LET’S TALK ABOUT DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Fostering an inclusive work environment through communication

ACADEMIC SOCIETY FOR MANAGEMENT & COMMUNICATION
An initiative of the Günter Thiele Foundation
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EDITORIAL

» Talking about diversity and inclusion is just a means to an end. Eventually, it’s really about changing people’s mindset. «

Corporate stakeholders from the general public and politicians to employees increasingly expect corporations to reflect the diversity that exists in society within their workforce. The increasing recognition and influence of movements such as Black Lives Matter and ChooseToChallenge has reinforced public awareness and emphasized the need to manage diversity and inclusion (D&I) within organizations. This is not just imperative to foster equality and fairness; strengthening an inclusive organizational culture is also necessary to remain competitive. Thus, companies that genuinely support and successfully implement D&I management will profit from its benefits, such as increased competitiveness and a reputation as an organization that sincerely cares about human rights and equality. For D&I management to be successful, communication is a key driver. Communication helps to create awareness, understanding, and support among employees on all hierarchical levels, which is necessary to achieve the goal of establishing an inclusive organizational culture.

Despite the growing importance of D&I management, so far there has been very little in the way of research into the communication of D&I within companies. Therefore, a research team at the University of Vienna headed by Daniel Wolfgruber and me set out to address the question of how strategic communication can support D&I management to create and strengthen an organizational culture of inclusiveness and belonging for all employees. The aim was to provide comprehensive insights into D&I management and communication in an organizational context. Our findings are based on an extensive literature review and three empirical studies, for which we conducted interviews with 20 D&I experts and 84 employees as well as a survey among 1,000 employed persons.

The central findings of our research are presented in this issue. Why and how are diversity and inclusion beneficial to organizations? How can organizations establish effective D&I management? What role does communication play in enhancing an inclusive organizational culture?

We would like to express our gratitude to all the participants who devoted time and energy to the interviews and the survey. Our thanks also go to Marlen Born for her support in writing up the results as well as to the Academic Society for Management & Communication for funding this research project and supporting the creation of this publication.

We hope our findings prove valuable and that you enjoy reading this issue!

Dr. Sabine Einwiller
Professor of Public Relations Research
University of Vienna, Austria
LETS TALK ABOUT DIVERSITY & INCLUSION: KEY FINDINGS

Objective: The aim of this research project was to examine the role and practice of communication in D&I management. While there is already a considerable body of research on the management practices of D&I, the communication aspects have largely been overlooked so far. By interviewing D&I experts in major organizations, we provide insights into good practices of D&I management and communication as well as challenges in this field. Interviews and a survey among employees complement these insights by highlighting factors that influence employees’ perceptions of inclusion.

Definition: Diversity refers to the reflection of observable and non-observable characteristics (e.g., gender, identity, ethnicity, social background). Inclusion is a positive psychological state in which employees perceive a sense of belonging due to the organization’s appreciation of their uniqueness and based on the provision of opportunities to participate in decision-making processes as well as formal and informal practices. (pp. 8-10)

Reasons for introducing D&I management: Besides legal requirements, the main reasons for introducing D&I management are of an economic and social nature. While the business case stresses the economic benefits from a diverse workforce (e.g., increased creativity and thus the strengthening of innovative power, adaptation to a diverse clientele), the justice case emphasizes the social responsibility of companies to treat all (prospective) employees equally and to enable them to develop their full potential. Even though the dichotomy of business and justice is often emphasized, our findings clearly show that the two cases are interdependent in that economic rationales and resources pave the way for a company’s involvement in social justice issues. (p. 11)

Development and main ingredients of D&I management: To establish D&I management, the overt commitment of the management board is vital. The development of a D&I strategy that is aligned with the corporate strategy requires a thorough analysis of the status quo (both internally and externally) to subsequently create a D&I vision from which goals can be derived. Involving and listening to employees at all hierarchical levels and external stakeholders in the development process is crucial to identify problem areas and subsequently develop a strategy and measures to achieve the set objectives. Central measures include fair HR measures regarding recruitment, development, and promotion, competence development, barrier-free infrastructures (spatial and digital), quota policies as well as the introduction of diversity-sensitive corporate language and trust-based working hours. Furthermore, several companies offer their employees resources to carry out D&I-related projects and events. The implementation of inclusive leadership is also a key factor in fostering an inclusive culture. (pp. 19-26)

The necessity of strategic and authentic communication: Establishing D&I management requires strategic communication delivered authentically. Accordingly, communication needs to be an integral part of the corporate D&I strategy right from the word go. Organizational listening (e.g., surveys, interviews, focus group discussions) lays the foundation for the “right” communication strategy and the corresponding measures because knowing the needs and wants of the diverse workforce is necessary to engage D&I-embracing attitudes and behaviors. To communicate D&I content, storytelling is a particularly promising approach to reach and engage employees and to motivate them to speak up and take action. (pp. 31-37)

Interpersonal communication facilitates inclusion: Interviews with employees show that interpersonal communication has a greater impact on the development of employees’ sense of inclusion than mediated communication (e.g., articles on the intranet, videos, podcasts, email circulars, newsletters). While mediated communication is often desired by employees to obtain relevant information on D&I and stay up to date, it is interpersonal communication in a formal context that fosters a sense of inclusion most strongly. Although informal conversations about D&I-related issues among peers are also important, it transpires that perceptions of exclusion are related to a lack of formal interpersonal communication on D&I topics (e.g., in the form of training, workshops, meetings, events), which may lead to frustration and dissatisfaction with the work situation as a whole. (p. 34)

D&I management as an enabler: Effective D&I management means not only strategy development and implementation but also enabling and advising all organizational members. In this sense, it is first and foremost a matter of providing executive personnel with the necessary tools to foster an inclusive leadership style, which is indispensable if a company wants to develop an inclusive organizational culture. Managers should also be provided with resources such as budgets, time, and know-how to engender a D&I-embracing climate in their teams.

Another aim of D&I management is to empower the workforce. In addition to training and
mentoring programs, employees are often provided with resources such as project-based budgets, know-how, and time to actively engage with D&I issues. Furthermore, issue-specific networks and gamification elements such as competitions (e.g., D&I awards) are implemented to make employees active participants in D&I management. (pp. 27-29)

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research project “Let’s talk about Diversity & Inclusion” was overseen and conducted by Daniel Wolfgruber and Sabine Einwiller from the Department of Communication at the University of Vienna. In the course of the project, an extensive literature review and three empirical studies were carried out between February and December 2020.

1. Literature review

The project started with a systematic literature review. In addition to practitioner-oriented literature on D&I, scientific publications from the disciplines of communication studies, management and organizational studies, business ethics, psychology, and sociology were examined and amalgamated. These insights provided the basis for the empirical parts of the research.

2. Semi-structured interviews with 84 employees

This first empirical study pursued two goals: firstly, to investigate employees’ experiences gained with D&I-related measures and communication in their companies. Secondly, to determine the extent to which organizational communication about D&I issues impacts employees’ identification with the organization and subsequent behavior patterns. To increase the explanatory power and generalizability of the results, quotas were predefined concerning company size (number of employees), gender, and age. Other sociodemographic variables were gathered in the survey to determine the diversity of participants including ethnicity, physical and mental condition, sexual orientation, and position in the company. A total of 1,000 people employed in for-profit and non-profit organizations in Germany and Austria were surveyed. The unrepresentative sample was composed of 503 females (103 of them in management positions) and 497 males (35 of them in management positions). No participants reported a “diverse” gender identity. Moreover, 130 participants reported a migration background (52 females, 78 males) while 154 respondents had a physical or mental impairment (84 females, 70 males). Based on the literature review and findings from the qualitative interviews, a questionnaire was designed for the survey of employed persons. In order to ensure the high validity of the results, established scales were used, some of which were adapted to fit the D&I context of the study. The measurement tools used included the Organizational Authenticity Scale by Men and Hung-Baesecke (2015), Mael and Ashforth’s (1992) Organizational Identification Scale, as well as the Climate for Inclusion-Exclusion and the Diversity Climate scales developed by Mor Barak (2017). The survey was conducted in cooperation with a panel service provider between August and September 2020.

