Unmet Standards for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the USA & recommendations to meet the standards.

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Abstract- Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) have been wholly focused on the continuous need to make American society fairer. Despite decades of efforts towards this goal, there was still a substantial difference between the desire for diversity and real-world achievement in corporations, organizations, or government. In this account, the journal traces the historical background of DEI in America before illuminating what is being done today and pointing to new standards that are not yet met, thus challenging genuine change. Structural problems like systemic racism, inequality, and cultural backlash remain in place. However, the lack of intersectionality and reliance on tokenistic band-aids instead of system-level changes has broadly short-changed DEI work. This paper takes business, education, and healthcare case studies as three examples of sectors where these challenges are evident. It ends with suggestions for reducing the chasm between policy and practice, such as improved accountability, education, training, and evidence-informed DEI. The hope is that this kind of work would be transformational and instill a more significant culture shift in making DEI-deed (these are initialism) real, moving beyond talk into action as the norm to drive measurable change for inclusivity and equity everywhere in America.

I. INTRODUCTION

Diversity, Equity, and inclusion (DEI) is a critical framework that promotes fairness of opportunity and representation in all walks of life. For a country so proud of its democratic foundations and those sacred individual rights, the vitality must not be taken for granted where DEI is concerned (Badruddoza, 2024).

These ideas have become more popular over time, right alongside the country's increase in diversity, and as genuine global concerns about inequality get more focus (thank your post-pandemic life?) However, along with the progress we have made since the Civil Rights Movement of the 60s toward DEI ideals, there are still many significant gaps between those ideals and actuality (Rodney & Hill, 2014). This truth has ignited necessary conversations about the benchmarks of DEI and impediments to reach them far differently. Diversity refers to differences or a mixture within the setting: cultural, racial/ethnic, gender (male and female), socio-economic class, and other similarities. Equity: Creating policies and structures to give everyone the same opportunities, regardless of their background or identity. Inclusion is about giving people a sense of belonging where they feel seen/heard, appreciated, and able to add value (Moumne, 2017). While they combine to respond to systemic inequity comprehensively, these three concepts are not new. Despite their significance as core DEI elements, the US still struggles with achieving unmet standards in each space – those spaces being health care operations even outside identified needs for remediation.

It goes back to the movements for civil rights in America when an effort toward racial equality catalyzed broader societal change. Major benchmarks like the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and affirmative action policies sought to repair institutional systems that African Americans still suffered through. The truth is that even with these legal victories, the fight for true equality has not yet been won (Gonzalez, 2022). Black Lives Matter and #MeToo are the most salient examples that reveal that we still have

unfinished business regarding race, gender, and intersectionality in other social justice dimensions. While this heightened awareness has led to more institutions adopting DEI policies and initiatives, many have failed to meet expectations due to solidifying systemic inequities within institutions and a lack of weapons for accountability.

In corporate AMERICA, countless companies have integrated DEI programs into their bucket list of philanthropic investment. The aim is to diversify workforces, help ensure equity in hiring and promotion practices, and create a more inclusive organizational culture. Nonetheless, there are also indications of struggle (Shore et al., 2011). Additionally, the lack of solid accountability mechanisms renders many DEI efforts ineffective at delivering real change. Even as diversity and inclusion become a greater priority at companies, there remain disparities in leadership representation, wage gaps, and discriminatory workplace practices (Rodney & Hill, 2014).

Significant efforts in higher education and faculty/staff diversification have been made for DEI, some observed to be wildly impacting the world. Affirmative action policies were intended to remedy past injustices in college admissions. However, recent court decisions and debates about the fairness of such measures have put them under withering fire—and into fresh legal danger (Costa, 2024). At the same time, many minority students find themselves up against unequal resource distribution in K-12 education—attending underfunded schools in poor neighborhoods—as well as a curriculum that erases their experiences and a discipline apparatus predicated on punishing various forms of identity (Lawrence & Mupa, 2024). Creating better educational opportunities is about breaking this cycle of disadvantage that conflicts with the core values of equity and inclusion.

Another glaring example of unmet DEI standards lies in healthcare. Such findings show the disparities in healthcare access, treatment quality, and health outcomes between racial minorities or different socioeconomic levels that highlight long-standing structural inequities within the U.S. (Hughes & Hughes, 2019). healthcare system Systemic biases and unequal access to medical resources also result in much higher rates of chronic illness, infant mortality, etc., for minority populations like African Americans or Native Americans, which causes their life expectancy 92–94. These disparities have been challenging to address for some time, with DEI efforts in healthcare settings moving slowly due to the complexity of the system and where race, income, and geography meet.

