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Diversity, equity and inclusion

in post-pandemic
global work

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Intro...

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I) are critical considerations for individuals and companies. As we explore in this paper, DE&I provide both opportunities and threats, which prompts some important questions.

Is your company's approach clear? Is it truly lived in all aspects of the business? Or is it merely a nod to the social pressures placed on "good employers" to value DE&I? Given that DE&I is fundamentally based on principles of ethics, access to opportunity, fairness and justice, how are these topics reflected in your approach to Global Mobility (GM)? And what can we learn from industry leaders?

To set the scene for our discussion, and to explore how individuals and organizations can refine their DE&I to gain positive outcomes, we review some historical and some more recent events that cast these issues into the limelight.

We start with three events, although there are many more that could be included.

Sexual Orientation. The underlying events of the LGBT Pride Month and the Stonewall riots, date back to June 1969. A police raid at the Stonewall Inn in New York's Greenwich Village caused a series of spontaneous demonstrations by members of the gay community. As a result, worldwide Pride events have become common each June, to recognize the impact of now LGBTQ+ (lesbian, gay, bi-sexual, transgender, queer / questioning) people in the world.

Gender Diversity, Equity and Duty of Care. In the aftermath of Harvey Weinstein's decade-long history of sexual abuse and eventual prosecution, a global movement, known as MeToo (or #metoo), publicised the vast number of women who are victims of sexual violence. In addition, there is persuasive evidence that women are underrepresented in higher hierarchical levels, for instance in management (Business Leader, 2022¹).

Race & People of Colour. While the civil rights movement has a much longer history, the tragic death of George Floyd in May 2020 - a man of colour murdered by a Minneapolis police officer after being arrested for buying cigarettes with a counterfeit \$20 bill - made its way into collective memory. This tragic event once again highlighted how racism and racially motivated violence remains deeply rooted in society.

“ *Inclusion is not a matter of political correctness. It is the key to growth.* ”

- Rev. Jesse Jackson

Companies around the world started to recognise these movements and associate their brands with them, including adding rainbow flags to their logos. Organizations now celebrate gay pride month, publicly support initiatives like Black History Month (February in Canada and the US, October in the UK and Ireland), Black Lives Matter, use the MeToo hashtag, and commit to the Charter of Diversity.

In essence, organizations are well-aware of the importance of DE&I and understand that not publicly committing to diversity, equity, and inclusion is a big no-go. And don't get this wrong – we believe this is great! But is the reaction of companies good enough? It is one thing to penetrate (social) media by repeating these messages; living these values, implementing them in corporate structures, and designing processes in the organization to truly embrace diversity, equity and inclusion is another story.

Foreword

Emma Dodwell-Groves

Organisations are widely beginning to address diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) in their mobility programs.

They are considering, perhaps for the first time, unconventional families, differing levels of accessibility, neurodiversity, gender and sexual orientation safety concerns, and a wide array of other disclosed or undisclosed diversity needs that may not have been addressed in traditional 'one size fits all' policies.

Not only is it a legal responsibility and a talent imperative in many locations to support the needs of protected groups, but since we all have our own diverse circumstances, priorities and motivations, these changes benefit all mobile employees.

The shifts to mobility programs most commonly include an array of practical alterations to policy language and provisions, increased flexibility, and increased visibility and transparency to support diverse demographics that may otherwise not have felt they had the opportunity to relocate. However, the often-neglected angle of DE&I in mobility is the strategic and proactive role that mobility can play in broader organisational DE&I objectives.

Mobility as a function has long sought a more prominent 'seat at the table' with regards to involvement in organizational talent. Mobility is known as a functional way to move talent from point A to point B and redistribute key skills and is often identified as a means to develop future leaders (formally or otherwise). But in addition to skills gleaned such as international experience, global mindset development, and regional networks, you can add developing a more inclusive mindset and a better understanding of diversity.

