

# Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Getting from a “Good Idea” to a “Great Place to Work” in the Building Enclosure Consulting Industry

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*This paper was originally presented at the 2023 IIBEC International Convention and Trade Show.*

Images courtesy of Ellen Thorp, MA, CAE, and Melissa Walker

**ACCORDING TO ADVOCATES** for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in the workplace, organizations benefit from DEI in many ways—it helps companies kickstart ideas, enhance productivity, minimize turnover, enhance their reputations, and even boost their bottom line. But what does a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace actually look like? Does every DEI-responsive company look the same? What are the components of a successful DEI program? And how do you go about implementing a sincere and successful DEI program in your workplace?

Countless commercial, business, and management publications have been devoted to making the business case for DEI programs and answering these and other questions. This article recaps some of the latest thinking on the benefits of DEI and best practices for implementing DEI programs.

## THE BUSINESS CASE FOR DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

In a 2020 follow-up<sup>1</sup> to its widespread and influential 2015 and 2018 reports on DEI,<sup>2,3</sup> global management consulting firm McKinsey &

Company said, “The business case for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is stronger than ever,” and suggested that the first step toward achieving “real progress” toward DEI goals is to take a closer look the policies and practices of “diversity winners”—those companies and organizations that are doing DEI right. Additional analysis of the 2015, 2018, and 2020 reports found that companies that prioritize gender diversity on their executive teams have been reaping significant benefits. The research reveals that companies in the top quartile for gender diversity were 25% more likely to achieve above-average profitability compared to those in the bottom quartile. This percentage has been steadily increasing from 15% in 2014 to 21% in 2017, highlighting the growing importance of gender diversity in driving financial success.

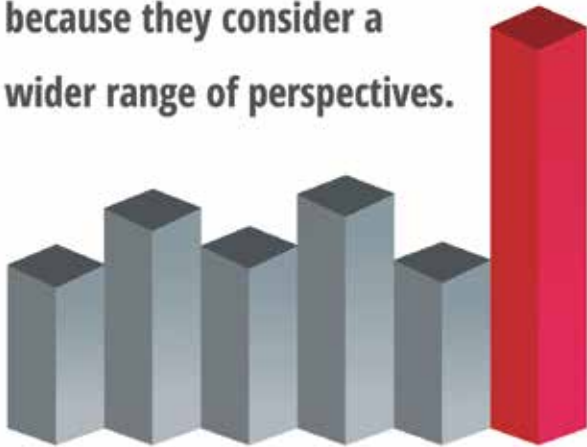
Furthermore, McKinsey’s findings indicate that the correlation between women’s representation in executive leadership and organizational performance is strong. In 2019, organizations with a minimum of 30% female executives demonstrated superior financial performance compared to those where women account for 10% to 30% of executives. Conversely, organizations heavily dominated by male executives, comprising over 90% of the leadership, experienced the poorest performance.

**DEI**  
**Diversity**  
**Equity**  
**Inclusion**

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# DIVERSE COMPANIES OUTPERFORM competitors

because they consider a  
wider range of perspectives.



Notably, McKinsey & Company's research doesn't stop at gender diversity. Their 2020 report establishes a compelling case for the benefits of ethnic and cultural diversity in executive leadership. By categorizing companies based on the diversity of their executive ranks, the study revealed that "top-quartile" companies, meaning those characterized by the highest levels of ethnic and cultural diversity, outperformed those in the lowest quartile by a remarkable 36% in terms of profitability.

These findings underscore the immense value of diversity in driving business success, both in terms of gender and ethnic/cultural representation.

Consultant Ryan Jenkins, who focuses on generational issues in the workplace, has reached conclusions similar to those of McKinsey & Company. In 2018, Jenkins wrote that "organizations with inclusive cultures are two times as likely to meet or exceed financial targets, three times as likely to be high-performing, six times more likely to be innovative and agile, and eight times more likely to achieve better business outcomes."<sup>4</sup>

As encouraging and hopeful as these numbers are, they don't explain *why* organizations that are more diverse and inclusive outperform their less diverse and less inclusive competitors. In all likelihood, the reasons for superior performance vary. Nevertheless, research has shown that one reason why diverse companies outperform their competitors is that they tend to consider and understand a wider range of perspectives, which allows them to tap into different markets at a faster pace, and make business decisions that accurately reflect society.

