin, gender, age and religion." Durabrik takes an active approach to translating this vision into reality and has launched several initiatives to keep the 'application threshold' as low as possible. For example, they collaborate with social enterprises to employ people who do not always get the opportunities they deserve in the regular labour market – e.g., people with a mental disability (LetsCo) or those who belong to a disadvantaged group (JobRoad, KONEKT and VOKANS). In addition, they engage their employees to give construction-related workshops to young people with a background of poverty to help them discover their talents – an initiative in collaboration with Tajo (2022).

Positive action measures can be defined as any kind of action taken by employers to actively promote diversity and minimise disadvantages for under-represented groups without giving them an unfair advantage. There are 2 types of positive actions: *targeted support* and *targeted recruitment*. Within targeted support, we speak of opportunity enhancement actions, such as coaching, mentoring and sponsoring. Targeted recruitment consists of specific approaches to making decisions on recruitment and promotion.²⁴

In this chapter, we take a closer look at the different types of positive actions and highlight some objections against positive actions made by employees.

TARGETED SUPPORT: COACHING, MENTORING AND SPONSORING

Both coaching and mentoring are forms of non-directive learning and help targeted employees during their careers. A **coach** is either a skilled consultant or one of your colleagues who takes a guiding role. A **mentor** is typically a more senior colleague or manager who gives advice. A special kind of mentoring is **reverse mentoring**, where more junior colleagues share their experiences with more senior colleagues. Lastly, a **sponsor** actively advocates for the targeted person and creates opportunities for them. As a result, sponsoring is not only a learning tool, but it also involves preferential treatment and influencing decisions from senior managers to advance the targeted person's career.²⁵

COACHING AXXES

Several employees within Axxes are coaching refugees and migrants in IT. By doing this, they help these people enhance their knowledge and skills in IT and find opportunities in the labour market. For Axxes, this initiative shows that they value diversity. Additionally, it brings Axxes closer to a wider and more diverse talent pool. The result: a win-win situation (2022).

Most professionals suggest promoting coaching and mentoring, but not sponsoring. Sponsoring may block inclusion by justifying a workplace based on exclusive relationships. This introduces a huge potential for bias. Secondly, legitimising sponsorship relationships may reinforce a fixed mindset regarding talent. Once a targeted person is selected, the sponsor advocates for them irrespective of their ongoing performance, and the sponsor is also partially blinded to other people's growing talent. This may undermine an organisation's commitment to fairness, which is an essential part of an inclusive climate.

TARGETED RECRUITMENT

An established method of diversity recruiting is *targeted recruiting*, where the focus is on locating, identifying, and attracting potential employees. If an organisation wants to attract applicants from different social groups, it must find out which information sources these groups use to find a job vacancy (websites, newspapers, magazines).

When designing a job post, impression management techniques (such as projecting an image of inclusion) can enhance targeted diversity recruiting. When one wishes to encourage targeted groups to apply, it can also help to have the vacancy contain images representing a member of this group.²⁶

Recent research showed that explicitly stating in job postings that a company seeks to pursue diversity leads to more applications and more diverse applicants. The intervention also resulted in a higher selection of candidates from a minority background. So, not only were more applicants attracted, but the candidates were stronger as well. Finally, the study also found that the inclusion of diversity messages in a job posting had no negative effects on the number of applications from non-minorities.²⁷

“WE BELIEVE THAT HAVING A DIVERSE TEAM MAKES US STRONGER” BEWIRE

At Bewire, all vacancies are accompanied by a non-discriminative disclosure, namely: *“We believe that having a diverse team makes us stronger. Therefore, we encourage everyone to apply. No matter who you are, where you come from, or what you stand for, it is your talent that will make the difference.”*

Additionally, Bewire uses an applicant tracking system, with which they can easily follow up to what extent they need to adjust their campaigns and advertising texts in order to attract a wider and more diverse audience (2022).

QUOTA AND TARGETS

Companies usually set targets to be more transparent about their diversity goals and to be able to measure how they are doing compared to the targets. Targets are also used to increase accountability. Quotas serve the same goals but are mandated outcomes, which means they must be achieved.

Most quotas we see in organisations are imposed from outside the organisation. For example, European public limited companies and state-owned enterprises are now required by law to have at least 40% of their boards of directors comprised of women. Targets, on the other hand, typically originate from within the organisation.

Discussions on diversity quotas or targets tend to become rather emotional. Many people are opposed to them, or at least have some strong opinions about them. We summarise some of these objections:

OBJECTION 1: Positive action measures are not based on meritocracy (a system in which the most talented or skilled individuals reach the top)

- **WHAT?** Many people object to targets and quotas because they feel that candidates should be selected based solely on their talents, and not on other characteristics.
- **HOW TO OVERCOME?** We doubt the claim that candidates, in absence of positive action measures, are always selected or promoted on merit. This is certainly not the case. For example, network relationships can be a great advantage in getting a promotion. We recommend that employers put resources and effort into carefully positioning the aims and outcomes of any positive action. Communications should emphasise why the approach is being used, how it is of benefit to employees and the organisation, and, crucially, what positive action is and is not.