The fact that these challenges are experienced in a variety of industries demonstrates they go beyond Silicon Valley and underscores what appears to be somewhat of a systemic phenomenon — DEI policies may come with the best intentions but often do not work because they tend to be reactive rather than proactive when it comes systemically addressing why inequality happens in the first place (Ghaffar, 2023). Also, there is a massive disconnect between the DEI rhetoric and the realities of minority groups in America today. Bolstered, in turn, by political polarization and economic inequality, the cultural challenge of DEI becomes an additional hurdle to clear on top of these existential external threats.

This journal will cover bad DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) in the U.S. — trying to figure out why it has failed so spectacularly to meet its standards for so long throughput that what can be done (should anyone care at this point). This study will identify the structural barriers to becoming genuinely diverse, equitable, and inclusive by examining primary social institutions (education, healthcare) and corporate America (Mupa et al., 2024). Ultimately, it will offer a course of action for institutions and society not to be performative but to have effective structural change.

II. HISTORICAL CONTEXT AND EVOLUTION OF DEI IN THE USA

The ideas around Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) have grown as the nation has reckoned with race, gender, socioeconomic status, etc. We often understand today's DEI framework through decades or centuries of social movements, legal decisions, and shifting societal norms (Casellas Connors, 2021). Understanding today's unfulfilled promises of diversity, equity, and inclusion requires exploring its history — from early civil rights efforts to a suite of

institutions created in response to persistent disparities.

2.1 The Civil Rights Movement: The Birth of Modern DEI

The Civil Rights Movement (1950s and 1960) of DEI in the United States. Activists were predominant, such as Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks, and Malcolm X, seeking the removal of racial segregation and ending institutionalized racism for African Americans. Crucial moments like the Montgomery Bus Boycott (1955), the March on Washington (1963), and the Civil Rights Act of 1964 marked significant advancements in securing racial equality (Angelis & Kanavos, 2017). The Civil Rights Act, in particular, was a monumental piece of legislation that outlawed discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin and set the stage for the legal basis behind diversity and inclusion efforts within employment and education, amongst other areas within American society.

The Civil Rights Act set the stage for affirmative action policies that attempted to grant disadvantaged groups, such as African Americans, access to avenues denied them throughout history. These policies aimed to create equality in education, employment, and government contracts. This is based on the idea that justice also must involve equity — true fairness means not just treating everyone equally in the future but making amends for hundreds of years of past discrimination (Davis, 2024). Affirmative action was always a controversial remedy designed to assuage deep-rooted inequalities by attempting to build diversity and inclusion in institutions that, for way too long, have been the exclusive playground of wealthy white men.

2.2 The Role of Affirmative Action in DEI

In the U.S., affirmative action soon became one of the big things that promoted DEI goals. Initially created by President Lyndon B. Johnson's Executive Order 11246 in 1965, the notion of affirmative action calls for federal contractors to take "affirmative action" so that job applicants are recruited. Employees were treated somewhat based on race, color, religion, sex, or national origin (Casellas Connors, 2021). This expanded the policy to include women and other underrepresented groups to provide a diverse work staff that addressed racial as well as gender-based discriminatory inequities.

Affirmative action policies were widely debated during the 1970s and '80s, and some states (California) faced prolonged legal challenges on grounds of unconstitutionality (Gonzalez, 2022). A U.S. Supreme Court decision that grew out of the conservative interpretation of The Fourteenth Amendment was Regents Of the University Of California V Bakke (1978), where we have a.0001% quota on students accepted into not only colleges but more broadly in life to give each Firemen department male and female members at about an equal percentage ratio yet, let us all keep asking Democrats why Police are all be white or Quotas Clintons backbone while you lay everything thats problematical which is indeed Melting Pot Foundationally Unconstitutional Systemic even including Fascist cruxes! It underscored the difficulty of balancing a goal of diversity against notions of fairness and reverse discrimination that remain unresolved (Hunt & Scarpignato, 2015).

As much as affirmative action programs brought many differently situated individuals to higher education and employment environments, they also encountered considerable pushback (Angelis & Kanavos, 2017). Opposition to the policies came from whites who complained that they were unfair, while supporters contended that affirmative action was needed in order to remedy decades of systemic discrimination (Gonzalez). Through this controversy, affirmative action would remain one of the most visible and powerful DEI tools in broadest use across at least late 20th century U.S. history.

