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The Future of Diversity and Inclusion: Technology Solutions

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“Inclusion is not a matter of political correctness. It is the key to growth.”

– Jesse Jackson, Politician and Civil Rights Activist

Introduction

From profitability to employee retention, diversity and inclusion in the workplace has long been more than a corporate trend. Today, your company’s financial performance and ability to compete for consumers and employees depends on how diversity and inclusion is addressed.

According to a 2018 McKinsey study, “the top quartile of gender-diverse companies were 21 percent more likely to experience above-average profitability than companies in the bottom quartile”. It is also widely researched and reported that diversity is also linked to increased revenue generated from innovation and higher employee retention.

The bottom line? Diversity and inclusion – if done with intention and supported with the right resources – is critical to your company’s success.

And yet, despite the solid business case, so many organizations get it wrong. Because it’s not easy.

One solution? Technology.

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Technology, like art, is a soaring exercise of the human imagination”

– Daniel Bell, American sociologist and Harvard Professor

Tech companies have always solved some of the world’s biggest challenges in new and exciting ways. And now, innovative tech companies are leading the way to help address diversity and inclusion (D&I) in the workplace with new technology that will support enterprise-wide D&I initiatives.

When D&I technology is implemented as part of a well-rounded D&I strategy, the entire organization benefits. At the individual and organization level – both inside and outside of your organization – D&I technology provides insights, optimizes processes and practices, and streamlines and supports your organization’s D&I efforts. This technology can also be used to address systemic bias and unfair treatment, thereby creating company cultures that reject discriminatory or inequitable behavior and drive substantive change.

Not unlike other companies, technology and data analysis can provide a look at the big picture and aid in the development of solutions that tackle systemic problems head-on.

Ultimately, D&I technology can be a significant disruptor of structural biases hidden deep within processes and behaviors. When deployed in good faith, this technology can empower organizations by creating and supporting opportunities to effect scalable change. D&I tech can both alert users to their own hidden biases and highlight those embedded in the current process, leading to more consistent and even-handed decision making.



A Look Back: Diversity and Inclusion Then

In the past, most solutions for diversity, equity, and inclusion focused on the individual. Diverse individuals were mentored or sponsored while hiring departments looked to unconscious bias or other training as a way to ensure any outside perceptions was of a diverse and inclusive business.

These approaches have repeatedly been shown to be inadequate, requiring a more robust overarching

commitment to D&I to facilitate change. Leading companies and executives are coming to the realization that not having a diverse organization or an inclusive culture is a real business problem, and individual effort is not a meaningful solution. A greater awareness that is collective and top-down is necessary to develop system-wide solutions that will effectively address D&I challenges.

A Look Forward: D&I Meets Technology

In the past 18 months, the D&I space has seen technology become bolder and deliver more practical solutions such as creating transparency around pay equity analytics, helping remove unconscious bias from hiring, identifying high-value potential employees, building out networks of diverse hiring markets, and creating an inclusive and diverse workforce.

All of these solutions and more can now be aided by technology. Plus, most D&I technology is data-driven, allowing companies to dig deep into their recruitment and hiring practices to root out bias and drive positive change.





THE GOAL:

Talent Acquisition

Knowing what you are trying to achieve with D&I initiatives is vital to finding the right D&I technology to drive growth. If the goal is talent acquisition, functionalities such as artificial intelligence (AI) and machine learning may be at the top of the list. Technologies that can reduce unconscious bias in hiring and create a more diverse candidate pool will target candidate sourcing and selection. More than 40% of D&I technology vendors prioritize talent acquisition as an offering.

Language decoders can help companies avoid unintentional skewing of job applicants by removing coded language from job ads, and help attract diverse talent by adopting language geared to specific candidates who may be under-represented. Controversial but also impactful are tools that include enhanced search capabilities, permitting recruiters to specifically search for candidates by highlighting attributes such as ethnicity or gender.

THE GOAL:

Analytics, Development, and Engagement

Analytics in the realm of D&I technology lean heavily toward D&I analysis and monitoring, which can cover diversity in hiring as well as pay equity analysis. These tools are useful primarily as a scale for the measurement of progress against a baseline, and as an indicator of where companies can do more to drive D&I practices.

