SEÇÃO: DOSSIÊ: ENSINAR E APRENDER EM TEMPOS DE GLOBALIZAÇÃO: DO LOCAL AO INTERNACIONAL

Bridging Divides: Navigating the political and cultural barriers to DEIB

Superando divisões: Navegando as barreiras políticas e culturais ao DEIB
Superando divisiones: Navegando las barreras políticas y culturales hacia DEIB

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Abstract: In this article, the author explains the meaning and the historical development of DEI (diversity, equity, and inclusion) and DEIB (diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging). DEIB policies have regulated the way companies and educational institutions have implemented their recruitment efforts in order to attract a diverse body of students and workforce. However, in the past few years, there has been a very vocal anti-DEIB movement that argues against the constitutionality of these policies. The article presents arguments both for and against DEIB policies and programs and concludes by stating the need for maintaining these policies, particularly given the socio-economic impact that DEIB policies have.

Keywords: diversity; equity; inclusion; belonging; educational and social policies.

Resumen: En este artículo, el autor explica el significado y el desarrollo histórico de DEI (diversidad, equidad e inclusión) y DEIB (diversidad, equidad, inclusión y pertenencia). Las políticas de DEIB han regulado la forma en que las empresas y las instituciones educativas han implementado sus esfuerzos de contratación para atraer un cuerpo diverso de estudiantes y fuerza laboral. Sin embargo, en los últimos años ha habido un movimiento anti-DEIB muy vocal que argumenta en contra de la constitucionalidad de estas políticas. El artículo presenta argumentos a favor y en contra de las políticas y programas de la DEIB, y concluye afirmando la necesidad de mantener estas políticas, particularmente teniendo en cuenta su impacto y beneficios socioeconómicos.

Palabras clave: diversidad; equidad; inclusión; pertenencia; políticas educativas y sociales.

Resumo: Neste artigo, o autor explica o significado e o desenvolvimento histórico do DEI (diversidade, equidade e inclusão) e DEIB (diversidade, equidade, inclusão e pertencimento). As políticas do DEIB regulamentaram a forma como as empresas e instituições de ensino implementam os seus esforços de recrutamento, a fim de atrair um corpo diversificado de estudantes e força de trabalho. No entanto, nos últimos anos, tem havido um movimento anti-DEIB muito vocal que argumenta contra a constitucionalidade destas políticas. O artigo apresenta argumentos a favor e contra as políticas e programas do DEIB e conclui afirmando a necessidade de manter essas políticas, especialmente tendo em conta o impacto socioeconômico que as políticas do DEIB têm.

Palavras-chaves: diversidade; equidade; inclusão; pertencimento; políticas educacionais e sociais.

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The Rise of DEI – DEIB

All eyes were on the city of Minneapolis on May 25, 2020; the day that changed the course of American history when George Floyd, a 46-year-old black American man was murdered by a white police officer. The incident caught on tape drew widespread criticism and outrage and the image of a white police officer holding his knee on a black man's neck went viral and caused not only protests against police brutality everywhere in the country, but also ended up triggering a national debate on the issues of race, privilege, and power.

As the Covid-19 pandemic was still rampant and causing the death of millions, another pandemic was developing alongside – a pandemic of inequities. Spearheaded by movements such as Black Lives Matter, this battle against the pandemic of inequities resulted in the country reckoning with its own history. Suddenly, schools, companies, universities, all different institutions both public and private were engaging in an exercise of self-reflection and self-doubt questioning their roles in perpetuating the status quo by promoting policies and practices that sustained different forms of discrimination, particularly systemic racism (Tesfaye, 2023).

Racial unrest is not a new phenomenon (Eaton, 2023). There are plenty of examples to illustrate how the issue of racial segregation, discrimination and unfair policies have been present throughout American history and there are also several examples to describe the fight against intolerance and prejudice (Salvatore, 2009). What seems to have erupted with the George Floyd killing was a revolution in the making.

It is within this context that institutions have decided to focus their attention and efforts on the development of policies that became known as DEI – diversity, equity, and inclusion. These efforts have been in place since the mid-60's, an era marked by civil rights and counterculture movements which culminated with the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and its extension in 1968.

