Talent, Business, and Competition

A New World of
Diversity & Inclusion

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As the global leader in talent solutions, we take pride in what we do, connecting great people to great opportunities, helping businesses win and careers soar. Today, with $11.5 billion in revenues and 500+ global locations, Allegis Group and its network of specialized companies provide a full suite of complementary talent solutions that solves nearly every workforce challenge to empower business success while consistently delivering an unsurpassed quality experience. Our companies include Aerotek; TEKsystems; Aston Carter; Allegis Global Solutions; Major, Lindsey & Africa; Allegis Partners; MarketSource; EASi; The Stamford Group; and GettingHired.

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Top talent is scarce. Competition is intense. If a company does not make an effort to understand, attract, and engage diverse workers, it could miss out on great candidates, increased productivity, and many competitive advantages. In fact, in this age of constant disequilibrium, a company's very survival hinges on its ability to create an inclusive environment where diverse talent thrives.

As a critical business partner for companies of all shapes and sizes, Allegis Group has seen first-hand how the dynamics of a competitive marketplace and shifting demographics are reshaping the landscape of diversity and inclusion (D&I). Whether you are just now embarking on a diversity initiative or looking to mature your approach, you need an understanding of today's D&I opportunities and issues. With that in mind, we are pleased to introduce our latest report, "Talent, Business, and Competition: A New World of Diversity & Inclusion."

A Starting Point for Shaping a D&I Discussion

The report draws on research and expertise from the world of talent acquisition, two surveys of business and talent decision makers, and insights from leaders in the field today. Our goal is to provide an informed foundation that can help companies move the D&I conversation forward. While it is not intended as a prescriptive "how-to" manual, the report provides a valuable starting point for helping talent and business leaders:

- **Understand the issues.** Key challenges and considerations range from the basic influence of unconscious bias to the implications of leadership diversity, fair compensation, and the need for an inclusive culture.

- **Ask the right questions.** Is the organization concerned with superficial hiring quotas, or is it focusing on creating a diverse employee base and inclusive corporate culture? How can success be measured? How can hidden issues be identified and solved? An informed D&I mindset leads to questions, like these, that can lead to real progress.

- **Consider recruiting and talent management implications.** From job descriptions and sourcing tactics to promotions and fair pay, the possibilities for improving D&I span the entire candidate and employee lifecycle.

Drawing from Experience

Allegis Group has nearly 35 years of experience helping organizations tackle their most pressing talent needs, and building a diverse workforce is an important part of the equation. Through our expertise in recruiting and implementing diversity-focused talent and leadership strategies, we play a vital role in improving diversity in the workforce for clients across industries.

Experience has shown us that improving the way we identify, attract, and hire diverse workers does not happen automatically. It requires a conscious effort to reach out to a larger supply of quality candidates, remove the barriers to hiring, and ultimately create a more diverse employee population. But diversity is not just about recruiting. The way a company treats employees after hire also influences the views of job seekers and candidates. Do candidates see diverse employees rising in the organization? Can all workers be their authentic selves and apply their unique perspectives? These are questions of inclusiveness — the "I" in the D&I equation.

As a company, our commitment to a diverse workforce and inclusive culture is fundamental to our growth and success. D&I is a journey of continuous improvement. We have achieved many successes in building diversity into our own culture and in helping our clients bring their D&I goals to life.

We realize there is no single formula for success, but I believe the research that follows can be a valuable resource for exploring issues that should be on every talent and business leader's radar today. Enjoy the report!

Andy Hilger
President, Allegis Group

Why are companies growing more focused on increasing diversity in the workforce and promoting a more inclusive employee culture? Consider the potential impact on business:

+35% Competitive Advantage
The percentage by which ethnically diverse companies are more likely than their peers to financially outperform their industry medians[1]

$655 Billion in Profits
The amount potentially lost by companies with men-only boards[2]

$4.3 Trillion in Value
The amount the U.S. could add to its annual GDP by 2025 if women were to attain full gender equality in the workplace[3]

2.3 Times Higher Cash Flow Per Employee
The revenue advantage for companies with mature diversity programs[4]

1.7 Times More Innovative
The estimated likeliness of a company with a mature diversity program to be an innovation leader in its market (compared with the industry norm)[5]

67% Improved Candidate Attraction
The percentage of active and passive job seekers who consider diversity a factor when evaluating companies and job opportunities[6]

The Business Case

The shortage of skilled talent is here to stay, and it is causing real pain for talent leaders. In its survey of nearly 7,000 employers and job candidates from around the world, Allegis Group found that:

only 7.7% of employer respondents expressed **high satisfaction** with their talent acquisition function's ability to deliver in terms of speed, cost, and quality of results.

A significant portion of hiring managers were either somewhat or strongly concerned about issues related to attracting quality talent (23 percent), filling positions quickly (39 percent), and optimizing costs (27 percent).[7]

These challenges are no surprise as many companies struggle to keep up with the new demands of a rapidly changing workforce. Consider the forces at play. Large numbers of older workers are retiring while new generations embark on their careers. Innovation is leading to a high demand for emerging skills, and organizations must compete for talent against companies both inside and outside their industries. Finally, companies are adjusting to the new reality of a workforce that is more diverse than ever before.

Millennials (those born between 1982 and 2000) have now surpassed Baby Boomers as the largest generation in

the United States (83.1 million versus 75.4 million Baby Boomers), and 44 percent of Millennials are part of a racial or ethnic minority group. In the future, the worker population will grow even more diverse as those under five years old, of which 50.2 percent are from diverse backgrounds, enter the workforce.[8] Added to this mix is a growing portion of women, LGBT workers, people with disabilities, military veterans, and other groups in the overall working population. The result: the workforce of the future is already here, and it is growing more diverse every day.

Given the challenges of competition and talent scarcity, long-standing commitments to workforce diversity are now a high priority among many organizations. The intention of "doing the right thing" aligns with the business necessity of attracting diverse talent, improving retention, and maximizing the value and contribution of every employee.

As a result of the changing workforce and the challenges of talent scarcity, companies are rethinking their approaches to D&I. As a practice, D&I is no longer about compliance, quotas, or check-off-the-box activities; instead, it is about taking down the barriers that stand between employers and vital sources of scarce talent. It is about bringing to bear the full power of diverse, personal experiences and perspectives to understand customers, create value, and support innovation. And, D&I is about being prepared for a future where demographic shifts will fundamentally change workforce dynamics.

Big Challenges Stand in the Way

The business case for improving diversity in the employee population is compelling. Numerous studies indicate that a diverse workforce and inclusive corporate culture improves innovation, business agility, productivity, employee engagement, and talent attraction. And, leading companies across industries have publically committed to improving diversity as part of a business need and as a social responsibility. Unfortunately, many companies find that their ability to attract diverse talent remains blocked by long-standing issues that must be addressed clearly if they want to rise above lip service and achieve real progress. Those key issues include:

Diversity in Leadership

Diversity in the C-suite and board influences many of the strategic decisions an organization makes, and it reflects the opportunity for diverse employees to advance their careers at the company. Lacking leadership diversity, companies convey the presence of a "glass ceiling" that blocks diverse employees from attaining leadership roles. The issue is grabbing headlines. In Fortune 500 companies, women and minorities hold 31 percent of board seats, a low but slowly improving figure, with much progress still needed. Overall, nearly 80 percent of board members are male.[9]

Equal Pay

A 2015 study calculated the gender pay gap at nearly 20 percent.[10] Another study estimated the pay gap in median hourly earnings between black and white employees at 25 percent.[11] In an era when compensation discrepancies draw negative attention, organizations continually struggle to achieve parity. Addressing the pay gap is not a one-time event; it requires vigilance and a focus on eliminating the barriers and biases that lead to those discrepancies.

Accountability

In an Allegis Group survey of 500 senior talent decision makers, only 4.6 percent of respondents worked for companies that linked executive compensation to D&I objectives. Notably, Microsoft announced in late 2016 that it would tie executive bonuses to diversity goals after reporting the second straight year of declines in female employees.[12] Accountability begins at the top. Leading companies are taking action, and diverse candidates are looking to prospective employers for the level of change that accountability brings to the organization.

D&I in the Board and C-Suite:
Why are Companies Making Leadership Diversity a Priority?

Paul S. Williams
Partner, Major, Lindsay & Africa

Co-Leader, North America CEO &
Board Practice, Allegis Partners

In my career, I've had the good fortune to work with some of the best and brightest leaders in business. I've been a board member of four different organizations, and I've facilitated CEO, board of director, and general counsel placements for top companies across industries.

This experience has shown me that increasing diversity at the leadership level is not only the right thing to do; it makes business sense. Diversity at the top makes for a smarter, more agile, and more competitive organization.

I have also found that most company leaders agree with this idea. When clients come to me to help them fill a role for their leadership team, the majority will say that they would like to see diversity in the slate of candidates they consider. But beyond simply wanting to consider diverse leaders, companies are making leadership diversity a practical priority. The reasons for such change are compelling.

Reflecting the Marketplace
It would be a disservice for a company not to align diversity in leadership with the diversity of its markets and customers. A diverse leadership team brings a nuanced perspective that can better set the direction regarding how the company serves its customers today and how it innovates to meet changing needs of the future.

This need to reflect the marketplace is something I have personally addressed before. As executive vice president and chief legal officer of a Fortune 20 healthcare organization, I was part of a team that knew we had to reflect the makeup of the people we served. During my time there, I built out a legal team where more than half were women and half were ethnically diverse. This level of diversity was very important for a company that needed to reflect the market it served. The process took time, but with a conscious effort, we were able to make it happen.

Challenging the Status Quo
Diverse leaders bring new, and sometimes challenging, perspectives that are essential to leading a dynamic business. Obviously, there is no way that a diverse leader (or any leader) can walk into a boardroom without being the absolute best person for the job.

Whether we're talking about a CFO, general counsel, or CEO, the leader who is diverse is not in that position because of her diversity. She is there because the organization recognizes her as a credible expert in the field.

But that same leader can also open the door to better decisions by not shying away from difficult conversations. Whether considering a direction in products or services, a strategy for operations, a legal approach, or possibly the selection of other new leaders in open roles, the view of the diverse leader is critical. I've had the experience of being the first diverse person on a board, and I've placed diverse leaders who were in positions to be similar catalysts of change in other organizations.

Of course, it would be nice to walk into a diverse boardroom every time, but I'm also passionate about being that person who speaks up and pushes for change when change is needed.

Finding Diverse Leaders Outside the Comfort Zone
Companies can't be content to rely on blind luck to send diverse leaders in their direction. People naturally gravitate toward the networks of people they know. In leadership, that means a board without diverse members is likely to have candidates in line for succession who are not diverse.

Changing the makeup of a leadership team requires a conscious effort at building a diverse slate of candidates to break into that circle of opportunity. Companies can achieve this by evolving the way they identify high-potential employees for promotion, and they can also turn to someone like me to identify candidates from an entirely different network.

In both cases, an organization can bring in new faces and new perspectives for consideration. Over time, a consistent diversity of candidates will change the makeup of a leadership team.

Yes, Improving Diversity in Leadership is the Right Thing to Do
Finally, I often talk about the business value of building diversity, but we can't lose sight of the principles of leadership diversity. Improving the makeup of leadership teams is the right thing to do. Our clients believe in that principle, and I've lived that principle.

As companies look to their futures, they are looking for leaders who will guide them through complexity. A healthy mix of perspectives at the top provides the vision to do just that, and it makes the world a better place.

A New World of Promise: D&I as a Business Advantage

Together, the issues of leadership diversity, fair pay, and accountability persist in the world of D&I. These challenges impact the way prospective workers view a potential employer, and the organization that fails to address those issues will not be able to compete effectively for diverse workers or keep them on board.