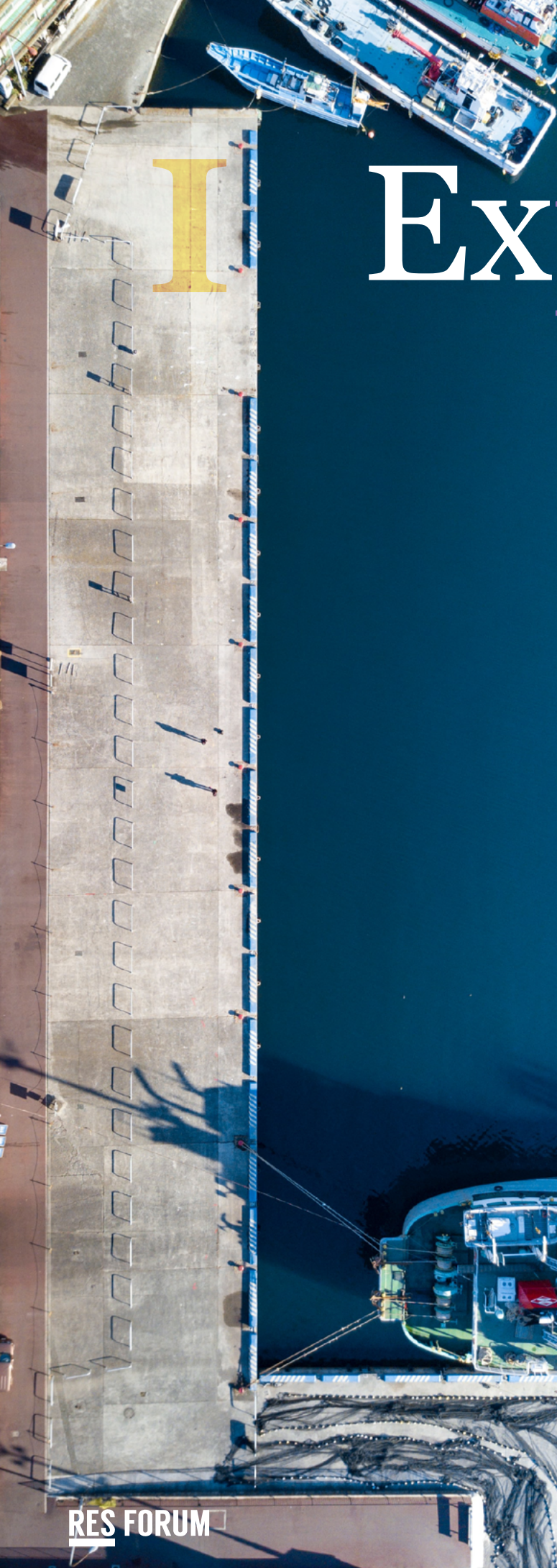
These attributes aren't automatically bestowed upon a mobile employee by default when they relocate, but if they are provided with training, and a framework of understanding is provided, then strategic exposure to diverse cultures, ways of working and attitudes can improve empathy, listening skills, self-reflection, awareness of biases, and a greater appreciation of the value that diverse perspectives provide.

Mobility is uniquely positioned not only to support and encourage more diverse mobile employees right now, but to consciously grow and develop a pipeline of leaders with experience of diversity and an inclusive mindset for the future.

Emma Dodwell-Groves

Senior Manager, Mobility Experience Solutions





Exploring beneath the surface

In this report, we look beneath the surface and explore the status quo of DE&I in GM. We go beyond public statements and separate lip service from dedicated action. Plus, we provide a deep dive into how organizations understand, operationalize, and measure DE&I in GM.

Data for our research comes from a series of in-depth interviews with experts both in the GM sector and in leading DE&I roles. Those experts were interviewed with a semi-structured set of questions and presented with a rough idea of the topic. Then we let the conversation flow freely. We followed up on our preliminary findings with further subject experts and we queried the RES Forum Strategic Advisory Board to elicit their views. By including experts from a broad range of industries and various roles, we had a great opportunity to gather many diverse perspectives, each of which we followed up further.

DE&I is a complex topic. It's multi-faceted and handled differently in different organizations. In essence, while a lot has been achieved, there is still substantial ground to cover. To structure this report, we depict DE&I approaches as a journey. This owes much to the fact that many of our interview partners made explicit and implicit comparisons to a sea voyage when reporting on how they perceive the handling of DE&I in their organizations.

They talked about reaching a safe harbour that represents a state where the company had successfully achieved their DE&I goals – a place to take stock, refine objectives and to continue the journey towards a culture truly characterized by DE&I. This safe harbour would metaphorically allow a protection against the 'elements' – a chance for a diverse crew to come together, to discuss openly and take time to jointly develop superior ideas. This would allow companies to prepare for the next leg of a journey in which DE&I objectives might well change.

