

THE 6 METHODS FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION TO BECOME INCLUSIVE

A DEI GUIDE BY:

MICHELLE NGOME
LINE 25 CONSULTING



Background

I have always been a student of marketing. I have swayed back and forth between corporate America and business ventures with marketing remaining the foundation. In September 2013, I started my business, Line 25 Consulting, to help small business owners manage social media. By December it was brought to my attention that there were no Black marketing professional organizations established in Houston. I performed my Google search and was shocked when nothing was retrieved on a national level. Unfortunately, there was no way that I could add anything else to my plate at that time.

Fast forward to 2018, there was a series of advertisements that displayed the misrepresentation of African-Americans. In addition, there has always been a lack of representation of Black people in advertising. It made me question if Black creatives were present in the decision-making process. I knew it was time to water this seed of an idea to create a Black marketing group. The African-American Marketing Association (AAMA) launched in February 2019. AAMA's mission is to foster the growth and professional development of African-American marketers, creatives, and entrepreneurs.

We know 2020 has been unrivaled compared to any other year. The nation has been in a whirlwind addressing the disparities in healthcare, employment, education, and technology due to COVID-19; then a Black man died with a knee on his neck for 8 minutes and 46 seconds. The death of George Floyd has raised the attention of the Black Lives Matter movement on a national level once again. Once again Black people took to the streets to protest. This time it was different. Companies were getting involved in the movement by making public statements. However, some companies faced backlash for making the wrong statement or no statement at all.

I have spent hours consulting with organizations, conducting surveys, and reviewing the material to find the common denominator on why there is a lack of Black marketers in corporate settings. The 6 Methods For Your Organization to Become Inclusive shares with you key points that organizations can work on to practice diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Not Culturally Aware: What is Diversity, Equity & Inclusion?

Since 1788 America has been classified as The Great Melting Pot to describe the numerous nationalities that came to the country. America continues to evolve at a rapid rate, but inclusiveness remains stagnant in the workplace. If we really value diversity like we say we do, we have to learn how to manage diversity while remaining mindful of the significance of equity and inclusion. Looking into the future, becoming culturally aware and inclusive will be an invaluable skill for all individuals, especially leaders. Applying this skill to one's leadership style enables one to build and maintain productive relationships with all types of people in a work environment.

When we discuss diversity we immediately think of race. However, there is a great deal of depth when it comes to diversity. Diversity means gathering individuals representing various backgrounds such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, religion, sexual orientation, disability, and other factors. Diversity can be broken down to internal and external factors. The internal factors connect to our identity as we belong to a larger group of people. This includes, but not limited to the following:

- Race
- Ethnicity
- Culture
- Age and generation
- Gender
- Sexual Orientation
- Physical and mental ability

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the population by race and ethnicity includes:

- White Americans
- African or Black American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Asian
- American Indian and Alaska Native
- Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander
- Other races
- Two or more races

Race and Ethnicity

Race

328,239,523 +/- ****

Total population in United States

Table: DP05

Table Survey/Program: 2019 American Community Survey 1-Year Estimates

Population by Race in United States

White alone - 72.0%

Black or African American alone - 12.8%

American Indian and Alaska Native alone - 0.9%

Asian alone - 5.7%

Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander alone - 0.2%

Some other race alone - 5.0%

Two or more races - 3.4%



External diversity pertains to outside factors that may influence you and shape your experience.

External factors may include, but not limited to the following:

- Socioeconomic level
- Family structure
- Location
- Education and employment
- Religion or spiritual persuasion
- Citizenship status
- Military or veteran status
- Interests and experiences

As you can see there are internal factors that we can't control and external factors that influence who we are in life's journey. We take all of those experiences and bring them to the workplace.

The diversity of an organization includes:

- Work Location
- Job Function
- Management Level
- Department
- Seniority

Equity is about acknowledging people's specific needs, experiences, and goals. Everyone has different needs and defines success based on their terms. For example, a single woman looking to buy a home may be motivated by a higher salary compared to a wife and mother who needs to work from home during the pandemic. Neither desire is wrong; each factor is valued differently. It is worth asking your employees what they deem valuable and successful to understand the mutually beneficial exchange.

Many organizations have a diverse workforce, but are not necessarily managing an equitable and inclusive environment. DEI is a strategic opportunity for organizations to grow.

