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DIVERSITY, EQUITY & INCLUSION

Perspectives from Chief Human Resources Officers and Academic Researchers

A Partnership between the National Academy of Human Resources
& the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology

Table of Contents

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

Perspectives from CHROs & Academic Researchers

Introduction

Late last year, the National Academy of Human Resources (NAHR) and the Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) established a partnership to advance our knowledge of policies, practices, and research to strengthen Diversity, Inclusion and Equity in the workplace. This collaboration took on heightened importance and urgency after the tragic murder of George Floyd and ensuing racial injustice protests. A small team representing SIOP and NAHR interviewed Chief Human Resource Officers (CHROs), Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs), and Scholars who conduct research in the areas of Diversity & Inclusion to get their perspectives on issues organizations face related to providing equal access to key opportunities, increasing diversity in leadership roles, and creating an environment of trust and belonging – particularly among people of color (See Attachment 1). This document summarizes what we heard across the interviews, arranged by five major themes. Each theme is briefly described including questions that we believe highlight the theme. Based on the themes, we conclude with a series of potential studies and programs that can start conversations around next steps. Our plan is to use this document for further discussions with organizational leaders and researchers to create more specific plans for pilot programs of empirical research, and to enlist the support of organizations to further participate in these efforts.

Interview Findings

Five different themes emerged from the interviews conducted with Chief Human Resource Officers (CHROs), Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs), and Scholars of Diversity & Inclusion. In the section below, each of these themes is described in detail. Following each description, key questions that relate to the theme are provided.

Leadership Commitment, Organizational Culture & Accountability

A dominant theme emerging from all interviews is the importance of commitment from the top, beginning with the CEO and C-Suite. Additionally, employees and stakeholders are looking beyond the internal and external commitments that are currently being made and are focused on the demonstrated actions and outcomes that result over time. Those leaders at the top, CHROs, and Chief Diversity Officers, are critical for program success and they often play a key role driving the process of creating D&I strategic plans, including goal setting and metrics. Finally, prevailing thinking agrees that successful execution of the plans must be embraced by people managers across all functions and levels.

Accountability was also identified as a key indicator of commitment. The phrase "what gets measured matters" best defines this perspective. Goals need to be specified and leaders must be held accountable for results like any other critical business priority. Several organizations that have made progress in D&I, especially with women, stated that they had a specific and deliberate action plan in place, including goals and metrics for well-defined outcomes.

Key Questions

- **Is progress in equity, diversity and inclusion enhanced by having a more diverse Board and/or C-Suite team?**

- **How do you create sustained commitment and incentives at every level in the organization where the CEO, leadership team, people managers and ultimately all employees embrace the value D&I can bring to an organization versus viewing it as simply a compliance issue?**

- **Does linking senior leader compensation and incentives to diversity goals result in improved performance against those goals?**

- **What is the most effective way to frame diversity and inclusion so people can understand the benefits, challenges, and the importance of creating equity (which may mean putting an increased focus on talented women and people of color to level the playing field)?**

- **How do you link a thorough analysis of an organization's unique data with establishing an action plan and evaluation process to close diversity gaps?**

Communication and Engagement

George Floyd's murder on 25 May 2020 and many other events of racial injustice prior to that horrific incident created a very different type of dialogue in many organizations, dialogues that had never occurred before. CEOs and other senior leaders across the country conducted listening tours designed to better understand the current and past experiences faced by African Americans at work. The discussions were reported to be honest, authentic, and transparent. Through storytelling and having what is described as "uncomfortable conversations" these interactions created a level of awareness and key learnings as employees, for the first

time, felt empowered to share their stories and experiences. **Many CHROs stated that to sustain this type of dialogue and feedback, there needs to be an environment of trust, a sense of belonging, and an enhanced effort to ensure psychological safety – particularly among people of color. Many feel these programs broaden inclusion in important ways and can lead to self-awareness and empathy that builds a culture creating higher levels of equity in the workplace.**

Key Questions

- **What are the key attributes that contribute to creating an environment of trust, a sense of belonging, and an atmosphere where people feel comfortable speaking up rather than having a culture of silence?**

- **What are the best communication vehicles to continue to have open and candid discussions about diversity, inclusion, and racism?**