The difference now was on the focus of DEI initiatives and the strong disposition on transforming what were once intentions and words into actions and reality. The movement that initiated with the development of DEI policies has had its ups and downs. In fact, it is fair to say that part of the polarization in America today is due to the words expressed in the acronym. It has created what some have referred to as a 'ruinous rhetorical civil war' (Swan, 2024).

The critics of DEI policies associate it with another movement that came about the same time – wokeism. Also referred to as wokeness, the concept is historically associated with the experience of Black people being woke – conscious and aware of social injustices, systemic racism, and issues of gender, class, and race inequalities (Richardson & Ragland, 2018). In recent years, the term has been incorporated into the larger social and political discourse. It has gained new meanings and has been co-opted, particularly by more conservative-leaning politicians who use it in negative and even pejorative ways to criticize how identity politics has become the major force in decisions that affect the way policy is developed in universities, corporations, and even governmental agencies (Richardson & Jackson II, 2003). Some critics of wokeism even refer to a so-called woke ideology and claim that there is a woke agenda that has penetrated life in society in order to erase traditional values of merit-based policies and procedures (Hanson, 2022; Young, 2023).

The anti-woke movement is tightly associated with the anti-DEI campaign. In the state of Florida, for example, legislators have approved the 'Stop Woke Act' which dictates school curricula and prevents teachers from discussing topics such as race, gender identity and expression, sexuality and sexual orientation in their classrooms. Florida has also cut the funding for DEI programs in its state university system. Initiatives like these are now seen across the country (Adams & Chiwaya, 2024). DEI has become a taboo topic.

Supporters of DEI initiatives, however, claim that such policies contribute to the economic growth of the country and that racial barriers have deep and long-term consequences to the social

fabric of the American society (Ferraro, Hemsley, & Sands, 2023). There is data to support that claim. A study developed by Citigroup in 2020, shows that racism and inequality have cause the United States to lose $16 trillion (Peterson & Mann, 2020). The number sounds astronomical, but we are talking about decades of discriminatory practices not only in the financial sector, but also in education, living and working conditions, access to healthcare, among others.

Other studies have reached similar conclusions (Buckman, Choi, Daly, & Seitelman, 2021) and have pointed to the very real costs of enduring discrimination against minoritized groups and populations, such as African Americans. The World Economic Forum, for example, bumps up the figure to $51 trillion lost in economic growth since 1990 (World Economic Forum, 2021).

DEI is not just about economic development, though. It is also a recognition of how diverse the American population has become and a way of addressing the dramatic change in demographics that is expected to occur in the next 20 years. America is becoming more racially and ethnically diverse every year. Projections by the United States Census point to a lack of a single racial or ethnic majority group by 2055. Immigration is the driving force behind this shift. Although it is difficult to be precise when it comes to numbers of immigrants living in the United States, given the different immigration statuses of different migrant populations, the country census data estimate that more than 40 million people living in the U.S. today are foreign-born. In 2021, immigrants made up almost 14% of the American population (United States Census Bureau [U.S. Census], 2023). In fact, the U.S. has more foreign-born residents than any other country in the world.

The meanings behind the numbers are clear. The U.S. is a diverse country with a long and well-documented history of immigration and multiculturalism (Banks & Banks, 2015). More than one million immigrants arrive in the U.S. every year (Budiman, 2020). Immigration is associated with all aspects of diversity: from its cultural, ethnic, and linguistic aspects to its socio-econo-

mic impact. Immigrants diversify the workforce and drive economic growth. Their contributions to other aspects of life in society can be seen in the arts, music, literature, and cuisine, among others, and their presence makes society more multicultural, open, and inclusive. Different groups also have different ways of interpreting the world and relating to it. As new members try to integrate into societal expectations and norms, they may change the landscape and affect the status quo.

Diversity, thus, leads to a question of identity. The U.S. has an evolving identity which parallels its population trends. DEI policies, in that sense, come as a way of protecting groups that have been historically marginalized and whose presence and participation were not seen in all facets of society, from education to healthcare, and public service. DEI policies not only protect these groups but ensure their visibility and wider participation in the larger society.

This is why, more recently, the addition of belonging in the acronym (making it DEIB) brought about another concern which is now central to the issue of American identity: who belongs here and who does not.

