OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPROVE APPROACHES TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

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Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is an ever-growing field with relevance to every facet of society.

From healthcare to education to technology, there is a **consistently growing demand for equitable outcomes and meaningful experiences of inclusion rooted in embracing diversity.**

However, despite the desire for change, many **DEI efforts fall short in yielding sustainable culture-shifts to meaningfully realize desired goal states.**
APPETITE FOR DEI WORK

- Increasing demand for more socially responsible and equitable business practices as the public becomes aware of instances of bias, prejudice or discrimination
- Prior to 2020, demand for DEI roles steadily increase; however, COVID required many businesses and organizations to reduce business costs of nonessential functions, prompting de-prioritization of departments and roles in HR, such as DEI
- Murder of George Floyd reignited public pressure and expectation of leaders to meaningfully commit to advancing racial and social justice; this led to a renewed emphasis on DEI
HOW DEI IS PRACTICED: DIVERSITY MANAGEMENT IN ACTION

- Marketing
- Affirmative action
- Special diversity committees, task forces, or staff
- Mentorship

- Affinity Groups
- Targeted Recruitment
  - Diversity training
OUTLINE FOR TODAY

I. Overview of Landscape of DEI Trainings
II. Limitations of Current DEI Approaches (Trainings and Diversity Management as a whole)
III. Opportunities for SD
IV. Limitations for SD
V. Recommendations
ROOTS OF DEI TRAININGS

Affirmative Action
- Compliance with anti-discrimination
- Aid women and minorities in assimilating into workplace

Diversity initiative portfolio
- Cover wider array of topics beyond legal compliance

Organizational Home: Human Resources
- Desired skills of knowledge building, awareness raising
TRAININGS TODAY

Context

• Nature of Learning Environment: Professional or Learning

• Type of Participation: Mandatory or Voluntary

Content and Design

• Knowledge building or behavior change

• Time allotted for the DEI training
THEMES FROM PERSONAL PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE IN DEI WORK

Routine, almost Ritualized
- Often asked to “do what was done before” because “it worked”

Topic Areas
- Implicit Bias, Microaggressions
- Promoting inclusion -- What is equity?

Solutions to Adverse Events
- Underlying problem understood to be one bad apple or actor within the group who doesn’t have knowledge
LIMITATIONS OF TRAININGS – UNDERSTANDING EFFECTIVENESS

• Gap in literature on how demographics of DEI trainer(s) affects the participant experience

• Effectiveness is dependent upon how a training is designed, who delivers it, and the larger context in which the training is situated

• Lack of rigorous research to understand if/how trainings are sustained over time – leads to conflicting conclusions

• Measurement inconsistency in that trainings are evaluated on individual experience but goals for training are often systems-oriented
LIMITATIONS OF CURRENT DEI APPROACHES

MINIMIZATION
Decreased legitimization of unideal marginalized experiences

ABSTRACT LIBERALISM
Create sense of unfair advantages due to underrepresented status

CULTURAL RACISM OR NATURALIZATION
Promoting inferiority of marginalized group members
ORGANIZATIONAL RESPONSE – SHIFT IN UNDERSTANDING DEI WORK AND ROLES

Enhanced recognition DEI isn’t an HR issue but business issue with change affecting systems, processes and mindset

More DEI roles desire capabilities of change management or organizational development and value operational or strategic backgrounds.
Use of System Dynamics can move DEI efforts from responding to events to affecting the governing rules and beliefs of organizational and social system, alleviating reproduction of oppressive, harmful cycles and shifting power.

