

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Getting from “Good Idea” to “Great Place to Work” in the Roofing Industry

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By now, the notion that a diverse, equitable, and inclusive (DEI) workplace can kickstart ideas, enhance productivity, minimize turnover, enhance your company’s reputation, and even boost the bottom line is almost axiomatic. But what does a DEI workplace look actually look like? Does every DEI roofing company look the same? What are the components of a successful DEI program? And how do you go about implementing a sincere and successful DEI program in your workplace? Countless column inches in commercial, business, and management publications have been devoted to making the business case for DEI programs and answering these and other questions. This article recaps some of the latest thinking on the benefits and implementation of diversity and inclusion programs, and presents several recurring themes found in the literature.

The Business Case for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

In a 2020 follow-up to its widespread and influential 2015 report, consulting firm c said, “The business case for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is stronger than ever,” and suggested that the first step toward achieving “real progress” toward DEI goals is to take a closer look the policies and practices of “diversity winners,” or those companies and organizations doing DEI right.

McKinsy & Company’s analysis “finds that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity on executive teams were 25 percent more likely to have above-average profitability than companies in the fourth quartile—up from 21 percent in 2017 and 15 percent in 2014.”

In addition, McKinsy & Company found that:

- The greater the representation, the higher the likelihood of outperformance.
- Companies with more than 30 percent women executives were more likely to outperform companies where this percentage ranged from 10 to 30, and in turn these companies were more likely to outperform those with even fewer women executives, or none at all.

McKinsy & Company’s business-case findings pertaining to the benefits of ethnic and cultural diversity were equally compelling.

- In 2019, top-quartile companies outperformed those in the fourth one by 36 percent in profitability, slightly up from 33 percent in 2017 and 35 percent in 2014.
- The likelihood of outperformance continues to be higher for diversity in ethnicity than for gender.

These startling results have been supported by others as well. In a 2018 article that appeared on Inc.com, by Ryan Jenkins reported similar results, finding that “organizations with inclusive cultures are two times as likely to meet or exceed financial targets, three times as likely to be high-performing, six times more likely to be innovative and agile, and eight times more likely to achieve better business outcomes.”

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Yet, as encouraging and hopeful as these numbers are, they don't quite explain why these companies outperform their less diverse and inclusive competitors. In all likelihood, the reasons for their superior performances vary. Nevertheless, research has shown that one reason diverse companies outperform their competitors is because they can more readily understand different perspectives, which allows them to tap into different markets faster, and make better decisions that accurately reflect society. According to a 2020 Forbes article by Yola Robert, "racially and ethnically diverse companies are proven to perform 35% better, 87% better at decision making and are 1.4 times increase in revenue."

These claims were supported by 2017 research from the UK consulting firm, People Management, which found diverse teams make decisions faster than individual workers. Further, these results showed that "effective decision-making also increases with greater diversity in a team. All-male teams were shown to make better business decisions than individuals 58 percent of the time, while gender-diverse teams outperformed individuals 73 percent of the time."

Given all these percentages and statistics, it can be tempting to think of workplace diversity and inclusion in terms of numbers and ratios, as if the right ratio of men to women or amount of racial and ethnic representation will unlock these positive outcomes and a more profitable company. Yet, while hiring goals may boost the diversity of workplace teams, it won't necessarily create an inclusive culture.

"Too often, leaders focus diversity and inclusion efforts disproportionately on the employee pipeline, but the employee experience continues far beyond an offer letter," notes Sharon Florentine in a 2019 article on CIO.com. "To retain and nurture top talent, it's critical to take an honest look at the end-to-end employee experience, with an eye toward creating conditions that promote inclusion on a daily basis."

If scrutinizing the "end-to-end employee experience" and "creating conditions" that promote inclusion sound like time-consuming endeavors, it's because they are. But that's okay. Creating a diverse, equitable, and inclusive roofing company doesn't happen overnight. It takes time—and attention to detail. As McKinsey & Company point out, "even when they are diverse, companies will have to go beyond superficial aspects of diversity and inclusion" and consider other, less clearcut or obvious factors that can encourage—or detract from—an atmosphere of inclusion.

"Inclusion is ongoing, not a one-off training," says Florentine. "It isn't enough to teach employees what it means to be inclusive. Like any form of behavior change, inclusion requires individuals to identify key moments in which to build new habits or 'micro-behaviors.' Only when these habits are put into action in an environment that supports honest conversations and healthy tension, real change becomes possible."

Implementing A Successful Diversity and Inclusion Program

So how do you create this kind of workplace environment where these new habits can take root and grow? The literature on implementing DEI programs offers a range of suggestions, but there seems to be several core concepts and themes that the majority of sources agree on.

Getting buy-in from leadership is critical. According to the Society for Human Resource Management, "a company's executives and managers—those who interact directly with employees—who will be

Copyright 2022 Ellen Thorp and National Women in Roofing – do not reproduce in part or whole without written permission of the author instrumental to the success of diversity and inclusion programs.” Articles in both Forbes and Inc echo such sentiments and report that creating an inclusive organization must be “a priority of company leadership,” and there must be consensus on DEI goals built through open conversation, understanding the benefits of inclusion, and connecting DEI concepts with business strategy.