3. Semi-structured interviews with 20 D&I experts

In the fourth phase, we conducted 20 interviews with experts in the field of D&I in Germany and Austria (17 D&I managers, 2 D&I consultants, and the spokesperson of Charta der Vielfalt e.V.) between October and December 2020. To ensure systematic sampling, only D&I managers whose companies had previously signed the Diversity Charter were invited to participate in the study. The most relevant results of the literature review and the studies conducted beforehand were taken into consideration when developing the interview guide to ultimately draw a holistic picture of the status quo of D&I management and the concomitant organizational communication. The interviews addressed various dimensions of D&I and included questions about the reasons for establishing D&I management, the development of the D&I strategy and corresponding measures, the conception and implementation of communication measures to engender company-wide support for D&I management, as well as the (long-term) impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on D&I management.

Interviews with D&I experts - a selection of organizations that participated

Twenty interviews with experts in the field of diversity and inclusion in German and Austrian companies and consultancies were conducted by the University of Vienna.
Diversity and inclusion started in the USA in the 1950s and 1960s during the civil rights movement. What began with affirmative action and equal employment opportunity strategies led to the emergence of two different approaches to reduce ethnic and gender inequality: (1) a liberal approach and (2) a radical approach. While the former approach refers to rather voluntary “positive action” initiatives, the latter emphasizes controversially debated “positive discrimination” initiatives such as the implementation of quotas (Hansen & Seierstad, 2017). The evolution of such initiatives and concepts of action has (partly) found its way into legislation over time. It has helped more women, members of ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, members of sexual minority groups, older workers, and members of other marginalized groups become part of the labor force (Mor Barak, 2015). Eventually, diversity management was born and embraced, particularly by large multinational corporations, simply because they operate in numerous countries that often differ in terms of cultural norms, political and education systems, as well as legislation. However, with societies becoming more diverse due to globalization, the free movement of people, progressive equality policies, and medical advances, all organizations are challenged to deal with this social fact. Moreover, people expect corporations to give something back to society. Thus, D&I is also an inherently moral obligation.

Diversity: Reflecting social facts in the workforce
The concept of diversity in organizations refers to the (sociodemographic) differences among people in an organization on grounds of observable (e.g., gender/gender identity, age, ethnicity, physical disability) and (mostly) non-observable (e.g., education, sexual orientation, religion/worldview, cognitive abilities, social background) characteristics (Charta der Vielfalt, 2021; Mor Barak, 2015; Roberson, 2006). The German Diversity Charter defines seven diversity core
dimensions that add up to an individual personality (see figure on p. 9). This chapter is part of the European Diversity Charter network comprising 26 national diversity charters across the EU.

One of the main goals of D&I management is to bring in and promote members of minorities in particular—in comparison to the sociodemographic majority of society, industry, or an organization. However, it must be borne in mind that individuals often combine multiple diversity dimensions at once. For this reason, the term inter-sect-onality has recently been introduced in research into diversity and equality issues (Hansen & Seierstad, 2017). Consider, for example, a woman who is discrimi-nated against not due to her gender, but because of her skin color and creed. Diversity in organizations should thus be considered a reflection of the diversity of society in the respective workforce.

**Inclusion: Empowering employees from all walks of life**

Michalle Mor Barak (2015), one of the world’s most renowned researchers in D&I, defines inclusion as employees’ perceptions that their unique contribution to the company is appreciated and their full participa-tion encouraged, and thus as a sense of belonging. Therefore, both inclusion and exclusion refer to either a favorable or adverse psychological state, resulting from an organization’s structure, practices, values, norms, and above all communication.

A central goal of diversity management is to give all employees a sense of inclusion regardless of gender (identity), ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, religion, etc. To accomplish this goal, organizations have to remove all (potential) tangible and intangible obstacles that may hamper employees’ full participa-tion and contribution, which are considered crucial aspects of inclusion (Roberson, 2006). Possible obstacles that impede a sense of inclusion are the unjust dissemination of (work-related) information, diversity-insensitive (i.e., sexist and discriminatory) language and practices, nepotism, and unfair chances for promotion.

To engender a sense of inclusion, it is vital to give all organizational members the opportunity to engage in formal and informal activities and practices which are inherently communicative. Three aspects concerning communication and interaction have to be considered when organizations genuinely want to foster an inclusive work environment for all employees (Downey et al., 2015; Mor Barack, 2017):

- Enabling employees to take part in decision-making processes
- Granting access to relevant information networks
- Assuring a high level of participation and involvement

When these three aspects are ensured for all employees, organizations can speak of an inclusive work envi-ronment that facilitates a sense of belonging. This implies that diversity management aiming to facili-tate an inclusive work environment for all employees, which we term D&I management hereafter, is in large part a strategic communicative endeavor.

**BUSINESS CASE VS. JUSTICE CASE? NOT A BATTLE AT ALL!**

Organizations should address both the business case and the justice case for further diversity and inclusion as they are interrelated and not opposites. Several experts we interviewed recommended initially emphasizing the economic advantages of highly diverse staff to convince and motivate top management to invest in D&I manage-ment. However, it is also important to recurrently address social justice issues. This is because merely focusing on economic objectives as drivers of D&I management can reinforce or yield inequalities by regarding human beings simply as a means to an economic end (e.g., Bendik et al., 2010; Bleijenbergh et al., 2010; O’Leary & Weathington, 2006). Neglecting ethical and social justice issues can also backfire because employees may reject D&I management that exclusively focuses on a company’s bottom line (Jones et al., 2013).

Research findings indicate that there is indeed a positive relationship between D&I management and economic benefits such as increased sales revenue, more customers, and a greater market share (Herring, 2009). However, the impact of D&I management on the bottom line is considered rather multicausal and often mediated by psychological variables (Ravazzani, 2018; Van Dijk et al., 2012). For this reason, the organ-i zational context, as well as employees’ wants and needs, must always be considered when establishing D&I management.

**Reasons to establish D&I management**

**Business case**  
Utilitarian approach

Economic benefits through:
- Increased innovative power
- Enhanced problem-solving strategies
- Improved customer service
- Lower staff turnover
- Philanthropic image
- Burnished employer brand

“Doing good business”

**Justice case**  
Deontological approach

Societal benefits through:
- Equal career opportunities for everyone
- Support of minority groups
- Increased visibility of underrepresented groups in management positions
- Influencing public opinion about minorities
- Initiating changes in legislation/policy
- Serving as a model for organizations

“Doing the right thing”

**Overcoming the business-justice divide**

- Attracting the attention of (top) management by highlighting economic benefits
- Thereafter, highlighting the social responsibility of the organization through emotional work
- Consistently communicating the interdependency between economic and societal benefits of D&I
- Repeatedly assessing hard and soft facts to underpin the cohesiveness of business and justice issues

To establish veritable D&I management, organizations should highlight and reconcile the specific benefits of the business case and the justice case.
D&I management can affect individual employees, workgroups, and, ideally, the whole organization. Yet, the presumed impact of D&I management and an inclusive work environment on economic variables such as enhanced productivity and performance as well as innovative strength are hard to detect (Van Dijk et al., 2012). This is because these effects are usually mediated by psychological factors such as organizational commitment or job satisfaction. In our survey among employees, we tested the effects of some relevant psychological and behavioral variables to explore the outcomes of D&I.

Effects of D&I: State of research

An inclusive work environment has several direct and indirect favorable outcomes. The results of an online survey carried out by Acquavita et al. (2009) identified a highly significant positive correlation between perceived inclusion and job satisfaction. Going a step further, studies show that an inclusive work environment (Hwang & Hopkins, 2015) and a pro-diversity climate (McKay et al., 2011) have a highly significant positive impact on employees’ commitment and job satisfaction, which consequently have a negative effect on turnover intentions. This means that the desire to leave the organization decreases if employees perceive a diversity-embracing work climate and/or feel highly included. Moreover, research indicates that perceived inclusion has a highly significant impact on employees’ well-being and that employees feel safe in inclusive work environments. Further, D&I management leads to a higher level of trust towards the organization, which subsequently positively affects employees’ engagement (Downey et al., 2015; Jaiswal & Dyaram, 2020).

