



# DEI STRATEGY: THREE ELEMENTS TO CONSIDER FOR REAL PROGRESS

**If you want to know how truly devoted an organization is to the causes of diversity, equity, and inclusion, look at their organizational chart.**

Count the number of people who reside in that org chart between the CEO and the Chief Diversity Officer. If the person you have tasked to lead your organization's DEI initiatives is buried by layer upon layer of senior leadership, then you may have difficulty executing an effective DEI program.

For many organizations around the world struggling to make progress, CDOs have been buried deep within hierarchies and starved of adequate resources.

**A lack of resources and authority.** Surveys that examine the failure of DEI programs tend to uncover the same themes: inadequate resources; a failure to adequately assess and measure the size of the problem, and the absence of executive-level influence to create real change.

A 2022 survey of HR professionals and DEI practitioners by Culture Amp, an employee engagement platform, reported that only half of respondents said their organizations had a formal strategic diversity plan in place, and only a third said their organizations had provided adequate resources to affect real change.

Metrics like this explain some of the reasons why organizations fail to make progress in their DEI goals. But the shortage of resources and information point to another inherent structural problem: a lack of leadership authority.

**DEI needs disruptive leadership.** When it comes right down to it, a CDO's first job is to make their organization feel a bit uncomfortable. The demands of designing and deploying a DEI action plan are too complex to be considered an adjunct responsibility or a classic example of the "other-duties-as-assigned" complex.

Tackling DEI issues requires honest conversations and frank assessments. You could look long and hard, but you won't find many examples of organizations that have realized true DEI progress without facing up to some unflattering and inconvenient realities. Systemic discrimination is deeply ingrained in organizational culture and human nature; eliminating it often requires major surgery rather than nips and tucks.

How can you ensure your organization has a fighting chance to make progress? The DEI challenge is too complex to be served by a small collection of prescriptive bullet points. But there are three elements that should be considered as part of your DEI efforts:

### **1. YOUR CDO NEEDS FACE TIME WITH THE C-SUITE.**

Nothing communicates a meaningful commitment to DEI better than ensuring the CDO gets regular time to talk and share ideas with the senior-most leaders in an organization. These opportunities send a strong message to the outside world — and to your employees on the inside — that your organization is serious about DEI.

### **2. CDOS MUST BE GIVEN ADEQUATE RESOURCES TO DESIGN A STRATEGIC DIVERSITY PLAN AND TO MEASURE RESULTS.**

In the DEI world, as in many other important aspects of life, you get what you pay for. To make real change, CDOs need adequate and ongoing resources to gather demographic information on employees, investigate hiring and other HR practices, and measure the impact of any initiatives. Mission statements and townhalls are certainly important, but they cannot be the core of DEI programming. Achieving a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive culture requires resources.

### **3. LIVED EXPERIENCE MUST BE GIVEN PRIORITY IN THE HIRING OF CDOs.**

As an emerging professional discipline, the qualifications to serve as a CDO are still rather vague. Do you need to be an HR professional? Would a background in law or perhaps organizational psychology help? Many of the world's best CDOs come from varied professional and educational backgrounds but they often share one inalienable quality: lived experience.

The nuances of systemic discrimination are so subtle, they can be overlooked by someone who has not experienced that discrimination firsthand. Lived experience cannot be the only qualification, but it definitely needs to be near the top of the list.

Breaking down an organization's systemic flaws and barriers and replacing them with a new culture based on true DEI requires strength and resilience, but it also requires a leader who is considered a peer with other senior leaders, and who has the resources to affect real change.

## SPEAK WITH AN INDUSTRY EXPERT:



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