2.3 Equal Employment Opportunity and the Workplace

Alongside affirmative action, forming the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) in 1965 was also one of the main events contributing to DEI. EEOC was to enforce federal laws that make it illegal to discriminate against a job applicant or an employee because of the person's race, color, religion, sex (including pregnancy), national origin, age (40 or older), disability, or genetic information (Carter & Groopman, 2021). It sought to diversify the workforce, investigate complaints of bias, and litigate

against corporations that had run afoul of anti-discrimination statutes.

However, DEI workplace initiatives have been lacking and inconsistent across the board. Although companies do not implement DEI policies as frequently in small businesses and sectors where inequalities are deeply embedded, any remaining reticence at large corporations, universities, or government agencies has decreased (Thielke et al., 2007). Moreover, it does not have accountability mechanisms and underpins continuing discrimination practices at a formal Diversity Equity Inclusion (DEI) policy level_FUNC_517 on organizations.

2.4 The Role of Women's Rights in DEI

Though the original point of DEI in the U.S. skewed towards racial equality, it would be remiss to overlook how important a role The Women's Rights Movement played in broadening that lens and making room for more discussions under this umbrella while still battling uphill battles today — even despite significant strides made within specific corporations or fields only (i.e., The feminist movement of the 1960s and '70s aimed to address gender discrimination in public as well as private areas. The Equal Pay Act of 1963 and Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 were significant victories in advancing gender equality at work or school (Friedkin, 2004). In particular, Title IX banned sex-based discrimination in federally funded education programs (opening up new opportunities for women to participate in sports, academics as well as leadership positions) (LAWRENCE et al., 2024).

While progress is certainly being made on these fronts, gender equality in American society as a whole remains far from satisfactory; the wage gap still looms large across our country, and women continue to contend with underrepresentation at all levels of leadership and sexual harassment endured throughout their professional lives (Hunt & Scarpignato, 2015). Such challenges are symptomatic of the larger struggle to achieve equitable policy, where compliance on paper does not necessarily lead to lived experience.

2.5 Expanding DEI Beyond Race and Gender

In the past few decades, diversity and inclusion (DEI) efforts in America have extended beyond race and gender to also look at the marginalization of other groups, including LGBT+, disabled people, and religious minorities. In the 21st century, considerable progress was made in the LGBTQ+ rights movement that reached a climax with the US Supreme Court's ruling in Obergefell v. Hodges (2015) that legalized same-sex marriage across all states of the USA (Doll, 2023). These efforts were capped by the landmark Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, which bars discrimination against people with disabilities in employment and public accommodations, among other aspects.

However, as DEI efforts broaden to encompass more types of populations, the obstacles persist (MUPA, 2024). Nowhere is this more evident than the ongoing debate over whether to include transgender people in workplaces, schools, and other public spaces, even where formal legal protections exist, such as those enshrined within Title IX (the federal sex non-discrimination policy for educational institutions), a surge of proposed legislation has aimed at banning trans girls from competing on their school sports teams — despite evidence that not only indicates these bans are discriminatory but also contradicts claims made about estrogen therapy threatening cisgender women's health (Ozimek, 2020). In the same way, barriers to full inclusion are a daily reality for those with disabilities and how one might tap in, especially when it comes to jobs and access.

2.6 The Shift Toward Inclusion and Intersectionality

Over the past several years, we have seen a pivot in DEI from increasing representation to real inclusion — where all individuals of their diversity feel valued and respected. We can contribute to both communities and companies fully. This change can be seen alongside an increased awareness of the concept of intersectionality — a term from scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw that describes how people's identities, such as their race, gender, and class (who are also experienced together) result in having unique experiences with oppression and benefit (Casellas Connors, 2021). Theoretical Apparatus: Intersectionality as a Frame to Understand and Conduct DEI

Over time, DEI has made substantial strides; however, the recurring space between talk and action is a reminder that much work remains to be done to

remediate structural inequities. While measures we have taken in the past, such as affirmative action and anti-discrimination laws or efforts to advance gender rights or LGBTQ+ visibility, have helped us build a strong foundation over time, much more work still needs to be done. There will be the challenge of ensuring that DEI policies not only focus on correcting past wrongs but also are responsive to a broad range of new issues facing an ever more diverse U.S. population.