As a matter of fact, belonging is the most important of the concepts described in the acronym. We cannot advance equity or build a more socially just society without engaging all of its members. Without a feeling of belonging, citizens end up creating sub-groups that highlight specific aspects of their identity and interacting among people who look, act, and think like them, which ultimately results in further division and segregation (Naiditch, 2022).

The combination of races, ethnic groups, genders, sexualities, languages, religions, socio-economic statuses, and even values and beliefs must function as a tool of unity. At the end of the day, as stated in the Pledge of Allegiance, this country still needs to be one indivisible nation.

There are many reasons why people resist or reject DEIB policies, but it seems that the strongest one lies in the lack of unity, purpose and values that many identify as being lost when there is too much diversity to be considered. It

becomes a threat to a perceived national identity and causes fractures in society that also challenge the existence of the nation and its people.

Supporters of DEIB policies, on the other hand, point to the exact opposite argument. A diverse nation is a stronger nation, a nation that values differences and uses its differences as a way of advancing in all areas of knowledge and builds strength in the difference (Woods & Tharakan, 2021). Different ways of knowing, thinking and acting on the world can result in more advanced science, technology, knowledge production and solutions for the challenges and problems we face as a society. DEIB brings creativity and innovation to the table and promotes more opportunities for all. This will not only increase profit, but also productivity.

Why Diversity and DEIB Matter

Culture is one of those complex concepts that encompass a people's whole way of life – from the objects that characterize customs and inventions, the rituals that reflect their practices, to the ideas that describe them as a civilization.

Spencer-Oatey (2008, p. 3) defines culture as a

> fuzzy set of basic assumptions and values, orientations to life, beliefs, policies, procedures and behavioral conventions that are shared by a group of people and that influence (but not determine) each member's behavior and his/her interpretation of the 'meaning' of other people's behavior.
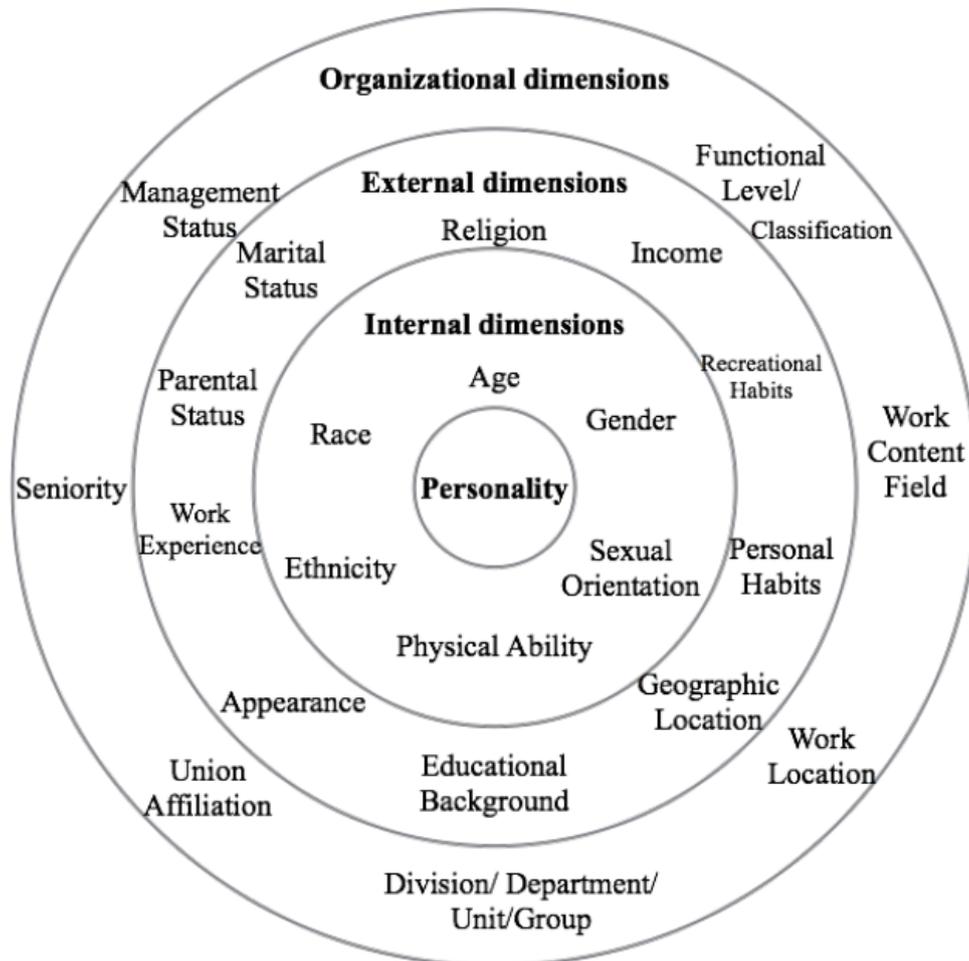
Her choice of the word 'fuzzy' to characterize culture points to the fact that the concept is abstract, somewhat vague, even ambiguous, and not easily defined. It can also be approached from many different areas of knowledge, such as anthropology, sociology, linguistics, law, and education, among others. The evolution and the different uses of the term 'culture' demonstrate how complex and convoluted the concept is and the need to clarify its meaning contextually (White, 2022).