At the same time, they were certain to praise what has been achieved so far, especially considering the port from which this choppy voyage began. Next, we must consider the crew, steering the ship towards a better future, blown along by winds that drive this change. Finally, we turn to the challenges that were already overcome, accounting for the learnings made, while highlighting the barriers holding organizations back. At the end of this report there is a summary of the key learnings embodied in ten DE&I recommendations.

II What does DE&I want to achieve?

Destination Safe Harbour!

First, and foremost, the respondents explained that DE&I is about accounting for all different layers of diversity, not just single dimensions. Diversity represents a variety of differences and similarities. It consists of characteristics such as age, gender, race, religion, ethnicity, national origin, and sexual orientation. In this regard, the term diversity needs to be understood quite literally, and one of the best ways to illustrate this is based on the Layers of Diversity Model by Gardenswartz & Rowe.

- Institutional ■
- Organizational ■
- External ■
- Internal ■

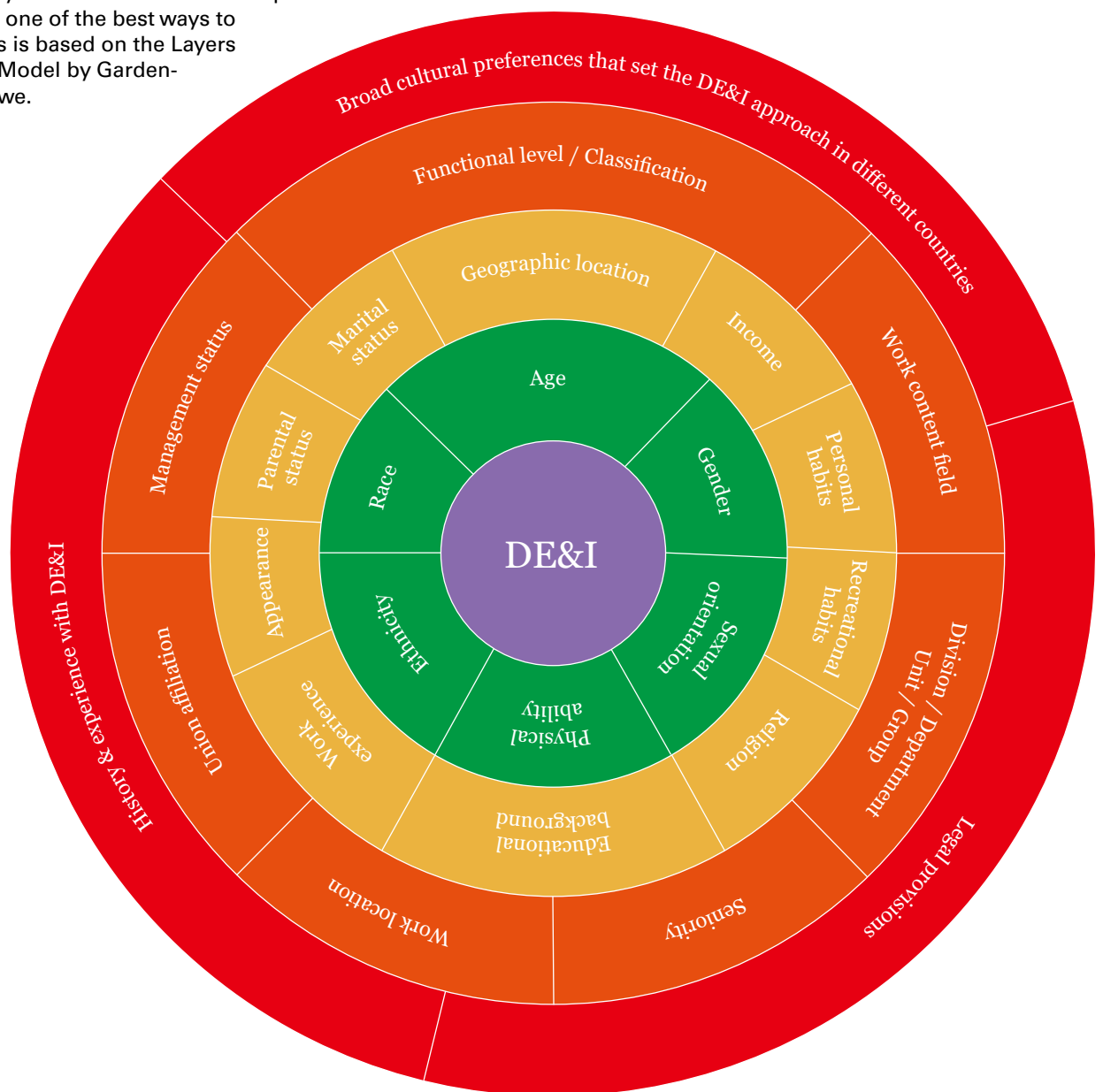


Figure 1 - adapted and extended from Gardenswartz & Rowe, *Diverse Teams at Work* (2nd edition, SHRM, 2003)

II

what does DE&I want to achieve?

“ We are receiving attention and resources and we are moving forward. ”

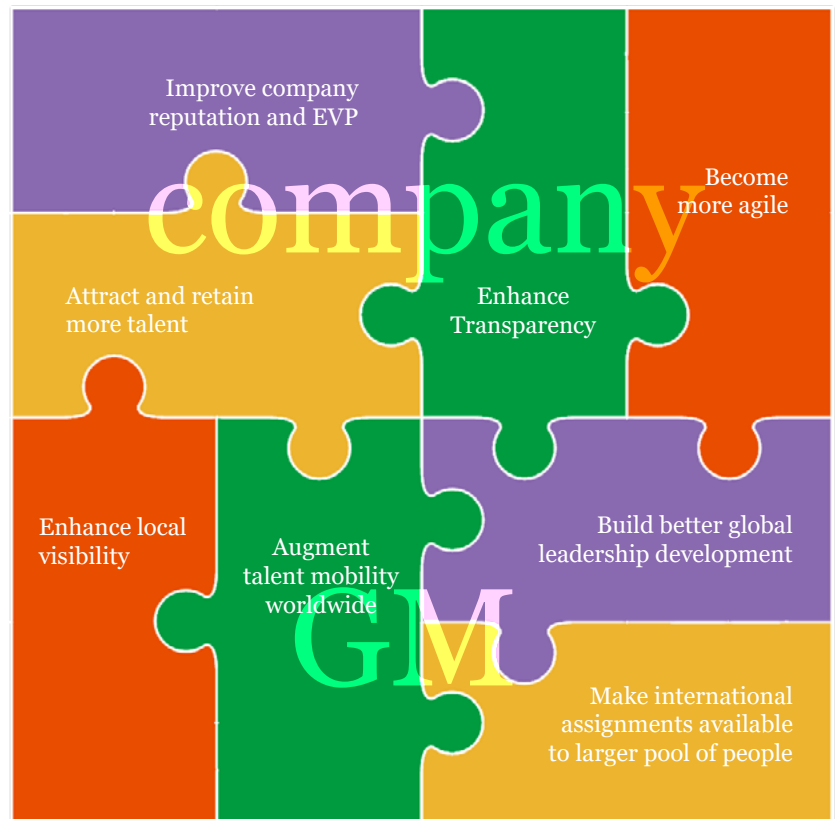
Fair, transparent, varied