III. CURRENT STATE OF DEI IN THE U.S.

Diversity, Equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the U.S. has a long way to go compared with much of the progress we celebrate and outcomes we wrongly take for granted as solved problems across our country today. As systemic inequalities continue to be a focal point of societal strife, organizations in all sectors have moved to heightened attention on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) — as accountability mandates proposed longer-term social justice implications (Casellas Connors, 2021). However, although many institutions are taking steps toward creating environments that are diverse and inclusive, there is still a long road ahead to reach accurate equity.

Lastly, more businesses are realizing the benefits of diverse workforces in driving innovation, decision-making, and overall performance and have implemented DEI programs. Research shows that creating successful DEI practices also attracts the best talent and increases overall employee satisfaction. Consequently, hiring Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs) and creating DEI task forces to manage these initiatives has seen a marked increase (Ortiz, 2018). So, not only are companies integrating DEI (Diversity et al.) goals into their overall strategy, but they also set measurable objectives concerning the diversity of new hires, retention rates in high potential populations, or promotions every quarter… at least.

However, the impact of these efforts is widely criticized in academic and organic farming circles. Performativity regrettably remains a weapon that many corporates have resorted to using, as they often find comfort in enouncing diversity tactics instead of anything deemed substantial or structural (Schuster, 2024). There is still a real problem where many from

various marginalized groups are put in such roles without actual support or empowerment, as if by tokenism. Furthermore, the absence of accountability mechanisms may mean that DEI efforts fail to materialize into tangible changes, leading to systemic issues that remain unattended.

In education, more and more schools are pushing programs to increase diversity among students as part of their DEI initiatives in admissions and faculty. Unfortunately, the accessibility to quality education is still unequal, especially for those who are underrepresented and marginalized (Potoski & Prakash, 2013). Debates persist regarding affirmative action admissions policies that make access to higher ed more equitable even harder. Moreover, providing inclusive environments that accommodate student interests, racial socioeconomic class education, and history of disability is challenging for school contexts. The efforts and investment in DEI are also spreading to other areas, such as health care, where stories of COVID-19 spread wide disparities in the outcomes among various populations. To this end, efforts are underway across healthcare organizations to tackle social determinants of health and solutions to alleviate disparities in overall well-being (Acker, 2006). However, robust differences in care access and quality remain along racial and socioeconomic lines as systemic inequities within the current system are further exposed.

The polarization of politics has also impacted the state of DEI within this nation. Several states have passed laws restricting critical race theory in schools and DEI training at the workplace. The pushback against DEI efforts has fueled fears for the future of equity and inclusion work, along with apprehensions about what it means more broadly to stifle dialogue around race and identity (SHEM & MUPA, 2024).

So, while there have been significant improvements in DEI-related efforts in at least some sectors, the US has performed somewhat poorly on this crucial measure. Although there is a growing recognition of diversity and inclusion in organizations today, many find achieving sustainable and impactful DEI practices challenging (Schuster, 2024). However, it also means an ongoing commitment and real controversial accountability to face unchanging system issues that

constitute American society's cornerstone. As we go forward, the emphasis must be from compliance around required DEI initiatives…to truly changing our culture so that everyone is genuinely respected and included (MUPA et al., 2024).

IV. UNMET STANDARDS AND CHALLENGES IN DEI

While there remains a vast amount of unfinished business and new challenges for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) work to address in the US across different sectors (Schuster, 2024). Together, these challenges often stymie the impact of DEI efforts and give rise to an intention-impact gap. Knowing these problems is essential to bring about real change and make universally inclusive efforts.

Accountability and Transparency: One of the biggest hurdles in DEI efforts. Although the adoption of DEI initiatives is widespread across many companies and institutions, more often than not, this can be done to look good or tick a legal box rather than having metrics for success, meaning these efforts soon become performative (Joseph, 2023). So, without anything set in stone for DEI goals and a way to measure them on an ongoing basis, organizations are bound not to realize any level of effectiveness within their DEI program. While a company might track the demographics around hiring and promotions, it probably does not couple that with qualitative feedback on how their employees are experiencing work — providing some sense of narrative but still affording only shallow insight into workplace dynamics.