Considering the business case and evolving expectations associated with D&I, it is no surprise that business and talent leaders face a compelling environment for change. But how can talent leaders re-think D&I? The conversation centers on four key areas:

Understanding Bias as a Root Cause of D&I Issues

A natural part of human behavior, bias affects nearly every decision we make. The influence of bias is felt across the talent acquisition process and in the employee experience. Bias often results in decisions or conditions that stand in the way of opportunity for diverse workers, even in the most culturally advanced, diversity-aware organizations. Fighting the negative influence of unconscious bias is the single common thread that underlies every D&I-related strategy and activity.

Getting Real About Change

Commitment to diversity is important, but how does an organization turn commitment into action, and, most importantly, action into results? The answer involves a solid diversity position, objectives for change, metrics for success, and executive support.

Building Diversity Through Talent Acquisition

Great recruiting brings diverse talent through the door. From job definitions to the sourcing and recruiting process, evaluation and selection, and in the use of technologies, the opportunities to reduce bias and improve diverse hiring span all aspects of talent acquisition.

Enabling an Inclusive Employee Experience

A positive employee experience is vital to attracting diverse talent. Leadership involvement, mentorship, training, employee resource groups, fairness in compensation, and opportunity for advancement are ingredients to an inclusive company culture.

Diverse Workers:
Who are We Talking About and Why?

In an ideal world, the term "diverse" would apply to everyone as each worker brings a distinct perspective, background, and skills to any organization. The sum of these unique contributions is a diverse workforce. In reality, however, the term typically applies to specific groups of people who have experienced discrimination (e.g., racial bias) or incidental conditions (e.g., no access to office buildings for people with disabilities) that created obstacles to opportunity.

D&I initiatives are aimed at eliminating obstacles and bringing people from these groups into full participation in the workforce. Understanding the opportunities these groups provide and the challenges they face is critical to building an effective D&I plan. Examples of key areas of diversity follow.

Gender

There are more women in the workplace today than at any time in history, and women (34%) are more likely than men (26%) to have earned a bachelor's degree by age 29.[13] Yet, female workers continue to encounter significant obstacles. In 2015, women earned 83 percent of what men earned.[14] In leadership, the gap is more significant, with women making up only 5.4 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs and 20 percent of Fortune 500 board members.[15]

Beyond pay and representation, women face issues of bias and harassment. High-profile stories such as Uber's internal sexual harassment investigations have shed light on a male-dominated culture in IT, but gender bias extends across industries. From unfair pay and limited career advancement to policies and practices that unnecessarily burden female workers, companies are recognizing a variety of contributors to gender bias.

A further complication for women is the supply of talent in some skills. Women with expertise in STEM-related fields are outnumbered by men, so hiring is limited by availability. At the same time, talent acquisition is also prone to areas of unconscious bias, with job descriptions and interview questions often slanted toward traditional, male-oriented responses.

Ethnicity/Race

A 2015 McKinsey study of more than 300 public companies found that "those in the top quartile for racial and ethnic diversity are 35% more likely to have financial returns above national industry medians."[16]

As organizations consider race and ethnicity in their D&I strategies, a few factors are important to note. For example, identities are evolving. The U.S. Census Bureau acknowledges established racial backgrounds as social constructs rather than as biologically defined categories, and the increasing self-definition of "mixed race" further reinforces the idea. Ethnicity, on the other hand, is based largely on the idea of a shared history, cultural, or geographical background (e.g., Latino or Mexican). This agreed-upon cultural reference point of ethnicity can make it a positive force in the workforce conversation without many of the controversies associated with race.

In facing the challenges of ethnic diversity, companies are elevating the conversation among employees by opening lines of communication and interaction, and, notably, shifting away from mandatory programs to focus more on providing voluntary resources. Likewise, talent planners recognize that views on ethnic diversity are influenced by a variety of factors, from social backgrounds to generational identity. Bringing the conversation to life is essential to promoting inclusion as companies foster understanding and acceptance among all employees.

On the talent acquisition front, ethnic groups are subject to bias in hiring, as well as limited representation in the supply of available talent. A conscious effort to target sourcing toward specific areas is essential for improving the representation of ethnic groups in the talent pool. Organizations are stepping up their sourcing to boost ethnically diverse hiring, and they are tracking results; nevertheless, there remains much work to do.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender (LGBT)

Numerous surveys reveal that LGBT workers continue to experience high levels of discrimination in the workplace, yet the LGBT population represents a powerful part of the consumer market and corporate workforce. According to one study, the buying power of the LGBT market in the United States is roughly $800 billion.[17] Likewise, their influence on the total workforce is significant as a company's treatment of LGBT workers also impacts the view of "allies," people who are not part of this group but agree with and advocate for the rights of LGBT persons in the community. One study found that, all things being equal, 72 percent of ally job hunters would choose a potential LGBT-friendly employer over a less supporting company in their career decisions.[18]

Care is needed in developing any strategy for the LGBT community because it comprises multiple, distinct groups of people with unique experiences, interests, and challenges. The transgender worker, for instance, will have a different perspective (and often experience a different type and level of discrimination) than gay, lesbian, or bisexual workers.

Military Veteran

In the United States particularly, veteran hiring represents a significant social need and business opportunity. The country affords veterans official Equal Employment Opportunity status, and the U.S. Department of Labor issues specific veteran hiring benchmarks for federal agencies and contractors based on the percentage of the workforce comprised of veterans. This benchmark has hovered roughly around seven percent since the guidelines went into effect in 2014 (6.9 percent in 2017).[19]

Veterans carry many of the scarce skills that are in demand today, ranging from leadership and management to engineering and many other STEM fields. Likewise, organizations look to veterans as having strong discipline, teamwork, and problem-solving skills based on their military training and experience. Not surprisingly, veterans in the U.S. enjoy a low unemployment rate.[20]

Despite the advantages veteran workers bring to the table, however, many organizations have difficulty hiring them because military job titles, skills, and experience do not translate into language that companies understand. Today, some public organizations are devoted to helping veterans navigate the transition to civilian careers, and U.S. companies are either engaging these organizations directly or implementing their veteran outreach strategies.

Workers with Disabilities

People with disabilities have been recognized as the largest U.S. minority group, comprising almost 50 million people with nearly $200 billon in discretionary spending power.[21] Globally, people with disabilities represent approximately 10 percent of the total population or 650 million.[22]

Workers with disabilities differ from other groups in the D&I discussion by the sheer diversity within the group. It is likely that physical disabilities come to mind for many, but the total range of impacts vary greatly from vision, movement, and thinking to learning, communication, mental health, and social relationships. At the same time, the negative connotations of disability are changing. For example, in some cases, people with Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) bring with them skills that surpass non-ASD workers, notably in the world of IT. Today, many companies such as SAP, Microsoft, and IBM are implementing programs for hiring what is known as "neurodiverse" talent with great success.

Age

By 2024, people over age 55 will include 41 million workers or roughly 25 percent of a total 164 million strong U.S. labor force.[23] Unfortunately, older workers are excluded through many types of bias, conscious or otherwise. For example, companies may rely heavily on campus recruiting to fill certain positions, automatically excluding older workers, or job descriptions may skew toward "entry level," cutting off interested older workers who may be considered overqualified.

Younger generations experience age discrimination, too. Today, such discrimination often occurs as employers take on widely held stereotypes of younger Millennial workers, or organizations tacitly seek out "mature workers."

Companies are taking several approaches to improve inclusion of both older workers and professionals across generations. Apprenticeships can be available to workers of all ages. Mentoring across generations helps drive knowledge sharing. Programs to bring workers back into professional life after extended absences are highly effective in connecting companies to the older workforce. Finally, education and awareness-building about generational differences can improve collaboration among workers.[24]

Cognitive Diversity and Thinking Style

Everyone has the potential to bring a different perspective to an organization. Drawing from a workforce with a diversity of thought and background, companies can assemble more effective teams, tackle difficult tasks, and drive innovation. While diversity of thought is an open area that does not lend itself to tracking and measuring that can be done with formalized diverse groups, an increasing portion of workers, most notably Millennials, value coworkers with diverse views. Removing bias from all aspects of the employee experience enables many workers with unique views and perspectives to advance. Moving forward, this category has the potential to lead the redefinition of what diversity and inclusion mean in the workforce.

Humans cannot survive without some of the tendencies that lead to bias. Google estimates that our brains typically process more than 11 million bits of information at a time, yet we can only consciously process 40. How are we handling the other 10,999,960 bits? Some of the information is ignored. Other data is distorted and generalized based on past experience.[25] Unconscious tendencies underlie the myriad actions we take without a second thought (i.e., "In the past, I pressed that button and the elevator door opened, so I will do that now"). The generalized reaction, based on experiences or pre-conceived notions, can lead to unconscious bias.

Unfortunately, the same instinct that enables us to make quick decisions and determinations based on what we think we know also causes us to behave in ways that unfairly affect others. Unconscious bias sneaks into job descriptions and interview questions. It can skew requirements toward male engineers and female nurses. It influences who is involved in a group, who speaks the loudest, who is heard the most, who sits in the back of the room, and who sits up front.

In effect, bias puts an unneeded thumb on the scale as employers weigh the decisions that affect every employee's experience.

Bias can sneak into every encounter we have and every word we say. It can make coworkers view women who are clear, outspoken, and confident as aggressive while the same qualities in a man earn him praise as being confident. It can make managers overlook performance weaknesses of workers they know and like while noting those weaknesses in the performance of employees they do not know as well. Small, unconscious influences of bias can add up quickly in a company culture with implications for the talent acquisition process, as well as the employee experience.

Talent Acquisition

In the world of talent acquisition, **bias has many ways of preventing a connection between a company and the potential new employee.** For example, a company may have difficulty finding diverse talent because its sourcing strategies overlook key venues for securing candidates. Consider a campus recruiting effort that targets a university with an under-representation of people from different backgrounds or ethnicity. Could the sourcing effort be expanded to include other universities? If the company understands the deficit and has established goals for improving the candidate slate, those goals will spur talent acquisition to expand campus recruiting.

Bias in talent acquisition also stems from how an organization defines a job vacancy. A diverse candidate may decide not to pursue a job opening because the company builds unconscious barriers into the role's requirements or descriptions. For example, some military veterans, while not overtly denied access to opportunities, have struggled to align the military language that describes their experience to corporate requirements for a role. Similar issues with biased job requirements leave qualified women and other diverse groups unable to take advantage of opportunities.

Unconscious bias on the part of a hiring manager can also influence candidate evaluation and selection. The prospective candidate, though qualified, may find himself being ignored or rejected at the interview and screening stage. This prejudice on the part of the hiring manager can result in a candidate slate that is skewed toward non-diverse talent, or it can result in diverse talent reaching the interview and evaluation stage and being rejected. Finally, bias can create a culture for a company that is not inclusive for diverse workers. An employer's poor reputation as an inclusive place to work will eventually be discovered by prospects, whether through word

of mouth, websites like Glassdoor, or other social media venues. As a result, the negative employer brand will drive away prospective talent. With fewer diverse candidates applying and fewer diverse candidates reaching the hiring stage, the supply of diverse talent will dry up for a company that does not manage acceptance and inclusion in its employee culture.

Employee Experience

Bias often stands in the way of an inclusive employee culture, leaving diverse workers to feel unaccepted. Employees who are not accepted are often overlooked. When performance reviews are conducted, a diverse employee may receive more critical scrutiny than her colleagues face. She may be excluded from projects. Diverse employees' suggestions may fall unheard, or they may be denied raises. Acceptance issues remain a critical symptom of bias in the workplace today, preventing some workers from advancing even when the potential opportunities are present.