When summarizing the ultimate goals of DE&I, we see a diverse pattern. Often, the “safe harbour” is described along more than one dimension of the model. Most respondents shared that they wanted to create a fair and transparent environment in which every employee has the same chances and opportunities. However, when it came to secondary goals there was a lot of variety as depicted in the box.

True win-win situation

A common factor for all these goals is that their success would truly improve the organization. Beyond ethical drivers, successful DE&I results in a greater number of and more diverse ideas and perspectives. It also enables enhanced innovation that is more closely aligned to various markets and customer interests and, ultimately, better financial outcomes.

Thus, there can be a true win-win situation: beyond ethics there is also a financial driver, which is important to power the necessary changes. Although this should not be the main reason to engage in DE&I, one of our respondents nicely summarized it by stating that “even if the CEO pushes our DE&I initiatives to make a profit” - so for the “wrong reasons” - at least it means “we are receiving attention and resources and we are moving forward”



What is driving DE&I?

The wind in the sails!

What drivers are propelling DE&I? Yes, financial gains may be one. However, another theme that emerged in our conversations is the link between the COVID-19 pandemic and DE&I initiatives. As mentioned earlier, companies understand the importance of DE&I, but the pandemic seems to have given the movement a tremendous uplift. For instance, equality and inclusion has seemingly soared through the increase in virtual meetings.