Questions

1. How does my company prioritize diversity, equity, and inclusion?
2. Do all of my employees feel that they are treated fairly and respected under my supervision and the organization?
3. What is the organization's makeup of stakeholders, employees, and customers?
4. Do employees know how to access the resources and opportunities within the organization?

Not a Culture Fit: The Language of Inclusion

Language has power. Language is inclusion. It demonstrates how we navigate the world, in this case, the workplace. Whether it is internal or external, written or verbal, communication needs to remain respectful at all times. There has been so much emphasis on what is politically correct when we need to focus on professional competencies while remaining personally conscious. Tierney Bates interim executive director of university career services at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (UNC), “language is a key element of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), and can help or hinder efforts in this area.”

The language of inclusion starts from the recruiting phase leading up to when the hiring manager needs to make a decision based on *cultural fit*. Lauren Riveria, author of *Pedigree: How Elite Students Get Elite Jobs*, mentions in her book when interviewers said they “clicked” or “had chemistry” with a candidate, they often meant that they shared a similar background. On the flip side, when interviewers said that they didn’t think a candidate would be a good fit, it was often because that person didn’t have a similar background, not because the candidate lacked skills or positive values. To sum it up the interviewer is gauging from personal experience and not what is best for the team or company as a whole.

It is not unusual for an unconscious bias to turn into a microaggression. A microaggression is a comment or an action that negatively impacts an individual or a minority group. A microaggression may or may not be intentional, but it is a form of discrimination. Coupled with unconscious bias this can affect anyone at recruiting, mentoring, wages, and promotions. In order to do so, we have to remove all stereotypes and biases of groups of people. How does bias show up? Some examples of how microaggressions show up in the workplace:

- You’re so articulate. You don’t sound Black.
- Is that your real hair? Can I touch your hair?
- Telling a transgender person, they don’t look “it.”
- Complaining about a female boss, calling her crazy or out of her name.
- Not willing to learn how to pronounce someone’s name.

Companies pride themselves on having a culture and become adamant about finding someone that can fit. However, the intention of the word can lead to repercussions. Biases and microaggressions may cloud one’s judgment on what is a good fit. In 2015, Deidre Jackson

worked for her employer for eight years with an exemplary work record. A new manager arrived and she was fired because “she did not fit the vision.” She was awarded \$150,000 in a racial discrimination case. There are a lot of directions we can go in this story, but this displays how the word *fit* in a negative connotation based on someone’s preferences. When a candidate believes they had a solid interview, did everything right, and hear that they are not a good fit while a company lacks diversity with a mediocre reputation it raises questions. Hence, Wells Fargo. It is time we become intentional with inclusion.

As we enter the transgender and non-binary communities, acknowledging pronouns are important. More professionals are including pronouns in email signatures, Zoom meetings, and LinkedIn profiles. It is affirming and provides a safe space for people of all sexes and gender identities are the respectful use of gender pronouns. The [Transgender Training Institute](#) provides a great breakdown of pronouns:

She/her/hers

Most women go by she/her pronouns. She/her is also the pronoun most people use when they assume someone to be a woman.

Though she/her is used by *most* women, there are women who might use other pronouns. There are also people of other genders who might use she/her pronouns, and that’s completely valid!

He/him/his

Most men go by he/him pronouns. He/him is also the pronoun most people use when they assume someone to be a man.

Though he/him is used by *most* men, there are men who might use other pronouns. There are also people of other genders who might use he/him pronouns, and that’s completely valid!

They/them

They/them pronouns, or singular pronouns, are most commonly used by non-binary people who don’t identify exclusively as a man or woman. People will also commonly use they/them pronouns when referencing a person whose gender is unknown.

Relearning pronouns can be a bit challenging and a few mistakes will be made in the process. It is important to remain open and affirming with your nongender or transgender colleagues.

We all have a level of influence and moments when we need to get our message across and using respectable language is imperative. In addition, remain mindful of facial expressions and tones. The language of inclusion eliminates biased behavior and helps create an inclusive environment for all. Remember, language establishes trust.

Questions

1. Has there been a time when you were hired based on culture fit and it backfired on you?
2. Do you make an effort to use respectful language with your colleagues?
3. Can someone be different and a good fit?
4. Are you ready to be intentional with inclusion?