Diversity Talent Pipelines & Networks

In a study by the Center for Executive Succession, <ins>Building Diversity into the Talent Pipeline for Senior Operating Roles</ins>, there were several important findings. CHROs stated that 76% of reporting organizations have fallen short of their diversity goals for key operating/P&L roles. However, compared to 5 years ago, 76% said that the diversity has increased or greatly increased. When asked about the obstacles the top two reasons cited were: (1) current pipeline lacks enough ready internal talent and (2) lack of required volume of talent in the external market/industry. The CHROs we interviewed all acknowledged that the gaps cannot be closed without deliberate and accelerated development and the essential need to reevaluate their approach to recruiting in terms of both expanding the sources of talent and the processes to determine qualifications for a position. They acknowledged that it is critical to expand where they recruit diverse talent and evaluate the job requirements (e.g., focus on competencies vs. experiences) which may restrict the pool of potential qualified candidates. Organizations that have made progress with women can demonstrate the importance of having deliberate plans. Examples included identifying key diverse internal talent early, accelerating their advancement into special projects and critical roles, and providing the appropriate support to facilitate their success. The above issues are further complicated by differential opportunities for building effective and large networks. We repeatedly heard that networking varies as function of gender and race. Attention to the forming and maintaining of networks becomes a key element in efforts to enhance diversity and inclusion. Providing senior level coaches, mentors, and/or sponsors as a network of support to help provide feedback and guide their careers was identified as a critical aspect of demonstrating organizational commitment.

Key Questions

- **How do we better understand and enhance our pipelines to expand opportunities both for current employees and, more generally, for those who wish to join the organization?**

- **Do differences in advancement stem from differences in experiences and are these differences in experiences a result of assignments being based on race, gender, or both?**

- **Are women and people of color held to different standards for selection, promotion, or placement in key assignments and training?**

- **Research suggests that there are important differences in the way different groups form networks. Can this disadvantage the access women and people of color have in terms of key opportunities and help explain how top diverse talent is often missed?**

- **Do leaders who personally have broader diverse networks (i.e., based on who they know, who they trust, who they seek out for feedback) see the value of diversity and of building more diverse teams?**

- **What are the best practices to provide sponsorship and advocacy for underrepresented populations within the workforce?**

HR Policies, Practices & Interventions

Another theme that emerged was the importance of evaluating HR policies and practices with the specific intent of identifying those that may inadvertently contribute to inequity. An example provided was in a partner-based firm where they were hiring top diverse talent from some of the best schools. Yet over time, people of color were not making partner at the same rate as their white counterparts. It turns out, the white males had more access to the "plum" assignments, so naturally they had more impactful results, not because they were smarter or more capable, but because of the opportunities they received. While CHROs are focused on gender pay equity (and some are now looking at pay equity among various ethnic groups), they have typically not done an "audit" of their policies and practices to detect patterns of inequity in their implementation.

We also heard unanimous feedback that unconscious bias training has not been as effective as people would have liked, particularly given the significant investment organizations have made. Yet, everyone agrees that while the biases might be unconscious, they can heavily influence decisions regarding who we recruit, hire, develop, and promote, as well as how we evaluate people.

Key Questions

- **What is the best way to objectively review all HR processes, practices, and policies to identify components that directly or indirectly contribute to bias?**

- **What are the most proven models of success in eliminating systemic disadvantages for people of color and women?**

- **Are women and people of color penalized more severely for failures (e.g., put in the penalty box)?**

Working Remotely and Other Business Model Change Implications

During and post the pandemic, most organizations are making more permanent changes to their business models and where/how work gets done. Many women are baring the primary burden of taking on more responsibilities at home – especially with students engaged in remote learning. Some organizations do not intend to ever have all their employees return to the office full time. Others are accelerating the implementation of technology, impacting certain jobs. There is a worry that many of these changes could erode the progress made with women and further suppress progress for people of color. There is a real need to evaluate these important changes through the lens of equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Key Questions

- **What impact does working remotely have on the development and advancement of women and various ethnic groups (e.g., recruitment, establishing support networks for new hires, creating a culture of trust and belonging, ensuring visibility and access to key opportunities)?**

- **Are there other business model changes that can potentially remove barriers or create opportunities for achieving equity, diversity, and inclusion goals?**

Avenues for Future Research

From our review of the interviews and creation of the above summary, we offer below the list of studies that we believe can help deepen our knowledge and influence future practice. The criteria we used when sketching these studies are 1) work that bridges science and practice, 2) high interest/impact as articulated by CHROs, 3) evidence-based research does not exist or its findings are not conclusive, and 4) topics are amenable to fast-paced research and broad sharing of learnings. What follows are suggestions of topics that we hope will lead to further discussions and the execution of research that addresses important issues in diversity and inclusion.

Leadership Commitment, Organizational Culture and Accountability

We know how important CEO and C-Suite commitment and accountability are to advancing diversity and inclusion goals.