If a company manages to empower their staff from countries in which Hofstede's² power distance is large (and communication is often more indirect and diplomatic) by creating mechanisms and expectations in which everybody participates, it is able to elicit more diverse opinions. After all, a greater 'catchment area' for meeting attendees, each with equal on-screen status, can reduce hierarchical differences.

While 'knowledge is still power', access to that knowledge, and the meetings where key decisions are taken, has increased. As another respondent put it, "since the lockdown, DE&I really hit it off". Although, as a caveat, we note that, for many organizations, this means a start to their journey with more tangible practices, while creating the necessary infrastructure to fully realise the potential of DE&I measures.

Part of this 'infrastructure' is a virtual team leadership approach that is sensitive to the work-life balance issues for employees working at home. Women have been shown to have more work boundary conflicts as they tend to have more family obligations. It is important that leaders are sensitive to the often-increased demands on women and that these pressures are factored into work, development and career approaches.

Another major driver is the global War for Talent. The combination of a more diversity-aware and conscious younger generation with different values and perceptions, as well as the shortage of skilled labour in many industries, makes it necessary for organizations to be more conscious in their DE&I approaches. Changing values in society have led to changes in employee expectations and many organizations are reacting to this by prioritizing DE&I.

This is also reflected in organizations' take on GM. GM departments are highly affected by their company's DE&I approach and must understand how to make DE&I part of their DNA and how to drive the diversity agenda. Our respondents highlighted both the need and the potential for more specific DE&I management in managing the global workforce and outlined several opportunities.



Who are the organizational players?

The crew on board

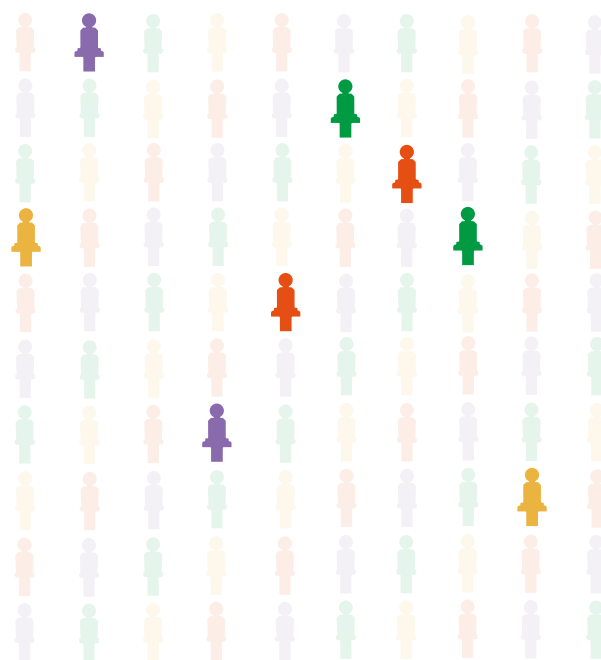
Every single human is a unique individual. However, we all share characteristics with other people, and, because of those similarities, we favour certain people over others. Research calls this Similarity Attraction theory, according to which, people mentally sort other people into an “in-group” (people like them) and an “out-group” (people different from them). It is deeply rooted in human nature and needs a conscious effort to overcome. Similarity Attraction can be found everywhere: notably in our friend circle and our choice of partner, but also in the business world. The latter was long dominated (and probably still is) by an in-group of individuals sharing two main diversity characteristics: white + men. And because of Similarity Attraction the system endures.

38 CEOs of Fortune 500 companies are female

What is striking is that the issue mentioned above does not only happen at CEO level. It applies to the C-suite in general, down to other (higher) management position, and affects GM and international assignees alike. Therefore, it is essential that the key change agents in an organization are represented at all levels.

Thus, it is not surprising that those interview partners who could report good progress in their DE&I initiatives mentioned the top executive team as being supportive agents of change. Particularly, companies with a CHRO who prioritized DE&I were seen by GM leaders as being more open and supportive of the topic. A good example of successful implementation of DE&I at all levels was mentioned by a consulting company who has regular meetings between their domestic DE&I lead and the person in charge of international mobility. Since laws, regulations, and culture differ from country to country, they deemed that a one-size-fits-all approach for DE&I would be unsuitable and implement a case-sensitive approach under the general corporate umbrella.