Effects of D&I: Our research findings

In our second study (i.e., an online survey of 1,000 employed persons), we were also interested in the effects of diversity climate and organizational inclusion on psychological and behavioral outcomes, respectively. One psychological variable of interest was organizational identification, which refers to an employee’s sense of “oneness” with the organization (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). We hypothesized that a pro-diversity climate may positively impact an employee’s identification with their employer. However, we assumed that the organization also needs to be authentic (i.e., genuine, reliable, trustworthy, and open to diverse viewpoints; Men & Hung-Baescke, 2015) for the positive relationship between diversity climate and organizational identification to emerge. Furthermore, we aimed to investigate (indirect) D&I effects on behavioral outcomes, namely organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), which comprises behavior that is (1) non-mandated, (2) based on individual initiative, and (3) contributes to the best interests of the organization (Bienstock et al., 2003). Hence, we hypothesized that a high level of inclusion leads to organizational citizenship behavior once employees identify with their organization.

Authentic D&I management as leverage factor for organizational identification

Employees who perceive a pro-diversity climate strongly identify with their company. However, the organization must be perceived as authentic for this effect to be achieved.

Authenticity is key to successful D&I management

Our first hypothesis – that a pro-diversity climate exerts a positive influence on organizational identification via organizational authenticity – is supported (see figure below). The strong, highly significant indirect effect indicates that employees must be convinced that the employer is serious about D&I to identify themselves with the respective organization. It is worth noting that the features fairness and enablement, in particular, induce this positive psychological effect. Interestingly, people with a migration background feel significantly more identified compared to natives if the organization is fair and provides opportunities for all employees to flourish.

How we measured it

To measure the impact of an authentic diversity management on how employees identify with their organization, numerous questions were asked, such as:

- **Pro-diversity climate:** “Managers here give feedback and evaluate employees fairly, regardless of employees’ race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, or social background.” “The company spends enough money and time on diversity awareness and related training.”
- **Organizational authenticity:** “I believe that my company’s actions are genuine.”
- **Organizational identification:** “When someone criticizes my company, it feels like a personal insult.”

» The goal of our internal networks was to bring people together and create a space for like-minded people to connect and share. Now we have over 80 networks that are also involved in the development of policies. This means we don’t just ask them for their opinion, but we ask: ‘What would that ideally look like from your point of view?’ This creates a sense of inclusion and belonging. «

Katja Planer, Corporate Diversity & Inclusion Advisor, Siemens AG
A climate for inclusion leads to employee loyalty

The second hypothesis — that employees who feel highly included show self-initiated behavior that benefits the best interests of the organization if they feel highly identified — is also supported (see figure below). There is a highly significant relationship between organizational inclusion and loyalty in particular — one dimension of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) — if employees feel highly identified with their organization. However, the results only apply to the two OCB dimensions of loyalty and participation. Notably, the latter dimension has major overlaps with inclusion, as participation is a cornerstone of an inclusive work environment. No significant correlation was identified for the third OCB dimension, obedience. Interestingly, employees older than 55 show significantly more proactive behavior than their younger colleagues if they feel highly included.

How we measured it

To examine the impact of organizational inclusion on employees’ loyalty to their employer, numerous questions were asked, such as:

- **Organizational inclusion**: “I have influence in decisions taken by my work group regarding our tasks.” “I am typically involved and invited to actively participate in work-related activities of my work group.”
- **Organizational identification**: “When someone criticizes my company, it feels like a personal insult.”
- **Loyalty**: “I tell people that my organization is a good place to work.”

Inclusion strengthens the loyalty to the employer

Employees who feel included in their organization show a higher level of identification than those who feel less included. Subsequently, employees who identify with their organization due to their sense of inclusion are more loyal to their employer.

![Diagram showing the relationship between Organizational Inclusion, Organizational Identification, and Loyalty](image)

Employees who feel included in their organization show a higher level of identification than those who feel less included. Subsequently, employees who identify with their organization due to their sense of inclusion are more loyal to their employer.

According to Silke Heinrichs, Head of Diversity & Inclusion, Roche Diagnostics GmbH, the younger generation is particularly interested in creating an inclusive work environment:

>> We have a number of employee networks, and what is intriguing right now is the burning ambition of the younger generation. They always come up with their own ideas and are just bursting with energy and enthusiasm and want to do something about the injustice in the world. I find that incredibly valuable. «

Much room for improvement to foster an inclusive work environment

The results of our survey show that there is still much room for improvement among companies in Germany and Austria when it comes to creating an inclusive, diversity-embracing working environment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>38%</td>
<td>Feel (quite) included</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45%</td>
<td>Perceive their organization as (quite) authentic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>53%</td>
<td>Are (quite) loyal to their employer (which can be fostered by inclusion)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>38%</td>
<td>Identify with their organization (which can be promoted through a pro-diversity climate)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56%</td>
<td>Perceive a pro-diversity climate at work</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

N = 1,000 employees

Conclusion of the survey

To sum up, D&I management has a positive impact on employees if the organization is perceived as authentic. The results indicate that employees with a migration background in particular scrutinize the authenticity of D&I measures. Furthermore, the findings suggest that loyalty to the employer and favorable behavior can be positively influenced by an inclusive work environment if employees identify with their organization. Older employees (55+) in particular are likely to appreciate a high level of inclusion with more proactive behavior than their younger peers.

1. **AT A GLANCE**

- D&I management is the strategic coordination of practices that bring a diverse society into the organization and ensures that all employees, no matter how “different” they may be, feel included.

- When considering whether to implement D&I management in an organization, both the business case (i.e., economic benefits) and the justice case (i.e., the social responsibility of an organization) should be considered, linked, and well communicated.

- D&I management can engender positive psychological and behavioral effects like organizational identification, perceived inclusion, commitment, job satisfaction, and loyalty. However, it is important to ensure that the organization is authentic, i.e. genuinely serious about its D&I endeavors.
Global Citizenship focuses on the unifying rather than the dividing elements between people. A global citizen is someone who self-identifies first and foremost not as a member of a state, a tribe, or a nation, but instead as a member of the human race, looking beyond the narrow scope of national or personal interests. Global citizens support peaceful solutions to today’s global challenges.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) call for action by all countries to improve the lives of people everywhere. The overall aim is to end poverty, to build economic growth and to address a range of social needs such as education and job opportunities while protecting the planet. The 17 SDGs include reducing inequality (i.e., empowering and promoting the social, economic and political inclusion of all citizens, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status), as well as achieving gender equality (i.e., ending all forms of discrimination against women and ensuring equal opportunities for leadership).

The Ban Ki-moon Centre wants to assist in the implementation of the SDGs.

(Source: https://bankimooncentre.org/our-mission)

Can you please briefly describe the Ban Ki-moon Centre for Global Citizens and its specific goals and fields of activity?

The Ban Ki-moon Centre is a quasi-international organization based in Vienna, founded in 2018. It arose from the friendship between the former Austrian President Heinz Fischer and the erstwhile UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who wanted to initiate a legacy project to push forward his two main achievements during his tenure: the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Climate Agreement. Within these two frameworks, our Centre works in various ways to empower young people and women to become future leaders living by global citizenship values, understanding the SDGs, and knowing what they can do to help promote and realize them. We believe that by working with young people and women, we can eventually give them the tools needed to identify and resolve issues in their communities. Divided between policy and direct cooperation with beneficiaries, our work is based on four pillars: education, leadership, advocacy, and peace and security.

The Ban Ki-moon Centre strives for a world in which human rights are respected and observed, regardless of age, gender, identity, religion, or nationality. What role do you ascribe to companies in fulfilling your mission?