Because culture is part of the understandings and meanings of DEIB, let us look at one model that helps us visualize the different aspects and layers of diversity that contribute to our general understanding of DEIB within the current culture wars. The model below, developed by Gardenswartz and Rowe (2003) starts with personality, which is an individual trait. We are all different individuals, and we all understand and relate to the world and others based on our own lived experiences, values and system of beliefs. The internal dimensions of diversity describe traits that we are born with, although some may choose to change or conceal some of those traits because of societal pressures, economic benefits, personal struggles, or identity formation. This is the case of gender, for example. People who identify as transgender see their gender identity differently from the gender they were thought to be when they were born or the sex they were assigned at birth. The external dimensions refer to factors that have more to do with personal choice and aspects of our lives we develop as we live. The organizational dimensions refer to features that relate us to our professional activities and line of work.

The categories within the dimensions only define us at a specific moment in time, which means that other features or traits may be added as we grow, evolve, experience new things, or change the course of our lives. Taken together, all these dimensions describe the way we present ourselves to the world and the way the world sees us.

Figure 1 - Four Layers of Diversity

Organizational dimensions

External dimensions

Internal dimensions

Personality

Age

Gender

Race

Ethnicity

Sexual Orientation

Physical Ability

Religion

Income

Recreational Habits

Personal Habits

Geographic Location

Educational Background

Appearance

Work Experience

Parental Status

Marital Status

Management Status

Seniority

Union Affiliation

Functional Level/ Classification

Work Content Field

Work Location

Division/ Department/ Unit/Group

Note. Adapted from Gardenswartz and Rowe (2003).

The model also helps us contextualize the current dialogue around DEIB policies. Most of the issues brought up in the anti-DEIB discourse focus on the internal dimensions of diversity (and some categories in the external dimensions). Using these particular features of a person's identity as a way of recruiting and selecting candidates for a job or a university is seen as problematic because it is assumed that these are the only aspects that are being considered in the decision-making process. This is not the case.

Companies, universities, and organizations that use DEIB policies in their recruiting and selection processes look at a person from a holistic perspective. It is not one specific aspect, such as the race or the gender of a candidate that is going to determine whether that person is going to get a job or a spot at a university. When you have

candidates with similar credentials, though, you may use DEIB policies as a way of diversifying your workforce or educational environment. In addition, DEIB policies serve as a reminder of our roles in promoting equitable practices and in addressing systemic discrimination of certain marginalized groups.

Diversity also matters because, as Page (2008) said, difference outperforms homogeneity. Companies and universities need diversity not only in the aspects described in Gardenswartz and Rowe's model (2003), but also in the diversity that comes from within, our individual skills, tools, knowledge and ability to think critically and creatively (Naiditch & Santos, 2020).

Page (2008) argues that thinking in diverse groups, as a collective, will always surpass individual work or work done by a group of people

who think alike. Diverse groups of people will always find better solutions than highly intelligent individuals or like-minded experts because diverse groups will have a variety of perspectives to draw upon, will display more varied and complementary skills and will build on the various backgrounds and distinct experiences of its members to work on the issues at hand. As Page (2008) claims, collective wisdom exceeds the sum of its parts.

DEIB and the Culture Wars

If DEIB is such an important concept that has a demonstrated history of advancing marginalized groups while also creating environments where differences are embraced, why is it that it has become such a divisive issue in American contemporary society?