Such a system is best addressed where change is induced exogenously or if the key stakeholders genuinely want things to change. The need for more diversity and change is clear: in the 2020 Fortune 500 (<https://fortune.com/fortune500/>) list, only 38 companies had a female CEO. And that is just one example. In fact, in the entire history of the Fortune 500 list, out of a total of 1,800 CEOs, there have been 19 (nineteen) Black CEOs³. Put this in context of these (and other) diversity characteristics in the general population and you see why this is a substantial problem – there is massive underrepresentation.



Share of female CEOs in the Fortune 500

However, we also learned that the best DE&I approach in GM is driven by the entire workforce. As one GM manager put it, a multigenerational workforce with complementary skills and overlapping core values, supported by DE&I ambassadors from different organizational levels, are vital to success. Those companies are the best practice examples of DE&I and the recommendations at the end of this report embody their good practices.

How can we come closer to the safe harbour?

While some organizations lead the way, others are still at the beginning of their journey. Others still have not even set sail from their home port.

In line with findings of DE&I research in general, we see a widening gap between the DE&I approaches of leading companies and those who are left behind. A big issue, particularly for those companies not at the forefront, is that the intra-organizational links are not sufficiently developed.

For instance, if talent management is not directly tied to GM, it is much harder to holistically manage DE&I of international assignments. Talent management is a core topic for every organization that does not have an abundance of high-quality applications of top candidates – which is the case for most companies. Many organizations are aware of the importance of success in the War for Talent. Indeed, part of a successful Employee Value Proposition⁴ (EVP) is to actively manage talent to ensure a sufficient flow of the “right people in the right place at the right time.” Since international experience is among the core things organizations value when considering promotions, it makes sense to link talent to GM. However, based on our research we found that, in many companies, this link is either weak or non-existent. Consequently, it is a lot harder to account for DE&I topics when those two critical departments are not effectively communicating.

Similarly, companies are held back when DE&I is approached too generally. Instead of closely linking and adapting DE&I to the aims and needs of GM, too many organizations still favour a one-size-fits-all approach. Even though it sounds reasonable to consider DE&I as “treating everyone the same” the truth is, doing so often misses the point. Indeed, there are constraints that should not be ignored. For instance, homosexuality is still a crime in certain regions of the world, in some even punishable by death, and assignments must make a case-specific approach.

We conclude our analysis with several recommendations we believe are valuable for your organization. While this list is not exhaustive, it is a good starting point, and we hope that reflecting upon other organizations’ approaches and successes can help you map your own voyage. Some of these recommendations are general and some are GM specific. What they have in common is that they are applied by leaders in DE&I and that they are proven to work. After all, every voyage starts with lifting the anchor and setting sail. If you do not start moving, one thing is certain, you will never arrive. This would be a genuine shame, as it would mean your employees and colleagues were restricted, and your organization would miss out on many opportunities.





Ten

DE&I recommendations from leading organizations

Build the business case for DE&I

DE&I strengthens the generation of ideas through a greater diversity of thought within the organization. This allows it to be more innovative, as well as shaping its products and services more closely to the preferences of its customers and clients. Beyond market factors, the employee value proposition is likely to be enhanced through ethical and fair approaches, making the firm more attractive. For employees, good DE&I approaches augment motivation, commitment and engagement. There is a strong moral and business case for DE&I – and due to its inherent touchpoints with different cultures, GM is a great platform to build your business case upon.

Join Forces across the entire organization

Organizations with the most successful DE&I collaborate across the entire organization. This sounds trivial, however, to achieve the best results, siloed-thinking and solo-runs are detrimental. In this regard, communication is key. Instead of falling for (cheap) actionism, successful organizations sit down together, come up with a joint strategy, and implement DE&I practices with one voice. This ensures two things: 1) everyone on board is involved in the development, and 2) it provides a holistic view, avoiding redundancies and allowing for specific solutions where needed.

Broaden support of and engagement in DE&I

When we say “involve everyone” we mean that literally. A good start is to invite all employees to join employee resource groups. Once they are established, sit down together and listen to your employees. What do they have on their minds? What is working well and what is not? Where do they see potential and what should be the priorities for change? It may be advisable to get external guidance when running these sessions. Even though an internal facilitator may have the purest intentions, there can be suspicions of driving an agenda or playing political games. Also, there may be “a history” among employees and it can be hard for the people steering the conversation to ignore that. External experts bring an unbiased and fresh perspective. Once the employee resource groups produced their first outputs, you should form HR / GM pressure groups to directly translate the topics identified into your GM programme.

