

DEIAB+ Strategy and Implementation Best Practices

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Introduction

What is DEIAB? Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility and Belonging.

and....

There isn't ever a "one size fits all" DEIAB strategy because each organization has a unique culture all to itself.

DEIAB integration into the DNA of an organization is not built overnight, and there will be missteps. As long as leaders set goals with actionable plans to meet DEIAB targets, and mechanisms to adjust in real time, they will maintain an upward trajectory.

An effective DEIAB strategy is reliant on clear guidelines and requirements to keep leaders and staff on the right track. This is why it is important to set goals to meet company targets.

The following best practices and latest research from leaders in industry provide insight into how successful DEIAB strategies are employed.

What Is Organizational Diversity

Simply put, the definition of organizational diversity is a company that both currently employs and continually seeks out individuals with a wide range of different traits and backgrounds to make up their workforce.

Those traits and backgrounds span a massive spectrum, covering everything from gender, age, and race to sexual orientation, class, political affiliation, military service, and much more.

The goal of organizational diversity? To maximize innovation, growth, and success by leveraging the talents and voices of as many groups of society as possible.

Representation is a key component of organizational diversity; that is ensuring modern organizations hire, retain, and advance talents who reflect communities in which they operate, and markets to whom they serve.

How do modern organizations achieve diversity goals, such as representation? It takes a combination of strategic planning, culture change, intention and accountability.

What is Diversity Management?

How can you define diversity management? What is managing diversity? A simple managing diversity definition can go something like this: the coordinated, determined effort of leadership and management throughout an organization to bring in employees from all walks of life and diverse backgrounds into various roles.

Diversity management encapsulates diversity and inclusion in a company—from establishing hiring practices and outreach efforts to the development of corporate standards and diversity metrics to the communication and coordination of continuing diversity education and training for the entire organization.

How to Successfully Implement and Manage

Be Intentional: Set Diversity Goals and Accountability for Change.

The second part of the “how to manage diversity” question? Be intentional with your efforts. Set concrete diversity goals throughout the organization based upon optimistic (but still realistic) benchmarks and hold your organization accountable to them.

Ensure these goals aren’t hidden in obscure corporate memorandums. Share them with the company as a whole, so your employees know exactly what you’re doing—and how you’re holding your organization accountable for diversity and inclusion efforts.

Implementing Diversity Management The Challenges

Implementing diversity management in an organization is not without its specific challenges. What are the potential pitfalls one can expect when developing a diversity and inclusion strategy for their organization?

“Traditional” Thinking

A specific focus on Diversity and Inclusion efforts for organizations is a relatively new development for the business world. Those wishing to implement these efforts may face pushback from those unfamiliar or uneducated about diversity and inclusion efforts (and their benefits for the organization). Patience and education are crucial to winning over those “traditional” thinkers; statistics (like those referenced here) can be extremely powerful for persuasive measures.

Poor Communication

It’s critical to be clear and open with all levels of employees about the need for—and implementation of—diversity and inclusion efforts. Certain segments of the employee population may feel threatened or concerned about their standing in the wake of a sustained D&I program. Again, education, training, and clear communication from the **top down** about the program’s goals and objectives (at every step of the process) are key for avoiding this potential pitfall.

The “One-Size-Fits-All” Approach

Like snowflakes, no two companies are alike. What might work for one company’s diversity management efforts might not work for yours; a different industry, management structure, corporate culture, company history, or a host of other factors could contribute to one approach failing where another succeeds.

Adding another complicating factor? The specific problems of a global organization, facing the complex social issues of not only its home country but of all of the other places it might do business in. Be wary of thinking what is right for one organization is right for yours, and what is right for your headquarters country would be perfect for a satellite office. Careful planning, study, knowledge, and education for your organization’s specific needs are crucial for successful diversity and inclusion efforts.

Align DEIAB Initiatives with Organizational Goals

Using metrics, benchmarks, and milestones, align DEIAB initiatives with organizational goals. Ensure the program's progress is reported, monitored, and owned by a senior executive who is responsible for its implementation and success. If an organization doesn't set standards and take action using numbers to ensure diverse staffing, pay equality and promotion, then it is likely not serious about DEIAB.

Consider Invisible Factors

Some parts of DEIAB are visible and others are not, but all of them need to be considered. The three invisible forces that can make or break a team are often neglected: drive, cognitive diversity and psychological safety. The ability to measure, visualize and optimize those is the foundation of creating an inclusive environment where diversity can flourish.

