

# 5-Step Roadmap to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Success in 2022:

## Integrating DEI into Business Strategy

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By Donald Thompson



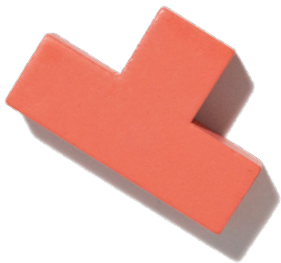
the diversity movement

The business case for diversity is clear: increased revenue, greater innovation, more productivity, better retention, and higher employee satisfaction overall. Yet, if it's so obvious, why isn't everyone already working on a plan? Why hasn't everyone already implemented one?

The truth is that most businesses are trying, but most businesses are failing as well. Since corporate diversity education in America first took off in the 1960s, thousands of hard-working executives and professionals have pushed for individual and organizational awareness, working under the hopeful assumption that changing minds would naturally start to change behavior as well.

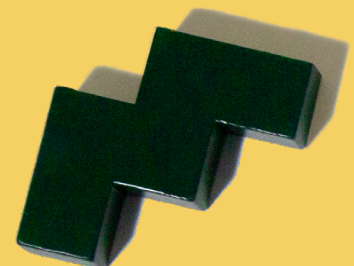


What we have learned from their work is that diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) cannot operate as an isolated initiative. One-off learning sessions make little difference in workplace culture or employee mindset, and mandatory education is usually met with disdain or resistance. As PwC's [Global Diversity and Inclusion Survey](#) reveals, despite unprecedented investment in diversity education, "only 5% of organisations are succeeding in key dimensions of successful D&I programming."



As you build your budget and set your priorities for the next fiscal year, now is the time to plan for DEI initiatives that will generate success and a greater return on investment.

**If you hope to build sustainable, effective, and worthwhile programs, DEI must be aligned with and integrated into the core of your business. It must be reflected in your mission, vision, and values, and it must be quantified like any other element that contributes to your bottom line.**



# Why Diversity Programs Fail

Most diversity programs are not aligned with and integrated into business strategy and are, therefore, falling flat. A 2019 report from [Weber Shandwick](#) which surveyed 500 corporate diversity professionals found that “although half of all D&I professionals strongly believe that internal support for D&I efforts is integral to the success of D&I, such support is not materializing on a large-scale basis, leaving corporate D&I functions short of achieving alignment.”

That surprising lack of integration may be due, in part, to executive resistance. As Janice Gassam Asare suggests in an article for [Forbes](#), “diversity resistance can manifest in multiple ways including a refusal to fund DEI efforts, pushback of diversity programs, and a lack of leadership buy-in for DEI initiatives.”

Diversity initiatives have always faced and will always face resistance. Now, they’re facing a newer challenge as well: [diversity fatigue](#). Even before the seismic shift and social upheaval of 2020, American workers were feeling skeptical and weary of business-driven diversity movements, many of which only seek to check the box of mandatory sensitivity training or don’t include everyone in the organization.

George Floyd’s death inspired a new commitment to equity, inclusion, and workplace initiatives around these topics, but we’re already seeing a drop in engagement as employees watch their companies struggle to build and communicate viable DEI plans.

One other reason that diversity programs fail is a lack of training for middle managers. The truth is, your middle managers are your frontline DEI workers. They are the people actively involved in daily operations, social interactions, and on-the-ground activation of DEI strategy. In that way, middle managers form a critical link between C-suite imperatives and day-to-day behavior. By giving them the tools and education they need to build an inclusive workplace culture, you can create a sturdy scaffold for accountability and learning.



## TOP 3 REASONS WHY DIVERSITY PROGRAMS FAIL

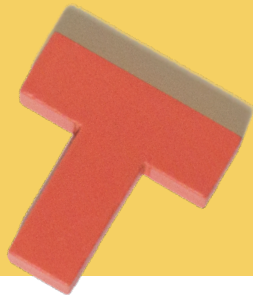
1. Executive resistance
2. Diversity fatigue
3. Lack of training for middle managers



**Getting people to care about an issue is the beginning of the journey, not the end.**

—[Forbes](#)

The truth is that every one of your employees has probably participated in at least one failed attempt to inspire diversity and inclusion at work – initiatives driven primarily by compliance that made them feel uncomfortable, failed to take off, and made little or no difference in their day-to-day lives. Considering the circumstances, **how do you push forward to ameliorate resistance and integrate diversity so you can reap the benefits of successful DEI implementation?**



**The goal is not to change minds, but to change behaviors. Infuse your DEI strategy into every part of your planning so that your business goals and diversity goals complement and support each other.**

**The key to strategy integration is creating an organizational culture that values DEI.** As the NeuroLeadership Institute expounds, successful DEI means changing a number of deeply-ingrained [priorities, habits, and systems](#), both at an individual and organizational level, in order to create long-term cultural change.