At the same time, employees often face unintentional social and physical barriers that act as biases. For many, these issues create personal conflicts and questions, such as, "If I don't play golf, but my bosses do, will I have access to the conversations, interactions, and deal-making that may help me meet my goals? If I can't attend a corporate event or physically work in a certain location even though my contribution is recognized as valuable, will I have access to the people, knowledge, and networks I need to advance my career?"

Physical details matter, too. As an example, consider an accessible restroom located on the opposite side of a building from an employee with disabilities who would use it, or a private nursing room that must be shared, scheduled, and used by mothers returning from maternity leave. In each case, the location and availability of the facilities demand that the employee spend otherwise productive time accessing and using such facilities. Thirty extra minutes per day equates to three weeks of working time over a year — a significant disadvantage for an employee who may gain that time back through an adjustment of location or, in the case of the nursing mother, of a policy requiring the use of such a room.

Finally, a company's policies and practices can be biased against certain employees. Is the employee available or able to attend a leadership development program, or does childcare present scheduling conflicts? Will an employee who works remotely due to a disability be included in discussions that lead to an innovation project group, or will that person be overlooked even though his background and contribution could shape the outcome of the initiative? These are questions that can either lead an employee to advance her career or leave her overlooked when it comes time for filling a higher-level role.

D&I at Work: A Conscious Effort to Fight Unconscious Bias

Unconscious bias touches nearly all aspects of diversity in the workforce. Left unchecked, it damages employer reputations, reduces talent acquisition effectiveness, and stands between a company and a significant diverse portion of the workforce. Bias also causes companies to lose diverse workers without achieving full value from them. In other words, bias puts undue pressure on any company's supply of talent.

D&I programs seek to eliminate or reduce the effects of unconscious bias. Fighting unconscious bias requires commitment and action, but the results, in terms of improved diversity, an inclusive culture, and reduced pressure on the workforce supply, can yield a significant talent advantage for any company that commits to the vision.

Talent Strategy Perspective:
Fighting Bias

Rachel Russell
Executive Director, Corporate Strategy
& Marketing, Allegis Group

Building a diverse workforce and an inclusive culture is a priority for any forward-thinking talent function. As a business leader, I see challenges that a D&I program must address and the successes that can be achieved. Our companies have executed mentorship programs, built employee resource groups, tracked hiring and advancement of women and minorities, and created services that help our clients boost diversity in their workforces.

These activities have yielded significant results across our organization, but as any HR decision maker knows, it's easy to get lost in the details. For talent leadership, D&I is about one single mission: fighting bias in all its forms.

Finding the Face of Bias

Every challenge to becoming a diverse and inclusive workforce is rooted in bias. There is bias in evaluating diverse talent. Will Howard have more callbacks than Heidi for that programmer role? Will Jane come into the shortlist over John for that administrative assistant opening? Most of us make assumptions based on what we've seen. That's how unconscious bias works.

But bias isn't just about hiring decisions; it's also about access. Does the highly competent working mother who misses social events to take care of her family also miss out on networking opportunities to advance her career? How many potentially career-advancing hours in an employee's year otherwise have to be devoted to accessing a handicapped restroom or to finding nursing accommodations?

Bias is also found in our fundamental assumptions about people. The person who talks the most may seem more "up to speed" than the one who is awkward in conversation — even though the reticent employee may excel in delivering the best work. The one who is not a leader or fast thinker may be the most qualified person to execute some of the most difficult tasks a company faces. The woman who speaks directly and holds people accountable may be seen as controlling or intimidating while the man who does the same thing may be considered a confident, straight-shooting leader. These are all examples of unconscious bias that diverse employees of all backgrounds encounter every day.

A manager or business leader doesn't have to actively discriminate against employees to limit their opportunities. They simply have to overlook them. That is the nature of unconscious bias, and that's why simply fighting discrimination is not enough to change the conversation. We have to make a concerted effort to recognize and respect the differences each member of every team has to bring to the table.

Uphill Effort Creates Change

Because bias is often unconscious, it is easy to dismiss the shortcomings of a person or an organization as unintentional. But this is not acceptable because the result on the receiving end of that bias is the same — an obstacle to contribution, career development, and opportunity. For HR leaders, it may be tempting to depend on passive efforts to fight bias, focusing on voluntary training and education, or simply allowing employees to form social groups as they see fit. These are nice-to-have efforts, but real change in the face of unconscious bias requires conscious force and some level of discomfort.

In the United States, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the affirmative action laws that drove integration in society for 20-plus years after it were all uncomfortable. Today, an effort to measure hiring success in diverse groups, track promotion, or look at compensation will cause discomfort. That's the nature of any company initiative that drives change.

As HR industry leaders, we share responsibility with our colleagues and employees in the success of our D&I programs. Business leadership has to be willing to implement programs that feel uncomfortable. It must be able to ask questions that aren't easy to answer, and it has to be willing to look at metrics and measurements it may not like to see. That means a direct confrontation of bias through the words and actions of company leadership and a deep commitment to equality in compensation.

Overall, clear accountability to D&I through measurable results will make the difference between lip service and real impact. These are the fundamentals of change, and when fighting the very human and ever-present influence of bias, they cannot be shortcut or ignored.

Adversity makes change happen.

Between 1991 and 1993, IBM reported $16 billion in losses. Its internal structure was complex, deeply siloed, and resistant to change. The IT market was evolving rapidly, and CEO Lou Gerstner saw a culture that was out of touch with customers.[26] What happened next is well known. Business units were cut. Tens of thousands of employees were laid off. Old conservative cultural rules, from dress code to employee bonus calculations, were thrown out, and the company turned around under a solutions- and customer-driven market focus.[27]

Less well known is the fact that Gerstner made diversity a priority as part of that cultural turnaround.

In 1994, Gerstner kicked off an initiative that would reinvent diversity for a company that historically fought discrimination by simply ignoring differences within its workforce. He established diversity task forces to understand different parts of the workforce. He pushed the issue as a leader, making it part of conversations with other executives, touching on everything from flexibility for working mothers to succession planning, and he approached diversity as a business imperative, linking it to performance in market sectors.[28]

The strategy worked. By 2003, the company had significantly expanded its client base among women-owned businesses, as well as markets for Hispanic, Native American, Asian, and black people. Harvard Business Review reported that revenue for small and medium-sized businesses grew from "$10 million in 1998 to hundreds of millions of dollars in 2003."[29]

As IBM found, the motivation for improving diversity does not have to be regulatory compliance. And while everyone agrees that D&I is a vision for good, a moral imperative is not always enough to make it a priority. At its root, **moving the needle on D&I requires a change in the status quo, and it requires a force to make it a business imperative.** Gerstner saw a future that embraced diversity in employees and diversity in markets. It was part of a larger turnaround for IBM, and the result was a bottom-line impact that was part of a business transformation.

While companies do not need to be facing major adversity to re-think D&I, building a diverse workforce and inclusive culture requires real change. So, what does it take for a D&I effort that achieves impact? The answer is common to all successful initiatives: executive commitment, a clear position on D&I, and metrics for success.

Executive Commitment and Ownership

Talent and HR leaders can create D&I programs, but without executive support, lasting change will not happen. Through the commitment of C-suite leadership, organizations can give HR and talent organizations the backing to ensure D&I initiatives rise to the level of priority needed to affect change. Leadership must move the effort forward in three crucial areas: framing the story, raising the volume, and transforming expectations:

Framing the Story — D&I as a Business Issue

Today, building a diverse workforce and inclusive culture is a priority that can be linked to business objectives. Does the company's workforce reflect the diversity and interests of its markets? If not, how does the workforce need to change, and what impact should that change have on the organization's competitive capability? The answers to these questions are expected to come from C-suite leaders, as those questions connect to core business performance.


Raising the Volume — Making D&I "Unignorable"

There is no question that HR and talent management can build awareness for D&I and enforce policies that improve everything from diverse candidate recruitment to employee experience in an inclusive culture. However, executive leaders have a unique ability to make it personal. An executive leader can question managers on their flexibility for working requirements, succession planning, or compensation of diverse employees. That executive can create and approve the message that will live in communications to employees, investors, or prospective customers. Most of all, corporate leadership can set the goals, ask the questions, and create the mandate (and discomfort) needed to spur change.

Transforming Expectations —
From Nice-to-Have Activity to Measurable Result

Results-driven initiatives are based on clear metrics and objectives. Executive leadership can be held accountable for achieving change, whether that means a positive result in an audit of compensation across the employee population or in the percentage of diverse groups advancing to higher roles over a given timeframe. Working with HR and lines of business, executive leaders can determine objectives, communicate the vision, and push the activity that will achieve change.
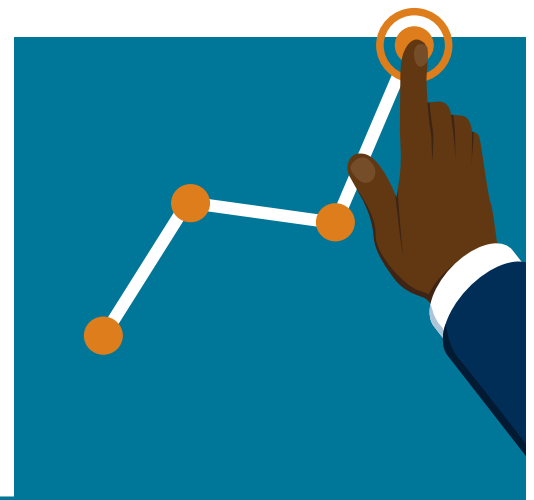
Executive View:
D&I Commitment Touches All Parts of the Business

Tanya Axenson
Global Head of Human Resources,
Allegis Group

Bring people together. Treat differences as strengths. Turn the unique contribution of every team member into an asset that contributes to the success of all of our employees, our clients, and the thousands of people we put to work every day. A diverse workforce and inclusive employee culture bring these principles to life, and it is the reason we embrace D&I as a core business priority.

As the global leader in talent solutions, Allegis Group knows the importance of D&I to our company and our people — and like most forward-thinking organizations, we have advanced our D&I vision significantly over the last decade. In the process, we have seen how a sustained commitment can influence every aspect of our business.

Workforce Diversity
A diverse workforce is reflective of the communities in which we operate, and our organization consistently focuses on expanding diverse hiring in all our markets.

Hiring among key diverse groups, including gender and ethnic or racial diversity, is trending up as a percentage of our total hires each year. Within our network of companies, our programs are consistently achieving diversity hiring goals. In some cases, we have surpassed those goals by a significant amount, including one program that has exceeded veteran hiring goals by more than 40 percent. Close to half of new hires are female, and our companies have been effective at meeting goals for hiring people from historically underrepresented minorities.

When it comes to building diversity in the workforce, we are proud of our commitment and progress but are never content with the status quo. Building a diverse workforce is a continuous journey of improvement that is essential to our business.

Workplace Success
The impact of our D&I commitment touches the workplace in which our people create value, find acceptance, and advance their careers. From employee councils that inform business strategy to resource groups that bring diverse employees together and make their voices heard, Allegis Group is leveraging some critical best practices in D&I to help bring our people together.

Our employee engagement surveys reflect the inclusiveness of our culture, with survey scores consistently rating five to 10 percent higher than high-performing industry rates for engagement among diverse employees. We've also seen inclusion programs boost performance in our companies, with one program reporting a rise in high-performing female sales staff by 300 percent and people from different backgrounds or ethnicities by 200 percent. These are positive results that speak to the link between an inclusive culture and improved performance for all employees.