First of all, the frameworks that we work with – the Paris Climate Agreement and the SDGs – are a call for everybody. The whole world signed up to them and we all want to reach these goals. It’s really hard, and we’re probably not going to reach all of them by 2030, unfortunately. But we have to do everything we can to get as close to them as possible. Corporations have a huge part to play in this. They must understand the SDGs and integrate them into their everyday work. For example, the Ban Ki-moon Centre works actively with companies and is a member of the Austrian UN Global Compact Network, where I’m part of a working group to promote education for sustainability and global citizenship on the corporate level, meaning integrating the SDGs and educating their staff. Corporations play a huge role when it comes to shaping the public dialogue, and the language they use ultimately shapes reality. It’s crucial to keep that in mind.

Also, so many people spend many hours at their workplace, and corporations are responsible for creating a safe and inclusive environment. I think it should become easier to have a diverse workforce, including people with disabilities and different backgrounds. It shouldn’t be a question of whether or not to include people in wheelchairs or to provide jobs and opportunities for blind or deaf people. This includes everyone from factory workers to office staff, and everybody can contribute in their very own way.

Besides, companies can declare things as environmental issues in their CSR agenda, can be found in the activism taking place around the world. Besides, companies can declare things as environmental measures that they would have done either way. Did you change your light bulbs to save the environment or to save energy? The social aspect, however, is much more difficult. You see a lot of investment costs, for example when you build a ramp or make all hiring processes more inclusive, but you don’t see the results immediately. I think a lot still needs to be done here.

Global Citizenship is about understanding the dividing elements between people. A global citizen is someone who self-identifies first and foremost not as a member of a state, a tribe, or a nation, but instead as a member of the human race, looking beyond the narrow scope of national or personal interests. Global citizens support peaceful solutions to today’s global challenges.

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In our research, we’ve learned that D&I management is often viewed as an HR matter. Only a few companies assign D&I to the CSR department. What’s your view of this?

That’s quite surprising to me because the social aspect is even encapsulated in the acronym, so why pull them apart? However, when you think of diversity and inclusion, people tend to think of their staff and HR processes, such as how we can get more women in leadership positions, how can we create a harassment-free work environment, or how can we include more people with diverse backgrounds, as they may contribute to a more successful business. Another reason why companies emphasize environmental issues in their CSR agenda can be found in the activism taking place around the world. Besides, companies can declare things as environmental measures that they would have done either way. Did you change your light bulbs to save the environment or to save energy? The social aspect, however, is much more difficult. You see a lot of investment costs, for example when you build a ramp or make all hiring processes more inclusive, but you don’t see the results immediately. I think a lot still needs to be done here.

Katrin Harvey is the Chief Operating Officer of the Ban Ki-moon Centre for Global Citizens. The Ban Ki-moon Centre works for peace, poverty eradication, empowerment of youth and women, justice and universal respect for human rights, regardless of age, gender, identity, religion, and nationality. The Ban Ki-moon Centre strives for a world in which human rights are respected and observed, regardless of age, gender, identity, religion, or nationality. What role do you ascribe to companies in fulfilling your mission?

First of all, the frameworks that we work with – the Paris Climate Agreement and the SDGs – are a call for everybody. The whole world signed up to them and we all want to reach these goals. It’s really hard, and
In what ways could the Ban Ki-moon Centre support organizations to establish socially just and economically beneficial D&I management?

We’ve started building a very interesting pool of leaders and young activists that could participate in management processes. We host regular SDG training, online or in-person, depending on the circumstances. One of our key activities is advocating for the inclusion of sustainability and global citizenship education across the world in all kinds of training. We’re always very happy to get more support for this. We work closely with governments and regional institutions such as the City of Vienna to promote knowledge of the SDGs and then hopefully instill it in people of all ages, making them realize that they can do something to support the SDGs. These are some of the things that companies and institutions can also participate in and benefit from.

Katrin Harvey, Chief Operating Officer of the Ban Ki-moon Centre, has over a decade’s experience in sustainability, climate change, clean energy, and organizational management. Having led business development, strategic growth, and communications at an international non-profit organization for clean energy access, she now combines her academic background in language studies and international development to enhance the impact of projects and programs related to the Sustainable Development Goals.

MODERN DIVERSITY & INCLUSION MANAGEMENT

LISTEN, PLAN, PERSUADE, ENABLE, AND LET IT GROW

Establishing effective D&I management requires a strategic approach combining analytical skills, creativity, empathy, communication skills, and business expertise. Developing and implementing a D&I strategy and corresponding measures are non-trivial tasks that can have a significant impact on the overall corporate strategy and business processes. This chapter therefore addresses the main ingredients of D&I management, the main steps of the strategy development process, the role of D&I management as an enabler, and the backlash that can occur when D&I management is considered or introduced.
INGREDIENTS OF EFFECTIVE D&I MANAGEMENT

Our results indicate that there is no blueprint for a D&I strategy and its management due to the manifold, frequently complex contexts and environments in which organizations have to operate. Nevertheless, there are several pivotal ingredients of D&I management, as our analyses have shown.

The strategic role of D&I

First of all, effective D&I management has to be built on an elaborate strategic foundation. The efficacy of a D&I strategy increases when it is integrated into the overall organizational strategy and implemented in all business processes, as discussed in more detail on pp. 23-26. A well-resourced team responsible for D&I (and ethical) matters that directly reports to the board is the key element of an organization’s D&I management. This team is in charge of the development of D&I-related documents such as a code of conduct and anti-discrimination policies, which set rules for organizational practices such as recruitment, talent management, performance appraisals, promotions, supply chain management, and how all organizational members should treat each other and external stakeholders. Other vital elements of effective D&I management are competence development in the form of training and mentoring programs (see p. 21) as well as a barrier-free infrastructure (spatial and digital). As the compatibility of family and work is receiving more and more attention, an increasing number of employers now offer their staff flexible working time models, telework, company kindergartens, flying nannies, reintegration programs after parental leave, and the consulting services of social workers. This focus on the individual’s desires and needs is at the heart of the New Work concept, which emphasizes agility, flexibility, participation, and sensemaking (Hays, 2021). Furthermore, the definition and constant monitoring of strategic goals and KPIs are vital to evaluate the effectiveness of D&I management. The development of a D&I strategy and corresponding measures and KPIs are discussed in more detail on pp. 23-26.

Effective D&I management needs persuasion and communication

To ensure the alignment of the D&I strategy with the overall corporate strategy, the commitment of the management board is crucial. Additionally, continuous persuasion of and communication with all organizational members are key to engender a genuinely inclusive culture over time. Communicating the underlying organizational (moral) values and their embodiment in everyday work life is thus essential to successfully establish and maintain an inclusive work environment. Executive personnel in particular should continuously exemplify D&I values in their words and deeds to act as respected D&I role models for employees. Hence, inclusive leadership that appreciates diversity and facilitates participation and involvement is important if organizations truly want to become a workplace in which employees from all walks of life feel a sense of belonging and can therefore tap their full potential. However, D&I managers and communicators should refrain from putting a D&I label on all communication measures, processes, and practices, as an overemphasis may also cause reluctance within the workforce. The key role of communication in fostering an inclusive organizational culture is explained in more detail on pp. 31-37.

Competence development as a crucial factor for an inclusive work environment

Certainly, D&I managers cannot assume that all employees are familiar with the meanings of diversity and/or inclusion, or the potential economic and social benefits. Therefore, the development of an inclusive environment heavily depends on competence development through training. Such training impacts the need for and importance of valuing diversity, and raise employees’ awareness (Mor Barak, 2017). Moreover, developing competencies plays a crucial role in decentralizing D&I management, which is inevitable in large corporations.

Diversity sensitivity and unconscious bias training, as well as train-the-trainer programs for executive personnel, are especially conducted in corporations with a considerably diverse workforce. Such training is occasionally intertwined with common leadership training. While sensitivity and unconscious bias training are mandatory for people in leadership positions in almost all the companies interviewed, only a few organizations offer such training to employees without a management role. Nevertheless, some organizations have adapted diversity training for employees to create “aha moments” in which the participants realize how biased they are against people who are different from them. Additionally, employees need to learn intercultural competence and conflict resolution, as – despite the numerous advantages of diverse teams – the conflict potential is fairly increased (Herring, 2009). It is important to keep in mind for training sessions that the goal of participants should be diverse so that they can learn from each other in roleplays and share the insights gained (Jones et al., 2013). Ultimately, the goal of diversity training is to engender personal business cases that prompt participants to ask themselves why and how D&I could be beneficial to their own lives.

