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5 Creative Ways to Move DEI Forward

EXPLORING PROGRESSIVE PRACTICES WITH KORN FERRY





Being “aware” of the need for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the workplace isn’t enough. Companies leaning on unconscious bias training cover only behavioral inclusion topics such as allyship, privilege, and empathy, whereas to truly move DEI forward, it’s necessary to focus on structural and systemic inclusion.

“Who builds the systems if not people full of unconscious bias, who now have inadvertently codified in a scalable way all their unconscious bias to the systems?” says Korn Ferry senior client partner and ESG and DEI strategist Andrés T. Tapia in a 2022 webinar co-hosted by Dr. Meisha-ann Martin, senior director of people analytics and research at Workhuman®.

Here are five ways to move the needle on your DEI strategy.

ONE

Build flexibility into systems.

Every business is run by systems – people systems, ethics and compliance systems, research and development systems, operational systems. Unconscious bias can pervade these systems.

Flexible work arrangements aren't immune, either. The ability to work hybrid or remote varies by industry and role, and Black workers are often tracked into "lower-paid jobs, dead-end jobs, or jobs that will become obsolete," Meisha-ann explains, and are less likely to have options aside from on-site work.

If your company has some combination of hybrid, remote, and on-site workers, consider that 39% of hybrid and 29% of remote workers agree with the statement: "When I work from home, I don't receive as much recognition as my on-site colleagues." Pay attention to how praise is distributed across your employee base.

Source: "[Two Years into COVID: The State of Human Connection at Work](#)," Workhuman, 2022

TWO

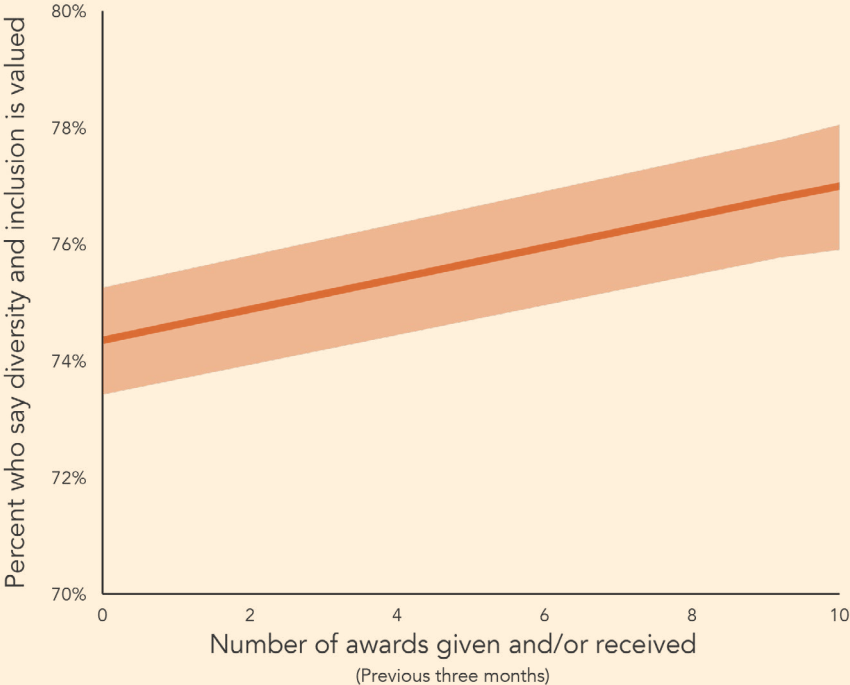
Use recognition to go deeper in your pay equity analyses.

For a real-world example, Andrés told the story of an organization with diverse business lines – except within the sales team. When leadership looked at the problem objectively, they came to an unsurprising but upsetting conclusion: “The people that were most successful today at sales were given the most high-profile, largest sales portfolios 15 to 20 years ago. When we did a pay equity analysis, it turns out those people were mostly white men.” Beyond increasing diverse entry-level sales hires, the organization opted to also distribute portfolios more equitably to new salespeople.

While an excellent first step, pay equity analyses are typically inclusive of only base pay and bonus, leaving out other important aspects of compensation. [Data from a peer-to-peer recognition program](#) highlights cross-organizational connections, top performers, and their impact on the business. It also shows the reverse – people and groups who are isolated or not receiving the appropriate amount of recognition for the work they do.

“Black employees are less likely to strongly agree that they get the right amount of recognition and are more likely to report a low frequency of recognition at work,” Meisha-ann explains. “Recognition can be a huge bridge to diversity and inclusion.”

Recognition leads to greater feelings of inclusion at OhioHealth.