- What role are Boards now playing to provide more robust and ongoing oversight to ensure the highest level of accountability and outcomes?
- What are the most effective strategies for driving sustained D&I commitment, accountability and enthusiasm among leaders and people managers lower down in the organization?

Diverse Talent Pipelines and Networks

- Compare/contrast pipelines that are relatively sparse when it comes to underrepresented candidates and those organizations that have managed to build their pipelines despite the more limited pool and identify actions to expand the pipeline of underrepresented employee populations.
- What are the most impactful changes that companies can make in their approach to recruiting that can increase the pool of qualified people of color, from expanding the sources of candidates to revisiting recruitment practices? Include the creation of a taxonomy of recruiting program elements effective in attracting people of color.
- How can existing intra-organizational networks best be shaped to maximize more equitable career opportunities?

HR Policies, Practices, and Interventions

- Develop a protocol for an HR "audit" of policies and practices that focuses on barriers to selecting people of color either for entry into the organization or advancement into key roles proven to serve as feeder pools for senior leader positions.
- Review analyses on unconscious bias training to identify program elements that are effective/sustainable and those that are not.
- Identify inhibitors for managers and other leaders in having these difficult conversations about race, equity, and organizational justice.

Working Remotely and Other Business Model Change Implications

- What impact does working remotely have on the recruitment, development, and advancement of people of color? Women?

- **With fewer connections and less extensive networks than white colleagues, how can organizations help people of color ensure that remote working does not have an even further negative impact on those relationships?**

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Interviewees

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Collaboration between the National Academy of Human Resources (NAHR) and the Society of Industrial and Organizational Psychology (SIOP) on Diversity and Inclusion

In light of the recent events surrounding George Floyd's tragic death and the ensuing protests, it has been a sobering reminder of the pervasive and systemic injustices that remain in our country (and globally). The collaboration between NAHR and SIOP on Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) is even more important than ever; however, we need to recognize and acknowledge that much of the work we have done in the past has fallen short of our expectations and not resulted in the kind of progress and positive outcomes that we all desired. This includes both research agendas in D&I and practice.

Rather than emphasize what has been done in the past, we want to focus our workshops on the future and what big opportunities exist to address diversity, inclusion, and racial injustice in a systemic and sustainable manner. While we are all eager to act, it is critical that any future efforts must be done thoughtfully (after doing more active listening) and focus on root causes rather than visible and often misleading symptoms. Academics will no doubt want to redirect their research agendas to respond to these challenges. Yet, we need to make sure they are asking the right questions and designing research that is faster-paced, practical and results in closing equality gaps. The goal is to ensure that everyone in the workplace has equal access to opportunities so all individuals can learn, grow, and realize their full potential, and organizations can thrive by being profitable, productive, humane, and able to positively impact the world.

We have framed the questions for the virtual D&I workshops. We will solicit insights from both CHROs and Academics.

CHRO Questions:

- Given the recent events on racial injustice and the listening sessions you and your CEO have conducted with employees, what have you learned and how would you reframe the D&I challenges your organization is facing?
- What D&I work efforts would you stop or change because they have not yielded strong results and why?
- Have there been D&I efforts that have moved the needle and for what groups (e.g., gender, racial diversity)? Why do you think the effort moved the needle? If the progress did not sustain, why not?
- How have you measured progress in D&I efforts, and would you change those metrics in the future and if so why and how?
- Who is held accountable in your company for meaningful results and change? What happens if there are no results or change?
- How would you recommend we move forward, so we can all begin to see impactful change? What concrete steps is your company willing to take?
- Have you partnered with academic professionals? What worked and what did not? What would you do differently to make it more effective? Are you interested in working with academics in the future?

Academic Questions:

- As you think about the D&I research that you and your colleagues have had underway and the tragic death of George Floyd and the ongoing protests, what have you learned? How might your research help to explain what happened and how to respond?
- What D&I research (or theories and theoretical perspectives) exists that you believe can be helpful to practitioners and provide direction and evidence that can influence desired results or outcomes? If they have not been helpful, can you explain why?

- In a brief sentence or two, what have you found in your research that a CHRO might use to make progress on D&I?
- Where do you see gaps in the research and how would you build or modify your research agenda to address the ongoing challenges?
- How much progress has been made in D&I research (1=low and 10=high)? Why do you believe we have made so little progress?
- What are the outcomes (dependent variables) you are trying to influence with your research?
- From your perspective, how do you define the "phenomenon" of D&I? What are the most important research questions we should be asking?
- Are you aware of any research on race that might be applicable to driving more innovation and impactful solutions in the workplace?
- Are you willing to partner with practitioners (e.g., CHROs) and build a research agenda that is faster-paced, actionable and impactful?