Marketplace Influence

As a provider of staffing and talent solutions, we have a unique opportunity to influence diversity in the marketplace. After all, every one of our recruiters is in a position to advance the careers and lives of diverse workers with the skills our clients need. Presenting hiring managers with a diverse slate of candidates is essential to the work we do and to our ability to meet client needs. As an example, we recently helped a company achieve a fivefold boost in female hires for key roles due to our strategic talent support. When our clients do a better job of hiring diverse talent, they do a better job of accessing a larger portion of the workforce. It's a win-win situation for everyone involved.

Our influence on the marketplace also includes the communities in which we do business. Our companies provide support to a variety of venues, such as the Black Engineer of the Year Award, a great example of a sponsorship by a professional organization dedicated to advancing diverse workers. Likewise, support from our companies also includes exclusive staffing partnerships with three large STEM events that reach more than 10,000 participants, including our largest customers and their executive teams.

These examples of outreach reflect a D&I organizational approach that balances enterprise-wide consistency with local flexibility. Through our network of D&I councils, ambassadors from defined markets align with senior executive leaders for each region or area of the business. This approach enables each market to create situation-specific solutions to support their internal and external talent needs. As an outcome of this approach, our council members partner with more than 100 diversity organizations and associations and have engaged with over 2,000 of our customers at the local level.

A Broader Approach to Inclusion

Beyond our continued focus on diversity in the workplace, workforce, and marketplace, we also look to broadening our approach to inclusion. Organizations must make sure that they value a diversity of perspectives, thoughts, and opinions — and that people of different backgrounds are fully included in the progress of the organization. A variety of perspectives makes great teams even greater, and it will be increasingly important as the speed of innovation accelerates.

Great companies never give up on change or accept the status quo for any practice, and D&I is no exception. That's why we continue to evolve in a world that is more diverse, more inclusive, and more focused on the success of our people than ever before. Our clients and employees expect nothing less.

A Position on D&I

Because a D&I commitment requires communication and change management, a clearly defined position is essential. Standalone diversity committees and task forces are widely used to move the D&I vision forward. These groups represent all facets of the organization, not just senior leadership, and they are frequently granted authority to develop the diversity statement.

A D&I mission statement is the centerpiece for promoting diversity both internally among employees and externally in the marketplace. The vision sets the tone for how the company wants to improve. At the same time, the vision must be honest as it reflects both the company's accomplishments and the work yet to be done. Most importantly, the vision must be championed by executive leadership.

A Statement on **Diversity**

There is no single formula for structuring a position on diversity and inclusion, but one example is a framework that encompasses internal and external constituents in three general areas: workforce, workplace, and marketplace. The Allegis Group position applies this approach, organizing D&I principles that are relevant for today's global companies.

Growing Through Diversity

Because Allegis Group values differences and believes they make us a stronger organization, diversity and inclusion are embedded within every aspect of our culture and business strategy. We are committed to attracting and retaining qualified talent from diverse backgrounds and creating a work environment that values every individual for his or her distinctive skills, experiences, and perspectives.

The Core Pillars of our Program

Our Workforce

We seek qualified talent from diverse backgrounds at every level of our organization.

Our Workplace

We foster an inclusive work environment that provides everyone the opportunity to thrive.

Our Marketplace

We actively build partnerships with minority- and women-owned businesses and organizations.

Goals and Metrics

The cliché is true, "What gets measured, gets done." When it comes to D&I programs, relevant metrics are the key to ensuring accountability, sustaining and improving activity, and driving impact. But what exactly can an organization measure? The answer goes well beyond the traditional hiring quotas of the past.

While diversity can be measured through headcount, inclusion requires more focused attention. The good news is there is a wealth of data to be tracked, and much of that data can help companies pinpoint and address issues related to employee experience. A holistic look at metrics, and the data that can be collected across the employee lifecycle, can provide an accurate picture of where the issues lie (see chart, "Comparison Data Reveals D&I Strengths and Weakness" on the next page).

The types of data being collected will ultimately determine the direction of the D&I strategy. For example, tracking the proportion of different nationalities in a given market and location and comparing it to the company's employee mix can reveal gaps. This approach can be carried to all levels and types of diversity, including ethnicity, age, nationality, gender, veteran status, or disability. Input from legal counsel is important when collecting data, as laws vary greatly around the world. Armed with a strategy that captures D&I data and compares it to relevant thresholds in key areas of recruiting and employee experience, organizations can set goals that can be measured.

Together, the influence of executive support, a clear D&I position, and metrics for success can make the difference between a nice-to-have activity and a D&I effort that raises the bar on talent acquisition effectiveness and employee experience. With these pieces in place, companies can focus their efforts on applying best practices for building a diverse workforce and inclusive employee culture that is attractive to talent from all backgrounds.
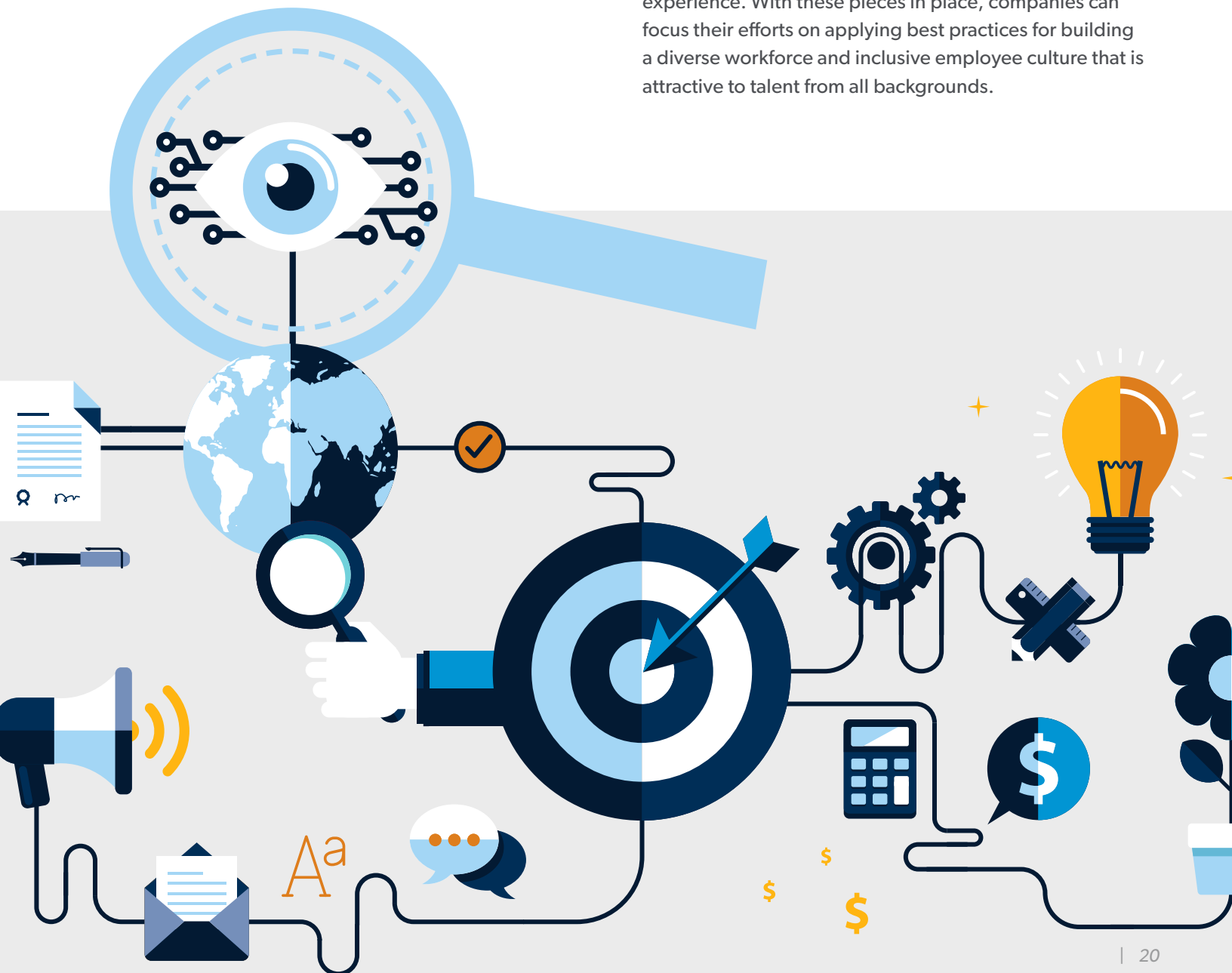
Comparison Data Reveals D&I **Strengths & Weaknesses**

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Stage of Talent Lifecycle & Potential Bias	1. Track …	2. Compare to …
Pre-Hire: Candidate Experience and Recruiting		
Sourcing — Job description and requirements	X applicants as a percentage of total applicants	X applicants as a percentage of available workforce for a given location or skill set (benchmark data)
Initial screening	Percentage of X candidate résumés submitted to the hiring manager for consideration	X candidates as a percentage of total applicants
Hiring manager review	X candidates as a percentage of candidates interviewed	X candidates as a percentage of total applicants
Final interview and decision process	X candidates as a percentage of hires for an open position	X candidates as a percentage of total applicants
Recruiting process	Survey scores for X candidate satisfaction	Survey scores for candidate satisfaction (total)
Post-Hire: Employee Experience and Inclusion		
Inclusion, employee experience	Survey scores for X employee satisfaction	Survey scores for total employee satisfaction
Employee experience — Bias in promotion, compensation, or development opportunity	Annual: (or other fixed-time period) X employee retention rate	Annual: (or other fixed-time period) total employee retention rate
Can identify the presence of a "glass ceiling" barrier to promotion	Percentage or number of X employees in each level of the organization (e.g., line, management, or leadership)	Percentage of X employees one level up in the organization (e.g., line, management, or leadership)
Can pinpoint where the "glass ceiling" barrier is within the organization	X employee promotions per level or type of role (e.g., line, management, or leadership)	X employee attrition per level or type of role (e.g., line, management, or leadership)
Pay inequity — Bias in management and promotion decisions	X employee compensation per level or type of role (e.g., line, management, or leadership)	Average employee compensation per level or type of role (e.g., line, management, or leadership)

Business and Talent Leaders Weigh in on **D&I Progress**

Results from the Allegis Group Talent Advisory* and D&I** surveys reveal that organizations are making progress on building diverse workforces and inclusive cultures. However, the gap between stated commitments and real action separates leading talent organizations from the rest of the pack.

The good news is that 72 percent of employers report that they have a D&I strategy in place. However, less than half identify D&I as a top priority for business success, bringing into question their true commitment to necessary D&I-related change.

Notably, work remains to be done in terms of defining clear and measurable goals for success. Only 37 percent of employers say they have diversity hiring goals, and only 31 percent have fair compensation goals to ensure D&I impacts the workforce as equitably as possible. Furthermore, 41 percent of employers state that "no one" in their organization has compensation tied to D&I goals, and 27 percent say they have no specific D&I practices in place.