VI

10 DE&I recommendations from leading organizations

Champion true diversity and inclusion across many different characteristics

Many organizations focus on one or two aspects of diversity – often these are gender, race and sometimes sexual orientation. As Gardenswartz and Rowe’s model demonstrates, there are many internal and external ways in which individuals vary. Understanding diversity holistically and becoming a truly inclusive organization is a great challenge that promises many rewards.

Re-Think how DE&I is seen in your organization

DE&I is not supposed to be an “HR thing”. As it affects everyone, it should be an “Everyone thing”. Relying on HR to take care of DE&I has two major problems. One: it is dependent on HR. If the people in HR care about DE&I, they may drive it. If they do not care, or if their power is limited, they won’t drive it – and nothing will happen. Two: relying solely on HR creates a false sense of responsibility. DE&I is not HR, it is the job of everyone to ensure a discrimination-free environment that is open and welcoming to everyone. This is important for leaders at all levels in the way they think about people, are sensitive to their particular issues (e.g., the pressure of the manifold family obligations on women (although this does not mean that sometimes men might not be in a similar situation) or the tensions that some assignments can bring for the LGBTQ+ community) and, therefore, need to ‘live’ sensitive approaches. Successful DE&I organizations engage everyone in the organization and create a culture of belonging!

Value diversity & create as well as commit to an inclusive organizational culture

Organizational culture is essential for successfully leading in DE&I. If the culture is not receptive to and fully behind these practices, they are likely to fail. While your current organizational culture may not be quite there yet, this does not mean you cannot do anything to change it. Apart from hiring people with the right attitude, you can commit to DE&I with written statements. These, of course, must be clear, precise and concrete. They must go beyond platitudes like “we value diversity”.

In terms of GM, clearly formulate a no-penalty policy if someone turns down an assignment. Sometimes people may provide you with reasons, sometimes they may choose not to. Think about employees who have chosen not to share their sexual orientation at work for personal reasons. If these people were offered an assignment to a country where they could face capital punishment simply because of their sexual orientation, it should not be surprising if they decline. However, a safe and trustful organizational culture does not force employees to give a reason. They rejected the assignment, and they should not receive any penalty, no questions asked.

Forget one-size-fits-all in GM

As outlined in the report, it’s tempting to develop a single DE&I policy and apply it universally. However, this often falls short. Also, it tends to focus on limited factors and ignores specific needs. For instance, think about managing the relocation of an employee who is a single parent with two school-aged children, or somebody who relies on a wheelchair. Every organization has a Duty of Care and fulfilling this duty throughout an international assignment has many different dimensions and implications. Overall, while companies would be wise to determine globally applicable DE&I principles, the actual policies and practices must consider local and contextual variations. A one-size-fits-all approach simply does not work. By choosing it anyway you risk negative consequences.

Be pro-active and put your assignment practices to test

For five decades academics have puzzled why so few assignees are women. Yet the situation has not substantially changed, with three in four assignees still being men. Other diversity elements – be they colour, race or nationality – also show a lack of diversity. It is time to tackle this imbalance of diversity and inclusion and the current pandemic provides a good platform for targeted action. GM professionals would do well to analyse historical trends in their organizations and to develop approaches that focus on addressing such imbalances.

Link talent management and GM activities

Effective DE&I in GM demands concerted and coordinated efforts from both the talent and GM functions. The pandemic has created more opportunities for local talent to be spotted and more need for the organization to delegate and empower employees in far-flung units of its global operations. Assignments are only one element that firms use to develop their high-potential employees. Working with the same DE&I principles and liaising intensively will help workers become more insightful and more capable global employees.

Evidence-based management is key to monitoring and improving DE&I efforts in GM

Finally, as in many other aspects of business, data rules. Only when we define goals and make them objectively measurable, can we assess their success. Therefore, DE&I champions develop appropriate KPIs and measure progress against them. Even though DE&I is not simply about “getting the numbers right”, not looking at the numbers is not an option. For instance, if an organization aims to increase the number of women on international assignment, simply collecting and tracking data allows them to objectively and unambiguously evaluate whether the goal has been achieved. Not using data and associated KPIs is a missed opportunity, because without evidence success is undefined and open to interpretation.

