MCQUAIG PRESENTS

THE QUICK GUIDE
TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY AND INCLUSION

Introduction

There is no doubt that diversity, equity and inclusion, or DE&I, is becoming a driving force in the talent industry. As society starts engaging in more direct conversations about prejudice and discrimination businesses are being called on to ensure they are doing their part to provide safe spaces for all their employees. But DE&I is about more than just making sure employees feel safe at work. It's about building an inclusive culture together that makes room for multiple voices and viewpoints and takes steps to level the playing field so all employees can succeed.

There are, of course, numerous benefits to improving the inclusivity of your workplace. Companies that prioritize DE&I often find they have more engaged employees who are satisfied at work and happy to remain with an organization long-term. Some companies even report higher profitability when they start championing diversity and inclusion and it makes sense why they would. Workers are more likely to put their best effort in when they work somewhere that values and supports them. But where do you start when you want to improve DE&I? It's not just about planning out a great employee experience. Instead, let's consider DE&I strategies at multiple points along an employee's tenure that can help increase the overall levels of inclusivity within your organization.

Did you know?
78% of people believe diversity and inclusion offers companies a competitive advantage[1]

What do the numbers say?

Let's explore some stats about DE&I to help us understand how it's viewed in the workplace right now and what that might mean for the future.

- Inclusive teams make better business decisions 87% of the time[2]

- 41% of managers report their number 1 barrier to implementing diversity initiatives is "being busy"[3]

- Teams equally made up of men and women earn 41% more revenue[4]

- Companies identified as being more diverse and inclusive are 35% more likely to outperform their competition[5]

- More than two-thirds of candidates count workplace diversity as an important factor when deciding to apply[6]
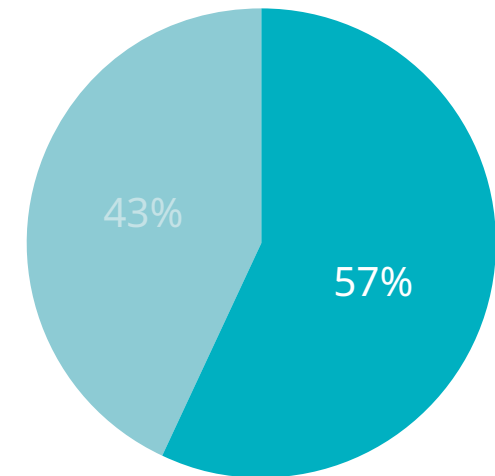
57% of employees believe their company should be more diverse[7]

This is just the tip of the iceberg when it comes to the stats, studies, and research that's been done on the importance of DE&I. Again and again the results show the same thing. When companies increase their diversity, they increase their performance. Teams that have a better mix of voices are able to make better decisions that can drive a company forward. So what can you do to improve DE&I where you work?

DE&I strategies as you prepare to hire

DE&I efforts should start before you even meet with candidates. The following tactics can help you prepare to hire more diversely before you get to the interview process.

Take stock of your organization

Before you go out and start hiring, you need to have a solid understanding of DE&I in your own company. Spending some time upfront to understand the role diversity already plays at work will help you better prepare for recruitment and decide what your hiring goals should be right from the start. Can you identify teams or departments that are too homogenous? Might there be unseen barriers in your HR processes that overlook certain groups? Are different demographics fairly represented in senior leadership? You need to understand where you currently are in order to accurately plan where you need to go. Employee surveys, tracking recent promotions, and reviewing hiring metrics can be a great place to start. What you learn will likely impact where and how you source future talent.

Review your job descriptions

How a job description is written can be one of the first hurdles derailing DE&I in your hiring process. When advertising a job you probably think about the skills and requirements you want to find for a role but the language you use can impact who will ultimately apply. Using gendered or cultured language, for example, can send signals to candidates about how inclusive a company is which could cause them to pass a post by.[8] Instead, write your descriptions to include a blurb about your company's approach to inclusion, including any benefits or awards it might have won. Plus when in doubt, it never hurts to get a second or third opinion before an ad goes live. Others might see language cues you've missed which can help ensure your final ad reaches the right candidates.

DE&I strategies as you prepare to hire

Where are you sourcing?

There are many places to post job listings and if you're always using the same ones (such as only posting on LinkedIn, for example) you might be missing out on a whole section of the talent market. If you want to change who is applying to your open roles, you need to change where those roles are visible.[9] Reach out to communities that are underrepresented in your organization and build relationships with professional and local associations that can pass around your job posts as they come out. Connecting with neighbourhood organizations can also lead to new internship programs, volunteer opportunities, and community support for your company. Just because you've always advertised your jobs one way in the past doesn't mean you can't switch things up in the present.

