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Reprioritizing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion With Renewed Focus





In 2021, a Gartner® report on the DEI efforts of the IT industry deemed 2020 the year of the pledge. The year 2021, the report said, was to be the year of committed action.

Unfortunately, with two years of hindsight, that call has still not been heeded. In the years since, Glassdoor saw a decrease in access to DEI programs in 2022. Revelio Labs found DEI roles shrinking at a faster rate than non-DEI roles in 2021 and even more so during 2022 layoffs.

And overall, there seems to be a waning interest in prioritizing DEI programs, a concerning trend that is taking cover under “uncertain economic conditions” and “diversity fatigue.”



Economic conditions should not affect whether the employees in your organization are treated and evaluated justly. Gartner notes that “organizations are trying to tackle too much at once and it is leading to a lack of focus and impeded progress. This leading to a lack of focus and impedes progress.” So let’s simplify things.

This toolkit is focused on four pillars of a robust and impactful DEI strategy:

- Improved inclusion
- Equitable talent development
- Continuous feedback
- Rewards and recognition

Together, they combine to transform your company culture and make your organization a better and more equitable place to work.

Source: Gartner, “CIOs Must Renew Commitments to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion to Boost Talent Retention,” Debra Logan, Rob O’Donohue, Dec. 16, 2022

Improved inclusion

Employees need to feel like they belong at a company to be at their best. If they don't, they're far less likely to stick around. Think of it through the lens Gartner articulates, that "equality and inclusivity drive diversity and retention, not the other way around."

One of the most consistent ways leaders, employees, and organizations can drive equality and inclusion is by being mindful of the words they use. Inclusive language does not make assumptions or judgments, and it steers clear of defaults that can make someone feel alienated.

Inclusion Advisor[®], a linguistic machine learning tool from Workhuman[®], is designed to flag unconscious biases in written messages. The tool provides in-the-moment learning to steer users toward more inclusive language. And that will begin in other areas of the business as well.

Inclusivity can extend to the language used in job descriptions before jumping off the page in the form of website and office accessibility. It can stretch even further to organizational flexibility.

Remote and hybrid work have been a boon to people with disabilities, as those populations saw massive gains in employment after the shift to remote, as well as marginalized groups who have historically felt othered in the office. Code-switching and developing a corporate persona were two major anxieties of participants in the latest Workhuman and BLK Men in Tech survey.

Employee resource groups (ERGs) are another initiative that will pay massive dividends in building a more cohesive and inclusive culture.



Equitable talent development

It is more cost-effective to retain existing employees than it is to recruit and replace them from external sources. And inequitable promotion and development opportunities are organizational unforced errors.

Dr. Meisha-ann Martin, senior director of people analytics and research at Workhuman, wrote in the Workhuman-BLK Men in Tech report, “Often, most of the diversity in organizations is found in entry-level positions. The higher up you go, the more diversity starts to decrease. Then you get to the most senior level and see almost none. It is my perspective that a broken internal talent assessment process is to blame.”

Many participants in the survey described the lack of diversity in the company's C-suite as disheartening and discouraging. For younger employees, it's hard to envision yourself in a leadership position if no one there looks like you.

Mentorship opportunities can play a massive role here. Mentors help improve psychological safety, they can lay out a path to advancement, and they can provide additional context to a nomination or recommendation. "From mentorship springs encouragement, empowerment, and exhilaration of someone believing in you," says Martin.



Continuous feedback

Gone are the days of feedback being limited to tense, once-per-year reviews. Leaders need to shift to a coaching mindset that prioritizes frequent feedback to highlight efforts and successes and to make on-the-fly adjustments when needed.

As you might've guessed, using inclusive language when providing this feedback is imperative. Martin recommends avoiding superlatives and feedback about personality while supplying specific examples. Whether positive or constructive feedback, an employee will learn more with a clear understanding of the impact of their actions and behaviors.