While useful as a tool for creating a roadmap to greater diversity and inclusion, monitoring tools shouldn't be the only way data is leveraged for D&I. While the tools available in modern technology can shift a company away from ad hoc analysis moving them further into

the realm of data supported proof, the area in which D&I analysis shines is the power it gives to those trying to make the business case for D&I to superiors at the executive level.

Supportive data analysis can shift the perception of D&I initiatives from a "good cause" to a bottom-line factor, highlighting the strength of companies that engage in diverse hiring and showcasing financial rewards. Once the business case for D&I is made, advocates can use the same analytical tools to identify critical areas that could be improved, and prioritize D&I areas for resource

allocation, implementation, and roll out.

Employee resource groups (ERGs) can be tapped to provide extra support for D&I initiative launches, and analysis can be broadened to include internal tracking of D&I results and employee engagement. When ERGs are paired with a strong commitment to D&I their effectiveness can increase exponentially.



THE GOAL: **Development and Advancement**

Development and advancement can use tech that focuses on the processes used to develop and promote new and existing employees. These tools focus on learning, development, mentorship, and career management, which have yet to receive the same devotion and attention as talent acquisition and people analytics.

Yet, development and advancement can be just as useful at keeping a diverse workforce moving in a positive direction post-hire, creating a company culture, and upward mobility within organizations. Technology that promotes lasting career support beyond the initial recruitment and hiring stage are crucial to maintaining D&I initiatives long term.

THE GOAL:

Engagement and Retention

Employee retention is essential to your company's success, and this is where D&I comes in. D&I technologies can capture how employees perceive an organization and, in turn, help companies better understand and analyze the work experiences of diverse groups. These technologies can also help foster a culture of belonging where employees feel welcome, comfortable, and supported in their unique talents – which makes them want to stay.

Internal D&I goals such as engagement within diverse workforces and improved systems for reporting misconduct, sexual harassment or discrimination in the workplace can be elevated and placed on a level of importance with more obvious external goals related to outreach and diversity in hiring. However, because only 12% of D&I technology vendors focus on enhanced employee engagement and retention, it's key to find the right partner.



THE GOAL:

Blind Recruiting

Blind hiring has become a trending topic in HR circles, but the concept goes far beyond merely the orchestral equivalent of auditioning from behind a curtain. New software technologies strive to remove gender and racial bias from the hiring process in order to promote merit-based recruitment.

For perspective, the most even-handed hiring process can lead to judging candidates based on factors such as gender and race. These unconscious biases can run deep. Still, the added awareness that such biases exist fails to aid in D&I efforts.

Research notes that even female hiring managers will negatively flag information on women's resumes that are summarily ignored on men's resumes, such as a tendency to negotiate. Non-white-sounding name bias can force Black applicants to submit up to 50% more applications to get a callback. When companies implement data- and metric-driven hiring strategies, such as a quota system, it only works to meet a metric, not address the bias.

D&I technology helps support a merit-based recruitment strategy by tackling bias in workforce hiring. Making hiring decisions based on qualifications only can help diversify a workforce – but only if the tools being used are accurate and comprehensive when it comes to removing unconscious bias in personal judgment from the hiring process.

Blind recruitment processes can include tools that spot, flag, and remove coded language from job postings. It can also include matching services bolstered by machine learning that pair candidates with job descriptions to provide the best matches regardless of ethnicity, background, age or gender. Other tools allow candidate profiles to be anonymized – removing identifiers that trigger unconscious bias and instead highlight qualifications and skills.

“Auditioning” platforms can provide a way for candidates to perform skilled work assessments, so the most qualified candidate becomes apparent before a potential employer examines resumes.

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“A diverse mix of voices leads to better discussions, decisions, and outcomes for everyone.”

– Sundar Pichai, CEO of Google and Harvard Professor

True diversity and inclusion as a goal may be on the rise but how does a company actually meet those goals? It requires a combination of strategy, culture and individual behaviors backed up by purposefully developed processes, policies, and technology. Every facet of a successful program should address both individual and structural bias, embedding D&I values into organizational processes and practices helping to eliminate barriers to fair and respectful treatment in the workplace.