The first answer is a legal one and it goes all the way to the Supreme Court. In June of 2023, the highest Court in the country reversed a long-held policy that had not only protected minoritized groups, such as the African American population, but also ensured their participation and inclusion in all areas of society by making discrimination illegal. The policy known as Affirmative Action was a result of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, specifically Titles VI and VII, and it prohibited discrimination based on race, color, and national origin in all programs that received financial support from the federal government. Affirmative Action also served to ensure equal opportunity in employment and the law even established the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission.

The decisions brought up by the Civil Rights Act were further expanded by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965. Through an executive order, he prohibited any form of employment discrimination based on race, color, religion, and national origin and later amended it to include sex and to advance the presence and inclusion of women and minorities through equal participation in society.

When the Supreme Court overturned the decades-long decision of Affirmative Action, it used its own words to reverse its purpose. The case was brought to the Supreme Court by students who were challenging admission practices in higher education institutions such as Harvard and The University of North Carolina, which were accused of using an applicant's race as one of the main deciding factors in his or her admission to the university. The argument brought to the Court was that by using race as a factor in the college admission process, universities were violating Title VI of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. In its decision, the Supreme Court questioned the use of race-based admissions and noted that establishing racial quotas or percentages for admissions of certain racial groups does in fact constitute discrimination and that simply admitting a student because of his or her race separates that student from the pool of applicants who all need to go through the normal admission process.

This was a majority decision and not all the Justices agreed with it. Justice Sonia Sotomayor, for example, wrote a dissenting opinion stating that the Court "rolls back decades of precedent and momentous progress" and "cements a superficial rule of colorblindness as a constitutional principle in an endemically segregated society where race has always mattered and continues to matter". Justice Sotomayor stated that the Equal Protection Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment "enshrines a guarantee of racial equality," and the Court's opinion "is not grounded in law or fact and contravenes the vision of equality embodied in the Fourteenth Amendment". Justice Sotomayor, nevertheless, implored universities to "continue to use all available tools to meet society's needs for diversity in education" (Savage & Victor, 2023).

It is still early to predict the long-term consequences of the Court's decision, but it brings attention to any practices, programs and policies that take a protected trait into consideration as a factor in the decision-making process that affects human resources protocols, such as recruiting hiring, promoting, and retaining employees, students, and members of any industry.

Moreover, the term diversity will need to be redefined. When the Court describes race-ba-

sed categories as being imprecise in grouping together students who may or may not even belong in the same racial or ethnic group, it sends a message that race – and diversity, for that matter – are imprecise concepts and that their definitions and understandings need to be constantly clarified and operationalized by the institution that uses it as part of its mission. Furthermore, institutions and organizations will also need to expound what diversity means for them. It is important to note that the Court did not fully prohibit the use of diversity as a category in the decision-making process, but that it needs to be defined within a context that does not discriminate candidates of any origin, race, ethnicity, gender, etc. For example, it is legitimate and lawful for an organization to look at the life experiences that a potential student or employee has and how these lived experiences will contribute to the diversity in the organization. This includes being a first-generation college graduate, having lived in different parts of the world, being able to speak several languages, overcoming socio-economic hardship or battling a serious disease, for example.

The lesson taken from these examples is that institutions will need to revisit their DEIB policies and practices, which include their use of affirmative action efforts. Ultimately, private companies and institutions will not need to interrupt existing DEIB programs or terminate any initiatives aimed at enhancing its diverse team, workforce, student body, so long as they are able to phrase it in a way that does not emphasize any specific category or defining feature as more significant than another in the decision-making process.

As controversial as the Court's decision was, it reverberated around the United States and opened the doors for other state and local organizations and institutions to revisit their own admission and hiring processes as well as all the practices that had been traditionally used as a way of leveling the playing field for marginalized, segregated and excluded populations. The political, social, and economic consequences of the Supreme Court's decision have spread to all facets of society and diversity, which was once

seen as an asset was suddenly transformed into a disposable good.