Challenges also include longstanding resistance to DEI initiatives. DEI programs can be seen as unnecessary, or worse yet, divisive —by employees and stakeholders in organizations emphasizing a colorblind space to foster their meritocracy (SHEM & MUPA, 2024). Resistance can stem from misunderstanding the goals of DEI initiatives and believing that diversity efforts mean reverse discrimination or reduced standards (Joseph). Consequently, organizations will catch hell trying to implement robust DEI policies, and no one is willing to vouch for the changes that need to be made.

This is also due to the limitation of intersectionality, as said identities and experiences are not only more numerous than being a woman over fifty. DEI initiatives that only concentrate on race and gender do not address how some are burdened by what we might call multiple marginalizations — for example, a woman with disabilities or an LGBTQ+ person of color. The failure can usually create a gap in DEI programs that could ostracize and disillusion some who may fail to see their distinctiveness being acknowledged (Goldberg, 2022). Successful DEI strategies must understand how different types of bias overlap to present an intersectional picture where being subjected to one may result in further discrimination and disadvantage.

Additionally, the DEI landscape is known to be shaped by the external environment, especially concerning political and social climates (Doll, 2023). In some states, recent legislative efforts to restrict the teaching of topics concerning race, gender, and privilege can also limit important discussions about systemic inequalities needed for meaningful DEI training. Opposition to DEI initiatives can lead to a toxic environment where people are afraid of discussing diversity and inclusion for fear of retribution or intimidation.

However, DEI work is rarely adequately funded or properly allocated resources. While many organizations pursue DEI initiatives, some do not invest enough money to ensure these programs succeed. Developing training programs, employee resource groups, and holistic assessments are expensive for the organization. Therefore, they risk becoming performative in value with no depth or staying power for sustainable change.

V. CASE STUDIES OF UNMET DEI STANDARDS

Case studies focusing on U.S. DEI weaknesses can help shed light on the intricacies of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) provisions Neuroscience Organizations encounter in their everyday operations. The examples highlight the importance of accountability, genuine engagement, and systemic change.

5.1 Google's Gender Pay Gap Controversy

The report was the first time Google released its pay equity data; in 2017, it faced a high-profile gender pay gap controversy. However, Google had a professed commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion work in the past — launching projects specifically designed to relieve its gender representation problems before facing backlash that such efforts could not unseat systemic inequality in practice (Girod & Dop 2024). Critics pointed out that although Google had created organization initiatives to hire and keep women, it did not result in fair pay or promotion. That controversy led to a federal investigation, which concluded that women in similar roles up and down the corporate hierarchy were being underpaid relative to their male colleagues. This case epitomizes why it is critical to advance diversity and how equity can be supported pay and move up the ranks.

5.2 Starbucks' Racial Bias Incident

In April 2018, the coffee giant made headlines for all the wrong reasons when two Black men were arrested in a Philadelphia Starbucks after sitting without buying anything. The episode caused uproar and led to protests, exposing the public space racial profiling that takes place. Starbucks made a company-wide statement when more than 8,000 stores closed for racial bias training (Coincidence) or DEI. Still, some critics said that a one-time training session would not touch the underlying structural racism problems at Starbucks (Helena, 2023). The episode also demonstrated the limitations of brief DEI training without additional follow-up and systemic changes to ensure all workers are treated with dignity, respect, and value.

5.3 Disney's Lack of Representation

Disney is known as one of the entertainment world's biggest brands, so it has been subjected to greater scrutiny regarding diversity in its creative teams. This is despite several recent years when the company released several films promoting diverse characters and stories, while critics have contended that Disney executives in decision-making positions continue to be limited regarding representation from historically marginalized communities (Ghaffar, 2023). Executives are mostly all white, leading to a separation between the stories told on screen and how diverse audiences experience it. His case exemplifies the importance of diversity not just in front of but behind cameras, such as it is imperative to have people with varied and representative views on what they perceive from you.

5.4 The Higher Education System and Campus Climate

Creating inclusive environments for students of different backgrounds has been a challenge at many U.S. universities. The protests at the University of Missouri in 2015 are perhaps the most well-known over racial discrimination and a hostile campus climate for students of color. There were DEI programs available; however, students felt marginalized and unsupported by the administration. The demonstrations laid bare the chasm between what the university says it does to ensure diversity and student anecdotes (Halsell, 2024). This case is evidence that discussions with marginalized communities should be ongoing for DEI initiatives to meet all students' needs truly.