This would result in a not-yet-achieved reality rooted in the practice of inclusion and celebration of diversity, with an outcome of equity.
Foundational Concepts

• Dynamic Complexity
• Accumulations
• Feedback Thinking

Practices

• Developing a reference mode for equitable problem definition
• Causal Loop Diagrams to identify balancing processes which maintain systems of oppression despite efforts to change
REFLECTIONS FROM PRACTICE
APPLICATION-- FOUNDATIONAL CONCEPTS

Dynamic Complexity
- Intersectionality

Accumulations
- Microaggressions

Feedback Thinking
- Application to performance problems
REFLECTIONS FROM PRACTICE
APPLICATION – ELICITING STRUCTURE

Ability for WCC to Effectively Engage Diversity

Percent of PRC Practices that Center Racial Equity

Perceived effectiveness over time:
- High
- Low

TIME

- Fall 2019
- Jan 2021
- Fall 2022

- Percent of Policies
- 100%
- 0
- 2015
- Now
- 2026

Hope
Fear
REFLECTIONS FROM PRACTICE
APPLICATION – ELICITING STRUCTURE

Perception of Relevance for DEAI at Various Time Points:
- Hoped for Path
- Business as Usual – if things keep going with no changes
- Feared Path

Graph showing changes in Aggregate Perception Level from 2018 to 2022.
Potential for Transformation

Actual Transformation

People will act nice and doing what is relatively easy will win over transformation.

Embracing the uncomfortable to produce the transformation.
REFLECTIONS FROM PRACTICE
APPLICATION -- REFERENCE MODES

• Also useful for depicting how even though team members are part of the same team, the organization’s system produces different experiences for individual team members.

• Utilizing reference modes was a useful thinking tool for working through how groups wanted to operationalize equity
REFLECTIONS FROM PRACTICE
APPLICATION -- ELICITING STRUCTURE
Underlying problems related to diversity were reframed as issues within the group’s locus of control AND reframed as problems everyone in the group was affected by albeit in different ways.

Enabled the group to apply topics (knowledge) to practice (behavior – personal and organizational).

Focusing on system structure or behavior mode enabled the group to reflect on why there has been challenges in applying what they have learned or why they fall short of aspiration DEI values.

Made abstract topics concrete – easier to identify solutions or interventions for improving.
LIMITATIONS OR POTENTIAL UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF SD

- System dynamics as a field is situated within a larger oppressive and stratified sociopolitical context; as a result, just like current and historic DEI approaches, SD can still unintentionally reproduce oppressive dynamics in its application in DEI.

- Particularly for Group Model Building and Community-Based System Dynamics the facilitator’s ability to identify and intervene on reproduction of oppression plays a crucial role for how well scripts and systems thinking concepts are able to avoid unintended consequences of DEI work.
LIMITATIONS OF SD

- Marginalized experiences may not make the final cut
- Create sense we’re all in the same boat
- Promoting inferiority of marginalized group members

ABSTRACT LIBERALISM

MINIMIZATION

CULTURAL RACISM OR NATURALIZATION
RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PRACTICE

- Multipartial facilitation rather than neutral or impartial facilitation
- Work toward being trustworthy
- Lean into complexity a bit more
- Time horizon of work
“In a balancing (stabilizing) system, there is a self-correcting that attempts to maintain some goal or target...as in all balancing processes, the crucial element...gradually adjusts itself toward its desired level. Organizations and societies resemble complex organisms because they too have myriad balancing feedback processes...

In general balancing loops are more difficult to see than reinforcing loops because it often looks like nothing is happening...The feeling as Lewis Carroll’s Queen of Hearts put it, of needing ‘all the running you can do to keep in the same place,’ is a clue that a balancing loop may exist nearby...

Whenever there is resistance to change, you can count on there being one or more ‘hidden’ balancing processes. Resistance to change is neither capricious nor mysterious. It almost always arises from threats to traditional norms and ways of doing things. Often these norms are woven into the fabric of established power relationship. The norm is entrenched because the distribution of authority and control is entrenched. Rather than pushing harder to overcome resistance to change, artful leaders discern the source of the resistance. They focus directly on the implicit norms and power relationships within which the norms are embedded.” pp 84-88 The fifth discipline
• modeling DEI topics, such as structural racism, will only avoid DEI pitfalls if modeling expertise is complemented with beneficial necessitates a subversion to hegemonic ideologies by requiring modelers to name these implied goals structurally to capture this balancing behavior, or desire to maintain the status quo; it is in this practice of making the implicit explicit, we stop running to stay in the same place.
“All that you touch
   You Change.
All that you Change
   Changes you.
The only lasting truth
   is Change.”

-Parable of the Sower by Octavia Butler