The [Weber Shandwick](#) study of diversity professionals shows that DEI and business strategy alignment “has a tangible outcome on talent acquisition,” “positively impacts company reputation,” “positively impacts company financial performance,” and “creates a competitive advantage.” Working toward alignment is easier said than done.

When you’re ready to embed DEI into your organization’s DNA, here are the five key steps to get started.



## 1. TEST YOUR NEEDS FROM THE TOP DOWN.

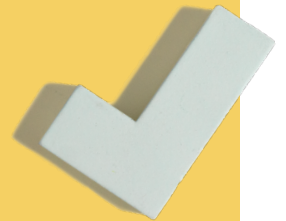
Begin by conducting a DEI assessment that starts with your board and C-suite executives then expands to include directors, managers, and frontline employees.

**YOUR WORKPLACE DIVERSITY SHOULD SEEK TO REFLECT THE DIVERSITY OF YOUR LOCAL COMMUNITY, POTENTIAL CLIENTS, AND MARKETS YOU WOULD LIKE TO ATTRACT.**

Measure key dimensions like gender identity, race, religion, ethnicity, disability, invisible illness, education, veteran status, sexual orientation, neurodiversity, and age, but remember to look beyond those demographics as well. Acquired diversity (travel, hobbies, political perspectives, life experiences), background, and personality are also important in creating diversity of thought and innovation.

The most effective diversity assessments also measure employees' perception of equity and inclusion at work. It is common to see a vast disparity between management and employees' experiences and impressions of workplace culture. As [PwC](#) attests, "as organisations all have subcultures, business leaders may also not be as attuned to behaviors 'on the ground' that are causing employees to feel that their environment is not inclusive." It is equally common to see a gap in knowledge about the organization's DEI efforts.

**Look critically at your systems, policies, and procedures to find areas of concern and potential improvement. Ask for input from across the organization and communicate your findings with vulnerability and transparency to all key stakeholders, emphasizing your intention for progress.**



Diversity initiatives are most effective when those at the top are fully committed, as the necessary investment and prioritization are approved at this level. If you're not in the C-suite, work to gain executive buy-in as early as possible. If you are in the C-suite, lead by example.

**YOUR OWN EFFORTS AT PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT, EDUCATION, AND INCLUSION WILL SET THE TONE FOR ORGANIZATION-WIDE CULTURAL CHANGE.**

In fact, your example is one of the most important keys to DEI success.

## 2. ASK FOR HELP.

Learn as much as you can about successful DEI programs, start to form an idea about what you want to do, then find a consultant or diversity practitioner who can help you bring those programs to life. External experts bring important objectivity and can offer multiple strategies for solving your DEI challenges. Look for a firm that will help you learn to do the work yourself. They should supply you with the resources, guides, and knowledge required to maintain a strong DEI program that continues to show results long after they've completed their work. At this point in the process, many organizations realize they are facing a severe lack of trust.

**ACCORDING TO THE WEBER SHANDWICK STUDY, “ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE IS THE TOP CHALLENGE AT THE COMPANY LEVEL STANDING IN THE WAY OF ACHIEVING D&I GOALS.”**

Culture can sometimes be difficult to shift, so hire an expert with specific experience in constructive disruption and building inclusion.

In doing their work, the team may conduct listening sessions, organize DEI education, help you make the business case for diversity, and identify high-potential candidates for diverse leadership. A consultant will help you bridge the gap between executives, managers, and employees to shift your business culture toward inclusion and transparency, creating buy-in for your DEI initiatives.





### 3. CULTIVATE DIVERSITY CHAMPIONS.

We have known for years that [mandatory bias training does not foster sustainable change](#). Instead, voluntary education, employee-led DEI councils, and business resource groups drive the necessary transformation. In fact, as [Diversity Best Practices](#) reminds us, “diversity councils are a critical driver of organizational change [...] connecting D&I activities to a broader business-driven, results-oriented strategy.”

**AS YOU SEEK TO INTEGRATE YOUR DEI PROGRAM INTO WORKPLACE CULTURE, YOUR EMPLOYEES ARE YOUR STRONGEST PARTNERS AND YOUR MOST POWERFUL AGENTS OF CHANGE.**

By empowering and involving them in the process, you can turn resistant learners into passionate and educated diversity champions who will model inclusive behavior and support diversity programming across the organization. Business resource groups offer the opportunity for everyone to be heard, valued, and engaged in leading your business toward greater DEI.

The same report from [Diversity Best Practices](#) shows that the most successful DEI councils are not distinguished by a single identifier but instead work as models of diversity, inclusion, and cross-functional collaboration. DEI councils should be given defined goals and key performance indicators, reporting to the C-suite but with open communication amongst the entire organization.