Once leadership is on-board, middle managers must be involved and equipped to follow through on DEI goals. Then, to find out if these DEI policies are having the desired effect, it is recommended that leadership survey employees to gain a thorough understanding of the workplace culture. As Shelia Callaham writes in Forbes, “[Survey] Questions should help establish the level of understanding employees have about the subject, how inclusive they believe the culture to be, the level of trust they have in the company and their management and their perception of organizational commitment,”

If expertise in the area of DEI is lacking among company leadership, hiring a subject matter expert to oversee the implementation of a DEI program is a way to show that management is serious about creating a diverse and inclusive workplace. And speaking of hiring, it is recommended that companies pay special attention to their hiring and recruiting processes, as they who gets invited to apply for a job opening or hired to fill vacant roles can reveal conscious and unconscious biases in rather obvious and glaring ways. Thus, in addition to conducting surveys about workplace culture, companies should also, track and monitor analytics that can help them measure their progress toward their DEI goals.

Beyond hiring, another obvious way to foster diversity and inclusion in a roofing company is through training. As Jenkins notes in the Inc.com article “Here Are the Benefits of Inclusion and How to Create an Inclusive Culture,” all of the *Fortune 500* companies and almost one-half of U.S. midsize companies “mandate diversity training [which] helps raise awareness, uproot bias, and create a common language to facilitate diversity and inclusion discussions.”

“Training is one of the best ways for employees to understand how their perceptions may be sabotaging inclusive words and behaviors,” said Callaham. “It’s one thing to explain what it means, but something altogether to demonstrate what good inclusion practices look like and how to incorporate them in their learning and development plans.”

Yet, as noted earlier, creating an inclusive and equitable workplace takes time. Employees need the time, training, and opportunity to build the habits that lead to real change. One way to give employees that time and space is through the creation of voluntary employee-led groups—commonly known as Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) or affinity groups—wherein they can talk about DEI-related issues and share their experiences in a safe and welcoming environment.

Another, similar, recommendation from the Society for Human Resource Management is for workplaces to form a group or council composed of Eight to 12 influential leaders who are one or two levels below the CEO that is “involved in goal setting around hiring, retaining, and advancing a diverse workforce and in addressing any employee engagement.”

Of course, whether DEI policies are implemented from the top down or encouraged and promoted through employee-led groups, effective communication is key to the success of any workplace DEI program. However, companies and leaders should approach communication expansively and not just focus on the traditional methods of memos, employee handbooks, and other official communication

vehicles. Therefore, while its important to establish and clearly communicate specific and measurable

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DEI-related goals in the same way you would communicate any other strategic aim, companies are also encouraged to showing their employees they are respected and valued by celebrating differences. The Society for Human Resource Management suggests “inviting employees to share their backgrounds and traditions in the workplace through creative events and programs” and an article in the Harvard Business Review cites storytelling as a way for companies to advance toward the DEI goals.

“Storytelling, one of the most universal human experiences, gives us a rare chance to look through new lenses. And perspective-taking is a life skill, not just a workplace one,” write Selena Rezvani and Stacey A. Gordon in a 2021 article appearing in the Harvard Business Review. “Companies that prioritize inclusion will emerge from crisis stronger, and stories are one major vehicle to help them get there. Employees are encouraged to tell their stories, own them, and consider how they impact their day-to-day experiences at work.”

Getting leadership buy-in, eliminating bias in hiring, offering training, communicating openly, and taking the time to show employees they are respected and valued—when taken together, these practices amount to walking the talk on diversity, equity, and inclusion, which, ultimately, is the most important thing a company can do.

Companies with successful DEI programs are those that have examined whether their day-to-day practices are fostering the culture they want to have and, if not, have made the necessary changes to get where they wanted to be.

If your company is not quite there yet, there are several things you can do in addition to the recommendations mentioned above, to advance your DEI efforts. Among them is ask others for input on how well you are doing to uncover those blind spots you may have missed in your own assessments. Another is measuring your progress on DEI benchmarks by conducting an audit of your DEI-related practices and processes, from recruiting and hiring to developing and retaining employees. Further, these data points can be used in concert with other data pertaining to social media engagement metrics and survey data to gain a more complete understanding of your brand and culture.

Finally, in addition to communicating about your DEI initiatives and goals, take the time to listen to your employees to help you better understand how notions about diversity and inclusion vary across the generations represented in your roofing company. As Jenkins states, “Generation X and Baby Boomers tend to define diversity along the traditional lines of gender, race, and ethnicity. While Millennials typically define diversity beyond demographics, viewing cognitive diversity and an individual's variety of experiences and perspectives at the core of diversity.”

Despite these differences, there is no question that diversity and inclusion matter. So, while there is no one-size-fits-all approach to implementing a successful DEI program, there is consensus that a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace can be a boon to your company's bottom line and so much more. Unfortunately, the DEI policies and practices that will work where you work will likely have to be tailored to your workplace's unique culture, traditions, and method of operations, which means they'll likely take time and a little trial and error to get right. The good news is that there are a number of practices, processes, and procedures that you can use to guide your DEI initiative and make sure it's taking you and your company where you want to go.

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