According to HP’s Chief Diversity Officer Slaton Brown, “Creating an inclusive work environment where people have a real sense of belonging is a prerequisite for diversity to thrive in organizations.”

Deloitte’s 2017 Global Human Capital Trends report noted that more than two-thirds of the executives surveyed identified D&I as an important issue moving forward. D&I technology can drive adoption of best practices, inclusivity in the workplace, and diversity in hiring – but why should your organization, specifically, put a D&I initiative in place?



THE GOAL:

Making the Case: The Benefits of D&I in the Workplace

1. Enhanced ability to attract top talent

When you secure top talent, your organization's ability to perform increases exponentially. High value employees are 400% more productive than other employees under normal conditions; in highly complex situations, that level of productivity can double.

2. Improved performance

Research shows over and over again that the more diverse and inclusive an organization is, the more likely it is to outperform organizations that fail and D&I. A survey of 1,700 organizations across eight countries revealed that organization with above average total diversity had both 19% higher innovation revenues and 9% higher margins.

3. Adaptability in rapidly changing business environments

More diverse companies have the edge in innovation,

meaning they are also more flexible and able to pivot to meet and overcome new challenges in their industry.

Diversity can be leveraged for adaptability, increasing your organization's chances for survival in case of industry disruption.

4. Normalized hiring diversity

One of the most apparent benefits of D&I technology is the opportunity to create consistent, scalable practices that can lead to the identification and mitigation of biases across organizations, potentially in real-time. Since people-related decisions are often subject to bias – specifically when assessing an applicant's skills, behaviors, or value – D&I technology that removes biases can naturally lead to more diverse hiring.

THE GOAL:

Making the Case: The Benefits of D&I in the Workplace

5. Higher transparency levels

Another benefit of D&I technology is the increased visibility and transparency regarding the current state of diversity and inclusion throughout your organization, allowing you to better measure and monitor the impact of D&I initiatives.

Modern D&I programs have shifted away from mere “compliance” oriented goals and toward true diversity in the workplace, driving systemic change across organizations. By embracing D&I technology, you can foster innovation and creativity through the creation of diverse teams resulting in increased revenues.

6. AI pros and cons

Developing technologies including AI, machine learning, natural language processing (NLP), algorithmic matching, textual mining and sentiment analysis are now providing new and transformative capabilities which can be used to solve the challenges of diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

Prioritizing objective decision-making is driving innovation in D&I analytics and associated technologies, although there is still potential for introduced bias in programs that depend on artificial intelligence (AI) algorithms depending on the data sets used for training.

For instance, Amazon was forced to scrap an algorithm it hoped would select “best fit” resumes when it was discovered that the AI had been trained using resumes from men only – causing a hidden internal bias against resumes submitted by women.

7. Bias disruption

Implementing bias interrupters in your organization can support diversity and inclusion initiatives. D&I technology can help identify situations in which bias is at work in existing organizational flows and help you identify where changes need to be made to promote employee support at all stages of their career.

Black women report the least contact with senior executives within a company than any other demographic, and as a result, are more likely to leave. Finding ways to retain talent is equally as important as attracting talent, and addressing the biases at work that make this scenario a reality can help you resolve the issue in your own organization.

8. Customer perception

Consumers are now demanding D&I be a part of the workplace, as Millennials overwhelmingly determine brand loyalty based on their perception of a company’s values. Brands that support clear causes are gaining ground, and the causes are increasingly linked with equality and social justice in the minds of the generation that is rapidly catching up with the baby boomers in terms of purchasing power.

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“We are building products that people with very diverse backgrounds use, and I think we all want our company makeup to reflect the makeup of the people who use our products.”

– Sheryl Sandberg, COO of Facebook

A D&I Technology Tip List

D&I technology solutions can help you build out your organization’s workforce with diversity & inclusion at the center, rather than depending on a quota-based system to present the appearance of inclusion. The types of D&I technology available allow you to select where you can make changes that will drive your organization in the right direction.

