

Creating an Inclusive Culture in a Global Work Environment

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Even as technology makes the world appear smaller, managing diversity and inclusion (D&I) remains a significant challenge for organizations. To succeed in today's environment, they must commit to developing an inclusive culture.

Increasingly, companies are working with and managing people who are spread out not only within countries but also across borders and oceans. Their managers are managing people from more diverse geographies, cultures, demographics, and backgrounds than ever before. People from a variety of backgrounds must work together—one-on-one and in teams—across locations that may or may not be formally linked.

Organizational leaders need the skills required to manage this changing, diverse workplace. CLOs have the task of teaching the managerial skills needed in today's multicultural work environment. Their job is to prepare leaders and managers to value differences among employees, external clients, and customers so that everyone is treated with dignity and respect.

In an article in *SAGE Open*, Harold Andrew Patrick and Vincent Raj Kumar define diversity as “a set of conscious practices that involve understanding and appreciating interdependence of humanity, cultures, and the natural environment; practicing mutual respect for qualities and experiences that are different from our own; ... recognizing that personal, cultural, and institutionalized discrimination creates and sustains privileges for some while creating and sustaining disadvantages for others; and building alliances across differences so that we can work together to eradicate all forms of discrimination.”

Toward an inclusive culture

The role of the CLO is to move individuals and the organization toward philosophical and practical change in support of diversity and inclusion.

The most effective way to help move an organization forward and provide a measurable, long-term impact is centered around what we call the Three A's: “Analysis—Assessment—Action.” Here's a look at each element:

Analysis. This stage isn't just about asking questions. It's about asking the *right* questions. The initial goal is to capture the issues, concerns, and barriers currently existing within the organization and use that knowledge to develop a strategic diversity plan to address them. The plan should outline the specific steps necessary to reach the agreed-upon organizational goals.

Assessment. Generally, an organizational climate study, cultural audits, self-assessments, and one-on-one and group interviews are beneficial in capturing the existing climate. Both quantitative and qualitative measures of the D&I climate should be used.

Useful documents include EEO/AA reports and data on pay equity, promotions, recruiting (what are the costs of finding diverse employees?), and retention (who stays? who is leaving and why?). Other important data include department/team effectiveness and how conflict is managed within the existing culture.

Action. Based on the analysis and assessment, the CLO must implement some proven practices:

- Conduct organization-wide training tailored to each level—that is, leadership team, managers, and employees. When possible, separate the groups so that each feels more free to open up and discuss relevant issues.
- Provide data to help leaders and managers see the correlation between D&I and productivity and employee

engagement.

- Develop a consistent operational definition of diversity and inclusion.
- As part of the organization-wide training, include a discussion of perceptions and how our perceptions unconsciously shape how we treat and respond to others.
- Illustrate the positive impact of cultural differences, an area that is commonly overlooked.
- Explore the values of cultural orientation.
- Examine personal values and how they influence behaviors and interactions.
- Acknowledge differences, define what the differences are, and leverage those differences within the organization.

Achieving a high-performing, inclusive organization is a journey. The CLO and the leadership team must develop milestones and target dates to assess where they are (actual) with where they want to be (projected). With that information, they can develop SMART goals for reaching the desired destination.

The D&I imperative

Most organizations are made up of diverse cultures internally, in the customer base, or both. Acknowledging and respecting differences can create a competitive advantage and increase employee engagement, thereby increasing productivity. D&I is about creating a fair and safe work environment where all employees can contribute and have access to opportunities.



To develop a high-performance team, you need to motivate people, win their cooperation, provide effective feedback, and more. Learn how to adjust your management style to the needs of various situations.

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About The Author

Carrie Spell-Hansson is the executive director and founder of The Folke Institute for Transformative Learning and an expert in diversity and inclusion. TFI provides training and development, coaching, and research in diversity and inclusion, communication, cross-cultural and gender competencies, and leadership and management development both domestically and internationally. She is a sought-after speaker and a top-rated facilitator of communications, management, and leadership courses for American Management Association. She draws on her extensive years of experience in the field, using both professional and personal insights in her dynamic workshops and presentations. Spell-Hansson has been the subject matter expert on D&I for several organizations, including AMA.