Since the Supreme Court overturned affirmative action policies in college and university admissions, the focus has shifted to DEIB practices, which, some argue, also creates inequalities and discriminates against certain groups. Apart from the legal aspects discussed so far, then, there are also political and cultural forces that present a challenge to DEIB initiatives. Many states have followed the example of Florida and are also developing and implementing legislation that opposes the use of DEIB policies and even prevent personnel from being trained or from participating in workshops or engaging in activities that would help them become more open, aware and conscious of their implicit biases, preconceived notions and microaggressions (see Adams and Chiwaya (2024) for additional examples of legislation being created across the United States).

The current debate revolves around culture wars and identity politics – two other reasons why DEIB seems to be on the chopping block. The origin of the DEIB movement and its subsequent culture wars can be traced back to the 60's when the United States witnessed the development of several ethnic movements that fought not only for the liberation of historically marginalized groups, but also for inclusion and participation of these groups in the larger society. While celebrating different heritages and identities, the civil rights movement also challenged social norms, demanded the recognition of inequities and injustices faced by these groups, and legislation that would reverse years of segregation, prejudice and discrimination.

The term culture wars became popular in the 1990's when James Davidson Hunter (1992) used it to characterize the divisive political discourse that created a gap between progressive and conservative views of the world. The tensions between these two forces were not just because of lack of agreement on cultural and social issues, but an actual clash of different perspectives that could not be reconciled. The inability from each side to accommodate or negotiate these opposing

viewpoints led to a battle of words and actions that reflected a polarized society that could not be integrated. The main consequence of these culture wars is that there is no vision for the future of the country, especially when one side sees the other as an enemy whose values and attitudes cannot be accepted. In practical terms, the culture wars affect the way a society decides on issues such as women's reproductive rights, same-sex marriage, gun control, and immigration, among others.

In a report published by the Policy Institute at King's College London, Duffy et al. (2021) describe culture wars as inevitable flashpoints in a process of culture change. As time goes by and as the public is faced with new issues, the expectation is that eventually the issue will be resolved whether it is through legislation or vote, and that new issues will arise. However, they also note that political identities have serious implications for social relations and societal norms. While much of the population does not identify with extreme views on either side, the political discourse and the media amplify the extreme voices and make it seem like there is a deep polarization that goes beyond political opinions or disagreements to describe the state of a society.

The issue of identity politics is a case in point. The term is used when a discussion on issues that many consider controversial becomes politicized and used as part of a political agenda. Identity politics is about identity. Therefore, minoritized groups and marginalized populations are usually at the center of it. Social issues that revolve around decisions on women's health, LGBTQIA+ rights, immigration policies, gender fluidity, among others, are all part of identity politics. Heyes (2020, p. 1) describes identity politics as the "shared experiences of injustice of members of certain social groups". She goes on to say that

> rather than organizing solely around belief systems, programmatic manifestos, or party affiliation, identity political formations typically aim to secure the political freedom of a specific constituency marginalized within its larger context. Members of that constituency assert or reclaim ways of understanding their distinctiveness that challenge dominant

characterizations, with the goal of greater self-determination (Heyes, 2020, p. 1).

Identity politics directly affects culture wars by influencing the content of the political discourse and the way the media portrays the different sides of the issues. The public is led to believe that certain identities may pose a threat to their ways of life, their children's future and the direction the nation is headed. Eventually, legislators enact policies that will restrict the rights of minoritized groups and marginalized identities and prevent them from being included in the mainstream society as equal members with equals rights.

It is within this growing social, political and legal backlash that DEIB is being challenged. Given the current pressure on companies to either dismantle their DEIB programs completely or at least revise and revamp their DEIB policies, the question remains as to whether we are stepping back in all the advances that have been made to secure more diverse and equitable workplaces and universities, or if this is a just a necessary recalibration to ensure that diversity itself does not remain the sole factor when making important workplace decisions, such as hiring practices, promotion determinations and even in aspects such as work environment and employee satisfaction and motivation.