Typical (soft) skill training is another D&I measure, as diverse skills and competencies enrich the organization. This also holds true for mentoring programs, which can be used to gently integrate underrepresented (minority) groups. However, it is important to note that mentoring can also lead to people eventually adapting and thus losing their individuality (Trüttin & Schoenborn, 2017). Thus, mentoring programs should not be deemed the panacea for fostering an inclusive workplace.
D&I management means listening

The effectiveness of a D&I strategy and its management hinges on the interaction between the managers in charge and the organization’s internal and external stakeholders. To ensure an inclusive organizational culture, the “polyphony” of voices (i.e., the organization listens to all relevant internal and external voices) is vital to achieve true diversity and inclusive-ness (Trittin & Schoeneborn, 2017). Helpful listening measures include conducting employee and customer surveys and interviews, gathering feedback in meetings, implementing reporting channels in case of discrimination and similar transgressions, or evaluating comments on internal and external social media channels. Competence development and listening are not only important ingredients of effective D&I management but also the cornerstones of its enabling and advisory function, which is discussed in more detail on pp. 27-29.

The D&I Management Model on p. 22 provides an overview of the main ingredients and processes of effective D&I management, which is considered the centerpiece of an inclusive organizational culture, which in turn is in constant interaction with its environment.

**HOW TO DEVELOP A D&I MANAGEMENT STRATEGY**

Our research findings indicate that to ensure effective D&I management, its underlying strategy ought to be intertwined with the overall corporate strategy and the corresponding formal and informal practices. D&I managers need to keep in mind that the adoption of D&I management is a long-term change management and learning project with cultural change as the ultimate goal. To achieve this goal, changes in behavior and attitudes among managers and employees must be initiated so that D&I management is seen as an essential means to ensure societal legitimacy and sustainable corporate success.

1. **Getting started: Making an abstract idea tangible**

To even consider implementing D&I management, the veritable commitment and support of the board of management are required. After initial discussions on the topic with top management, where both the potential economic benefits and the social necessity are addressed (p. 11), workshops with board members are recommended to work out the pros and cons of implementing D&I management. If needed, those workshops can be moderated by external D&I consultants. Once the board has decided to invest in D&I initiatives, it is important to appoint one or more people responsible for D&I affairs (Ravazzani, 2018). It is advisable to position D&I management at the interface between HR, CSR, and corporate communications, with a direct reporting line to the management board. This is important because D&I is both a strategic human resource and a sustainability issue that needs the support of the communications department to initiate and accompany the cultural change. Furthermore, it is advisable to investigate the state of the art and best practices in the industry and beyond as well as the legal situation on D&I-relevant issues to not only collect ideas but also obtain an overview of standards in D&I management and legal requirements.

2. **Checking the status quo: Status analysis**

A profound analysis of the status quo within the organization must precede strategy development. The starting point is to analyze the diversity of the workforce, including the gender ratio (at the management level), yet also the age structure and the number of employees with disabilities. If the information is available, the internationality of the workforce should be
assessed, too. Secondly, all relevant business processes and their underlying conditions concerning D&I need to be examined. In addition to HR practices and processes (e.g., recruitment, retention, promotion, development), procurement, manufacturing, service and sales processes should be analyzed for D&I compliance. Thirdly, input from organizational members at all levels regarding their perceptions of D&I needs to be assessed by employing systematic “listening” practices. Finally, it is useful to study the organizational environment. Besides examining industry standards regarding D&I, it is helpful to obtain input from customers, suppliers, and other external stakeholders on their perceptions and demands concerning D&I in order to be able to develop a holistic D&I strategy. This can be done by analyzing existing secondary data and documents on D&I as well as by conducting primary research using surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, and guided workshops. Based on all information gathered, a SWOT analysis can provide the necessary systematic overview of the current and desired status, opportunities, and risks regarding D&I in the organization (Jablonski, 2017).

One step at a time: Developing a D&I strategy

Once all the necessary preliminary work has been carried out, it is important to map out a D&I vision with the associated values and put it into writing in the form of a mission statement and D&I-related policies. This should be done with the involvement of employees at all levels and walks of life. Based on this, flexible SMART goals (i.e., specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) have to be developed, which will serve as the cornerstones of a goal-driven D&I strategy. To monitor the effectiveness of the D&I strategy and its management, associated KPIs (hard and soft) should be defined. Hard KPIs include quotas regarding gender, age, disability, internationality, the fluctuation rate, and the number of participants in D&I training courses. Job satisfaction, commitment, perceived inclusion, and well-being are soft KPIs that should be measured regularly. In the best case, the D&I strategy complements the overall strategy in that D&I management optimizes the corporate strategy and processes. A way to facilitate this process is to employ a balanced (D&I) scorecard or existing certified instruments such as ISO 30415, GDEIB (Global Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Benchmark), or ÖNORM S2501.

An occasionally neglected task, but one that can have a major impact on the effectiveness of D&I management, is the development of a corresponding communication strategy that bolsters the D&I management strategy and the corresponding measures. The communication strategy for D&I must be aligned with the corporate communications strategy to avoid contradictions and increase the company’s authenticity. The achievement of the defined communication goals, which are derived from the respective D&I goals, largely depends on decisions regarding what content is packed in how (key messages) and communicated via which channels (interpersonal and/or mediated communication).

» I would say that without the board’s commitment, such efforts are doomed to fail. I’ve been working in this field for 14 years now, and in those years, I’ve reported three times a year to the Group’s executive board to discuss the latest figures, data, and facts on diversity. To me, that’s key to success. Unfortunately, an executive board regularly putting diversity on the agenda is not a matter of course for many companies. «

Ursula Schwarzenbart, Head of Talent Development & Diversity Management, Daimler AG

The development process of a D&I management strategy

1. Getting started
   - Appointing D&I manager(s)
   - Doing research on D&I-related legislation, (industry) standards, and best practices
   - Involving consultants/facilitators
   - Initiating an internal project kick-off meeting

2. Conducting status analysis
   - Analysis of D&I-related key figures
   - Analysis of D&I-related business processes and existing conditions
   - Systematically obtaining input from internal and external stakeholders
   - SWOT analysis

3. Developing the D&I strategy
   - Formulating a D&I vision and related values
   - Defining D&I goals
   - Developing a D&I strategy that is attuned to the overall business strategy
   - Determining D&I KPIs
   - Mapping out a D&I communication strategy
   - Employing a balanced (D&I) scorecard
   - Considering certified D&I standards

4. Developing the D&I measures
   - Appointing a D&I task force with employees at all hierarchical levels
   - Conducting workshops, focus group discussions, and interviews to develop ideas
   - Budgeting for D&I measures
   - Developing D&I measures

5. Rollout of D&I measures
   - Ensuring basic conditions for rollout
   - Communicating the necessity of D&I and the initiatives employed
   - Testing and monitoring the D&I measures in a selected business unit
   - If successful, organization-wide rollout

To foster an inclusive culture, a well-wrought D&I strategy has to be developed, which above all requires the commitment of the management board. Based on this, it is necessary to define areas of responsibility, analyze the initial situation, develop a well-conceived D&I (communication) strategy, and derive D&I measures. The measures should be communicated, tested, and evaluated in a selected business unit before organization-wide rollout.
For this reason, continuously listening to the workforce is particularly important to be able to incorporate their (communication) needs and desires into the D&I communication strategy (p. 37).

The next step is to develop D&I measures to achieve the defined objectives. Setting up a task force consisting of employees who represent the diversity of the whole organization can be very helpful. In the course of guided workshops and further interviews and focus group discussions, ideas for measures are developed, refined, and checked for feasibility. At this point, the developed objectives are further defined. Setting up a detailed rollout plan consisting of measures has been drawn up, a transparency into corporate communications to raise awareness of the target audiences. The communication measures are aimed (1) to generate attention and support for the D&I measures, and (2) to obtain feedback to improve the measures as needed.

