

WHITE PAPER

Promoting frontline diversity in the workplace

A key to unlocking engagement and
growth for modern-day organizations



"Inclusion is not a matter of political correctness. It is the key to growth."

Jesse Jackson

Conversations around diversity in the workplace are gaining much momentum lately.

 **Data suggests that companies implementing DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) programs are 33% more likely to witness growth in their market share, while 21% are more likely to rake in higher profits.**

 **Another Deloitte study has confirmed that having an effective DEI policy improves employee engagement, customer satisfaction, and creativity.**

These facts indicate that DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) is not just a trending buzzword. It's not difficult to understand how organizations with diversity in the workplace can create an environment for individuals to feel safe and contribute positively. Ultimately, this helps the organization to grow alongside promoting an equitable and just working environment for everyone. However, there's a gap for organizations to bridge regarding diversity in their working environment.

A Harvard Business Review survey found that:

 **65% of respondents felt their organizations needed to be more diverse.**

 **30% of respondents felt their leaders needed to be more effective at shaping an inclusive culture.**

This state of affairs has ramifications for employee engagement and growth which organizations must tackle. This white paper examines diversity in the workplace, specifically for frontline workers. Read on to explore actionable ways to enhance DEI across your frontline workforce.

WHAT'S DEI? UNDERSTANDING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) are interrelated concepts that help create a safe working environment by reducing discrimination, micro aggression, and other undesirable behaviors. The three concepts are complementary, but it is essential to understand their differences.

 **Diversity** refers to the range of differences among people. These differences may pertain to race, sexual orientation, age, ethnicity, sex, ability, socioeconomic factors, and other variables. A good representation of groups historically left out due to prejudices and biases is a sign of an organization exhibiting diversity in the workplace.

- ✓ **Equity** refers to the prevalence of fair treatment of different groups and individuals despite their inherent differences. It ensures everyone gets a level playing field, and those needing support get it.
- ✓ **Inclusion** refers to a purposive effort to create a welcoming and supportive environment for everyone, regardless of any underlying differences. An inclusive atmosphere includes one where diversity is respected, and there's equity, with everyone feeling respected and empowered.

You may assert that overt racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination don't occur in most organizations today. This makes it essential to realize that their subtle forms do manifest in the form of microaggression.



UNDERSTANDING MICROAGGRESSION AS A BARRIER TO DIVERSITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Dr. Chester Pierce coined the term "microaggression" in 1970. He explained it as a subtle insult or informal degradation of an individual who belongs to an underrepresented group.

Common manifestations of discrimination and microaggression include:

- **Racism:** Discrimination based on a person's race, ethnicity, or skin color.
- **Sexism:** Discrimination due to a person's biological sex. Usually, women experience sexism in the workplace and find it hard to break the glass ceiling and occupy leadership roles.
- **Homophobia:** Hatred and stigma directed at individuals who are lesbian, gay, or bisexual.
- **Transphobia:** Hatred and stigma directed at individuals who are transgender.
- **Ageism:** Discrimination based on one's age. Usually, older people find it difficult to feel accepted in organizations. In addition, they may also find it challenging to gain promotions.
- **Ableism:** Discrimination directed at individuals with some form of disability or illness that requires material support.

As an internal communicator or human resources manager, you must be aware and mindful of these threats to diversity in the workplace. Let's understand why that's essential.



WHY SHOULD YOU ENCOURAGE DEI IN THE WORKPLACE?

DEI policies are a necessity in modern-day organizations. They ensure employees feel safe and engaged, and this boosts overall productivity and growth metrics.

LEARN MORE: [HOW DE&I CAN DRIVE SUCCESS FOR INTERNAL COMMUNICATORS](#)

Research from White, Patel, and Cassari's study describes how organizational commitment to implement a diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategy is essential to establish accountability and responsibility.

The researchers suggest that you can enhance your company's credibility and respectability by recruiting and retaining diverse talent and training individuals to be more culturally intelligent. This directly impacts sales and brand loyalty. In that vein, here are some of the critical benefits of diversity in the workplace you must note:

✓ **Builds a positive, productive atmosphere:**

A productive atmosphere becomes a natural consequence where there is fairness and social justice. With diversity in the workplace, trust, individual security, and openness rise, which helps people feel more positive and connect better with the organization. This translates into increased motivation, commitment, and loyalty. Odunayo and Y Ng (2021), in a [literature review](#), found that leveraging diversity promotes individual and organizational performance.