5.5. The Tech Industry's Diversity Dilemma

The tech industry is known for pushing the boundaries of what is possible — but no one needs to be breaking ground on gender or diversity ratios. In response to growing public pressure and internal turmoil from their employees, Silicon Valley companies such as Apple, Twitter, and Facebook have released closely guarded diversity data confirming the disproportionately few women and people of color they hire into technical positions (Ghaffar, 2023). While several efforts have been made to improve diversity, including recent commitments from the industry's most prominent players (IMAX among them), progress in addressing representation issues has often seemed slow and steady; at times throughout history, Hollywood has had little choice but undergo criticism for keeping diverse talent segregated on the sidelines. These examples show that simply declaring diversity targets is not enough — it needs a change in how we recruit, hire, and create workplaces.

VI. BARRIERS TO PROGRESS IN DEI

One of these deceptively persistent barriers is the advancement of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) initiatives that organizations struggle to facilitate in their corners all across U.S. soil. In short,

the barriers to DEI can be institutional, cultural, and just individual, but they all mean that doing meaningful work around diversity is hard (SYED et al., 2024).

6.1 Institutional Resistance

However, most opposition often comes from an institutional source, as resistance is frequently cited as one of the most significant obstacles to DEI progress. It represents established cultural norms and practices, which organizations have ingrained and may provide a challenging environment for change (Beach & Segars, 2022). The result: many companies might end up centering short-term profits at the expense of long-term DEI goals or start to view them as acceptable in good times but expendable now. Such a mentality can lead to underfunding, shortage of resources, and subpar prioritization for the DEI initiatives within an organization. In addition, any company that designs its employees' experience in a way that does not embed DEI into its core mission and values will have to work harder at it than organizations wherein the philosophy of diversity, equity, or inclusion is incorporated within everything they do.

6.2 Lack of Accountability

One of the critical problems related to DEI work is whether or not accountability structures exist. This lack of clear success-driving metrics and no regular assessments does not help organizations understand where they are falling short or lacking (Halsell, 2024). Remembering that DEI can become a tick-box exercise, working towards getting the numbers right rather than genuinely transforming is crucial. However, when leadership is not responsible for their diversity outcomes or held accountable, there will generally be only superficial change at best – and no incentive to put sustained practices in place that foster accurate equity.

6.3 Cultural Barriers

Organizational culture is a big mountain to climb in any DEI initiative. These barriers are linked to overarching biases and stereotypes, impacting decision-making practices and work culture. For instance, a culture that values individualism over collectivism may have difficulty recognizing systemic inequities, let alone correcting the injustice (Schuster, 2024). Furthermore, settings that do not have psychological safety tend to provide less space for open and authentic conversations about diversity; this is a disservice to issues of race, gender, or other identity considerations. If employees feel that they will get retaliated or punished for raising their voices, there is little hope for change.

6.4 Intersectionality Challenges

Not to mention the complexity of intersectionality and how multiple identities intersect to make a person's experience), which is just another thing standing before DEI progress; programs centered on a single aspect of identity (e.g., race, gender) may not address the specific challenges faced by individuals with multiple marginalized identities — such as LGBTQ+ people who are dark-skinned or women living with disabilities (Acker, 2006). Misunderstandings like this can often lead to fill-in-the-blank programs that do not adequately address all employee's nuanced experiences and needs, creating a situation where some (if not all) are left feeling more excluded or invisible than they would have been by traditional standards.

6.5 Backlash and Polarization

In the United States, a hostile political environment has reversed DEI efforts in academia and public institutions. In some states, legislative efforts that have attempted to make it illegal for employees in specific workplaces to talk about race and gender or implement DEI training suggest these kinds of topics are divisive or unnecessary (Girgis & Sanson-Fisher, 1995). Such a divide can make it difficult for proponents of DEI to network and discuss the underlying problems that may produce an unwelcoming climate. It leads to an environment where employees might hesitate to involve themselves with DEI initiatives for fear of reprisal from colleagues or leadership (SHEM & MUPA, 2024).

6.6 Resource Constraints

Many organizations do not have the resources to carry out proper DEI measures. Budget constraints, under-resourced staffing, and priorities that are more urgent than these development stages can all hamstring efforts to create a lasting DEI program. However, organizations may find it challenging to invest enough money in training and hiring diverse staff or measuring what you do with DEI.