Some corporations have even started using a new acronym to describe this new anti-DEI scenario: MEI. MEI stands for 'merit, excellence, and intelligence'. The term was coined by Alexandr Wang, the cofounder and CEO of the four-billion-dollar startup Scale AI. Wang refers to MEI as a hiring principle that aims at hiring the strongest candidate for the job independently of any racial, ethnic, linguistic, gender, sexuality or diversity factor that could prevent a company from identifying the people who can do the job. On his company website, Wang (2024, Meritocracy at Scale, para. 8) explains that they "treat everyone as an individual. We do not unfairly stereotype, tokenize, or otherwise treat anyone as a member of a demographic group rather than as an individual". He goes on to express his belief that "people should be judged by the

content of their character – and, as colleagues, be additionally judged by their talent, skills, and work ethic" (Meritocracy at Scale, para. 9). Wang's argument is that meritocracy does not conflict with diversity and that by focusing on merit and excellence, a hiring process will produce diversity in the backgrounds, perspectives and ideas of potential applicants.

Despite having just been coined, the term MEI has received a lot of attention both in the corporate world and by the media (Borchers, 2024). Business leaders such as Elon Musk have joined the call for a world where DEIB does not dictate policies or procedures in the way we select people for different purposes, whether it is for a job or a spot at a university.

Critics of MEI argue that people misunderstand DEIB. DEIB policies do not solely focus on a candidate's identity to make a decision about a person's future. Other qualifications are also considered in the process and the aim is to ensure both representation and equal opportunity for all candidates (Stoudemire, 2024). Workplaces and educational settings benefit from having an inclusive space where difference translates into more creative, innovative and productive environments.

Meritocracy, on the other hand, is one of those concepts that are ingrained in the American consciousness, as it is usually associated with the idea of an American Dream where success comes to those who work hard and persist. The problem with meritocracy is that it does not address historically marginalized populations and underrepresented groups that have been excluded from economic opportunities and access to a quality education.

Whether or not MEI is going to catch on and become the new normal for corporations, the fact is that the future of DEIB is in jeopardy. Merit and diversity do not necessarily contradict each other. It is possible to always engage in an exercise of broadening the pool of candidates for a job or the students applying for a spot at a college or university by promoting DEIB practices that will attract diverse qualified candidates. While true

objectivity in selecting the best person for the job or the best student to come to our campus is questionable, as we all have our own unconscious biases, there is a need to rectify societal inequalities and to address historical exclusion and segregation which prevented certain groups from having access to social and economic opportunities. When every member of a society has equal access and equal opportunity to benefit from all the resources a society has to offer, then everyone will have favorable conditions to advance and succeed. Only then will we be able to build a meritocratic future. Until then, we need to create the necessary conditions and mechanisms that will promote and advance social justice.

Looking Forward

Creating the necessary conditions and mechanisms that will promote and advance social justice is exactly the aim of DEIB policies and the future of these policies and programs will depend on how society will respond to changes in demographics, economic growth, social cohesion, and distribution of resources among citizens.

The need for diverse environments, whether it is a company, a school or any organization is clear: representation is important because it reflects what a society is and what it looks like. All the different identity expressions deserve a seat at the table. Different expressions reflect diverse walks of life, lived experiences and different journeys that moved people from where they were to where they are. For a child, seeing diversity as a norm on television, in advertising campaigns, in board rooms, at schools and at all levels of society sends a message of possibility, opportunity, and hope.

Anyone can dream, but not everyone can succeed if a society creates barriers that prevent certain groups from pursuing their dreams and achieving their goals.

DEIB policies and programs are essential to the development of a society, to its economic and social growth and to its internal coherence. If these programs need to be reinvented or renamed, we could take that as an opportunity

to remind ourselves of our roles in promoting equitable policies that will truly focus on creating a culture of inclusivity.

When an organization implements DEIB policies, it needs to understand its historical decision-making processes and how it has measured its talent over time. Understanding how you recruit, hire, promote and retain team members, students, and your leaders and who these people are and become over time helps you devise a strategic plan to ensure the integrity, fair-mindedness, and transparency of the processes.

It takes time to develop or change the culture of an organization, but you need to start somewhere and somehow. Focusing on inclusivity and on a deep examination of your policies, actions and performance assessments is a good starting point. It can lead to a stronger sense of belonging, which translates into more engagement, genuine interactions, and authentic dialogue and conversations between all stakeholders.

Years of research on diversity education has shown that the process of developing and implementing DEIB policies in schools, workplaces, universities, institutions in general, needs to be strategically thought out, intentionally planned, and methodologically carried out. The results will demonstrate the significance and the importance of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging, after all, as philosopher Matshona Dhliwayo (2013) has said, "a garden's beauty never lies in one flower."

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