Significantly, organizations that report the highest-performing talent acquisition processes (defined as having success gaining quality talent, in the right timeframes, while optimizing costs), are 38 percent more likely to cite D&I as a top priority. These organizations list the following tactics as the most effective in driving D&I initiatives:

88% **Leadership commitment**

56% **Employee training**

38% **Having an internal D&I team**

38% **Mentoring programs**

22% **Targeted hiring campaigns**

20% **Employee resource groups**

*The Allegis Group Talent Advisory Survey, a 2017 poll of nearly 7,000 hiring managers, talent acquisition professionals, and job candidates on key aspects of talent acquisition

**The Allegis Group D&I Survey, a 2017 poll of 500 senior HR professionals focused specifically on issues related to diversity and inclusion in the workplace

What does it take to execute a truly impactful strategy for acquiring diverse talent? Consider a great recruiter's constant to-do list:

- *Understand your talent markets.*
- *Understand your candidates' needs.*
- *Question the need for every job requirement.*
- *Search creatively.*
- *Always seek new talent sources.*
- *Take on a marketing mindset.*
- *Use technology.*
- *Embrace innovation.*
- *Be critical of your job descriptions and always be willing to revise.*
- *Understand how candidates see your company and always be willing to improve.*
- *Do not let flawed interview processes shut out great talent.*
- *Do not let flawed selection decisions stand in the way of great hires.*
- *Trust intuition but embrace the process.*
- *Be willing to measure, manage, and improve everything.*

These practices and principles separate the leaders in the war for talent from the rest of the pack. They are also part of the mindset that improves a company's ability to attract and hire diverse talent. Great diversity recruiting is, very simply, great recruiting. Yet, organizations often struggle to improve their effectiveness in securing diverse talent.

The issue goes back to the root of nearly all diversity challenges: **bias gets in the way**.

Without knowing it, even the best recruiting organizations can fall victim to bias. Bias is reflected in a recruiter's comfort with using talent sources that worked in the past even though there may be many other sources more suited to diverse talent. Bias is reflected in job descriptions with vague clichés, seeking "aggressive go-getters" and making those who do not describe themselves as such think twice about applying. Bias is built into unnecessary job requirements that shut out qualified candidates. Bias is felt when an interviewer asks questions that are not relevant to the job and in hiring decisions overly dependent on subjective ideas of culture fit or other intangibles. Bias is everywhere, and it stands between the talent organization and a supply of qualified diverse candidates a company needs to succeed.

The solution: get intentional about targeting talent and fighting bias. From job definition to sourcing, recruiting, candidate evaluation, and selection, opportunities to fight bias span the entire talent acquisition process.

Helping Great Clients
Recruit Diverse Talent

Kathy Clem
Director of Diversity Recruitment,
Allegis Global Solutions, an Allegis Group company

As a D&I strategy expert, I have worked with many clients who understand the need to improve workforce diversity but struggle with how to prioritize their challenges and create a tangible, results-driven strategy. Most business leaders know that simply focusing on headcounts and "check-the-box" activities is not an effective way to improve diversity in talent acquisition. Instead, a focused strategy is needed.

A sound plan is built on a framework that addresses common challenges and areas of improvement across the talent acquisition process. If you are a human capital management professional looking to get the diversity recruiting conversation off the ground, consider some of these potential areas of improvement and the subsequent questions that may arise.

- *Data and Analytics:* By identifying key metrics and objectives, and establishing the means of collecting data over time, critical trends and performance insight will become visible. Is your talent acquisition process built to measure success and pinpoint issues that can affect diverse hiring? Are you looking at each stage of the hiring funnel and outlining areas for improvement? Are you holding your recruiters accountable for attracting and delivering diverse slates to hiring leaders?

- *Branding and Marketing:* How you market your culture, opportunities, and business will impact the perception of your company in the eyes of current, past, and future employees. Do potential candidates view the company as a desirable place to work? Is your message to new candidates genuine? Does it speak to the needs of targeted talent? Can they see themselves excelling in your organization? Is your messaging deliberate and intentional?

- *Candidate Experience:* Each stage of the applicant's path is an experience that either builds or weakens the connection to the potential future employer. From accessing the career site to waiting for feedback or even greeting the front desk attendant at the facility, each part of the journey, no matter how small, influences how well a company attracts and engages diverse talent. Have you examined the experience your organization is providing to candidates through the whole process?

- *Job Descriptions:* Role requirements and the language used to describe the open job often convey biases that keep diverse applicants away. Have you considered best practices and technologies that can take bias out of the equation? Have you considered technology that assists with translating military experience?

- *Workforce Suppliers:* Today, many future employees enter the company as contractors or contingent workers. That means a solid diversity recruitment strategy should consider holding suppliers accountable for attracting and submitting diverse talent for consideration — even for contractors and freelancers. It should be a part of your Total Talent strategy. Does your diversity recruitment strategy address flexible talent and workforce suppliers?

- *The Recruiting Process:* From recruiter and hiring manager training to sourcing and recruitment marketing, an employer's talent acquisition strategy and capabilities should align with its diversity and inclusion representation goals. Your point for improvement will always be visible in the candidate funnel. Perhaps certain recruiters are not delivering diverse slates of candidates for consideration, or hiring managers are unfairly, but unconsciously, rejecting diverse candidates for positions. Perhaps your sourcers are looking in the wrong places. Do you have the visibility and knowledge to identify critical links in the diversity recruiting process?

Executing the Strategy

When it comes to developing and executing a strategy, clients can set high expectations if they work with a partner who is a trusted talent advisor. The relationship is consultative, focused on arriving at a solution for measurable D&I improvement. Elements such as training and education, accountability and transparency, clear goals, and a practical governance structure can make all the difference in building a strategy with a lasting influence on the business. At its very foundation, however, your D&I strategy won't be measured by the amount of activity it entails; it will be judged by its results.

Case in Point: Improving Senior-Level Female Hires by 500 Percent

Recently, a global financial services client turned to Allegis Global Solutions to increase representation rates of black, Latino, and female talent within the senior-level ranks of the organization. Our organization partnered with the client to integrate a dedicated diversity recruitment team into the talent acquisition process.

Included in the effort was a focused diversity sourcer embedded in the client talent acquisition team, use of advanced search tactics and technology, leveraging established networks supported with attendance at diversity recruiting events, a referral program, calendar management, and documented outreach activities. A diversity recruitment dashboard was established to track all activity, adjust the strategy as needed, and quantify impact. The year-over-year results included a:

500%
increase in female hires

100%
increase in representation of black candidates in the final interview slate for open roles

200%
increase in Latino representation at the business interview stage

As this example shows, the right talent partner should have the commitment and knowledge to advise on direction, evolve to address new needs, and take ownership of results, not just activities. For companies that forge the right relationships, the rewards are significant — a workforce advantage in a world of heavy competition and talent scarcity.

Job Requirements and Descriptions

Job requirements and descriptions are fertile ground for rooting out unconscious bias. Many job roles have long lists of requirements, and many of those requirements are overstated in their level of need. A hiring manager may view every requirement as part of a big picture, adding up to the classic notion of "the ideal candidate." The real effect of inaccurate, overstated requirements, however, is chilling. Each demand beyond the core job requirements is an opportunity to drive a potential applicant away.

Overstated requirements can have a real impact on whether diverse applicants apply for the role. For example, a 2010 study by Hewlett Packard found that, in many cases, women only apply for jobs where they meet 100 percent of the requirements for a given role while men will typically apply even if they only meet 60 percent of the requirements.[30] Hiring managers can improve results by questioning each requirement.

In its most recent Talent Advisory Survey, a poll of nearly 7,000 hiring managers, talent acquisition professionals, and job candidates around the world, Allegis Group found that:

Few hiring managers (28 percent) expect candidates to come fully equipped with necessary skills/experience.

More than half of candidates (53 percent) and 50 percent of talent acquisition practitioners who recruit them believe that the full set of requirements is needed.

Ask:
*Is every requirement **necessary** or is it a **nice-to-have** need?*

*Is the importance of each requirement communicated **clearly**?*

*Does the language used in job descriptions create **bias**?*

Language is also important. Studies have found that words used in descriptions and postings are naturally inclined toward either an aggressive or nurturing bias.[31] Is the applicant pool skewed toward male applicants rather than females? Perhaps the language of the requirements is playing a part. Compare two examples of the same requirement as reflected in an article by ERE Media[32] based on that study:

> *"Strong communication and influencing skills. Ability to perform individually in a competitive environment. Superior ability to satisfy customers and manage the company's association with them."*

> *"Proficient oral and written communications skills. Collaborates well in a team environment. Sensitive to clients' needs, can develop warm client relationships."*

Developing bias-free job descriptions requires time and commitment on the part of hiring managers. Training for recruiters and hiring managers can help. Likewise, companies can also use technology solutions such as those based on artificial intelligence (AI), which are making great strides in helping to identify and eliminate bias in written language. One example is Textio, an online application that analyzes job descriptions and highlights areas of bias and quality issues much like a spell checker. Another application known as Talent Sonar provides AI-driven intelligence to optimize unbiased recruiting in creating job requirements and descriptions, as well as résumé review, and support for the interview and hiring process.

Sourcing and Recruiting
From employer brand alignment to recruitment marketing, sourcing, and community outreach, companies have many opportunities to improve their ability to source and recruit diverse talent.

Aligning the Employer Brand
The employer brand is the perception of a company in the eyes of current and past employees, as well as potential, future talent. More organizations are focusing on strategy and messaging to improve their employer brand and its ability to attract diverse talent. But if reality does not match a brand message, the truth will eventually come out. Candidates can read reviews and learn the truth before they join a company, and, as employees, they will experience the reality of what it is like to be a diverse worker in the organization early in their tenure.

By establishing a specific improvement plan, demonstrating genuine progress, and conveying sincere commitment, even a company in the early stages of a D&I strategy can support a positive brand. A statement about D&I on a website or in the annual report is helpful, but the stronger message is one that shows inclusiveness through the perspectives and the stories of people in the organization. This perspective can also be conveyed through the views of diverse employees themselves in social media.

Recruitment Marketing

Today, a recruiter can still blindly post a vacancy on job boards and hope that qualified applicants will come to them, but this style of "post-and-pray" recruiting is unreliable at best. The best talent may not be actively looking for work. That talent may be presented with numerous alternatives, many of which are more accurately targeted toward their needs. Or, a job advertisement may fail to find its way to the places frequented by the potential applicant — the communities, websites, or social and mobile forums that cultivate large followings from people of common interests.

This is where recruitment marketing comes in.

A recruitment marketing approach treats candidates as targeted potential customers. The recruiter owns the customer journey and is expected to identify potential candidates, convey the company's promise of value, develop relationships with targeted talent, and bring them to the table as applicants. In the case of diverse talent, recruitment marketing begins with a critical look at the common wants and needs of a given group.

Diverse workers may have the same skills as the general population, but their career expectations and their online presence and activity may vary. They may frequent special interest websites or forums. Their preferred language may not be English. They may value family and stability instead of risk-taking and excitement.

As an example, veterans may respond well to messaging that celebrates the skills and qualities associated with their service while touching on the challenges of applying their service qualifications to meet civilian job requirements. Building a partnership with veterans' organizations and marketing toward veteran groups will help a company round out its veteran outreach. The same mindset applies to other diverse groups, whether ethnic or cultural groups, people with disabilities, the LGBT community, or others.

Technology also plays a role in recruitment marketing. New innovations are being brought to market that work with recruitment marketing platforms to automate communications to diverse talent communities. Together, an increased understanding of talent, focused outreach and messaging, and the use of technology make recruitment marketing an essential part of talent acquisition for diverse workers.

Sourcing and Recruiting: From Advanced Digital Search to Physical Grassroots Networking

Sourcing is still very much an art, as well as a science. Great sourcing happens in the online world of social media, Boolean searches, and emerging AI-based tools, and it also takes place in traditional areas such as campus recruiting and networking through current and past employees.

Digital Search

Many, if not most, potential high-quality candidates are not actively seeking new jobs, so a sourcer must look beyond the obvious locations to identify such talent. In the online realm, a sourcer's Boolean search string can probe the well-patrolled venues of ethnic-, gender-, or minority-focused websites and job boards, or the searcher can get creative and reveal targeted candidates through indicators of language and networks.