LEARN MORE: [4 INTERNAL COMMUNICATION STRATEGIES TO BOOST PRODUCTIVITY](#)



✓ **Helps control attrition levels:**

According to a report, 52% of frontline workers feel undervalued by their employers, while 85% feel alienated. Hofhuis, Rijt, and Vlug (2016) conducted two quantitative studies that confirmed the relevance of trust and openness to ensure that team members feel included and safe. By elevating diversity in the workplace, you can ensure employees feel valued, secure, and included, and in turn, appreciate your company culture. This can make it easier for you to retain them.

LEARN MORE: [THE POWER OF AN EMPLOYEE APP IN RETAINING TALENT](#)

✓ **Unfolds a broader realm of growth possibilities:**

A McKinsey study found that companies with more than 30% of women executives outperform organizations with lesser female representation. That's because diversity and inclusivity enhance brand image and attract more customers. Moreover, if your employees belong to different underrepresented groups, your chances of working with diverse clientele increase too.

LEARN MORE: [HOW CAN INTERNAL COMMUNICATORS DRIVE BUSINESS GROWTH?](#)

While DEI has many benefits, effectively implementing it organization-wide requires taking a granular view of the two broad workforce segments- in-office and frontline.

Let's explore what it means specifically for the frontline.



A GRANULAR LOOK AT DEI FOR THE FRONTLINE WORKFORCE

According to a Deloitte study, 32% of frontline workers were discriminated against by a coworker, while 40% reported customers discriminated against them. In addition, 25% of African American frontline workers said that a coworker or customer discriminated against them.

The environment and circumstances for frontline workers often differ from that of the in-office workforce. They're usually out and about on the field. Thus, their external environment may be more challenging to control for the management. Moreover, the frontline workers also sometimes communicate more with customers and the general public, raising their vulnerability, mainly if they belong to minority groups. Any gaps here can lead to losses in productivity and rising attrition. Moreover, frontline workers can also be a source to perpetrate discrimination against others, leading to undesirable consequences like damage to organizational reputation.

For instance, imagine a frontline worker belonging to a visible minority. They could be treated differently in an unpleasant sense by coworkers or customers because they look visibly different. This may cause discontent, impact their willingness to continue working, or continue with the same positivity and enthusiasm.

Statistically speaking, forty-seven percent of people actively looking for jobs mention undesirable company culture and atmosphere as the main reason for finding a new job.



Similarly, imagine another scenario. A customer from an under-represented group arrives at your store and asks your staff for help. Your frontline staff is busy and rudely refuses help. Due to improper treatment, that customer may either rant on social media or, at best, never step inside your store again. Another coworker from the same minority group may empathize and get upset even though this treatment was not meted out to them. Thus, this can have a two-fold damaging impact.

Therefore, it's essential to understand the nuances that can operate for the frontline workforce and take steps to be more diverse, equitable, and inclusive for them.

ARTICLE

How Employee Apps Boost Workplace Inclusion

[Read the article](#)



HOW TO IMPLEMENT A DEI STRATEGY FOR FRONTLINE WORKERS?

There are several practical steps you, as an internal communicator, can implement to increase diversity, equity, and inclusion in the frontline workforce.

01 Clearly ascertain the status quo

To begin with, you must start by looking at the existing diversity, equity, and inclusion status, policies, and processes in your organization. This can help you determine if there are any severe lackings and identify areas of tangible improvement. Measures to that end can include:

- ✓ Studying the employee data to understand how diverse groups are represented in your workforce.
- ✓ Keenly observing how well different groups are being treated and are treating others.
- ✓ Regularly conducting surveys and one-to-one conversations with your employees.
- ✓ Focusing on group research to gather an overall picture of diversity in the organization.



02

Establish clear, inclusive communication channels

Next; you must establish proper communication channels for your frontline employees to communicate easily with the management and vice versa. They must be able to share any thoughts or concerns efficiently and promptly. To that end, you can leverage technology to simplify aspects such as:

- ✓ Facilitating on-the-go, accessible communication for the frontline workforce using an internal employee communication app.
- ✓ Creating employee forums and suggestion boxes on digital channels.
- ✓ Providing frameworks for individuals to report if they experience any harassment at work anonymously.