Unable to Find BIPOC Talent: Establish & Maintain Viable Talent Pipelines

“While it might sound like an excuse, the unfortunate reality is that there is a very limited pool of black talent to recruit from,” **Charlie Scharf, CEO of Wells Fargo**

Companies face several challenges when it comes to finding diverse talent. The human resources department should not be the only team responsible for DEI initiatives and goals. These efforts should be extended to all leaders and their departments.

Since creating AAMA, one of the most common questions I hear is, where are all the Black marketers? A recent survey conducted by Line 25 Consulting, asked what are the challenges when it comes to finding BIPOC¹ talent, 93 percent of human resource professionals stated that volume is lacking. Followed by the quality of applicants, lack of local candidates, and job posting distribution. If recruiters are having challenges finding diverse talent, then what hurdles are candidates dealing with? It is good practice to publish a job opportunity; however, minorities are on the short end of the stick. The Harvard Business Review did a study where women only apply for a job if they meet 100 percent of the qualifications versus men who feel confident at 60 percent. Furthermore, 20-25 percent of Asians and Blacks receive callbacks when they whiten their resume. Overall, minorities are restricted when it comes to stepping into a hiring process, which further strains our conversation on equity and inclusion.

The truth of the matter is Black talent is everywhere. Where are you looking when it comes to recruiting diverse candidates?

Companies have to become intentional when it comes to recruiting an array of diverse candidates. Organizations have to create pipelines from entry-level to C-suite roles. This may range from outreach to Historical Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs), and professional associations are a good start. Furthermore, talent has to be nurtured once they are hired.

Several organizations are diverse because a large number of minorities work in entry level roles. However, when we look further up the career ladder, diversity is minimized and inclusion snuffed out. Even if the pipeline was established was talent development exercised with the intent of equity and inclusion. Ron Williams, the former CEO of Aetna, mentions that

¹ Black, Indigenous, People of Color.

“opportunity is not equally distributed ”which causes the lack of Black executives. The individual and the company cannot become complacent when it comes to professional development. Organizations have to develop and maintain programs that enable for skills and leadership development that allow for salary increases and promotions.

If diversity and inclusion were not an issue, would we have a gender pay gap? By the same token, the lack of diversity leads to unemployment and wage disparities. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce’s [Equality of Opportunity Initiative](#) reports the hiring and wage disparities among minorities. Black unemployment is twice as high as white unemployment rates with 25% of Black professionals and 50% of Hispanic professionals out of work. In regards to earning potential within these professional roles, the median weekly earnings for Black men was \$1,167 and Hispanic men was \$1,538. The salaries are even less for minority women. [Closing The Racial Inequality Gaps](#), a report conducted by Citi, mentions the Black wage gap could have added \$2.7 trillion in income per year over the past 20 years.

Lastly, if companies were more inclusive and tended to employees’ needs it would lower the turnover rate of minorities. [Kapor Center](#) research indicates that at least 35 % of women, people of color, and LGBTQ left their tech employer due to unfairness in the workplace. Unfairness includes sexual harassment, bullying, stereotyping, mistreatment, or being passed over for a promotion. Workplace discrimination remains a huge problem. In 2012, it costs businesses \$64 billion annually and a turnover of 2 million employees due to discrimination.

A company’s website is the first impression of your company culture. Minority job seekers will explore your website and digital platforms to determine if diversity and inclusion are implemented before applying for a role. In order to effectively exercise diversity and inclusion, it starts from the top down. Diversity has to be presented in leadership because candidates are looking at the makeup of an organization. Equity should be discussed during the interview and begins when the person is hired. Respect is a smart business move.

Questions

1. How many entry and mid-level pipelines have we established?
2. Do we pay our women, Blacks, and people of color fair and equal salaries?
3. Do I know and understand my employee’s career goals?
4. Do those opportunities exist within the organization?

Lack of Sponsors: Inclusive Leadership & Holistic Representation

Sharon Chuter launched the #PullUpOrShutUp campaign on [Instagram](#) to push brands to reveal the racial makeup of their corporate workforce and executives. Amazon, Adidas, Microsoft, and Nike are a few companies that have been called out on the makeup of their leadership. Black employees at Adidas exposed some of the company's racial shortcomings that resulted in the chief of global human resources resigning.