OBJECTION 2: Other people will question the competence of selected individuals who belong to the targeted groups

- **WHAT?** In general, the selection of a candidate for an open job position is taken as evidence that the person is qualified. But if the person belongs to a targeted group, it may be unclear whether the selection decision was due to the individual's qualifications or to the organisation's need to reach its targets. Evidence suggests that this reasoning only applies when colleagues believe there has been 'preferential treatment'.
- **HOW TO OVERCOME?** It is important for organisations to communicate how their quota systems work. Nevertheless, stigmatisation can be greatly decreased or eliminated by providing information about the selected individual's competence or successful performance on the job.²⁸

OBJECTION 3: Companies should focus on inclusion, rather than targeting certain groups

- **WHAT?** Some companies prefer to focus on inclusion, because that may seem more achievable than setting ambitious targets or because it avoids polarised discussions about targets. But focusing on inclusion and stating that everybody is welcome in your company might be an easy way out without changing very much in your company ('pro-diversity on paper').
- **HOW TO OVERCOME?** Like targets, levels of inclusion can be measured and tracked, but it is more difficult to define a level of inclusion to aim for. Becoming more inclusive is not opposed to targets. In fact, targets are most useful when they are accompanied by investments in an inclusive culture. Otherwise, targets may be seen as a mere 'check the box' for management.



CULTURE FIT AND DEI

Many recruitment processes include an assessment of fit between the applicant and the organisational culture. Hiring for culture- or value-fit increased in popularity in 2021. But it can be argued that hiring for culture- or value-fit undermines efforts to increase diversity, because it leads to hiring managers trying to 'clone' their current workforce with more of the same type of people. We identified a few pitfalls when looking at the criterium of fit from a DEI perspective, and we give some practical recommendations on how to balance fit with organisational diversity.

1. SELECT ON VALUE FIT

When balancing fit and diversity, it should be noted that you need some similarity among employees, but where to place the focus? It is recommended that you look for similarities between the organisation's and the individual's values.²⁹ And this starts by making sure everybody has the same understanding of the organisation's values. Do not be shy to state in job posts that you are a value-based organisation and what your purpose is. Research from LinkedIn indicates that a lot of job seekers even look for this kind of information.

2. HIRE FOR INCLUSION

Initiatives to increase diversity are most likely to succeed when organisations simultaneously invest in an inclusive culture. Being inclusive is not about pressuring diverse people to fit. It is about making people feel that they belong in your organisation. This is achieved by making sure their voices are heard equally with other employees while, at the same time, making them feel safe to be their own unique selves. Investing in an inclusive culture can buffer unwanted employee outcomes like excessive turnover.³⁰

LEADING FOR INCLUSION SALESFORCE

In order to create an inclusive environment, Salesforce developed a one-week leadership programme called 'Leading for Inclusion'. The programme is designed to help Salesforce leaders understand their role in creating an environment of inclusion. They learn to recognise the impact of systemic inequity from both global and local perspectives. Additionally, they learn to explore their own social identities and personal blind spots to help them shift their perspective to recognise and include differences (2022).

3. LOSE THE IDEA THAT CULTURE IS FIXED

Many organisations talk about their culture as if it is fixed, and diversity is something on top of it. In reality, culture is something that is constantly developing. This does not mean that there cannot be any core or fixed values. For example, organisations that operate on a global level set values at that global level, but they allow for flexibility to tap into local markets. We see that organisations that have offices in different locations do not have one culture in all of these offices, but rather multiple variations of their culture.

Recruiters can challenge assumptions about cultural fit by considering not only the current organisational culture but also the culture to which the organisation aspires. For example, by listing employee characteristics that the organisation needs and committing to focusing only on these characteristics in selecting candidates.

“THE PERSON BEHIND THE DEVELOPER” PEOPLEWARE

PeopleWare has a website for its talents dedicated to explaining its internal culture, vibes and values. They state: “At PeopleWare, we think differently than others. We are not looking for a specific profile that has to meet numerous checkboxes. No, we recruit talent. And together, we will look at how your talent and passion best fit within our organisation.” PeopleWare is no longer using standard vacancies with specific job descriptions and must-haves. Instead, they really want to look at the person behind the developer (2022).