Stop Saying Words and Start Thinking Action

It's easy to craft a blog post or a company statement about your commitment to diversity—it's another thing to follow through on it. Partner with organizations such as the Center for Respectful Leadership or the Center for Creative Leadership to get initiatives in motion with transparency. It's important to show movement and progress to prove to your organization that you are in action.

Create Standards and Practices to Ensure Success

Most DEIAB initiatives fail because of a "check-the-box" mindset. Many organizations put the conversation on the table but fail to (or in many cases, choose not to) create standards and practices to ensure their success. Without enforcement, what's revealed during discussions becomes nothing more than empty rhetoric. Enforced consequences are the only way to demonstrate a genuine commitment to DEIAB.

Take An Individualized Approach

There is no one-size-fits-all approach. Every company has to define the optimal level of diversity and then fill it with life. Policies are just a piece of paper. It's about creating awareness of the different types of diversity in the company. Everyone needs to understand the benefits and costs of DEIAB for individuals, teams, and the entire organization

Make DEIAB Part Of Your Organization's DNA

DEIAB initiatives have to align with the organization's vision and mission as part of its DNA, not just glitzy words on a website. Inclusion, inclusive leadership, inclusive behaviors, and inclusive cultures should be at the core of it. Diversity in recruiting and representation doesn't necessarily equal inclusion. First, define how diversity looks for the organization—it is not only about race and color.

Be Prepared to Coach and Manage the Change

DEIAB is not an initiative; it is a practice of growing awareness of others in a new way. Be clear on the outcomes you expect in your company. Reward those who are approaching their interactions in a new and more inclusive way. Be prepared to coach those who need ideas and support to meet your expectations. And always be prepared for late adopters. They are not bad, just late in adapting. Manage the change.

Reexamine All Processes Through the Lens Of DEIAB

Too many organizations are looking for a quick fix when it comes to DEIAB, and this can really backfire. Real progress usually means systemic change, starting from the top down. Simply mandating something such as unconscious bias training won't do it. All processes involving people must be reexamined and adapted through the lens of DEIAB.

Create A DEIAB Advisory Board

The advisory board will prioritize, steer, and make recommendations aimed toward the future focus of shaping and embedding DEIAB in the DNA of the organization based on the mission, goals and objectives of the DEIAB strategy. This layer of oversight ensures accountability and leading with intent.

How do you begin a DEIAB strategy implementation, and what are the biggest challenges?

There is no one-size-fits-all solution to implementing impactful DEIAB initiatives. Given that every organization is at a different starting point in their journey, the approach begins with a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the current state. This understanding crafts a strategic plan that identifies the desired end-state and outlines an approach to work toward that end goal. The final step in the process is to implement the strategy and leverage agreed-upon metrics to guide and gauge progress. It's also important to point out that this is not a one-off project. A company's DEIAB efforts should be constantly evaluated and adjusted as internal and external needs change.

How can companies go wrong in this process? How would you advise them to avoid making those mistakes?

A second misstep is the expectation that hiring a DEIAB lead is the be-all, end-all. While establishing leadership and a full-time focus on DEIAB is an important first step, enabling sustainable change requires the work and commitment from every employee in the organization.

Strategic Consideration: Human Resources

Is diversity seen as an “add-on” to HR practices rather than being grounded in inclusive design and implementation of HR practices?

- Review your policies and procedures around recruitment and retention of employees:
- Are hiring and promotion processes open and transparent?
- Are interview panels used rather than allowing for individual, subjective choices?
- Is there a reliance on referrals from current employees?
Employee referrals are great. This means our people love us. However, it is important to be aware that when we make referrals, we are most likely doing so from our individual networks and choosing people like us, thus further facilitating maintaining the status quo.
- Have job descriptions and job postings been reviewed to remove biased language in favor of evidence-based performance criteria?
- Do all employees have access to inclusive benefits?

Start Building an Inclusive Organizational Culture

Ready to take the first step into building an inclusive organizational culture and creating effective diversity management? The Maturity Model and Inventory from Brightworks Consulting is a great place to start. This assessment allows organizations to visually see their current level of maturity and develop an action plan to improve maturity along the DEIAB continuum.

Designed with a different perspective than other assessment tools—emphasizing “putting people first”—the Maturity Model features data based on science, a global lens on inclusion, and a seamless rollout experience to employees at all levels in an organization.

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Our Goal: Build more equitable societies, communities and workplaces



References for Best Practices and Research in this Report Include:

Brightworks Consulting

Deloitte

McKinsey & Co.

GlobeSmart

AustinBC

Brighter Strategies

Forbes

SHRM

Community Boost

Workable

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