“If you think about just a handful of examples, DE&I is a major initiative for a lot of organizations today where they want to have a diverse set of employees and they want to actually help cultivate and grow those employees within the organization, so they have a more diverse set of leaders of tomorrow. Something like an employee app, for example, can be really important for that because we have a more diverse workforce than we’ve ever had before.”

Daren Jennings, Chief Commercial Officer, Speakap



03

Use inclusive language:

When it comes to inclusive communication, language also matters.

Perales, Ablaza, and Elkin (2020) used data from an extensive Australian national workplace inclusion and diversity survey. They found empirical evidence that inclusive language helped trans employees' subjective well-being. This applies to other underrepresented groups, such as people from different ethnicities, racial groups, and sexual orientations.

Therefore, it'll help to consciously create a culture of using inclusive language in your employee communication. To that end, you can:

- ✓ Ensure using inclusive language when posting job advertisements or requiring hiring managers to be impartial when hiring members of underrepresented groups.
- ✓ Create a style guide for communication professionals to use inclusive language for corporate communication. For example, you can begin by avoiding the usage of gendered words. Instead, use neutral-sounding terms in internal communication, such as notices, emails, and other messages.

04

Provide the necessary training

Jacobs, Hatzigeorgiou, and McCamant highlight the importance of cultivating a culture of diversity. According to them, your frontline workers need to be taught about inclusion and diversity matters, as they may interact with customers who belong to underrepresented groups. To that end, some actionable steps to train your workforce can include:

- ✓ Training employees regarding prejudices and biases, cultural competency, and respectful communication. This can help you protect your staff and customers at the same time.
- ✓ Creating resources and material that can be shared with your frontline workers so they can actively promote diversity and inclusion in the workplace. This includes employee resource groups, volunteering opportunities, and mentoring programs. Conducting incentivized learning programs to help employees become more familiar with inclusive language and practices.

ARTICLE

Why You Can Benefit From Employee Training

[Read the article](#)

05

Implement policy measures to arrest any obstacles

Finally; you must undertake policies at an organizational level to keep threats to diversity in check. This can include actions like :

- ✓ Making active policies to recruit and retain individuals belonging to diverse and under-represented groups like the LGBT community, racial and ethnic minorities, and women.
- ✓ Using artificial intelligence tools during the hiring process to anonymize resumes and applications and reduce bias.
- ✓ Increasing accessibility for disabled employees by implementing text-to-speech software and other assistive technologies.
- ✓ Incorporating diversity and inclusion themes in company initiatives to drive home the message of DEI.
- ✓ Conducting initiatives to celebrate diversity and inclusion at your workplace. With planned events, and recognition programs, you can help minority groups to feel welcomed and supported.
- ✓ Implementing zero-tolerance policies for micro-aggression.

ARTICLE

Building an Inclusive Workplace: Leadership Tips

[Read the article](#)

With these steps in place, you must also monitor the progress of your DEI initiatives. By seeking regular feedback from your frontline workers — especially those who belong to underrepresented groups, you can ensure building the desired levels of diversity in the workplace.

HOW TO DEAL WITH RESISTANCE TOWARD INCLUSION AND DIVERSITY?

Any social change elicits resistance in human beings. In that vein, it isn't unnatural if your employees resist your diversity and inclusivity initiatives due to inherent, deep-rooted biases.

A recent article in the Harvard Business Review has identified three forms of threats due to which people tend to resist inclusivity. These include status threat, merit threat, and moral threat.

When encountering such threats, people often engage in defensive behavior. This manifests in ways like denying that they're engaging in discrimination or distancing themselves from any message about diversity and inclusivity. Hence, to overcome that, you must communicate regularly and highlight the importance of workplace equity, diversity, and inclusivity.



Gallup conducted a study on diversity and inclusion and found that three essential steps are necessary.

- 1 Make sure that all your employees are treated with respect. Again, communication is the key.
- 2 Ensure that you value your employees' strengths. Highlighting the achievements of staff who belong to under-represented groups helps to set a positive example.
- 3 Leaders should make extra efforts to do what is correct: to put diversity and inclusion policies in place.