For example, in targeting female talent, a sourcer may look for candidates by their places of education, which may be all female schools, combined with a focus on specific skills and experience. In other words, a good sourcer has the power to experiment in searching a venue, whether LinkedIn, a job board, or an organization's own applicant tracking system (ATS).

Campus Recruiting

Campus recruiting can be a reliable source of diverse talent. While job fairs and onsite recruiting for particular roles can yield results, smart talent organizations often take a longer view. They are supporting campus recruiting with active relationship building, partnering with traditional minority schools such as historically black colleges and universities through sponsorships, internships, and other programs.

This approach has been shown to improve the pool of diverse candidates available for recruiting, and it can be applied to institutions for nearly any diverse group.

A commitment of time and effort will be needed to fully cultivate that relationship. The effort may be significant, but it can yield a lasting source of quality diverse talent.

### Networking Current, Past, and "Almost" Employees

Smart recruiters already understand the power of networking as a source of great talent. According to one survey cited on LinkedIn, nearly 85 percent of jobs are filled through networking.[33] Employee referrals typically result in high-quality candidates as the employee likely has reason to believe that the role and the referred candidate are a match. MasterCard claims that its $3,000 per hire referral program has paid for itself nearly tenfold in terms of reduced recruiting and retention costs.[34]

Past employees are also great referral sources. Likewise, runners-up or silver medalists who applied for openings but did not get hired in the past may be the right hire for certain jobs in the future. Follow-up, fair treatment, and communication are all essential to maintaining contact and building networks. As any talent practitioner knows, these are not just good tactics for diversity recruiting; they apply to all roles and all types of candidates.

Community Involvement

Effective diversity recruiting requires an understanding of the communities in which an organization does business. Community outreach can help to improve that understanding while also helping those in the community, including potential candidates and customers, to better know the company. Organizations for women, ethnic or racial groups, veterans, or people with disabilities all provide access to diverse talent at the grassroots level. Types of community participation include:

- *Speaking and Participation in Professional Organizations:* Professional organizations at local and national levels provide a rich opportunity for companies to share their knowledge, gain visibility, and network directly with potential candidates.

- *Sponsorship:* Companies may opt to sponsor certain groups, whether in support of particular events or as a general sponsor. Such support can open the door to speaking opportunities, marketing, and other types of outreach to particular diverse groups.

- *Volunteer and Outreach:* Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) programs have long played a role in connecting companies to their communities, touching both potential customers and future talent. Teaching, mentorships, youth programs, and other activities all provide great opportunities to build an employer's reputation among diverse communities. Well-executed CSR programs build awareness about the company to talent from diverse backgrounds, and they provide an effective venue for engaging employees to participate in the community.
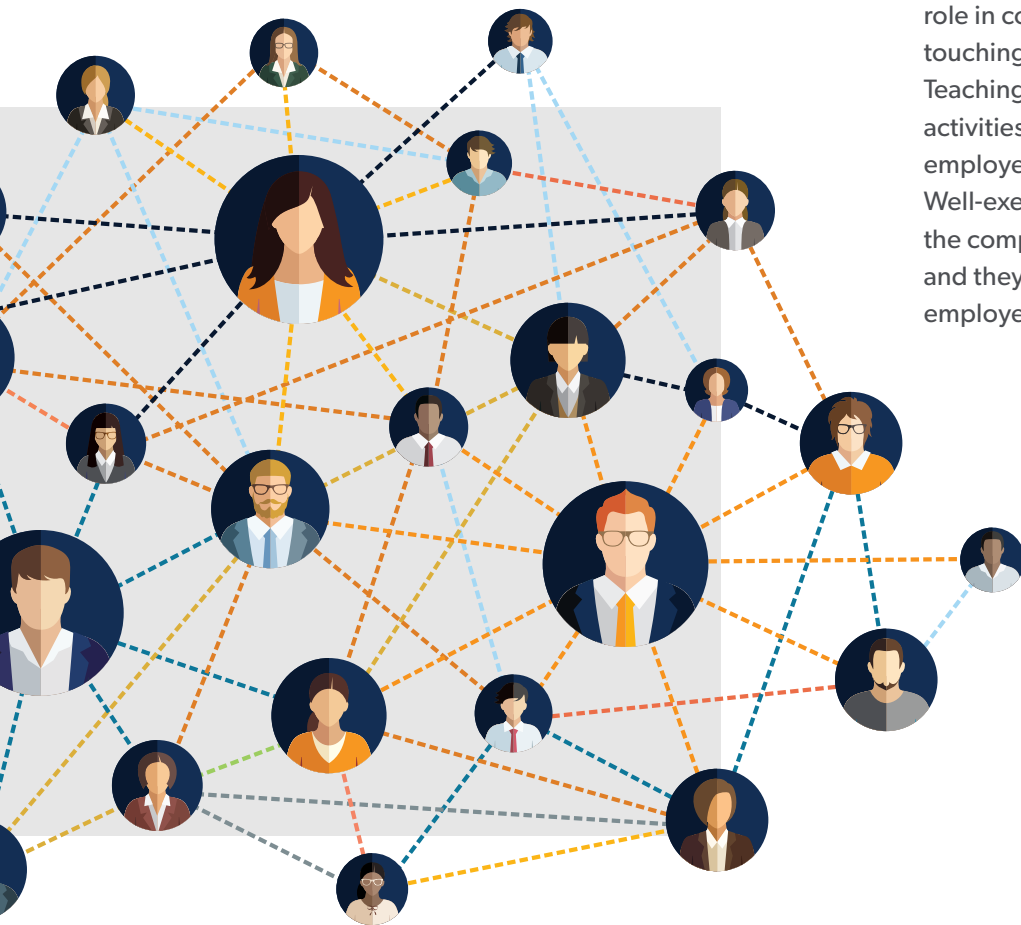
Candidate Evaluation and Selection

There are many opportunities to reduce bias within the evaluation and selection process. Typically, the better a company performs at ensuring consistency and objectivity, the more fair the outcome for all applicants. Examples of improvement areas include the following.

Blind Recruiting

Two decades after symphony orchestras in the United States adopted blind auditions (i.e., where judges could hear, but not see, auditioning musicians) the percentage of female musicians in orchestras rose from six percent to 21 percent.[35] In the corporate world, one study found that job seekers with ethnic sounding names needed to send out 50 percent more résumés than those with white male names and comparable qualifications before receiving a callback from an employer.[36]

There are ways to level the field for diverse and non-diverse applicants. For example, companies can strip résumés of any information that might identify a candidate as belonging to a specific group (e.g., gender, age, ethnicity, or any other factor) prior to review. Organizations like Deloitte and BBC have adopted this tactic, and new technologies are automating the editing of candidate information to present anonymous candidates. Talent planners should expect continued innovations to hit the market that will enhance the effectiveness of blind recruiting.

Interview Process

The goal of the hiring process is to arrive at a decision for the best-fit hire based on apples-to-apples comparisons of prospective candidates against defined parameters. Traditional interviews are conversations that vary greatly for each manager, potentially undermining that apples-to-apples review.

To help reduce bias, the interview itself can be restructured for consistency, ensuring every candidate has a chance to answer a common set of questions with scoring parameters that keep the focus on compatibility with job requirements. Scoring a respondent's answers to each interview question prior to moving to the next question can result in a more objective and detailed review, and evaluating sets of candidate responses one question at a time (i.e., all answers to question one, all answers to question two, etc.) also keeps the focus on the quality of each response.[37] These tactics offer a few ways to improve interviewing, but regardless of an organization's approach, improving results requires a conscious effort at minimizing the variations.

In addition to adjusting how interviews are conducted, an organization can improve fairness by ensuring that a diverse interviewer is part of the process. A diverse interviewer brings a perspective to the process that can help reduce bias in both the interview itself and in subsequent evaluation and selection.

Diverse Interviewees

In 2002, a study of the National Football League (NFL) found that 70 percent of the players, but only six percent of head coaches, were black. In 2003, a committee led by then-Pittsburgh Steelers owner Dan Rooney developed a requirement that at least one minority applicant be interviewed for any head coaching vacancy.[38] In the 71 years between 1921 and 2002, there were seven minority head coaches in the NFL, and in the 14 years since what is now known as the "Rooney rule" was implemented, there have been 17. Facebook implemented its own version of the Rooney rule in 2015, requiring managers to consider "at least one under-represented demographic for every job opening."[39] Likewise, Pinterest has implemented a policy requiring that a woman and minority be interviewed for all leadership roles.[40]

More recently, studies have found that one diverse candidate may stand out in an interview, calling attention to their differences and increasing the unconscious biases at play. In fact, researchers found that the chances of hiring a woman are 79 times greater if there are two women in the candidate pool instead of one, and 194 times greater if there are two minority candidates.[41] While adding two diverse candidates to the pool may be impractical in many situations, the findings are drawing attention to the issue in talent acquisition.

Assessment

As part of the candidate evaluation process, assessments can help organizations discover great talent, regardless of diverse background, that is often hidden by traditional biases. Whether testing candidates for skills, aptitudes, or behaviors, assessments can be effective tools for helping to predict a candidate's suitability to the unique demands of a role.

While assessments are created to help provide an objective view of the candidate's abilities and behavioral tendencies, biases can also find their way into the process. Questions that are asked in pre-employment screening tests may provide an unfair advantage to certain candidates over others. Major assessment providers have the expertise and resources to minimize bias in the tools they provide — an advantage over in-house development of pre-employment tests. Likewise, use of multiple assessments, where practical, reduces overdependence on one approach and minimizes the influence of biases in any one assessment.

Training and Change Management

Bias cannot be eliminated by training, but education can help boost managers' understanding of the issues at play and help to ensure they embrace changes in the interview process. Constant communication and change management is important here, and a good talent partner, whether an in-house HR expert or external talent solutions provider, can work hand-in-hand with managers to foster their participation in the change.

Culture Fit

Words shape mindsets when evaluating candidates, and examining how we talk about candidates can yield opportunities to eliminate bias. For example, many organizations are replacing the idea of "culture fit" in their evaluations. The term is meant to indicate intangible ways an employee may work well in the company, but it can also be a touch point for unconscious bias. Facebook has eliminated culture fit from its evaluation criteria. Pandora has replaced the term with "culture add," indicating that a candidate can have something unique to offer to the workforce other than simply "fitting in."[42] In both cases, organizations have taken an active look at a long-standing evaluation process and found a new opportunity to improve.

Use of Technology

The advent of AI has given rise to applications that can detect and correct bias in job descriptions. Likewise, applications in video interviewing, such as HireVue[43], are stripping bias from the interview by providing on-demand, structured questions that are consistent for every candidate. This feature enforces conscious consideration into developing questions for the position, and it ensures that every interviewee has a fair chance to address the questions that matter.

Measuring Results

Objectivity is the enemy of bias, and nothing brings to bear the power of objectivity better than data and performance measurement. Perhaps as much as any other point in talent acquisition or management, the hiring or promotion decision is the most effective for enforcing D&I accountability. How diverse is the slate of candidates considered for review? From that slate, how many diverse candidates are being hired? The data will tell the story.

Diversity Best Practices Make All Talent Acquisition Stronger

Whether talking about continuous measurement and improvement, or applying bias-reducing tactics, the principles of sound diversity recruiting will improve all aspects of talent acquisition. The result is not only good for talent, but it is also good for business, expanding the talent pipeline by reaching out to diverse workers with the skills and experience to succeed.