As the implementation of D&I management is considered a change project, it is advisable to test (i.e., introduce, monitor, evaluate) the measures in a predefined organizational unit (e.g., a specific department) as this facilitates the active involvement of employees and possible adjustments based on experiences gained (Hays, 2021). For transparency reasons, the existence of this project and its progress should be communicated throughout the company to create acceptance at an early stage. When the D&I measures have proven effective, organization-wide rollout can be considered, which again needs to be evaluated and possibly adapted.

D&I MANAGEMENT’S ROLE AS AN ENABLER

Since an inclusive culture thrives on all employees being able to participate and contribute to developing their full potential, it is also the task of D&I management to create the appropriate framework conditions. For this reason, D&I management should take on the role of an advising and enabling body since, as one expert claimed, “the ultimate goal of diversity management must be its abolition, because a truly inclusive organization does not need diversity management any longer.” Based on our research findings, various practices to enable the executive personnel and the workforce are presented below.

How to enable executive personnel

Successful implementation of the D&I strategy requires an inclusive and competent leadership style (pp. 35-36). As not all managers have all the necessary characteristics, D&I management needs to enable executive personnel to acquire the appropriate (leadership) skills. Based on the D&I vision and policies derived from it, managers should be trained in how to lead and communicate with diverse employees properly. To successfully display inclusive leadership, executive personnel should be provided with sufficient resources. That means in addition to a small budget (e.g., to organize team events on D&I), the provision of time resources is also crucial so that managers can develop their leadership strategies for implementing D&I measures. Furthermore, the provision of D&I-relevant information and know-how (e.g., access to relevant D&I literature, continuous communication about D&I developments in the company) is necessary to give executive personnel the tools they need to understand and embody the organization’s D&I strategy and lead by example.

How to enable employees: What executive personnel can do

To unleash the positive effects of D&I among all employees, D&I management and executive personnel must allow employees to become involved in D&I initiatives and to play an active role in maintaining and continuously improving them. To ensure this, managers should allow their employees to develop individually, for example by gaining new experiences through job rotation and enrichment, thereby increasing cognitive diversity. Managers should also allocate resources such as time (e.g., holding team meetings on D&I topics), and access to D&I-relevant information and expertise (e.g., giving updates on the company’s D&I endeavors). Besides, they can provide mini budgets to their employees to enable them to realize team-internal D&I projects.
Measures to enable executive personnel and workforce

**Executive personnel**

- **Competence development:**
  - Leadership training
  - Communication skills training
  - Sensitivity training
  - Unconscious bias training
  - Train-the-trainer programs
- **Resources:**
  - Budget
  - Time
  - Information and know-how
- **D&I policies**

**Workforce**

- **Competence development:**
  - Possibilities for further training
  - Job rotation & enrichment
- **Resources:**
  - Time
  - Information and know-how
  - Mini budgets
- **Inclusive leadership:**
  - Possibilities for participation
  - Involvement in decision-making
  - Open communication climate
- **Empowerment:**
  - Employee networks
  - Ideas competitions
  - Independent implementation of ideas

To get all organizational members interested in D&I matters and to foster an inclusive culture, D&I management is required to take on the role of an enabler and advisor. In doing so, it is important to motivate and train both executive personnel and employees in order to get them actively involved and to create a D&I-embracing work environment.

How to enable employees: What D&I managers can do

D&I management also plays an important role as an enabler and advisor for the workforce. Just as with executive personnel, individual competence development is a top priority. Most D&I-related training focuses on enhancing awareness of the benefits of diverse staff as well as on gaining skills and knowledge to enable employees to deal with diversity and otherness in an unbiased way (Treven & Treven, 2007). Mentoring programs, primarily for employees belonging to groups that are underrepresented in the company, are another way of developing employees. Yet, mentoring should only be carried out for a limited period so that the mentees maintain their individuality (p. 21). In addition to financial resources to fund small D&I projects or events, access to D&I-related information must also be ensured. Furthermore, a barrier-free environment (spatially and digitally) helps every employee to actively participate.

THE “WHITE MALE BACKLASH” AND HOW TO OVERCOME IT

Occasionally, D&I management leads to resistance from traditionally higher-status majority group members, who are afraid of losing their advantageous position due to their perception that hitherto underrepresented groups are receiving preferential treatment (Kiddier et al., 2004). In particular, listed companies have introduced quotas to meet their legal obligations and D&I goals, which are intended to ensure the representation of women at the management level or the inclusion of members of ethnic minorities and people with disabilities. Such quotas, however, can lead to a “white male backlash,” which usually occurs when white, well-educated men who are equally qualified feel discriminated against or marginalized. These feelings can lead to open or covert resistance, anxiety, frustration, or anger (Burke, 2005).

Last but not least, it is also the task of D&I management to empower all employees interested in D&I issues so that they have the opportunity to network and share ideas. The implementation of employee networks (sometimes termed business resource groups) is a measure already established in many companies. In a protected setting, like-minded people share ideas and discuss how to improve D&I management or the framework conditions. Although not yet common practice in D&I management, measures with gamification elements can be promising. Gamification can increase employee motivation and engagement, and improve group collaboration in a fun manner (Wanick & Bui, 2019). Besides quizzes, quests, or challenges as part of D&I training, ideas competitions are a gamified way to promote the creativity of employees and at the same time to identify areas for improvement. To encourage participation, it is advisable to give the winners of the competitions the freedom to implement their ideas independently. Communication plays an important role in promoting such competitions and presenting the winning projects to demonstrate the organization-wide commitment to D&I to internal and external stakeholders.
are still a matter of debate, particularly in companies with a culture that still embraces conservative views and principles. This explains why D&I management is often seen as a long-winded change process by almost all the experts interviewed.

However, there are various ways for organizations to successfully handle the backlash phenomenon – and here, too, well-wrought communication is key. The overt commitment of the management board, active listening, and persuasion through interpersonal interaction are indispensable for breaking down old thought patterns and attitudes. Empathic and transparent communication and an emphasis on both the justice and the business case, combined with the reminder that anyone can make it to the top through their efforts, are essential factors in counteracting the backlash. Humor can also be used judiciously to give D&I critics in the organization food for thought. Backlash effects usually result from prescriptive and implicit (gender) beliefs and often involve unconscious processes. Therefore, educating employees about the reasons and consequences of D&I management is one of the best ways to finally overcome the backlash phenomenon (Rudman & Phelan, 2008).

Elke Heitmüller, Head of Diversity, Volkswagen AG

**SILENCE IS SILVER, SPEECH IS GOLDEN**

COMMUNICATION AS THE KEY TO AN INCLUSIVE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE

D&I management is a long-term change process, which is the reason why the accompanying communication strategy should set the pace but also be flexible enough to adapt to an ever-faster changing environment. Factors such as immigration, aging, legislation, and changing educational standards elicit a greater variety of individual skills and experiences, which also have an impact on communication strategies and practices. Due to this complexity and the communication challenges inherent in D&I matters, this chapter is dedicated to internal communication in the context of D&I management.

COMMUNICATING D&I: STRATEGIC GOALS AND CHANNELS

Addressing and promoting an organization’s diversity through strategic communication that values diversity’s benefits and allows for different perspectives is an opportunity for improved business performance. Both practitioners and researchers point to the significance of strategic internal communication on D&I as a key to engendering and maintaining a diversity-embracing, inclusive culture. Communication measures that are in line with the D&I strategy help the organization capitalize on the strengths and differences in the workforce by supporting the development and full utilization of its HR potential, eliminating communication barriers, and contributing to employees’ problem-solving skills and increased productivity (Okoro & Washington, 2012).

Communication strategy for D&I

A well-conceived internal communication strategy can strongly impact an organization’s effectiveness as it facilitates the development of positive internal relationships and promotes employees’ awareness of risks and opportunities as well as an organization’s (changing) goals. Moreover, internal communication that aims to foster an inclusive culture contributes
to employees’ commitment to and identification with the organization (Welch, 2012).