Expert Perspective

Jacqueline van Haaften

DE&I and mobility: helping expat partners to anchor remains essential.

As the daughter of a merchant navy navigation officer, I greatly appreciate the maritime analogies in this report. Just like a captain can't sail the ship on his or her own, an expat needs the support of their partner/ spouse/ family to make a success of the assignment. That's why I am 'hoisting the flag' in the name of a 'partner proof' DE&I program.

The first sea change

It might be interesting for some to know that gender bias led to partner support being taken more seriously. When some companies on-boarded their first female expats, the attitude was: 'you can't expect a man to sit next to the pool with a glass of wine – we need him to find a job!' We decided not to take this personally, and gladly took advantage of the momentum to get the topic of spousal support on the agenda.

No one left adrift

More recently, I am hopeful that appreciation for the importance of partner support will further rise with the tide of DE&I-related discussions. But I also hope we don't go overboard. Our goal is to take care of all expat partners. If we all agree that every individual should have access to opportunity, fairness and justice, then partner support cannot be a flex benefit. It's for everyone. For us, it always has been.

Supporting LGBTQ+ partners a given

Recently, Global Connection was invited by an RMC to discuss what they called a 'sensitive topic'. They were in touch with LGBTQ+ partners and were anxious to know if we could support them. We had to read the email twice. Why would we treat an LGBTQ+ partner any differently? During the meeting, the RMC explained: 'sometimes such partners cannot get work permits'. But non-LGBTQ+ partners on a regular basis have the same issue! Don't get me wrong: we don't underestimate the challenges LGBTQ+ partners are facing. But don't think that those who don't belong to that group have a smooth voyage.

Irrelevant question

For years, we have supported many LGBTQ+ partners, but when getting in touch with our partners to help them define their support needs we never ask them to state their sexuality. For us it's an irrelevant question. However, we do talk about the restrictions they face, as we do with everyone. Taking those restrictions into account, we help them to make plans for a fulfilling occupation, whatever that might be. A truly holistic approach doesn't allow for preconceived notions on any topic.

Navigating uncharted waters

In the end it doesn't matter if a partner is 24 years old and fresh out of university, a mother of three who has never had a professional career, a gay researcher with a PhD, or a devout Christian moving to a Muslim country, or vice versa. Each one has left their network and comfort zone behind. If someone feels marginalised for any reason (their race, religious belief, sexuality, professional status), we're there to help them to take positive steps, form new networks and find their place in society. For us, there is no 'in-group'. Every partner is an individual trying to navigate uncharted waters, and we're there to support them.

A primary employment condition

In closing, if you would like to attract LGBTQ+ talent, and enthuse them about a posting abroad, please remember to address their partner's needs, preferably in advance. It's never simply an 'administrative issue'. I say that as we know of expats who technically relocated with 'their studying nephew' as they couldn't reveal they were in a same-sex relationship. However, we also know how difficult it can be for 'the nephew' to remain happy with that status. I hope that this report and the increased attention on DE&I will lead to spousal support becoming a primary employment condition for LGBTQ+ partners. Should that come to pass, non-LGBTQ+ partners will also benefit. As it would be in the spirit of equality that everyone be granted the same rights.

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Global Connection is an independent, international expat partner support organisation. We support the partners of employees on international assignments worldwide. Our expert consultants, coaches and trainers work with each expat partner to contribute to their wellbeing



on assignment, increasing the likelihood of a successful posting. With over 25 years' experience, Global Connection is still the only supplier with a global scope to focus 100% on expat partners.

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About The RES Forum

The RES Forum is an independent, highly engaged and international community of senior in-house International Human Resources professionals with more than 1850 members in over 45 countries. We are not influenced by external parties or third-party vendors. We share information to make our working lives easier and to assist in solving difficult work challenges.

We collaborate on shared projects and initiatives, and we learn together. Our agenda, set entirely by our membership, is delivered through a spectrum of services including data analytics, Global Mobility and International HR thought leadership and advanced learning and accreditation programmes in the area of Global Mobility management.

The RES Forum cooperates with leading academics in the field of Global Mobility. The main goal is to enhance the practical perspective of the RES Forum with a more academic research approach. We aim to match the understanding of pressing issues in HR management with research expertise in order to achieve academic thought leadership in the field of global HR management.

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