

Introduction

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Diversity, equity, and inclusion in the workforce are ideals that many companies aspire to. Yet achieving these goals is often challenging. The advice offered by consultants, scholars, and the media can be difficult to make sense of or even contradictory. This report cuts through all this noise to answer the question: what actually works? The following pages offer concrete, research-based evidence about strategies that are effective for reducing discrimination and bias and increasing diversity within workplace organizations. This guide is intended to provide practical strategies for managers, human resources professionals, and employees who are interested in making their workplaces more inclusive and equitable.¹

In this report, leading academics, researchers, and businesspeople offer keen insights on an array of important topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.² The opening chapter, written by psychologists Tessa Charlesworth and Mahzarin Banaji (both at Harvard University), examines change over time in implicit attitudes and beliefs about different social groups, including racial minorities, women, and LGBTQ individuals. They then tackle some of the reasons that change occurs in certain areas but not in others. This information provides a valuable backdrop against which to understand the remaining chapters of the report.

The following chapters examine key organizational policies and practices and evaluate their effectiveness for promoting the types of diversity and inclusion that companies often desire. In Chapter 2, sociologists Elizabeth Hirsh (University of British Columbia) and Donald Tomaskovic-Devey (University of Massachusetts Amherst) focus on one simple strategy: collecting metrics. By gathering and analyzing data on diversity over time, comparing those numbers to the numbers at other organizations, and sharing them with key stakeholders, organizations can increase accountability and transparency around diversity issues. In turn, they argue that this type of accountability and transparency can be a key driver for reducing bias and discrimination and increasing diversity.

Next, sociologists Frank Dobbin (Harvard University) and Alexandra Kalev (Tel Aviv University) tackle the changes necessary to improve how companies currently structure their discrimination and harassment complaint systems because the current systems are not working. Indeed, half of all discrimination and harassment complaints result in retaliation against the victim. Dobbin and Kalev propose a set of alternatives to legalistic grievance mechanisms that can improve how discrimination and harassment are dealt with in organizations. In Chapter 4, business leaders Kelly Trindel (pymetrics), Frida Polli

1 This report emerged from a 2018 conference that was organized by Devah Pager and David Pedulla, entitled “What Works to Reduce Discrimination?” and hosted by the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study at Harvard University.

2 Each section of this report was written independently. The views and recommendations offered in each section belong to the authors of that section alone.

(pymetrics), and Kate Glazebrook (Applied) highlight the potential promises and pitfalls of technological innovation for promoting diversity and equity. They describe how pymetrics and Applied have worked to develop tools that can be stripped of bias and then put to use evaluating candidates to create a more fair workplace.

Next, behavioral scientists Iris Bohnet and Siri Chilazi (both at Harvard University) discuss a subtle yet important factor that can contribute to biased decision-making: group size. When individuals belong to groups that are underrepresented in an organization, such as racial minorities or women, they may be subjected to stereotype-based evaluations or tokenism. These biased perceptions can have negative consequences for both individual workers and the larger organization. Bohnet and Chilazi offer key solutions for managers to consider in this domain.

In the final essay, researchers and strategists Lori Nishiura Mackenzie and JoAnne Wehner (both at Stanford VMware Women's Leadership Innovation Lab) discuss how to actually go about implementing change in organizations. Drawing on concrete examples from their own work in this area, they propose a "small wins" model of change that identifies a specific area to improve and then pilots a targeted intervention. Interventions are most likely to succeed when they take into account the specific structure and dynamics of the organization and when organizational leaders are engaged in the process.

Together, the chapters in this report offer a wealth of evidence-based insights about how managers can increase diversity, inclusion, and equity in their organizations. Of course, the report can be read cover to cover. But, you can also dive right in to a particular chapter that addresses a pressing issue for your organization. Each chapter can stand alone. Additionally, at the end of each chapter, the authors have included citations to the articles and resources that they have drawn on in their analysis. These reference materials may be of use to you as well.

We hope that the pages that follow are useful to you as you work to build more equitable, fair, and diverse workplaces.