VII. THE ROLE OF ALLIES AND ADVOCACY IN ADVANCING DEI

One of the most critical factors to inspire more significant change in organizations and communities revolves around allies and advocates for diversity (Angelis & Kanavos, 2017). Allies, or people who are not members of a marginalized community but act as such stand in support) help to lift the voices that may sometimes be drowned out and work towards dismantling institutionalized barriers. Advocacy is a very different animal — it means actively advocating for policies and practices that promote DEI. Combined, these establish a robust foundation for driving DEI work and outcomes.

7.1 Understanding Allyship
An ally stands up for marginalized people by being proactive. It is for people who see their privilege and use it to help those without the same advantages. Being an ally at the workplace means hearing them out on their experiences of marginalization. If possible, they can raise their voices or speak for equity (Helena, 2023). Moreover, this means stepping up against discrimination and ensuring you can be part of it all.
Signs of influential allies are those who self-educate about the issues others face. They learn the systemic inequities and how they affect various groups differently (Freudenmann & Lepping, 2009). They are also able to have IB conversations with senior executives and help correct misperceptions that may exist in their organizations. Lastly, allies do us a significant favor by advising underrepresented individuals and guiding them through their career paths.

7.2 Advocating for Systemic Change
At all levels, advocacy is essential for the promotion of DEI. They advocate changing the policies, practices, and culture that maintain those injustices (Dagnall, 2024). That might mean lobbying to change a hiring policy, advocating for initiatives that lead to more diverse leadership, or pushing forward policies to create an inclusive workplace.

In addition, advocates conduct public campaigns to bring attention to DIE issues (Doll, 2023). Their tools include social media, community organizing, and speaking engagements to teach others what diversity lessons mean. Visibility — shedding light on DEI issues gives advocates shared problems they can get inspired and other people to act upon.

7.3 Creating Safe Spaces
Creating safe spaces where individuals can come forward and share their issues without fear of retaliation is crucial. This means making it easy for people to talk and welcoming those who bring different points of view (Ovink & Murrell, 2022). Allies can close the gap between the marginalized and leadership by hosting dialogues around DEI challenges so employees become more engaged with accountability.

Another part of making safe spaces is listening actively to marginalized experiences with the intent to understand. Allies need to understand the impact of systemic oppression in their colleague's lives and be active support for them while dealing with these issues (Milless, 2022). A more inclusive and supportive company culture can result from this collective path.

7.4 Leading by Example
Allies and advocates do not know better; show us how it should be done! They modeled inclusivity and equity in action, leading by example. This can involve attending DEI training, discussing race and privilege in uncomfortable spaces, or holding oneself accountable to create inclusive learning environments (SHEM & MUPA, 2024).

Allies, meanwhile, need to push complacent organizations, too (Halsell, 2024). This will help deal with a one-time sprint — making it part of DNA, thus breaking all systematic barriers and promoting DEI. Allies advocate for better DEI practices and promote training/resources that help support this.

VIII. SOLUTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR BRIDGING THE GAP IN DEI

Drawing the line on its stark need during our last Coffee Break, Bridge Honcho Jane Wulf gave us an excellent overview of what has gone wrong and right in addressing it: The complexity behind systemic barriers obstructs any meaningful progress towards closing this gap (Milless, 2022). Organizations must prioritize a multi-faceted approach that promotes

diversity and addresses issues of equity and inclusion at all levels. Here are some suggested solutions and recommendations on how organizations can excel in DEI initiatives, actively promoting equal opportunity work culture.

8.1 Establish Clear DEI Goals and Metrics

Moreover, that is why companies must set specific requirements. Measurable, Achievable, Relevant Time-bound (SMART) goals for their DEI objectives One way to do this is by setting clear goals that create accountability and can repeat in time for the organization. These metrics should be focused on goals that the organization can tangibly track, such as diversity hiring rates, number of promotions by gender or race, and overall engagement scores to measure effectiveness at DEI (Dagnall, 2024). These goals should be regularly reviewed and adjusted to ensure they will meet the organization's mission today, not yesterday, and current societal standards.

8.2 Invest in Comprehensive Training Programs

All employees, including leadership, need to partake in mandatory DEI training programs which are not merely elective. Subjects like unconscious bias, cultural competence, and allyship should be a part of these programs (Helena, 2023). Instead of a one-time workshop, organizations need to provide a model for continuous learning that encourages ongoing reflection. Adding experiential learning through role-playing, discussions, and real-life case studies can improve comprehension and retention of DEI principles — developing a culture of empathy and respect.