To achieve such positive effects, a company’s communication strategy and concomitant measures typically aim at the acceptance and support of D&I initiatives at all organizational levels. This is the reason why managers who are responsible for D&I communication should ensure that the communication strategy is aligned with:

1. the D&I strategy and its goals,
2. the overall corporate communications strategy, and
3. employees’ needs and desires in terms of communication design, type, and channel.

According to D&I experts, it is essential to reach out to all organizational members and that every employee feels addressed and can derive personal benefits from D&I measures (i.e., personal business case). The use of diversity-sensitive language that aims to address every organizational member is also an important issue to consider. Due to the lack of uniform standards, however, this is often challenging.

Common interpersonal communication practices in D&I management

D&I management usually adopts a variety of interpersonal and mediated communication measures to (1) convey D&I-related messages and (2) facilitate a vivid discourse on D&I throughout the organization. The most common formal interpersonal communication measures encompass discussion groups dealing with the topic of D&I, which are occasionally attended by experts who provide input, followed by open debate among the attendees. Moreover, almost all the D&I managers interviewed stated that they organize workshops and internal events on the topic of D&I to raise employees’ awareness of D&I matters. Besides, team and town hall meetings as well as performance reviews are also suggested occasions at which interpersonal communication about D&I issues can and should take place. As a rule of thumb, managers and executive personnel are advised to lead by example and cultivate a cooperative and inclusive leadership style with an open-door policy to engender a “speak-up culture,” yet also to promote informal discussions about D&I issues among employees, for example during lunchbreaks or in the form of fireside chats.

Common communication channels in D&I management

Concerning mediated internal communication about D&I, the experts interviewed reported using the (social) intranet as the main communication channel. The intranet frequently features articles that address D&I in a narrative form (e.g., in the digital employee magazine), as well as D&I-related documents. Additionally, many organizations offer blog posts, videos, podcasts, online training, and provide Q&As about D&I matters.

Employees also have the opportunity to comment on the information provided or to share views virtually on D&I topics. D&I-related messages are furthermore communicated in email circulars, newsletters, and on the mobile employee app. For employees without a computer, some organizations still post notices on bulletin boards or distribute the printed version of the employee magazine with articles on D&I topics. Another form of mediated communication is the use of posters, murals, symbols, or screens in the buildings to convey the importance of D&I in the organization. Lastly, employee surveys are also used as strategic listening tools.
THE IMPACT OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION ON EMPLOYEES’ SENSE OF INCLUSION

Organizations are advised to use all means of internal communication – whether formal, informal, interpersonal, or mediated – to engender a climate in which all employees feel appreciated and highly included. While documents such as codes of conduct or anti-discrimination policies set the rules of engagement, mediated communication mainly aims to inform employees about D&I initiatives and developments. Yet, interpersonal communication ultimately tips the scale for establishing a truly inclusive work environment, as the results of our studies show. Its effectiveness stems not only from talking about D&I-related topics, but also from giving employees access to important information, involving them in important decisions, and actively encouraging their participation and involvement in various activities inside and outside work (Mor Barak, 2017).

Inclusion through formal and informal interpersonal communication

The context in which interpersonal communication takes place also influences the extent to which employees feel included. In the course of interpersonal communication, formal and informal turns of talk at the workplace can be distinguished. While formal interpersonal communication refers to the exchange of exclusively work-related information in an official context, informal interpersonal communication denotes “off-record talks” such as chit-chat, joking, or supportive feedback among colleagues in informal settings. Informal interpersonal communication usually takes place horizontally on a peer level (which does not categorically exclude occasional informal interactions between people at different hierarchical levels), whereas formal work-related interpersonal communication mostly occurs vertically between managers and employees (Fay, 2011; Holmes & Marra, 2004).

Interpersonal communication in a formal context engenders inclusion

Our research findings support the assumption that a sense of inclusion depends on a large extent on interpersonal communication about D&I matters. It shows that employees who feel included to a lesser extent or not at all perceive a lack of formal interpersonal communication much more often than highly included individuals. While informal interpersonal (peer) communication about D&I matters is still an essential element to engender a sense of inclusion, it seems that the absence of formal interpersonal communication about D&I-related topics in training, workshops, official meetings and conversations with executive personnel, or corporate events hampers the development of a sense of inclusion. Discussions about D&I issues among staff should take place and be stimulated in more formal contexts to make all employees feel included and taken seriously, with executives in particular playing a decisive role in creating an open and inclusive communication climate.

Julia Valsky, Head of Group Diversity Management, Erste Group Bank AG

THE IMPACT OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION ON EMPLOYEES’ SENSE OF INCLUSION

» It is essential that all employees are respected in their individuality, because if you manage to do that, you can also give them the security of knowing that “it’s okay to speak up!” And that’s why, in my opinion, diversity management has a lot to do with corporate culture, and only open communication and leadership can create an inclusive culture. «

A LEADER’S WORD CARRIES WEIGHT: INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

Leadership plays an essential role in shaping the work climate in a team, department, or the organization as a whole. Since leaders serve as role models, they influence the way individuals treat one another or others in the workplace. People often learn vicariously, which means that they observe higher ranking individuals and imitate their behavior if it has been rewarded in one way or another. Role models illustrate the commonly expected behaviors to employees and new recruits in particular (Bandura, 1985). Therefore, whether it is the CEO, a department head, or a team leader, leadership by example that not only accepts but also promotes diversity is immensely important.

Inclusive leadership is the name of the game

Despite the many benefits of diverse and heterogeneous teams, conflicts and disputes can also arise due to differing views and opinions. Research findings show that inclusive leadership not only reduces the potential for conflict in diverse teams but also facilitates an inclusive climate (Ashikali et al., 2020). Moreover, inclusive leadership has a significant positive impact on employees’ psychological safety (i.e., they feel able to show their true selves without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career) and consequently on innovative work behavior (Javed et al., 2017).

To achieve the aforementioned positive effects, managers who are in charge of a diverse team have to cultivate behaviors that facilitate group members’ perception of belongingness in the team while maintaining their uniqueness (Randel et al., 2018). Executive personnel who lead inclusively involve their employees in decision-making processes, communicate transparently, and grant all members access to relevant information. They encourage them to participate and be proactive in both the team and the organization (Mor Barak, 2017). Managers are advised to delegate competencies, listen to concerns, motivate, mediate in

The premises, practices, and effects of inclusive leadership

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<th>Individual leader characteristics</th>
<th>Inclusive leadership</th>
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<td>• Pre-diversity beliefs</td>
<td>• Facilitates belongingness</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Humility</td>
<td>• Supports individuals as group members</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Cognitive abilities</td>
<td>• Ensures justice and equity</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Humility</td>
<td>• Shares decision-making</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Pro-diversity beliefs</td>
<td>Values uniqueness</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Encourages diverse contributions</td>
<td>• Encourages diverse contributions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Helps group members fully contribute</td>
<td>Members’ perceptions of work group belongingness</td>
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Followers’ perceptions of inclusion

Members’ perceptions of work group belongingness

Members’ perceptions of work group valuing uniqueness

Member’s psychological empowerment

Members’ behavioral outcomes

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<th>Source: Randel et al. (2018)</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Help group members to identify</td>
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<td>• Improve job performance</td>
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<td>• Reduce turnover</td>
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Conflicts, and lead without prejudice. Leaders should affirmatively address D&I matters occasionally at meetings and performance reviews to demonstrate the importance of D&I to the functioning of the team and the company. Believing in the benefits of diverse teams is pivotal to be authentic. The diagram on p. 35 depicts Randel et al.’s (2018) model, which illustrates the basic elements of inclusive leadership and its ramifications.

**Continuing the Conversation**

Content is what counts most when organizations want to communicate messages effectively, persuade people, and elicit behavior change (see also Communication Insights No. 6: It’s All About Content). D&I topics can be rather sensitive and trigger both positive and negative emotions. For this reason, managers in charge are advised to carefully ponder on how D&I issues should be communicated internally – but also externally – to generate support and enthusiasm for D&I initiatives. Although facts and figures are fundamentally important to illustrate the workforce diversity of an organization along with its initiatives and measures to engender an inclusive culture, it is ultimately the stories of affected individuals that can bring about change in attitudes and behaviors. This was pointed out by all the experts interviewed.