“We've seen customers organize learning lunches, or, as we do at Speakap, cultural lunches. We're a very diverse company here at Speakap with many international colleagues, and as a way to engage employees, we encourage everybody to bring a dish from their own country and share it with the group. That way we learn about each other and have the opportunity to connect beyond the working context.”

Andrea Popma, Director of Customer Retention, Speakap

INCLUSIVITY IN CONSTRUCTION

By examining real-life examples of how companies have addressed issues related to diversity and inclusion, we can learn valuable lessons and gain insights into best practices. We will examine the challenges faced by the construction industry and the innovative solutions that have been implemented to create more equitable and welcoming workplaces.

CLARKSON
CONSTRUCTION COMPANY



“Another challenge in the construction industry is the generation gap. We have 3-5 generations of frontline employees in the workforce at one time, and their communication preferences are very different. We need to tailor to those joining the workforce, because we have to communicate in a way that feels native to them. And an app can do just that.”

Tara McKinney, HR Director, Clarkson Construction Company

By using technology such as an app to bridge the communication gap, organizations can create a more accessible and equitable work environment. For example, younger generations who are more familiar with using technology may feel more comfortable communicating via an app. Older generations can get hands-on experience because of its ease of use.





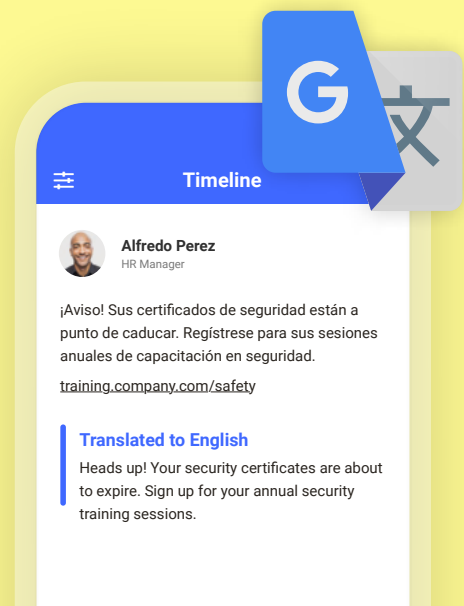
Q&D CONSTRUCTION
est. 1964

With the employee app, Q&D Construction has moved from emailing everything to creating two-way communication about events. This transparency in communication builds trust as employees see how the company reacts to situations. It reaches everyone and creates a common goal.

Additionally, the employee app can be particularly beneficial for employees who may have previously felt excluded from important discussions due to language barriers, physical distance, or other factors. Overall, the adoption of an employee app by Q&D Construction is a step towards creating a more inclusive and collaborative work environment.

Using a translation feature for inclusion in the workplace

By examining real-life examples of how companies have addressed issues related to diversity and inclusion, we can learn valuable lessons and gain insights into best practices. We will examine the challenges faced by the construction industry and the innovative solutions that have been implemented to create more equitable and welcoming workplaces.



WRAP-UP

By creating a DE&I strategy, utilizing resources and tools, and monitoring progress, you can ensure your workplace is diverse, equitable, and inclusive for your frontline workforce. This can unfold a productive and prosperous environment while limiting turnover.

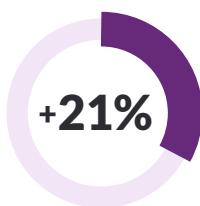
Using an employee communication app like Speakap can introduce ease in realizing your DEI goals.

Speakap empowers your frontline and in-office workforce to communicate freely through a mobile app. You can use the application to disseminate various organizational communication in an inclusive language. Your employees can also use it to report harassment and other kinds of discriminatory behavior anonymously. Most importantly, you can use the application to foster diversity in the workplace and encourage inclusivity by regularly creating content that helps your employees to be more inclusive of others — both within the organization and outside.

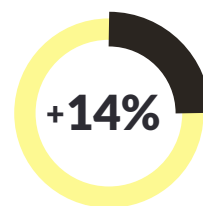
Contact us for a demo to learn more about how organizations are leveraging internal communications with Speakap to enhance:



**EMPLOYEE
SATISFACTION**



**EMPLOYEE
PRODUCTIVITY**



**EMPLOYEE
RETENTION**



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