Decide how you will measure success

Shifting company culture can be tricky because so much of our daily interactions particularly around diversity and inclusion are unconscious. It's hard to change what you're not aware of. That's why metrics are so important to track. When deciding what to pay attention to, ask yourself a few questions. Look at hiring practices and ask what candidates are getting offers and which ones are being turned away. Examine leaders in your company and ask whether advancement opportunities are open to everyone and whether certain groups of people are being moved up more commonly than others. And you should always be aware of your employee retention rates to see who is leaving your company and what reasons they give when they do so. Digging into these questions will give you somewhere to begin. Remember once you start, update and adapt as you go.[10] You might find your most important metrics are ones you haven't even thought of yet.
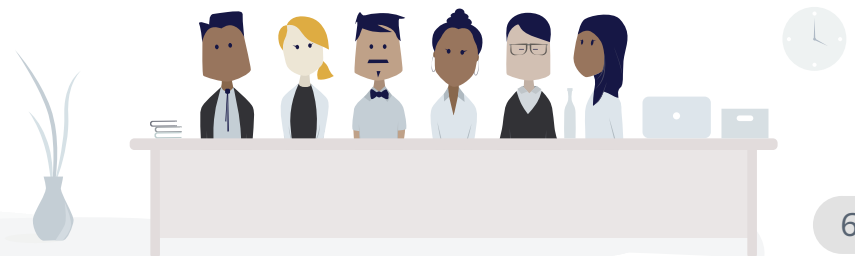
DE&I strategies for hiring

Once you have the foundation laid for an equitable hiring process, it's time to get started. Try these tactics as you hire to keep DE&I top of mind when you recruit.

Hire blind

Have you ever tried to hire someone without knowing their name? Sometimes something as simple as how a name is spelled or what gender it appears to be can cost candidates their chance at being called in. Hiring blind attempts to solve that problem by striping away any identifying information from a resume, such as a name, and replacing it with a number.[11] This way you can still keep track of resumes but your decisions will be based on merit rather than potentially unconscious preconceptions. Now hiring blind doesn't work once you get to the interview round and start meeting people, of course, but it's a good way of addressing some of the biases that can creep into the hiring process early on and cost you candidates.

Hire with a committee

Some of our best work happens when we collaborate with others so why wouldn't that hold true for hiring? Deciding who to bring into a team is often a solo process but adding more voices to the table can help you come to more thoughtful decisions. When you hire as part of a panel or committee, you're able to pool your insights which helps address any traces of hidden bias that might have arisen during the hiring process so far.[12] Gathering multiple opinions about a candidate can also help managers get a better sense of how a candidate would fit into the existing team. In fact, committee hiring works even better when one of the members is a peer as they'll be looking for different factors in an interview than a manager would.

DE&I strategies for hiring

Provide unconscious bias training

Unconscious bias, or the internal stereotypes we hold without conscious awareness, can throw insurmountable barriers in front of candidates and derail your hiring process. The problem is, it's hard to guard against something you're not aware of. That's where unconscious bias training comes in. Hiring managers who are trained in what to look for are better able to monitor their own reactions to a candidate and examine how and why they're coming to the conclusions they are about someone. This leads to fairer interviews and more inclusive hiring decisions overall. Not to mention, unconscious bias exists outside the hiring process too. Providing this kind of training to managers has the added bonus of benefiting the teams they are a part of as well. Over time, this can help your entire company develop a better understanding of bias and how to eliminate it.

Use structured interviews

Some people love to walk into an interview and wing it. They expect a candidate to tell them everything they need to know in order to make the right hiring choice and barely glance at a resume before walking into the room. While this is one way to hire, it's not your best bet for finding the right fit for a role and it certainly won't help improve DE&I in your hiring process. Instead, prepare in advance for your interviews and ensure they are planned and structured. This means using behavioural-based interview questions that avoid Yes/No answers and following the same interview structure with every candidate.[13] Giving candidates the chance to answer the same questions allows managers to compare responses more fairly and helps candidates to put their best foot forward. Not to mention, structured interviews will keep you on track and avoid tangents that might cost you valuable time with a candidate.

Use assessments

The more you can standardize your hiring process to rely on data over gut instinct, the fairer your hiring decisions will become. One way to gather insight into a candidate before you even meet is with the help of assessments. Assessments can be completed online at the candidate's leisure and can give you a better sense of who your applicant really is, before they land in a role. In fact, personality assessments as a whole produce the smallest differences between gender, ethnic, and sexual orientation groups as compared to other types of assessments. This gives candidates a more even playing field when they interview and allows hiring managers to leverage science over instinct as they learn more about a candidate's true potential. Setting a candidate benchmark of desired skills and traits can also help keep things fair by providing a more strategic way to compare job seekers that moves beyond personal opinion.

