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From Snacking on Diversity and Inclusion to Systemic Organizational Consumption

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Abstract

Purpose – Most global organizations have a diversity and inclusion (D&I) statement and initiatives to advance equity within their organizations though minimal traction is evidenced by what is espoused. This article demonstrates how to make progress in D&I generalizable to global workplaces.

Approach – Approaching D&I initiatives as collectivist working society bridges gaps in resourcing, powering, and actualizing D&I organizationally unlike is being demonstrated in companies where D&I is facilitated by majority groups.

Originality/value – This article provides human resource practitioners with a systemic method of advancing diversity and inclusion equitably while promoting organizational citizenship comparable to thriving workplaces.

Keywords Diversity, Inclusion, Equity, Equitable, Inclusive Workplace, Collectivist Culture

Paper type General Review

Introduction

Almost every organization in the world is now touting some form of a diversity and inclusion statement. The statements can be found under Diversity and Equity, or, Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity, or Equality, Diversity and Inclusion or some combination that lets the world know an organization's stance on actively and intentionally being inclusive of its diverse workforce. However, most are "snacking" on diversity and inclusion (D&I) rather than fully implementing it systemically and organizationally. Snacking occurs when the workforce of an organization shows minimal traction in equitable advancement of people groups other than the majority (Roberts, 2020). For example, the 2017 Fortune 500 list of CEOs showed the largest increase of female CEOs since the lists' inception in 1955 (Zarya, 2017). Zarya (2017) reports the highest number of female Fortune 500 CEOs to be 32, after seeing a drop to 21 in the previous year. Out of the 32 women listed, none were African American, and two were women of color (1 Latina and 1 Indian American); and these numbers are representative of a list of 500 names (Zarya, 2017). Snacking.

Modern companies sell the business case for diversity and inclusion as one that cultivates innovation and creativity and leverages a wide range of ideas and perspectives from a variety of people (Roberts, 2020). There is substantial evidence that companies with a diverse and inclusive workplace show significant increases in workplace performance organizationally and within the workforce (Aquino and Robertson, 2018). Though this may be the case, what may be the underlying tone for the increases could be the legal forces that can sway people to behave ethically towards their colleagues rather than the virtuous respect for humanity at work (Bowman Williams, 2018; Roberts, 2020). In other words, a legal or business case for a human conditions is not always a good sell for people needing to value and respect each other lives. Dr. Jamillah Bowman Williams (2018) conducted a study to see if the business case, legal case, or moral case was the prevailing reason why people chose to act out inclusive behaviors within a diverse work group. Dr. Bowman Williams (2018) found from her qualitative study that though people believed they were behaving morally toward others, they mostly had hidden concerns about infringing on discrimination laws.

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3 Diversity and inclusion in simplicity is understanding that humans have countless composites
4 and beliefs (humanness) with which they identify. Within humanness, we can appreciate
5 contributions people give to tasks and teams; even the people with whom we disagree or are
6 dissimilar to ourselves. Additionally, diversity has been marketed as a way of embracing
7 everyone's differences but not everyone wants to do that or knows how to embrace differences.
8 Culturally or spiritually, embracing may not be befitting of someone's beliefs. However,
9 respecting and valuing people's lives and their contributions that lend toward organizational
10 successes and achievements has been a more acceptable way of fostering organizational diversity
11 initiatives since those elements are common tenets of most global belief systems (Roberts, 2020).
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15 Diversity is organic to humans as we all are having a different life. Inclusion, however, is a
16 choice and is intentional (or not). Inclusion takes effort and must be a priority of the workforce in
17 general and especially demonstrated by organizational leaders. Getting the majority of the
18 workforce packed with voluminous perspectives, rationales, and reasoning to display inclusive
19 behaviors is not easy. Inclusivity involves actions that garner mutual respect, trust, commitment,
20 and cognitive and social dexterity so that everyone can fully contribute to the mission and goals
21 using their unique talents, backgrounds, and social astuteness (Aquino and Robertson, 2018). We
22 see this behavior in healthcare professionals or with first responders who typically, within
23 emergency situations, work together to bring health to a life no matter whose life it is. Outside of
24 the urgency of a situation, the same thing could happen in a business environment with people
25 working together to promote healthy inclusive workplaces.
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29 **What is Known**