According to a 2020 *Forbes* article by Yola Robert, racially and ethnically diverse companies are "87% better at decision making."<sup>5</sup>

Erik Larson, reporting on a project which researched inclusive decision making, found that diverse teams make decisions faster than individual workers. Further, these results showed that "effective decision making also increases with greater diversity in a team. All-male teams were shown to make better business decisions than individuals 58% of the time, while gender-diverse teams outperformed individuals 73% of the time."<sup>6</sup>

When the benefits of DEI are reported in terms of percentages and other statistics, it can be

tempting to think of workplace diversity and inclusion in terms of numbers and ratios, as if the right ratio of men to women or the correct proportions of racial and ethnic representation will unlock the positive outcomes and lead to a more profitable company. However, while hiring goals may boost the diversity of workplace teams, they won't necessarily create an inclusive culture.

"Too often, leaders focus diversity and inclusion efforts disproportionately on the employee pipeline, but the employee experience continues far beyond an offer letter," wrote Sharon Florentine in 2019.<sup>7</sup> She explained, "To retain and nurture top talent, it's critical to take an honest look at the end-to-end employee experience, with an eye toward creating conditions that promote inclusion on a daily basis."

If scrutinizing the "end-to-end employee experience" and "creating conditions that promote inclusion" sound like time-consuming endeavors, it's because they are. But that's OK. Creating a diverse, equitable, and inclusive building enclosure consulting company doesn't happen overnight. It takes time—and attention to detail. As McKinsey & Company have pointed out, even if a company appears diverse on the surface, it's important for them to dig deeper and go beyond just the obvious aspects of diversity and inclusion. They need to consider other factors that may not be so straightforward but can greatly impact the overall atmosphere of inclusion, and these less clear-cut elements can either contribute to fostering an inclusive environment or hinder it. So, it's crucial for companies to look beyond the surface and

address these subtler aspects to truly create an inclusive culture.<sup>1,3</sup>

"Inclusion is ongoing, not a one-off training," wrote Florentine. "It isn't enough to teach employees what it means to be inclusive. Like any form of behavior change, inclusion requires individuals to identify key moments in which to build new habits or 'micro-behaviors.' Only when these habits are put into action in an environment that supports honest conversations and healthy tension, real change becomes possible."<sup>7</sup>

## IMPLEMENTING A SUCCESSFUL DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION PROGRAM

How do you create the kind of workplace environment where these new habits can take root and grow? The literature on implementing DEI programs offers a range of suggestions, but there seem to be several core concepts and themes.

Getting buy-in from leadership is critical. In several of their articles on this topic, the Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), indicates that the success of diversity and inclusion programs heavily relies on the active involvement and support of a company's executives and managers, as they are the ones who directly interact with employees. Their engagement and commitment play a crucial role in driving the effectiveness of these initiatives. Yola Robert and Ryan Jenkins have expressed similar sentiments and indicated that an important initiative for company C-suites should be to create an inclusive organization, and there must be consensus on DEI goals built through open conversation, understanding the benefits of inclusion, and connecting DEI concepts with business strategy.<sup>5,7,8</sup>



Once leadership is on board, middle managers must be involved, equipped, and empowered to follow through on DEI goals.

Then, to find out if these DEI policies are having the desired effect, it is recommended that leadership survey employees to gain a thorough understanding of the workplace culture. As Shelia Callahan wrote in *Forbes*, “[Survey] questions should help establish the level of understanding employees have about the subject, how inclusive they believe the culture to be, the level of trust they have in the company and their management and their perception of organizational commitment.”<sup>9</sup>

If expertise in the area of DEI is lacking among company leadership, hiring a subject matter expert to oversee the implementation of a DEI program is a way to show that management is serious about creating a diverse and inclusive workplace. Related to hiring, DEI policy practitioners recommend that companies pay special attention to their hiring and recruiting processes, as those who get invited to apply for a job opening or hired to fill vacant roles can reveal a company’s conscious and unconscious biases. Thus, in addition to conducting surveys about workplace culture, companies should also track and monitor analytics that can help them measure their progress toward their DEI goals.

Beyond hiring, another way to foster diversity and inclusion in a building enclosure consulting company, and also within other companies in the IIBEC community, is through DEI training. As Jenkins has noted, all of the *Fortune* 500 companies and almost one-half of US midsize companies “mandate diversity training [which] helps raise awareness, uproot bias, and create a common language to facilitate diversity and inclusion discussions.”<sup>4</sup>

“Training is one of the best ways for employees to understand how their perceptions may be sabotaging inclusive words and behaviors,” said Callahan. “It’s one thing to explain what [unconscious bias] means, but something altogether to demonstrate what good inclusion practices look like and how to incorporate them in their learning and development plans.”<sup>9</sup>

Yet, as noted earlier, creating an inclusive and equitable workplace takes time. Employees need the time, training, and opportunity to build the habits that lead to real change. One way to give employees that time and space is through the creation of voluntary employee-led groups—commonly known as employee resource groups or affinity groups—wherein they can talk about DEI-related issues and share their experiences in a safe and welcoming environment.