The Wall Street Journal article Why There Are Still So Few Black CEOs, highlights that there are only four Black CEOs among America's Fortune 500 companies. Overall, Black people represent 3% of executives or senior-level roles. The total make up of ethnic minorities in executive positions stands at 11% with a breakdown of:

- LatinX - 3%
- Indians - 3%
- Asians - 2%
- Middle Easterns - 1%
- Multiracial - 1%

Diversity initiatives cannot start and stop in the hiring process. Leadership must be proactive in creating an agenda and be fully vested in the DEI strategy and process. Equity and inclusion are carried in the culture, executed through the company's vision, and benefits the employee through their tenure. Inclusive leadership and holistic representation are crucial when it comes to the future of work.

Blacks and other minorities take their careers seriously and believe in professional development. After a degree and years of experience, how does one get to the next step? The lack of sponsorship combined with a rigid work environment can make it challenging to obtain leadership roles. Carla Harris, an executive at Morgan Stanley, explains that your career will not survive without a sponsor. A sponsor is a person that speaks on your behalf when it's time for a promotion. There's nothing like having support in your career.

Inclusive leadership is important because they provide buy-in and sets the tone of the organization. Several companies have employee resource groups (ERGs) that are a critical component of a diversity and inclusion strategy. For example, it would be a great learning

experience if the executive sponsor of an ERG was not part of the demographic or include a reverse mentoring program. A truly inclusive environment encourages diversity, engages employees, provides access to resources and opportunities while eliminating discrimination.

One of the positives that come from inclusive leadership is holistic representation. When we think of diversity we default to race. However, we know diversity extends to more than just race. Having an eclectic mix of people well-versed in subject areas provides diversity in thought, experience, and background. It also creates holistic representation and inclusive communities. It is imperative to have minorities in the decision-making process because they're in touch with the culture. Multicultural marketing has become mainstream.

Brands have a great deal of influence. Think about it; we work for them and we buy from them. According to [Nielsen](#) African-Americans, Asian-Americans, and Hispanics combined exceed 3 trillion annually in consumer spending. People with disabilities are just as powerful representing a \$1 billion market. Brands know if the slightest mishap with one demographic can cost them millions of dollars in revenue. Having the right people in a position to direct strategy and display representation leads for an inclusive community to be effective from the inside out. Consumers and employees are looking for companies that align with their values.

Questions:

1. Are you in a position to sponsor the next leader in your organization?
2. Does your leadership attract new applicants?
3. As a leader, do I listen to feedback from my employees?
4. Am I skilled in equity and inclusion?

Everyone's Not an Employee: Supplier Diversity

In 2019, the [Small Business Administration](#) reported 30.7 million small businesses and 8 million are minority-owned. Let's be honest, everyone is not an employee. Departments need to find the best way to incorporate supplier diversity for their needs. According to the [SBA](#), a supplier diversity program encourages larger businesses to use minority-owned, women-owned, veteran-owned, LGBT-owned, service-disabled veteran-owned, historically underutilized businesses as suppliers.

All companies should invest and leverage supplier diversity initiatives. Not all work has to be employee-driven. The human resources department should not carry all the responsibility when it comes to diversity and inclusion. Managers should examine roles and job descriptions to determine what is best suited for the team and organization. The key is identifying projects versus operations. Projects are best suited for agency partners or freelancers for a specific time period. While operations consist of daily tasks that sustain the project upon completion that responsibility is dedicated to an employee.

Although African-Americans and Hispanics are starting businesses at a high rate, they tend to have lower revenues and fewer employees compared to their white counterparts due to a lack of access to financial resources and experience. A study by [Altarum](#) indicates that approximately nine million jobs would be created if people of color owned businesses compared to Whites. In [Closing The Racial Inequality Gaps](#) the report states providing fair and equitable lending to Black entrepreneurs might have resulted in the creation of an additional \$13 trillion in business revenue over the last 20 years. Funding could have been used for investments in labor, technology, capital equipment, and structures and 6.1 million jobs might have been created per year.

According to [CVM](#) some challenges with supplier diversity include:

- The registration process.
- Gender identity is not inclusive.
- Listed, but not being discovered.