That level of specificity in feedback should go both ways. DEI initiatives will affect everyone in the organization and will need consistent tinkering to meet the specific needs of employees. Organizations should embrace the feedback of employees affected by its policies and encourage them to be detailed and clear so effective changes can be made.

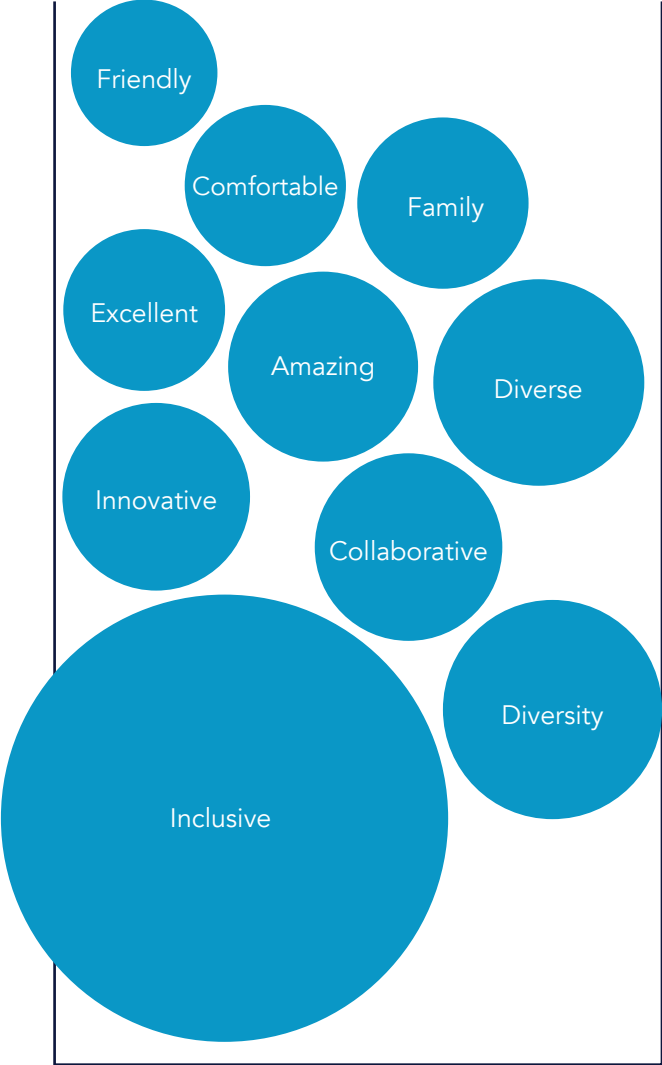
Rewards and recognition

Recognition should be part of your feedback strategy, your development strategy, and your DEI strategy. Expressions of gratitude have a positive effect on an employee's psychological safety, wellness, and sense of belonging.

When recognition is equitable and reaches all corners of the organization, it helps employees feel seen and be seen. Use recognition to celebrate members of ERGs. While members of these groups feel a stronger sense of community, they are also more stressed.

The work is largely voluntary, and as we found in our Evolution of Work report, too often ignored or seemingly unappreciated. However, when employees are recognized for their roles in reshaping the organization, they have a much deeper sense of connection.

How employees describe their company culture with and without a recognition program



With a recognition program



Without a recognition program

When done right, recognition celebrates the person for who they are and not just for what they do. It reduces stress, burnout, and turnover. It helps create community, and that is hard for people to simply walk away from.

Conclusion

As DEI initiatives slip from the top of priority lists, organizations can sharpen their focus and avoid “diversity fatigue” as they spread themselves too thin and try to do too much.

Improving inclusion, ensuring equitable talent development, providing continuous feedback, and building a culture of recognition are four specific arenas that should be reassessed as they have an outsized impact on a company’s culture.

Let’s make 2024, and every year after, a year in which we make meaningful progress in creating more diverse, inclusive, and equitable workplaces.

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