Technology View:
Bias-Killing Innovations Are Taking the Stage

Jonathan Kestenbaum
Managing Director, Talent Tech Labs

As part of its commitment to innovation, Allegis Group is a major investor and supporter of my organization, Talent Tech Labs (TTL). We are the only incubator and co-working space hyper-focused on technological development in talent acquisition. At TTL, staying ahead of innovation, both within and beyond our portfolio startups, is a core part of our mission, and we're seeing advances on many fronts, including D&I.

We're in an exciting time for innovation, particularly with emerging technologies that address the challenges of unconscious bias. Technology innovation can go a long way toward reducing bias associated with language and communication, as well as increasing the data-driven aspects (and therefore reducing subjectivity) related to talent decision making. Consider the examples of innovation concepts now in play across key areas of talent acquisition:

- **Skills Assessment:** Solutions can now administer anonymous skills-based challenges to evaluate candidates on their work performance rather than their background.

  > GapJumpers is a technology platform for employers to conduct blind auditions in hiring. Initial screening is based on applicants' performance in specific skills or "audition" type tests, helping to avoid biases associated with résumés, initial interviews, or other early areas of the recruiting process.

- **Blind Screening:** Software is now available that hides details on a résumé regarding a candidate's sex, ethnicity, age, socioeconomic status, and educational background.

  > Blendoor is a hiring technology that reduces unconscious bias by hiding data that's not relevant and highlighting data that is.

- **Employer Branding:** Sites are now highlighting and aggregating company profiles that showcase a firm's commitment to diversity initiatives and a culture of inclusion.

  > New communities or niche sites are emerging that are dedicated to specific diverse groups. InHerSight, for example, is a forum similar to Glassdoor, where women rate their experiences working for various companies.

- **Job Advertising:** A number of automated tools and services ensure employers attract diverse applicants through text, images, and videos as a part of their job descriptions.

  > Textio is a simple tool that analyzes job descriptions and instantly identifies terms and phrases that can be improved to boost candidate responses and attract a larger, more diverse candidate pool.

- **Matching Systems:** New platforms are connecting candidates from diverse backgrounds to companies looking to hire diverse talent.

  > Jopwell connects diverse professionals and students to top companies. Entelo uses a proprietary algorithm to help companies find candidates from underrepresented groups based on gender, ethnicity, and veteran status.

The Evolution of D&I-Enabling Technology

Today, many new applications are rapidly evolving as niche technologies develop to cover larger portions of the recruiting process or get acquired by talent platforms as part of their broader solutions. A prime example of the changing technology landscape is the re-brand of Unitive. Formerly focused on improving job descriptions and advertisements, the company now brands itself as Talent Sonar, a technology that addresses bias across the entire hiring cycle.

For any talent planner, the array of available technologies will continue to change, and it's important to note that technology in the space will never completely eliminate all aspects of bias. Consider that even AI-driven solutions are subject to "algorithmic bias" or a slant in the output based on the weaknesses of human training of the technology. Even considering the rate of change and limitations of D&I-focused technologies, the space provides great promise, and organizations can expect to see many of the applications in wide use across platforms in the future.

" Diversity is being invited to the party.
Inclusion is being asked to dance. "

Verna Myers | Author, Consultant and Cultural Innovator[44]

As soon as a candidate says "yes" to an offer, the employee experience begins.

That experience can start with the new employee wondering if her compensation is fair because she was not inclined to ask for more. It can start with silent stares from people in the office or warm outreach and greetings. It can start with confidence that this job is an opportunity to advance a career or merely a simple hope that the job works out. The experience grows every day. The culture of the company will either make the diverse employee feel included as a part of the organization, or it will make the employee feel separated from social interaction and advancement opportunity.

This is the inclusion part of the D&I landscape. Inclusion falls into the post-hire world of talent management, but the subject cannot be ignored by talent acquisition or business leadership. If inclusion does not work, the employee will eventually leave (creating a talent acquisition burden), or that employee will contribute less value to the organization (a core business performance problem).

At the same time, inclusion goes a long way toward shaping an organization's employer brand and its ability to attract the talent it needs. Decades of diverse hiring and affirmative action quotas in the United States have yielded hard lessons about the relationship between employers and the diverse employees they hire. The most important lesson is simple: without being asked to dance, the guest is likely to leave the party early. Without inclusion, diversity does not matter.

With that in mind, companies are taking notice of the inclusion issues that can impact talent acquisition. These issues encompass three essential areas of the employee experience: compensation, employee engagement, and career advancement opportunity.

Compensation

According to the Pew Research Center, women in 2015 earned approximately 83 percent of the pay of their male counterparts.[45] Another report by Pew found that "black men earned the same 73% share of white men's hourly earnings in 1980 as they did in 2015, and Hispanic men earned 69% of white men's earnings in 2015 compared with 71% in 1980."[46] Likewise, a 2016 study of law firm partner compensation found that compensation for male partners was 44 percent higher than for female partners.[47] The pay gap is one of the most visible D&I challenges companies face today, with gender equality issues gaining much attention in the media. While many organizations are acknowledging discrepancies in compensation, fixing the issue is not easy.

For example, in 2015, global customer relationship management (CRM) software provider Salesforce audited its compensation for male and female employees and found a $3 million gap. The company announced that it would invest $3 million to fix the gap. Two years later, the company repeated the audit, finding that the same gap had reappeared. Once again, the company would spend $3 million to address its pay gap.[48] Salesforce generated goodwill based on its transparency and commitment to address the gap, but the story shows that a lasting improvement in pay equality demands a focus on both the culture behind the pay disparity and continuous monitoring of the pay disparity itself.

Addressing the Culture Behind Pay Disparity

Raising the bar on compensation fairness begins with a look at the causes. These causes may vary for different groups, but using the gender gap as an example, one finds that some pay discrepancies stem from a combination of bias in role expectations and inconsistent approaches to compensation discussions and negotiations.

Eliminate Bias from Role Expectations

Gender bias in performance management, job expectations, and promotion dramatically influences the advancement opportunity for women in the workforce. Female employees may receive overly critical reviews from male managers. They may face assumptions by male managers about their ability to handle a new advanced role, and they may be overlooked for the work being done in current roles. In this way, the issues of career advancement and fairness in compensation are often intertwined.

Unrecognized work in a role may lead to "scope creep" of workload — with the female employee, for example, doing the work of a higher-paid, director-level role while being paid at a lower level manager role. All of these issues require a program of periodic audits that link job roles, requirements, and compensation for consistency across the organization.
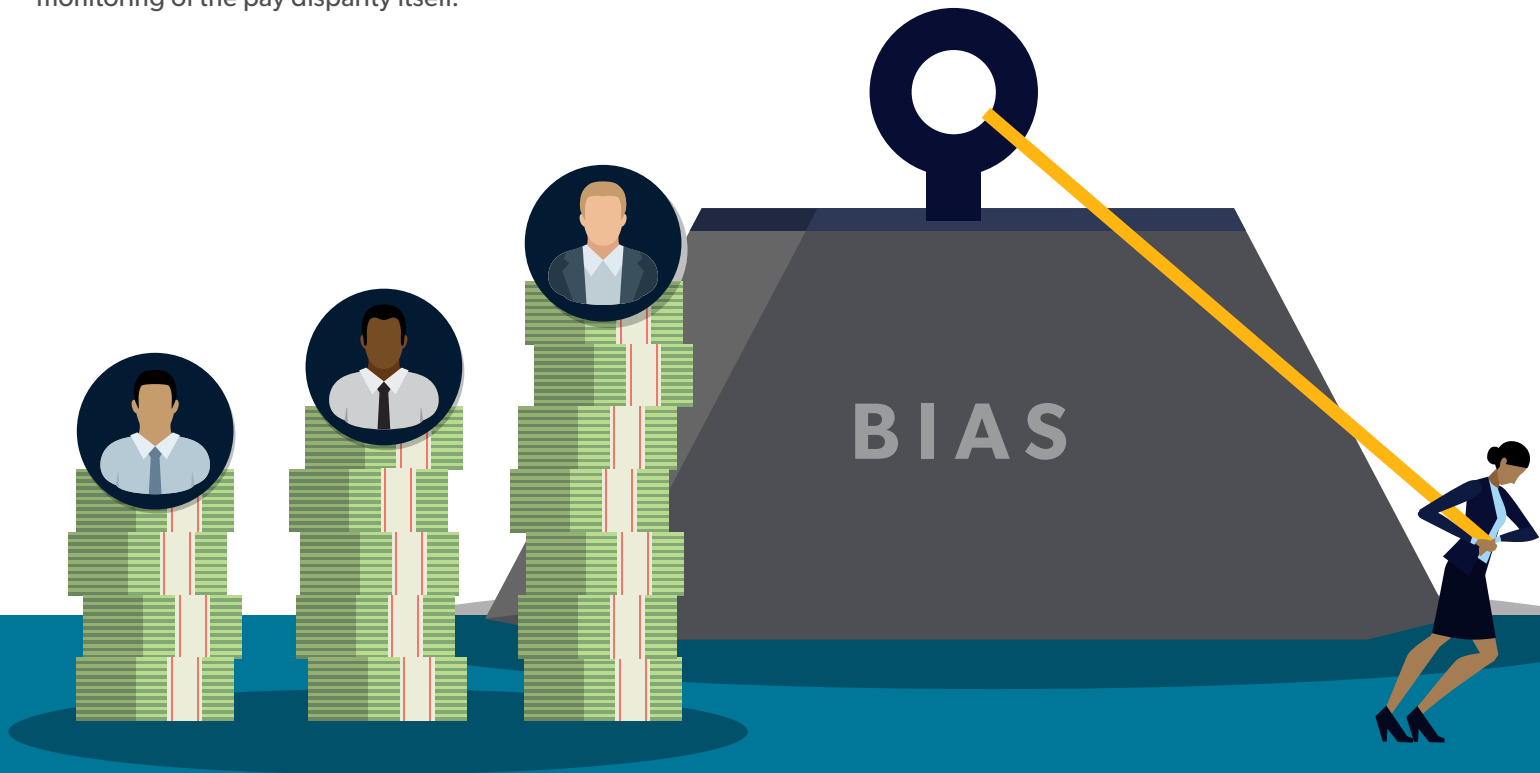
Enable Objective and Consistent Role and Compensation Discussions

Another factor in the pay disparity issue is a reticence on the part of diverse employees when talking about compensation. According to one research study, men were nine times more likely than women to ask for more money.[49] Another study found less of a gap in asking for money, but when it came to salary negotiations, four percent of women succeeded in obtaining more money while 15 percent of men succeeded.[50]

In either case — whether a diverse employee does not ask for higher pay or an employer refuses to raise a salary — the end result is that the pay gap expands. Over time, given the confidentiality of salary discussions and negotiations, the gap can be unwittingly allowed to increase unchecked and unnoticed. This problem has led some organizations, such as online social content forum Reddit, to eliminate salary negotiations altogether. Others, including a variety of smaller tech companies such as Buffer and SumAll, are making worker pay transparent across the organization. In these cases, all employees know how much other employees earn. Transparency alone will not solve pay disparity issues, but it will point them out and create urgency on the part of leadership to address them.

Directly Addressing Pay Disparity by the Numbers

As the Salesforce example showed, identifying pay gaps and correcting them will not necessarily yield long-term results if the cultural factors behind those gaps are ignored. Nevertheless, directly tracking compensation and opportunity (and fixing the gaps) is essential. The process involves key steps to boost visibility and take action, including:

Auditing Compensation Rates

Conducting an audit to reveal apples-to-apples comparisons of job roles and pay rates is not a simple task. Factors include consistency in role definitions and workload, and corresponding titles and compensation rates. A thorough and objective audit, conducted at regular intervals (commonly two or three years) is central to achieving transparency and revealing discrepancies.