CVM reports that 59% of diverse suppliers didn't realize a single opportunity from the supplier diversity portals they registered at. Some variables may include the supplier's business being too small, lackluster profiles, or the portal being neglected by decision-makers.

Supplier diversity is successful if it is easy to navigate as a business owner and decision-makers are committed to utilizing the program on a consistent basis. Having a database of names is not a winning metric. An effective program provides access, opportunity, collaboration, and a financial injection for smaller business owners. One of the best methods to grow a business is by landing and doing good work with a Fortune 500 company. Once you have proven yourself other companies are able to buy in. Just as it is important to implement diversity and inclusion hiring initiatives; it is equally important to partner with minority-led businesses.

Questions

1. Do we have a supplier diversity program?
2. Is our supplier diversity registration user-friendly?
3. How will a supplier diversity program enhance our business?

DEI Can't Be Measured: The Accountability of DEI Initiatives

We can no longer settle for quick fixes based on a checklist. In the famous words of Lord Kelvin, “if you cannot measure it, you cannot improve it.” Companies can measure and monitor data on a quarterly basis and include it in their annual report. As entrepreneurs and marketers, we discuss numbers all the time from milestones, revenue, profit margins, impressions, analytics, etc. Companies that say there is no way to measure diversity and inclusion do not want to be held accountable.

There are at least six categories that need to be considered when tracking diversity and inclusion initiatives. They include:

1. **Recruitment** - Creating pipelines that allow for qualified applicants, interviews, hires, and diversity boards and partnerships.
2. **Salary** - Ensure offers and increases are equal across the board for male, female, and non-gender talent.
3. **Supplier Diversity** - Creating a user-friendly process. Tracking vendors, proposals, and awarded contracts
4. **Representation** - Make sure that each department has fair representation as well as in leadership roles. Also beneficial for supplier diversity.
5. **Advancement** - Monitoring the success of employees
6. **Retention** - Track the attrition rate and survey why employees leave the company to determine what systems can be repaired.

Remember metrics are needed for accountability. High turnover rates among minorities will continue without clear diversity goals and objectives. Organizations that are tracking their D&I efforts are able to communicate value to their employees, consumers, and set the example for their industry.

Questions:

1. Do you understand the benefit of your organization measuring DEI efforts?
2. Does DEI fulfill the organization's business needs?
3. Will DEI initiatives enhance the organization's brand?

Conclusion

This is not the time for noble intentions, empty talk, and idle time because protests have subsided. This is the time where intention and impact have to meet in order to move the efforts of diversity, equity, and inclusion forward. Employees and consumers are holding companies accountable like never before. Practicing DEI is beneficial for all levels; individuals, teams, and organizations. When individuals feel an increased sense of belonging it leads to better performance. Among teams, there is an increased level of collaboration which leads to more innovation. The company wins with higher productivity, profitability, less attrition, and enhanced brand equity. When everyone can benefit, everyone will benefit. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are necessary.

About Line 25 Consulting

Michelle Ngome has garnered over 15 years of marketing experience in strategy and management. She is the owner of Line 25 Consulting an agency that helps companies create diversity and inclusion marketing initiatives. Michelle's work in marketing has been presented to dozens of organizations such as AIG, Capital One, and the YMCA.

In 2019, she founded the African-American Marketing Association, creating a platform that empowers Black marketers all over the United States. In 2020, Michelle received the Courageous Marketing Leader Award. She is a member of Forbes The Culture and the National Black MBA Association. Michelle has participated in leadership programs such as Leadership Houston Class XXXIX, Acceler8, and the Houston Black Leadership Institute Class II. She holds degrees in finance from the University of Houston, Victoria, and a certificate in Diversity & Inclusion from Cornell University.



She is a two-time author of Network, Navigate & Nurture and Success Undefined, podcast host of Networking With Michelle, and her work has been featured in The Wall Street Journal, Forbes, Entrepreneur, and USA Today.

Training Topics:

- The 6 Methods For Your Organization To Become Inclusive
- Knowing How Diversity Drives Revenue
- The 5-Part Framework to Inclusive Marketing

To learn more visit:

Company Website: <https://www.line25consulting.com>

Personal Website: <https://www.michellengome.com>

LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/mngome>

Email: ngome@line25consulting.com

Phone (713) 298-5851

I believe in you!

MEN
Ngome

