

2.18: Current Diversity-Related Trends

Learning Objectives

1. Discuss the role of allies
2. Discuss the role of artificial intelligence

Two of the trends that are expected to drive the next wave of progress on diversity and inclusion are allies and artificial intelligence.

Allies

Deloitte suggests that allies may be the key to helping employees live the organization's values with regards to diversity and inclusion, serving as behavioral models and influencers in informal discussions and meetings. Their research suggests that a majority of respondents consider themselves allies, but don't feel empowered or know what to do. Specifically, 92% of survey respondents agreed with the statement "I feel dedicated to supporting individuals or groups who are different from me." This represents a massive force for change, and one that's positioned to see and respond to microaggressions in daily behavior. However, the research indicates allies need to be activated and, in particular, trained and supported to be effective. For perspective, although 73% of respondents indicated that they felt comfortable discussing bias, 30% ignored it when experienced or observed. Deloitte's conclusion: "the majority of today's workforce demonstrates that they want to be involved in advancing inclusion—they just don't know how."

RESPONSE TO BIAS IN THE WORKFORCE TODAY

- 34% of people confide in a colleague
- 31% of people confide in their supervisor
- 29% of people address it in the moment by speaking up
- 24% of people address it later by speaking to the person who was showing bias
- 23% of people address it later by speaking to the person who experienced bias
- 34% of people ignore it

For the action-oriented, here are a few things that allies can do now:

- **Understand how you can change your own way of doing things.** Start by asking "why?"
- **Develop greater empathy and understanding of different life experiences.** Expose yourself to new people and perspectives and challenge your interpretation of "normal."
- **When people say they don't feel included, listen and support them.** Cultivate a culture of safety and respect.
- **Recognize that when you're hiring and you aren't finding good diverse candidates, it's probably you not them.** Evaluate your recruiting strategy to ensure you're not perpetuating a cookie-cutter mold.
- **Talk to other allies about what you're doing and why.** Be vocal, share what works (and what doesn't), and consider teaming up to amplify impact.

PRACTICE QUESTION

You are a team leader in charge of twenty employees in a state with strong LGBT+ legal protections. You hire a highly-qualified employee, Jade, who does a phenomenal job but tends to keep to herself. Another member of your team, Mindy, happens to see Jade in the park on a Saturday and notices that Jade is clearly with her female partner. Mindy considers herself a good ally, so the first thing she does on Monday morning is rush to your office to tell you what she saw. Mindy wants to let Jade know that being gay is fine with her. She also wants to encourage Jade to come out to the whole team. You know Mindy can get a little too enthusiastic. What do you do?

- Go talk to Jade privately and encourage her to come out to the team. You'll make sure they all behave—or else!
- Explain to Mindy that part of good allyship includes respecting people's privacy, so the most progressive and LGBT+-friendly thing she can do is let Jade come out in her own time—if ever.
- Explain to Mindy that Jade was hired to do a job, not to be a beacon of diversity. Mindy needs to keep what she knows to herself, or there will be consequences.

- Give Mindy the department credit card and tell her to go buy a rainbow cake for the team to present to Jade that afternoon.

Answer

Explain to Mindy that Jade was hired to do a job, not to be a beacon of diversity. Mindy needs to keep what she knows to herself, or there will be consequences.

LEARN MORE

For additional action items and perspective, read Melinda Briana Eple's post "[Tech Diversity: 12 Things Allies Can Do.](#)"

Artificial Intelligence

One of the 2019 workplace diversity trends highlighted by HR application provider Ideal's Director of Marketing Kayla Kozan is the use of AI or artificial intelligence; specifically, using technology like AI to avoid unconscious bias. A related trend, as Bohnet recommended, is testing diversity initiatives with data. One of the advantages of using AI for sourcing and evaluating candidates is the potential to avoid bias based on demographic factors such as race, gender, and age. However, the AI industry is experiencing its own diversity crisis. Fortune reports that New York University research group AI Now stated that "a lack of diversity among the people who create artificial intelligence and in the data they use to train it has created huge shortcomings in the technology." According to writer Jonathan Vanian, "The report's authors believe that AI performance issues could be fixed if those working on the technology's development were more diverse, and noted that "while tech companies say they are aware of the problem, they haven't done much to fix it." An MIT Sloan Management Review article recognizes the upside value of AI, asking "what if, instead of perpetuating harmful biases, AI helped us overcome them and make fairer decisions...that could eventually result in a more diverse and inclusive world."

In order for that to happen, the people working with the technology need to do a better job of vetting the data used to train AI systems. In a New York Times article, Shorenstein Center on Media, Politics and Public Policy at the Harvard Kennedy School fellow Dipayan Ghosh notes that "It is far too easy to assume that technology has an objectivity that humans don't. But the reality is that 'artificial intelligence and machine learning and algorithms, in general, are designed by none other than us — people.'" Apparently, Hellen Turnbull's point about the unchallenged brain refers to both humans and machines.

PRACTICE QUESTIONS

1. You've identified allies as one of two key diversity-related trends to watch and are summarizing your findings. Which of the following is a point worth discussing with your management team?
 - The majority of today's workforce feel dedicated to supporting "people like me."
 - Research suggests that those who consider themselves allies don't feel empowered or know what to do.
 - The majority of today's workforce is ambivalent about inclusion.
 - Research suggests that those employees who consider themselves allies feel empowered and know what to do.
2. Which of the following is an AI-related point worth discussing with your management team?
 - Technology such as AI has an objectivity that humans lack.
 - The AI industry is noted for its diversity.
 - AI has the potential to help us achieve a more diverse and inclusive workplace.
 - AI has been proven to eliminate sourcing and evaluation bias based on demographic factors such as race, gender, and age.

Answer

1. Research suggests that those who consider themselves allies don't feel empowered or know what to do.
2. AI has the potential to help us achieve a more diverse and inclusive workplace.

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