**Success stories and testimonials**

For thousands of years, people have been telling each other stories to pass on their respective cultural identities from generation to generation. Stories and narratives, however, are also pivotal in organizational communication to represent personal, social, and corporate perspectives. Organizational storytelling, which is inherently action-oriented, helps reduce uncertainty among members by disseminating information, frame organizational events through their value-laden features, and promote organizational identification by developing a social context against which employees can orient themselves (Barker & Gower, 2010).

For this reason, in addition to conveying information on D&I goals and measures, stories about employees or managers who have achieved something that was not necessarily to be expected due to pervasive biases and prejudices should be considered an integral part of the communication strategy. The general tenor of such success stories is: “You, too, can do it!” Such narratives can have a considerable impact on the self-esteem of members of underrepresented or minority groups and thus foster an inclusive work environment.

> We also do a lot of home stories because people who talk about their experiences are the best way to get the message across. We have a woman who used to be a man and who also works in a tough technical field. We asked her once if she wanted to do a brief interview in connection with Christopher Street Day. She did it and it was a bombshell. «

Elke Heitmüller, Head of Diversity, Volkswagen AG

**WHAT EMPLOYEES WANT …**

Having looked at communication strategies and measures from the vantage point of the experts interviewed, it is important to consider what employees want and expect in terms of internal communication on D&I issues. The in-depth analysis of 84 interviews with jobholders helped us gain insights in this respect.

**Inclusion requires human interaction**

Employees generally expect and demand more formal rather than informal interpersonal communication about D&I topics, which is in line with the findings shown above (p. 34). The data indicates the following:

- Employees with an average or low degree of perceived inclusion demand more formal and informal interpersonal communication compared to highly included individuals.

- Unsurprisingly, employees who feel moderately or (almost) not included demand more interpersonal communication about D&I matters in formal settings. In this context, regular meetings and training on D&I issues such as racism, discrimination, bullying, or sexism, at which managers initiate a discussion on D&I goals and initiatives and to tell success stories should be narrated - either in the written form or via video formats or podcasts.

To sum up, D&I managers and employees in charge of communicating D&I-related content are well advised to focus on interpersonal communication to establish an inclusive work climate. While mediated communication is a vital element to inform all employees about D&I goals and initiatives and to tell success stories to persuade employees of the personal and corporate benefits of a diverse workforce, human interaction and open discussion about D&I matters at all organizational levels seem to be key to fostering an inclusive organizational culture.
THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND ITS CHALLENGES FOR D&I MANAGEMENT

The COVID-19 pandemic that started spreading around the world in 2020 has had severe impacts on economies worldwide and the job situation of millions of people. Many have lost their jobs (at least temporarily) or had to work reduced hours. Remote working was implemented on a large scale wherever possible, while key workers and employees in the service sector were often exposed to the risk of COVID-19 infection due to physical contact with customers or patients. In addition to the impact on the individual work situation of many people, the pandemic has also posed challenges for D&I management in many organizations.

People disadvantaged by the pandemic

Interviews with employees revealed that chronically ill and older employees, in particular, felt unfairly treated and excluded because – depending on the sector they worked in – they were often the first employees to be ordered to work from home or were put on short-time work since they belonged to risk groups. Furthermore, the temporary closure of kindergartens and schools has forced many women back into their traditional roles as caregivers and housewives, as they are often the ones to bear the brunt of homeschooling and household chores – in addition to the professional work they are expected to do from home. Moreover, men have been quicker to return to the office when possible, with women tending to continue working from home. The snag is that working from home reduces visibility, which can harm one’s career.

According to the Hays HR report 2021, companies that were not yet familiar with New Work structures before the COVID-19 outbreak were preoccupied with implementing flexible and remote work, which is the reason why D&I topics have been deferred in numerous “conventional” companies. Organizations that had already established agile working structures and offered their employees telework opportunities found it much easier to deal with the pandemic. As a result, they were better able to focus on social and interpersonal issues to help their employees through this difficult time.

Remedies to get through the pandemic

The provision of workplace nurseries, flying nannies, and counseling by psychologists and social workers as well as the introduction of shared leadership have been particularly effective during the pandemic according to various D&I managers, especially when already in place before. Furthermore, employee networks have proven useful. Women’s networks, for example, have provided great support for mothers in this tiring situation. Also, appropriate skills-based training (e.g., software or time management training) has been held, and Q&As on telework issues have been made available on the intranet and continuously expanded to include the needs and experiences of employees. Once again, communication measures in the form of active listening and providing relevant, timely information and training have clearly proved to be the be-all and end-all of effective D&I management and the fostering of an inclusive work environment.

» I think the pandemic has brought a shift in the organizational priorities and people back to the fore. What we learned from the crisis is how important it is to focus on people and their needs and to bring more humanity and employee experiences into our organizations. We’ve put a lot of effort into it, and we’ve got lots of great feedback, which was very motivating and also touching at times. In my opinion, we currently have an exciting opportunity to rethink work. «

Verena Binder-Krieglstein, Head of Employee Experience, A1 Telekom Austria AG

Gender roles reaffirmed: Childcare and working at home during the Covid-19 pandemic

N = 2,113 women and men in Austria with children under the age of 15. Survey in April/May 2020 by Mader et al. (2020)

The results of the survey show that working at home does not change gender roles and the allocation of unpaid work such as childcare. Twice as many men indicated that their partner takes care of the children during working hours. Striving for gender equality requires new opportunities for the reconciling of work and family life.
The findings of this research project confirm the growing importance of D&I management in general and in companies in the German-speaking area in particular. The drivers lie both in the economic benefits resulting from a diverse workforce, and in the imperative to do justice to the social responsibility of fostering diversity and inclusion, which is increasingly demanded by society.

Wrap-up

The implementation of D&I management is a pervasive change process that affects all areas of an organization. D&I issues should be tackled strategically and in accordance with the overall corporate strategy, so that the organization and its internal and external stakeholders can benefit. Thus, the commitment of the management board is a vital necessity if D&I management is to be pursued seriously. Furthermore, the results indicate that accompanying communication measures should be aligned with the D&I and corporate communications strategy to avoid contradictions that might harm the company’s authenticity and trustworthiness.

D&I management trends

The interviews with experts revealed which topics will be particularly relevant for D&I management in the upcoming years.

- First, the superannuation of the population will require the development of novel work models and the definition of new roles for older employees.
- Secondly, employees’ physical and mental health, an issue supercharged by the COVID-19 pandemic, will also become more of a priority.
- Thirdly, the establishment of a diversity-friendly language, which also includes genders other than male and female, is also an issue that D&I managers will continue to address.

- Fourthly, the compatibility of family and work, which has already been facilitated by teleworking as well as the establishment of flying nannies and also reintegration programs after parental leave will continue to receive great attention.
- Lastly, teleworking opportunities, which will continue to be offered in many companies after the pandemic, pose new challenges for communication and inclusive leadership. For this reason, new management styles and competence development, especially of executive personnel, will persist in playing a major role.

Future research

Since D&I management is a complex, cross-cutting issue that cannot take effect overnight, longitudinal studies are a good way of providing scientific support for the introduction and implementation of D&I management. In addition to interviews, focus groups, and surveys, the method of participant observation can also provide valuable insights into how an inclusive organizational culture may be fostered, as well as what factors may hamper or undermine this challenging undertaking. Moreover, comparative research across different cultures with different demands regarding D&I would be a fruitful avenue for future studies.

CONCLUSION & OUTLOOK

FURTHER READING

Books


Articles

REFERENCES


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ACADEMIC SOCIETY FOR MANAGEMENT & COMMUNICATION

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Since 2020, the Communications Trend Radar, an annual research project, has identified trends that impact corporate communications. The aim is to help communication leaders to identify emerging challenges and opportunities early on and set the right course.

The key findings of our research projects are published in the series Communication Insights and can be downloaded at bit.ly/ComInsights.

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