THREE

Make sure everyone has equal access to recognition.

Research from [Gallup and Workhuman](#) found equitable recognition is a key pillar of successful strategic recognition that positively impacts business outcomes, including DEI. But what does that really mean?

Although recognition should be targeted and personal, how much others receive matters. When employees see recognition that is out of balance – particularly when they feel they are being shorted – it triggers an alarm to their basic need for fairness and damages their overall employee experience.

Overall, only 26% of employees strongly agree they receive similar amounts of recognition as other team members at their company with similar performance levels. Deeper analysis shows clear patterns in who is – and is not – receiving recognition, with significant implications about the state of diversity and inclusion in workplaces.

As shown in the following table, Black and Hispanic employees are less likely to report equitable recognition than white employees. Only 19% of Black employees and 21% of Hispanic employees strongly agree they receive a similar amount of recognition as other team members, compared to 28% of white employees. They are also less likely to strongly agree the recognition they get is authentic. Black employees, in particular, are less likely to strongly agree they get the right amount of recognition.

Meisha-ann summarizes: “When Black and Hispanic employees say that they do receive recognition that is fulfilling, authentic, and equitable, they are 5-7x as likely to say they feel like they belong. Plus, employees who have great recognition experiences are not only more engaged – 44% of them are more likely to be thriving in life overall. So, this is literally life-changing.”

Percentage of employees who strongly agree recognition is authentic, equitable and that they receive the right amount, by racial identify group

	Overall	Black employees	Hispanic employees	White employees
I get the right amount of recognition	23	17	21	24
The recognition I get is authentic	32	25	26	35
Recognition is equitable	26	19	21	28

Source: “[Unleashing the Human Element at Work: Transforming Workplaces Through Recognition](#),” Gallup and Workhuman, 2022



FOUR

Democratize recognition to drive connection and engagement.

Receiving recognition is great, but it's just as important to ensure each employee is equipped to give recognition. This is what we mean by "peer-to-peer" – everyone can give and receive recognition, up and down the organization.

According to Workhuman recognition data across 712,000 employees in various industries, after one year in a recognition program, Asian, Black, and Hispanic employee turnover dropped 20% and turnover among women dropped 17%. In general, we've found that the more employees give and receive recognition, the more likely they are to say their organization values diversity and inclusion.

Strategic recognition drives employee connections, helping employees feel supported, seen, and appreciated for who they are and what they bring to the organization. In fact, Workhuman research shows that the more recently someone has been thanked by a manager and/or peer, the greater their sense of connection to the company culture and their colleagues.



Manager recognition



Connection to COMPANY CULTURE (1-5 scale)



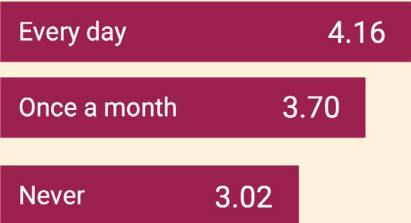
Connection to COLLEAGUES (1-5 scale)



Peer recognition



Connection to COMPANY CULTURE (1-5 scale)



Connection to COLLEAGUES (1-5 scale)

Source: "Two Years into COVID: The State of Human Connection at Work," Workhuman, 2022

FIVE

Improve communication with micro-coaching.

Have you ever been the recipient of a message that was well intended but missed the mark? Conversely, have you ever written or said something you didn't realize could be perceived in a negative way?

Inclusion Advisor, which lives within Social Recognition® from Workhuman, is an AI-powered, in-the-moment DEI coaching tool that empowers employees to make communication meaningful and inclusive. Inclusion Advisor allows users to instantly check for bias, understand how their language could be perceived, and make meaningful edits using suggestions tailored to their message. The tool also provides valuable context for non-native English speakers, helping them feel confident in the content of their recognition messages.

It's private to employees, too, mitigating embarrassment or self-consciousness when bias is uncovered. "It's not going to tell your manager," says Meisha-ann. "It's only for you to improve the way you communicate with other people. In doing that, it reinforces diversity and inclusion, in real time, every day, at every level." Ultimately, Inclusion Advisor aims to provide each employee with a personal and positive experience that has an impact far beyond recognition.

The key is to take DEI concepts and translate them from awareness to action, in every nook and cranny and at every level of the organization. Any strategy that falls short of that will miss the mark, regardless of intention.

Interested in using recognition as a strategic tool to scale DEI for organizational impact? Contact us today or [read more](#).

Join HR's leading innovators and trailblazers in Austin, April 15-18, 2024, for the ninth [Workhuman Live](#).

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