8.3 Create Diverse Leadership Teams

That spectrum of diversity in leadership is essential for sparking change at institutions. Developing leadership teams that mirror the communities we serve needs to be our top priority for organizations (Hunt & Scarpignato, 2015). They can do this by targeting their hiring and developing mentor programs and succession planning involving a diverse talent pipeline. When employees see their leaders, who are like them and have similar experiences, it gives a sense of belonging that leads to more participation in DEI initiatives.

8.4 Foster Open Communication and Feedback

A continual conversation about DEI issues is essential to building this open and inclusive environment. Organizations need regular feedback channels (e.g., questions, surveys, and focus groups) to understand how their employees are feeling and what requires improving and maintaining on an ongoing basis (Demeter, 2023). Leaders should have open discussions on diversity and inclusion, allowing all voices to be heard. This will create an environment that helps employees who are uncomfortable sharing information to do so by allowing them to report their experiences and concerns anonymously (Leroux-Roels, 2010).

8.5 Build Partnerships with Diverse Organizations

Partnering with community groups and nonprofits is an effective way for organizations to support their DEI efforts. Teaming up with these bodies often yields valuable perspectives on serving marginalized communities better and can make a job available to more people (Golding & Fencl, 2024). Collaborative efforts like apprenticeship programs, community outreach, and internships can engender engagement in the workforce due to diversity.

8.6 Prioritize Equity in Policies and Practices

In order to close the gap when it comes to DEI, companies have a responsibility to examine their existing policies and practices through an equity lens. However, reviewing hiring, promotion, and compensation practices to detect the biases that disproportionately penalize marginalized groups. Equitable practices mean that all employees have equal opportunity to succeed and access resources, which creates a sense of feeling included.

8.7 Monitor and Report Progress Transparently

One of the most effective ways to implement these DEI efforts is through complete transparency. Continuous progress reporting to all stakeholders (employees, customers, community). This creates a norm of transparency, where failures and successes are equally celebrated in the intersubjectivities as pillars, enabling continued participation in DEI (Friedkin, 2004). It is what allows societies to learn from experience and adapt constructively.

CONCLUSION

The path to genuine Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in the United States is a long road that will require consistent commitment from all organizations — including their leadership and everyone else. As we have analyzed throughout this discussion, we hope that our historical context, current growing pains, and barriers to making progress provide a clearer image of why more holistic strategies are needed if DEI centers on establishing standard practices.

While DEI is becoming increasingly popular and many organizations are getting on board, the challenge remains to make it more than a passing phase. This has resulted in an undercurrent of impunity, cultural skepticism, and limited resources that have perpetuated circumstances where marginalized people are still experiencing significant barriers to participation and advancement. That also supports the broader biases we have in society.

However, our struggle also necessarily includes the role of allies and advocates. When we work towards supporting marginalized voices, continuing our learning processes, and persistently challenging exclusionary practices, allies can create a culture where all can fully engage as members of an organization. By the very nature of how DEI works, calls for systemic change — whether through public policy advocacy or community engagement approaches — can translate into a ripple effect beyond the walls of establishment; frankly, we need policies to create enablers that facilitate behavioral modification across society at large.

In order to indeed close the gap in DEI, the initiative has several levers that need to be pulled, and tactics specifically for doing so must correspond with actual strategies aligned with their organizational culture. This accountability can only be created if the goals and metrics are clear so organizations can measure their progress and permit adjustments in strategy. Similarly, big businesses investing in comprehensive training programs to address DEI issues may equip their employees with research and understanding of how they can create an inclusive atmosphere around them. Leaders that reflect diversity are another key to advancing DEI. This will ensure that decision-makers represent all employees, making the process more well-rounded and appropriate. They need to carry this

ethos through more than just their hiring practices, extending into mentoring development programs supporting under-represented talent in leadership.

Two-way communication and feedback channels are also crucial in building a culture of inclusion. Organizations can foster safe spaces free of retaliation so that all employees can continuously dialogue about diversity, equity, and inclusion issues. This vulnerability can support more profound understanding and cooperation, which is critical for the organization to tackle its DEI issues successfully.

We should not consider our journey toward accurate equity and inclusion a finish line but rather an ongoing march forward. Organizations must be adaptive and learn from experience—or others. Cultivating relationships with various organizations and communities is a way to benefit from DEI initiatives, support them, and translate the message that this type of collective behavior needs actual steps to result in change.

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