1. **Start with analytics to reveal problem areas.** Use data analysis based tools to assess your organization. Where is the diversity present, and where can you benefit from more inclusion? Also, measure your existing workforce’s ability to adapt, problem-solve, and innovate – these baseline metrics can be important as you advance your D&I program and may be required to justify expenditures that are D&I related.
2. **Consider compatibility as just one factor among many.** D&I technology solutions that can seamlessly link into and integrate with existing HR platforms can be attractive, but don’t dismiss tools just because they may not be the easiest to implement. Look for ways to disseminate access to tools across locations and throughout all levels of your organization and get top-down buy-in for implementation.
3. **Reconsider employee engagement as the main metric.** The top success measure for D&I programs is often described as candidate and employee engagement, but many D&I technology solutions are not set up to directly influence or drive such engagement. Instead, seek ways to quantify the effect of decreasing unconscious bias and increasing the diversity of talent pipelines on specific talent area hiring and associated benefits.

A D&I Technology Tip List

- 4. Use caution with machine learning or AI-based tools.** As mentioned, AI can be subject to bias depending on how the artificial intelligence program was trained – the common tech description is “garbage in, garbage out.” AI can help surface best candidates only if it is free from contamination from the biased source material. Unless AI programming can be proven to be bias-free, focus on technologies that clearly and transparently remove bias.
- 5. Look for tools that can fast track high-value candidates.** When you concentrate on tapping into identified pools of diverse talent, you’ll be able to rapidly identify top candidates based on skills, knowledge, and potential. Fast-tracking such candidates by utilizing targeted communication tools can help attract their attention and create an opportunity for recruitment.
- 6. Seek intuitive and accessible technology.** To reach under-recognized pools of candidates, your hiring process must be both accessible and intuitive. Make initial contact as uncomplicated as possible, with resume and application workflows that eliminate repetitiveness and focus on data that matters most. 60% of job seekers will abandon an application midway through the process if it is deemed too long or complex.



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“When we listen and celebrate what is both common and different, we become wiser, more inclusive, and better as an organization.”

– Pat Wadors, Head of HR at LinkedIn

While we’ve highlighted key value-adds for D&I, it often takes a more targeted approach to sell-through to the senior team. Laying out the business case for D&I helps clearly and effectively communicate its necessity to keep your organization not only on track, but at the forefront of success in the new hiring landscape.

A must-have for the success of diversity and inclusion programs is the explicit support of senior executives. Achieving buy-in from the C-Suite is a must to deploy D&I initiatives effectively. You can encourage this commitment by laying out the business case for D&I clearly and effectively and following up with an actionable plan.

Getting the C-SUITE on Board

1. **Most senior leaders, CEOs included, will positively respond when confronted with incontrovertible evidence that an issue exists and that it is negatively affecting the bottom line.** Begin by collecting data from internal sources, then from your competitors. Compare and contrast with industry leaders that have linked success to proven D&I programs, and prepare your evidence in visual formats for a clear, concise presentation.
2. **Specifically, target the bottom line as the most likely ally in your quest for a D&I program.** If you can project positive returns predicated in hiring the best talent available through a strong D&I commitment, it will be easier to obtain funding for the initiative. Include data on how the shift can improve relations with vendors and supply chains and the potential consumer interest angle. Numbers around the value of inclusion in employee retention is key, too, as the cost of attrition averages 1.5-2 times the starting salary.
3. **Create a visible strategic intent to become a more diverse and inclusive.** This signals to internal and external stakeholders that you are committed to this course of action and helps solidify the new approach. Find out where you can make a public stand, and on what topics, and get approval to shift company messaging and branding if necessary, to reflect the desired values.

Review public communications, templates, your company's website, social media, and all recruitment materials to ensure they reflect inclusivity and diversity in both imagery and language.



Getting the C-SUITE on Board

4. Encourage CEO-to-CEO face-time with business leaders who have already successfully deployed D&I initiatives and benefited in tangible ways. Consider asking your CEO to participate in an inclusion and diversity pledge to put a public announcement of your company's commitment into play.
5. Finally, introduce any D&I technology you plan to utilize and explain how it works to further the ultimate goal of creating a diverse workforce and encourage higher levels of innovation. This five-step course of action will go a long way toward convincing your executives to make a move in the right direction.

Ultimately, how your organization reacts to the need for inclusion in the workplace and takes action to diversify the workforce will be how it is defined in the years to come. Embracing D&I—and D&I technology—is one essential way to facilitate this important stage of business evolution.





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