Correcting the Gaps

Based on the audit results, organizations may find they need to directly raise salaries in order to balance pay. Beyond the salaries themselves, other considerations such as job categories and employee classification in relation to those categories may need to be adjusted. For example, a female employee may be stuck in a job title (e.g., director) that limits her pay range while a male doing similar work may find himself in a different category (e.g., senior director or vice president) that commands a higher compensation range.

Measuring and Monitoring Results

There is no one-time fix for pay inequality. Periodic audits ensure a continuous view into the issue, and if an organization is to benefit from improved employee engagement, a policy of sharing results can help build trust. Compensation is a delicate subject, but a positive impact can be made through a communications approach that is honest (with legal guidance) and reinforces the organization's commitment to fair pay.
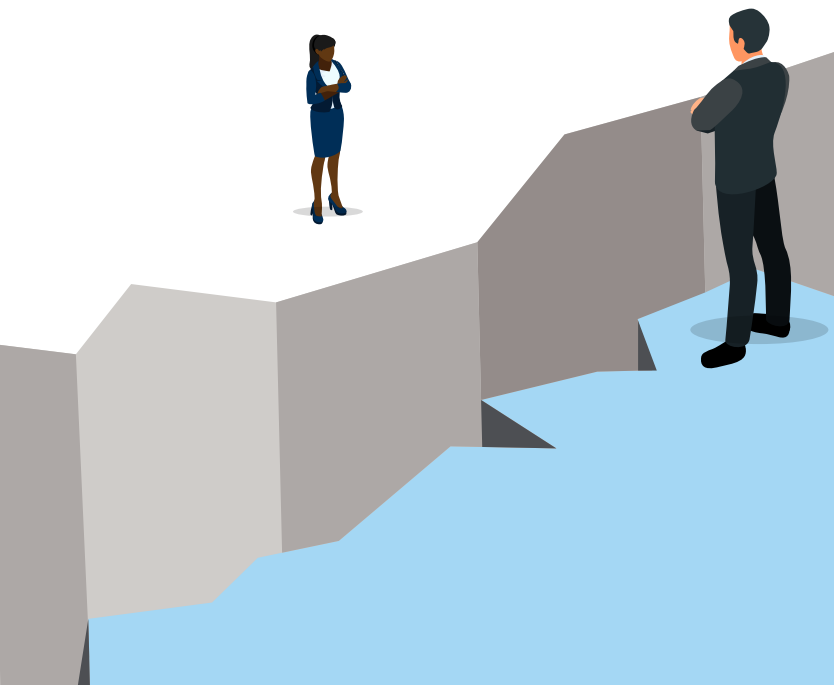
Engagement

Employee engagement makes business sense. According to a Gallup study, employees who are engaged with their work are 17 percent more productive than those who are less engaged. Improved engagement can reduce turnover rates by up to 59 percent. Profitability in highly engaged businesses averages 21 percent higher, and absenteeism is 41 percent lower than in companies with less engaged workers.[51]

Employee engagement boosts productivity and accelerates innovation. It creates a culture that can strengthen a company's employer brand and improve candidate attraction. And, in the case of diverse employees, inclusiveness is a key contributor to engagement. Today, talent and business planners benefit from the availability of expertise and proven best practices that can help them create a workplace that is highly inclusive. Examples of engagement strategies span all aspects of talent management, from communication and training to the establishment of employee resource groups and mentorship programs.

Communication

In shaping an inclusive culture, a consistent and steady stream of communications demonstrating and celebrating aspects of diversity in the company can play a vital role. For example, information and media highlighting what life is like in other parts of a geographically diverse organization can help cross-cultural and cross-border stakeholders become familiar with other cultures within an organization.

Generally, these types of communications are focused on the people rather than the business. They may be standalone articles or videos, or they can be included as part of internal newsletters or other communications. Complementing the outward communications pieces, companies may also want to establish dedicated diversity Intranet pages where employees can stay up-to-date on community events and news. Together, the dedicated site and internal communications help connect workers with others they may not know within the organization. The key to success in this area is patience. People read and retain a fraction of the news presented to them, so it is important to stay persistent, and consistent, in developing diversity-related communications.

Training

Education, in the form of presentations, special speakers, or other events, can be helpful for building awareness and fighting bias among all employees, but beware of mandatory training. In a study of more than 800 U.S. companies, Harvard research found that after five years of compulsory diversity training for managers, organizations saw declines in the numbers of some demographic groups, including black women and Asian-American men and women, with no improvement among white women or other minorities.[52]

A more effective approach is to provide less formal training in the form of "lunch-and-learn" sessions or workshops, focusing on different aspects of D&I. In some cases, these sessions may be conducted by HR or other corporate experts, but they can also feature speakers from diverse groups, leadership, or the community. These types of sessions break the training mold and instead highlight diversity as a positive experience rather than an obligation.

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)

Also known as affinity groups, employee networks, or business resource groups, ERGs are devoted to bringing together workers of common backgrounds, along with supporting allies outside of their group, to share and address challenges, raise awareness, and contribute to the business. ERGs can help refine how an organization reaches out to talent. They can also help new hires adjust quickly and become engaged as part of the organization.

Related to ERGs are employee councils. These groups may be smaller than ERGs and focus more on being the voice of the diverse group to the executive team. Both ERGs and employee councils can identify issues, contribute to strategy, and act as watchdogs for identifying issues and improving inclusiveness. ERGs may also conduct community outreach that helps to strengthen the organization's employer and customer brand.

Keys to an effective ERG include an executive sponsor, a charter with established goals, regularly scheduled meetings with senior management, and measurement and tracking of members in areas such as promotion and engagement. The executive sponsor helps to raise the voice of the ERG, but that sponsor is not the leader of the group. Leadership should come from within the group and foster grassroots connections with the employee population.

Within the Allegis Group organization, first-hand experience with ERGs has shown that the concept delivers value on many levels. One notable program includes operations for five major ERG categories (e.g., women, multicultural employees, military veterans, the LGBT community, and next generation employees), with each ERG category spread across location-based branches to create 100+ groups. Each of these groups has its own leader, membership, and related activity. Impact from the effort has been significant:

- A 2017 survey found that **87 percent** of ERG members felt more engaged at work due to their participation.

- Of the ERG regional leaders, **75 percent** have been promoted and **35 percent** have completed an "emerging leader" program — a great indication of ERG leadership as a training venue for advancement.

- In one year, the number of high-performing female sales staff jumped **300 percent** and people from historically underrepresented minorities jumped **200 percent**.

These types of results point to the effectiveness of the ERG concept in driving performance and creating future leaders from the diverse employee population. At the same time, ERGs do not have to be limited to people from the groups they represent. Allowing universal access can be beneficial. This approach is important in a culture where allies of the needs of a certain group are also engaged. For example, support of the LGBT community by non-LGBT people is becoming increasingly common, particularly among the growing population of Millennials and Gen Z workers. Likewise, it is now also common to see white men and women in multicultural ERGs.

Mentorship
Through mentoring programs, companies have significantly expanded the portion of historically underrepresented minorities in their workforces. Industry statistics vary, but studies have found improvements ranging from nine to 24 percent.[53] In industries such as chemicals and electronics, where many college-educated non-managers are eligible to move up, mentoring programs also increase the ranks of white women and black men by 10 percent or more.

The success of mentoring programs can be supported by several best practices. Start small, using a pilot program aimed at specific groups. Ask prospective mentors and mentees to provide information or answer questions, and then have the mentorship leader assign the pairings.

Finally, track employee performance after the mentorship is complete. What is the level of engagement and retention? What about advancement? Be creative. Do cross-cultural mentor-mentee relationships perform better, or do relationships among those with similar backgrounds help more? By asking the right questions and making adjustments over time, companies can boost participation in their mentorship programs and improve their effectiveness.

Advancement
Companies depend on workers to perform well in pursuit of new opportunities — to advance into new roles, to receive a raise, and to take on new challenges. And for diverse workers, bias often stands in the way of opportunity. Diverse workers may find themselves working for bosses who are less forgiving of weaknesses and less appreciative of their strengths compared to non-diverse employees. They may also find themselves shut out of the conversations that can put them on track for promotion. Once again, unconscious bias is a major culprit in limiting career advancement for diverse employees. Often, bias is hidden in situations or practices that are generally accepted by employers and employees alike.

For example, companies are beginning to recognize bias in the high-potential (Hi-Po) concept that determines succession planning. The Hi-Po label can be subjective, and it often leans toward people that leaders already know. If diverse employees are not already in the leadership fold, they are not likely to have the opportunity to be in the succession planning discussion. Organizations can mitigate Hi-Po bias by evaluating all employees against an objective set of criteria, from hard skills and aptitude to problem-solving and communications. Likewise, measuring and tracking targeted diverse groups and their inclusion in succession planning can reveal where opportunities are being limited. This approach can help to improve access to leadership opportunities for diverse workers, and it can boost compensation potential and diversity at C-suite levels.

Not surprisingly, cultural pressures also play a large role in advancement and opportunity. For example, research shows that women are still nearly twice as likely to take time off and more than three times as likely to quit their jobs for family reasons.[54] While these are conscious decisions on the part of the female worker, the employer can mitigate the pressures that cause women to quit or postpone their careers.

The key to adjusting to family pressures and retaining great employees is flexibility on the part of the employer. Does a job role or culture require the employee to attend every meeting and every event? Is the requirement to work onsite, nine-to-five, and Monday through Friday set in stone? The same issues that push candidates away from excessive job requirements also drive employees away before allowing them to advance. Adjusting to keep the talent from leaving is not just a nice gesture. The cost of losing talent is very real. Estimates of turnover costs range from 30 to 40 percent of salary for most employees and up to 400 percent of salary for leadership roles.[55]

An Inclusive Culture is a Performance Advantage

Fair compensation, employee engagement, and career opportunity: each of these results is an important ingredient in an inclusive company culture that delivers a positive employee experience. Each aspect takes time to build and requires continuous effort to maintain and improve. Together, they add up to a talent advantage in terms of worker productivity, retention, and talent attraction.

Moving Forward: D&I Builds Strength for Talent and Business

D&I is more than a value, a philosophy, or an initiative. For a job seeker, it is not just a hope or an expectation. For a hiring manager or employee, it is more than an imposition from HR. For executive leaders, D&I is not just a business case. All of these things may be part of the D&I experience, but at its root, building a diverse and inclusive culture is about more than business; it is about human nature. Even the most enlightened people are more comfortable with the people they know and less comfortable with people they do not. That is the beginning of bias, and it is a part of human nature that an effective D&I program must always continue to address.

Not surprisingly, building a diverse and inclusive culture requires a sustained effort, but it is an effort that builds strength across all facets of business. A diverse workforce and inclusive culture make a company more attractive to all talent, not just diverse talent. The practice of using marketing approaches to target candidates applies to all

types of workers, not just diverse workers. Interviewing best practices that eliminate bias helps every applicant, not just diverse candidates. Communication, mentorships, community involvement, and employee groups improve the experience of every employee, not just diverse employees. Fairness in compensation, paths for advancement, and access to leadership opportunities are great career options for everyone.

The need to improve diversity and build inclusiveness is not going away. Looking into the future, the workforce is growing more diverse. The issues of bias will always require vigilance and D&I best practices. And the business case for a diverse workforce and inclusive culture will make those D&I best practices worthwhile. For talent leaders and business leaders alike, improving D&I delivers value at all levels: **it is good for business, and it is the right thing to do.**

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