4. DEBIAS FIT

When reviewing fit, managers tend to find inspiration in a person that was previously an outstanding performer in the role, including that person’s personal characteristics. But this can bias the image of the ideal candidate. Bias can be reduced when managers write down a description of their ideal candidate and then review this description with an HR professional with DEI expertise. They can then decide which characteristics should be baked into the candidate’s specification and which should be jettisoned as irrelevant or inappropriate on the grounds of DEI. Because of the pervasiveness of unconscious bias, we suggest there is no middle ground here – characteristics that threaten to compromise workforce diversity should not be downgraded from ‘essential’ to ‘desirable’ but changed or removed. In some cases, it may be useful to add statements for internal use that counter the jettisoned characteristics: for example, *‘We welcome applicants of all ages for this role’*. This makes any implicit assumptions about the desired characteristics explicit, which makes it easier to put them aside as invalid.

BEYOND BIAS HILTI

Hilti introduced the Beyond Bias training. The aim of this training is to raise awareness in all their teams of the importance of inclusion in their day-to-day business. The Beyond Bias training is a workshop with team leaders across the globe, designed to deal with unconscious bias. By connecting these workshops to key assessment processes – like people development or recruitment – they support their leaders in improving their self-reflection and becoming more aware of their own biases. This helps them make more objective, and therefore better, decisions (2022).

LESSONS LEARNED

1. BUY-IN FROM MANAGEMENT

For organisations just starting to build a DEI strategy, the most important step is to get buy-in from top management and to ensure they take a stand and speak out about why this matters to them. Are they not convinced yet? Show them that organisations investing in DEI have proven to make more money, have a higher rate of innovation, and have more engaged employees. Convince them with facts and figures and create a burning platform.

2. FIRST LISTEN, THEN TRAIN

What is your employees' current experience at work? Do they feel included? Do they feel safe to be themselves at work? Do they see under-represented groups involved in decisions being made, in leadership roles, and in hiring and promotion decisions? Listen first, then train to bridge these gaps! Training is the most effective intervention for increasing people's knowledge of diversity issues. Right after training, people change their beliefs and behaviours to some extent; but, as time passes, these beliefs and behaviours tend to revert to how they were before training.

3. BUILD A PLAN

Based on what you have learned, building a DEI plan is the next important step in building an effective DEI strategy. Furthermore, there will be some initiatives that will simply not work in your organisation. See this as a learning opportunity, and keep striving to reach your goal – do not let one setback hold you back! We have offered some actions (targeted recruitment, targeted support, and hiring for value fit), but more inspiration can be found in the NiMAP toolkit, explained in the next chapter.

4. USE QUOTAS AS AN ALLY

Quotas lead to lots of emotions, both pro and con. However, once you use the quota as a means and not so much as a goal in itself, its impact on human behaviour – and, ultimately, on the mindset – might surprise you. In other words, use quotas as a friend or ally, not as an enemy.



DEI PROJECTS & THE CENTRE FOR EXCELLENCE IN STRATEGIC TALENT MANAGEMENT

The Vlerick Centre for Excellence in Strategic Talent Management provides a platform for membering organisations to connect, exchange and co-create knowledge to advance talent practices. In today's world, an inclusive talent focus is essential while doing so and, hence, DEI plays an essential role in our (research) activities.

1. DEVELOPMENT OF DIVERSITY TOOLKITS

With support of the European Social Fund and the Flemish Government, the Vlerick Centre for Excellence in Strategic Talent Management carried out the '**Newcomer Induction Management Acceleration Programme**' (NiMAP).

The NiMAP project focused on bridging the gap between companies and highly educated newcomers in Belgium in order to create a multicultural workforce. Based on the real-life experiences of many parties involved, toolkits were developed for both newcomers and companies to help them overcome the hurdles they face and find mutual benefits instead. The tools were developed in partnership with [Talentree](#).

This toolkit for companies consists of 4 tools that focus on different DEI maturity stages. The toolkit is accompanied by the training toolkit, which translates the 4 tools into 4 training modules (consisting of PowerPoint presentations and exercises) that can serve as a basis for organising internal diversity workshops.

- TOOL 1: Putting multicultural diversity on the agenda
- TOOL 2: Building a diverse organisation – getting the foundations right
- TOOL 3: Recruiting for diversity
- TOOL 4: Managing diversity in the workplace

More information: <https://www.vlerick.com/en/research-faculty/research-projects/newcomer-induction-management-acceleration-programme/>

2. DEI RESEARCH

DEI is part of our annual HR Barometer study in which we explore HR priorities of leading companies and examine how these priorities shift over time. In 2023, a special edition of the study was conducted with an in-depth focus on the topic of DEI.

Contact us if you want to learn more about our research findings.

3. DEI EVENTS

Staying ahead of trends and challenges in the field of talent management, the Vlerick Centre for Excellence in Strategic Talent Management organises workshops and events following new evolutions in research and business. In the past, we organised several events around DEI, for which we invited both academic experts and corporate speakers. And we will keep DEI on our radar as an essential scope for future events. Also, as part of our annual Vlerick HR Day event, we organise content sessions on DEI and bring together like-minded corporate HR leaders.

Contact us if you want to learn more about our events.



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