Try an ATS

Hiring can be a time-consuming process and when it comes to sorting through resumes sometimes the job seems endless. Leveraging an ATS, an applicant tracking system, can help save hiring managers valuable time by taking over the sorting for them but there's another added benefit. Using an ATS to do your preliminary shortlisting can remove any unintended bias from tired hiring managers working through a stack of resumes.[14] Most recruiters or hiring managers only spend a few seconds on a candidate's resume, making it easy to miss job seekers who might, in fact, be strong candidates. Instead, an ATS let's you can set the criteria needed for a role and sort for all the resumes in your database that meet your requirements, leaving you with a shortlist to work from. It's fast and it's fair, allowing hiring managers to focus on other pieces of the hiring process that need their attention.
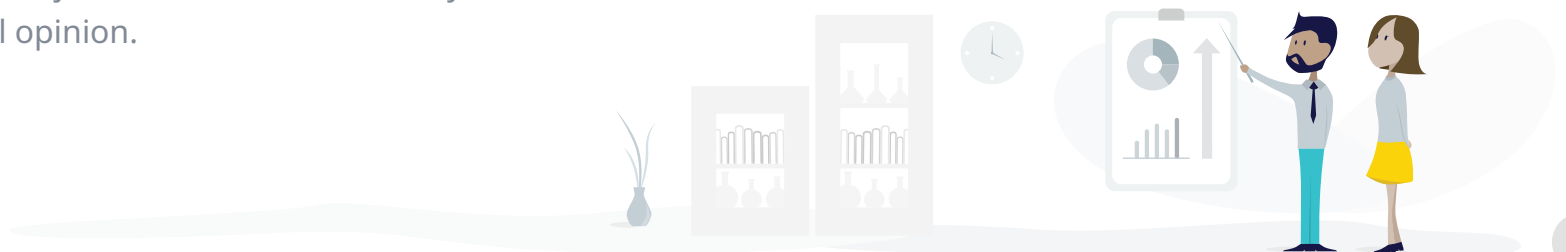
DE&I strategies after you hire

Finally, what should you do to support DE&I after your employees have been hired? Here are a few strategies to help companies create an inclusive environment for everyone.

Make policies that support DE&I

If your hiring process prioritizes diversity but your company policies don't reflect that attitude, you might find it difficult to retain your new talent. Take a look at the policies and structures currently in place at your organization. Are there procedures in place to handle discrimination or bullying? Is there room for different cultures and viewpoints that is reflected in how you work? Some companies provide floating holidays, for example, that can be substituted for a public holiday to accommodate important days in other religions that may not be in the company's calendar.[15] Providing flexibility like this in your work policies sends a clear message that the company is a supportive space for everyone. Inclusion is not just about the people you bring onto your team, but also about the rules you use to guide your organization.

Highlight DE&I in the employer brand

These days no one applies to a job without first looking up the company's reviews. They might ask friends who work for the organization or go online to scroll through social media posts and Glassdoor reviews. If you know your candidates are going to look you up anyways, make the most of their attention. Highlighting your DE&I efforts in your employer brand is a great way to let candidates know your company is inclusive and helps you stand out in a competitive market. These days candidates are looking for companies that offer meaningful work in respectful environments. Let them know you have what they're searching for on your job page, in your job descriptions, and when possible, on your website. Over time, your employer brand will only grow stronger and with it your ability to attract diverse talent.

DE&I strategies after you hire

Create transparent career paths accessible to all

When taking a long-term view of DE&I at your workplace, you need to consider not just who is entering your company but who is staying. And most importantly, who is rising. If you notice your teams are diverse but your upper leadership is looking pretty homogenous then that points to a problem with your diversity and culture efforts.[16] HR can help with this by keeping track of key metrics such as the composition of candidates when they apply to a role, the make-up for who is ultimately hired, and who receives promotions throughout the year. Ideally you want all three of those metrics to reflect the same ratios. Companies should also strive for clear career paths so all employees know what targets to aim for and consider making your pay scale more transparent. This helps employees have a better understanding of their future with an organization which can influence their tenure.

Build a culture of inclusion

Your company culture will set the tone for how successful your inclusion initiatives are in-house. Employees learn very quickly if employers were serious about their DE&I efforts or if it was just lip service. How they're treated in a role, the level of psychological safety on teams, employee's comfort levels with speaking up all point to what sort of culture is being created within an organization. Think of improving DE&I as needing a two-pronged approach. Your hiring process should be fair to all candidates and once they land in a role, the culture of the organization should continue to support diverse voices. You won't be able to have one without the other so take a holistic view of DE&I and make sure there is space for everyone within your teams.

Conclusion

Diversity, equity and inclusion should be top of mind for every company right now. We have all the research that points to more diverse companies succeeding ahead of their competition yet it's still a battle to build a diverse workforce. Yes, managers may have busy roles but when you prioritize DE&I, candidates and employees alike take notice. It impacts your employer brand and reputation as an employer of choice so isn't it time to start thinking about DE&I more strategically?

Improving the levels of diversity within your company needs to be a multi-level approach. You need to adjust your hiring practices to help you reach and attract new candidate pools while also improving your internal culture to support those incoming workers. When you have a culture where all your employees feel safe and supported, engagement levels go up and with it, productivity. The bottom line is, DE&I matters and when companies make space for it, everyone wins.

"Diversity is about who is represented in the organization, whereas inclusion speaks more to who is respected, expected and integrated into an institution."

Vernā Myers[17]

Notes

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