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31 The business, legal, and humanity case for diversity and inclusion has been a dynamic workplace
32 initiative for decades. Research and practical practices solidify the case of a diverse workforce
33 prospering an organization's innovation, creativity, profitability, and workforce development
34 (Livingstone, 2019). No doubts amongst scholars and practitioners that companies that employ
35 multi dimensions of diverse talent and intentionally nurture inclusiveness of diverse populations
36 outperforms those that do not (Barth, 2019). The classic dimensions of diversity or the ones that
37 people tend to think of the most are those protected by government law such as race, color,
38 religion, sex, or national origin. Other dimensions of diversity are equally important and
39 naturally found in human populations. For example, demographic diversity are those like gender,
40 socioeconomic status, family status, gender, and disability (Aquino and Robertson, 2018).
41 Cognitive or behavioral diversity are the variety of thinking, learning, spirituality, and
42 personality styles; these maybe even being geographically dynamic. Global diversity is found in
43 the knowledge and experience with a variety of populations, languages, and cultures causing
44 someone to be rich in cultural diffusion, global emotional intelligence, and global citizenship
45 (Aquino and Robertson, 2018). Such wealth of diversity to recruit and employ can make for a
46 powerhouse behind innovative advancements and flexing through the complexity of change and
47 behaviors normal to the global workplace.
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53 Diversity also helps people to deal with unconscious bias they may have about people unlike
54 themselves. Childress (2020) states, "it is difficult for most people to admit they have biases"
55 (56). Leaders are especially vulnerable to unconscious bias as their positional power influences
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3 staffing hires, structures, and compensation. Truth is, we all have biases; not because we are bad
4 people but because of how our brain functions. Our brains collect information through our
5 sensory organs (e.g. eyes (see), nose (smell), ears (hear), those that allow for touching, and
6 mouth (taste)) as we move around in our environments. Like a funnel, the amount of sensory
7 collection is too large for our brains to hold so most of it is filtered out through a process called
8 “perceptual filtering”. Perceptual filtering is the scaling down process naturally occurring in our
9 brains where we flush the data streaming through our unconsciousness that is not important to us
10 and keep and prioritize what is. The end product of the filtering process is our perceptions and
11 assumptions about the world in which we live and the people we encounter.
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15 Perceptual filtering is heavily influenced by our childhood (where it all begins), our experiences,
16 and our beliefs so that we form opinions (another filtering outcome) that are “true” to us but may
17 not be true to everyone else having a different experience and life journey. We package our
18 “true” into how we socialize and behave toward others (Roberts, 2020). Diverse workplaces
19 creates the space for us to act our true and examine how our true impacts others. At work, we get
20 to have new experiences that challenges our “true” and may even shift what we prioritize in our
21 perceptual filtering process about people dissimilar to ourselves. Diversity within working
22 groups sets the stage for us to learn from or at least about people with a variety of backgrounds
23 and ways of existing (Roberts, 2020). As we interact with dissimilar people we can discover new
24 ways of thinking that fills gaps in our knowledge comparable to completing or innovating work
25 projects and goals (business case for diversity) and have an appreciation for learning from/about
26 others (humanity and civility case for diversity) (Roberts, 2020).
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30 **Proposal on How to Move from Snacking to Full Consumption**

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32 As previously mentioned companies tout D&I statements without the evidence of diverse and
33 inclusivity being accomplished organizationally. Since the benefits of a diverse workforce has
34 been evidenced, then why not empower a diverse group of employees to champion D&I
35 initiatives and partner with human resources to hold the organizational accountable to the
36 ascribed D&I statement? Empowering employees as business partners could challenge the status
37 quo and assist in leveraging a variety of resources and talent comparable to an organizations
38 mission and espoused D&I core values (Roberts, 2020). An empowered employee group of D&I
39 champions/business partners is the accountability and traction that can move “snacking” on D&I
40 to full consumption demonstrated by the energy the diverse work group can generate around
41 diversity and inclusion advantages and activate others within the organization to do the same.
42 Energetic activation occurs through human interactions that powers the human mind, emotions,
43 and social behaviors that can disrupt and sway rigid biases hampering D&I progress (Ryan and
44 Frederick, 1997; Roberts, 2020).
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49 Additionally, empowering employees as champions of D&I is prodigious of a collectivist culture
50 and is befitting of the diversity and inclusion values most D&I statements espouse. Collectivist
51 cultures are ones in which people work together in groups representative of the entire community
52 rather than in homogenous power structures (Huppert *et al.*, 2017). Collectivist actions honors
53 the tenets of diversity and inclusion statements of leveraging trust, commitment, and
54 transparency. A collectivist approach shifts the burden of the majority to make traction on D&I
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3 tasks (like hiring, developing, and promoting diverse talent) to working groups responsible for
4 the same with equity as a central outcome. The working groups would consist of mix of minority
5 and majority populations within the organization actualizing diversity and inclusion that is best
6 for their organizational society. Bottom line, allowing employees to partner in D&I initiatives
7 and creating a collectivist organizational culture that drives D&I work is a better way of
8 advancing D&I systemically rather than just telling employees to embrace their organic
9 differences and similarities in a D&I statement.
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