A similar recommendation from the SHRM is for workplaces to form a group or council composed of influential leaders who are one or two levels below the CEO that is “involved in goal setting around hiring, retaining, and advancing a diverse workforce.”<sup>10</sup>

Whether DEI policies are implemented from the top down or encouraged and promoted through employee-led groups, effective communication is key to the success of any workplace DEI program. However, companies and leaders should approach communication expansively and not just focus on the traditional methods of memos, employee handbooks, and other official communication vehicles. Therefore, while it is important to establish

and clearly communicate specific and measurable DEI-related goals (in the same way you would communicate any other strategic aim), companies are also encouraged to show their employees they are respected and valued by celebrating differences. The SHRM recommends creating opportunities for employees to showcase their cultural heritage, unique backgrounds, and traditions, allowing for a greater understanding of diversity within the organization, and an article in the *Harvard Business Review*<sup>12</sup> cites storytelling as a way for companies to advance toward their DEI goals.<sup>8,11,12</sup>

“Storytelling, one of the most universal human experiences, gives us a rare chance to look through new lenses. And perspective-taking is a life skill, not just a workplace one,” wrote Selena Rezvani and Stacey A. Gordon in a 2021 *Harvard Business Review* article.<sup>12</sup> Prioritizing inclusion empowers companies to emerge stronger from crises, and stories play a vital role in achieving this. Encouraging employees to share and reflect on their stories fosters a more inclusive work environment, enhancing day-to-day experiences and promoting resilience.

Getting leadership buy-in, eliminating bias in hiring, offering training, communicating openly, and taking the time to show employees they are respected and valued—when taken together, these practices amount to walking the talk on DEI.

Companies with successful DEI programs are those that have examined whether their day-to-day practices are fostering the culture they want to have and, if not, have made the necessary changes to get where they wanted to be.

If your company is not quite there yet, there are several things you can do, in addition to the recommendations mentioned earlier, to advance your DEI efforts. Check out the clearinghouse of DEI resources at [realroofing.org](http://realroofing.org), a new DEI-focused education website built by National Women in Roofing. Also, ask others for input on how well you are doing to uncover blind spots you may have missed in your own assessments. Another strategy is to measure your progress on DEI benchmarks by conducting an audit of your DEI-related practices and processes, from recruiting and hiring to developing and retaining employees. These data points can be used in concert with other data pertaining to social media engagement metrics and survey data to gain a more complete understanding of your brand and culture.


**DEI education  
and training  
helps employees  
actively engage  
in inclusive  
behavior.**



Finally, in addition to communicating about your DEI initiatives and goals, take the time to listen to your employees to help you better understand how notions about diversity and inclusion vary across the generations represented in your building enclosure consulting company. As Jenkins has stated, "Generation X and Baby Boomers tend to define diversity along the traditional lines of gender, race, and ethnicity while Millennials typically

define diversity beyond demographics, viewing cognitive diversity and an individual's variety of experiences and perspectives at the core of diversity."<sup>4</sup>

Despite these differences, there is no question that diversity and inclusion matter. So, while there is no one-size-fits-all approach to implementing a successful DEI program, there is consensus among DEI researchers and practitioners that a diverse, equitable,

and inclusive workplace can be a boost to your company's bottom line and so much more. Keep in mind that the DEI policies and practices that will work where you work will likely have to be tailored to your workplace's unique culture, traditions, and method of operations, which means they'll likely take time and a little trial and error to get right. The good news is that there are a number of practices, processes, and procedures that you can use to guide your DEI initiative and make sure it's taking you and your company where you want to go. 



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**Ellen Thorp, MA, CAE, knows that powerful things happen when people who share a common interest come together for advocacy, education, and communication. In addition to providing leadership and advocacy work for other construction-related trade associations, Thorp has grown National Women in Roofing to 2000 members, 40 sponsors, and programs that have engaged thousands of people. She has a bachelor's degree in political science and a master's degree in education policy and is a Certified Association Executive. After spending 22 years in Washington, DC, working for associations and educational institutions, she and her family now live in the Denver, Colorado, area.**



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