Outside of those councils and resource groups, you should also select a diversity leader who has direct access to executives, feels passionately about DEI, and is committed to doing the hard work ahead. Many organizations choose to hire a Chief Diversity Officer, but it’s important to remember that **a culture driven by diversity, equity, and inclusion is part of every employee’s job.**

Drive your DEI integration by linking business outcomes directly to personal outcomes. As Maria Hernandez from [The Bridgespan Group](#) puts it, “to be inclusive in the workplace, skip the polarizing rhetoric or endless debate and move forward with setting performance standards regarding inclusive behaviors.” Tie DEI performance to raises, recognition, and promotion to encourage inclusive workplace behavior and reward team members who model inclusion.

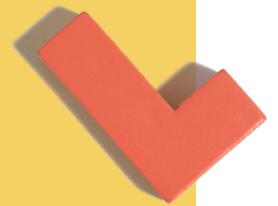
## 4. COMMUNICATE YOUR GOALS, SUCCESSES, AND FAILURES.

Transparency builds trust, inspires confidence, and shows that you are working toward organizational change. Create a communications plan that conveys your commitment to DEI, the motivation behind your decisions, and the benefit to employees of a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive culture. For example, increased revenue due to DEI efforts means increased pay or benefits for employees. Make sure you communicate what's in it for them.

**Commit to DEI in your mission, vision, and values.** Create a goal calendar with specific metrics for success, and share it broadly within your organization. Communicate what you have learned from your assessments, listening sessions, and resource groups to establish and reinforce a compelling, ongoing narrative around your DEI programs.

As the [Global Diversity and Inclusion Survey](#) shows, “63% of business leaders - compared to 42% of employees - believe that their organisation regularly makes information available on the diversity of employees and leadership teams.” Often, that means that employees who are not participating in DEI efforts don't know that they exist at all.

**As important as it is to share successes of a strong DEI program, it's also important to recognize failures and gaps. Employees will feel more encouraged by a DEI program if leaders are willing to admit that there is still room to improve.**



Make sure employees understand that DEI is a continuous process with unexpected and expected roadblocks that will require hard work from everyone to surpass.

## 5. KEEP IT UP.

**DEI IS A JOURNEY, NOT A DESTINATION. THEREFORE, SUCCESSFUL STRATEGY INTEGRATION REQUIRES THAT YOU REPEATEDLY REVIEW, RECALIBRATE, AND REFRESH YOUR EFFORTS.**

Invest in ongoing assessment, education, and communication. Set specific and measurable goals that are openly communicated throughout your organization, and lean on your business resource groups and DEI council to drive engagement.

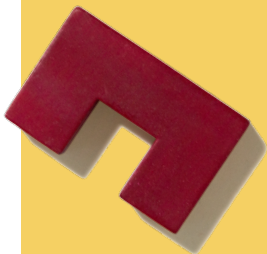
Move departmentally to examine systems, processes, and procedures that could be inhibiting your DEI success. Examine the details of your hiring process, performance reviews, supply chain, marketing, and cultural expectations so that your business goals and diversity goals can be one and the same.



# Conclusion



In *Diversity Officer Magazine*, B.E. Vaughn puts it best by explaining that the broad objective of DEI strategy is “to remove the barriers to productivity for every member of the organization with particular concern for historically excluded group members.” In other words, eliminate the systemic and cultural obstacles that keep each team member from doing great work.



**The failure or success of DEI programming hinges on C-suite buy-in and organizational culture. That is true regardless of whether you are a small, first-year start-up or a centuries-old multinational corporation.**

Self-examination and cultural change are difficult. Find a partner who will encourage your patience, courage, and resilience while helping you learn the skills you need to integrate DEI with your business DNA.

Now is the time to start planning your strategy and request the necessary resources to begin implementing your DEI initiatives. For more information on how The Diversity Movement can help, visit [www.thediversitymovement.com/](http://www.thediversitymovement.com/).

## ABOUT THE DIVERSITY MOVEMENT

The Diversity Movement is a results-oriented, data-driven strategic partner for organization-wide culture change through diversity, equity, and inclusion. Our team of experts provides a customized mix of online learning, tools, events, and consulting services that help our partners create future-focused, employee-centered cultures and better business outcomes.

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## ABOUT DONALD THOMPSON

Donald Thompson is co-founder and CEO of [The Diversity Movement](#). He is an entrepreneur, executive coach, public speaker, author, podcaster, and Certified Diversity Executive (CDE). With two decades of experience growing and leading firms, he is a thought leader on goal achievement, influencing company culture, and driving exponential growth. Donald also serves as a board member for several organizations in marketing, healthcare, banking, technology, and sports.