

*COMMUNICATION INSIGHTS*

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# LET'S TALK ABOUT DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

Fostering an inclusive work environment  
through communication



**ACADEMIC SOCIETY**  
FOR MANAGEMENT & COMMUNICATION

An initiative of the Günter Thiele Foundation

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## Imprint

### Authors and citation of this publication (APA style):

Wolfgruber, D., Einwiller, S., & Brockhaus, J. (2021). *Let's talk about diversity & inclusion. Fostering an inclusive work environment through communication* (Communication Insights, Issue 11). Leipzig, Germany: Academic Society for Management & Communication. Available online at [www.academic-society.net](http://www.academic-society.net)

**Published** by Academic Society for Management & Communication – An initiative of the Günter Thiele Foundation

c/o Leipzig University, Nikolaistrasse 27–29,  
04109 Leipzig, Germany

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**Proofreading** by Chris Abbey

**Photos and illustrations** by Adobe Stock: p. 4 (Angelina Bambina), p. 8 (lvnl), p. 19 (Huhu Lin), p. 38 (bsd555), p. 40 (melita); Colourbox Stockphotos (p. 31); Geraldine Aresteanu (Katrin Harvey, p. 16), Ban Ki-moon Centre for Global Citizens (Team Pride Month, p. 18); Flaticon.com (p. 11, p. 15, p. 28, p. 33, p. 39)

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# EDITORIAL



» Talking about diversity and inclusion is just a means to an end. Eventually, it's really about changing people's mindset. «

Corporate stakeholders from the general public and politicians to employees increasingly expect corporations to reflect the diversity that exists in society within their workforce. The increasing recognition and influence of movements such as Black Lives Matter and ChooseToChallenge has reinforced public awareness and emphasized the need to manage diversity and inclusion (D&I) within organizations. This is not just imperative to foster equality and fairness; strengthening an inclusive organizational culture is also necessary to remain competitive. Thus, companies that genuinely support and successfully implement D&I management will profit from its benefits, such as increased competitiveness and a reputation as an organization that sincerely cares about human rights and equality. For D&I management to be successful, communication is a key driver. Communication helps to create awareness, understanding, and support among employees on all hierarchical levels, which is necessary to achieve the goal of establishing an inclusive organizational culture.

Despite the growing importance of D&I management, so far there has been very little in the way of research into the communication of D&I within companies. Therefore, a research team at the University of Vienna headed by Daniel Wolfgruber and me set out to address the question of how strategic communication can support D&I management to create and strengthen an organizational culture of inclusiveness and belonging for all employees. The aim was to provide comprehensive

insights into D&I management and communication in an organizational context. Our findings are based on an extensive literature review and three empirical studies, for which we conducted interviews with 20 D&I experts and 84 employees as well as a survey among 1,000 employed persons.

The central findings of our research are presented in this issue. Why and how are diversity and inclusion beneficial to organizations? How can organizations establish effective D&I management? What role does communication play in enhancing an inclusive organizational culture?

We would like to express our gratitude to all the participants who devoted time and energy to the interviews and the survey. Our thanks also go to Marlen Born for her support in writing up the results as well as to the Academic Society for Management & Communication for funding this research project and supporting the creation of this publication.

We hope our findings prove valuable and that you enjoy reading this issue!

**Dr. Sabine Einwiller**  
Professor of Public Relations Research  
University of Vienna, Austria



## LET'S TALK ABOUT DIVERSITY & INCLUSION: KEY FINDINGS

- ▶ **Objective:** The aim of this research project was to examine the role and practice of communication in D&I management. While there is already a considerable body of research on the management practices of D&I, the communication aspects have been largely overlooked so far. By interviewing D&I experts in major organizations, we provide insights into good practices of D&I management and communication as well as challenges in this field. Interviews and a survey among employees complement these insights by highlighting factors that influence employees' perceptions of inclusion.
- ▶ **Definition: Diversity** refers to the reflection of **social facts** in an organization's workforce based on observable and non-observable characteristics (e.g., genderidentity, ethnicity, social background). **Inclusion** is a positive psychological state in which employees perceive a sense of belonging due to the organization's appreciation of their uniqueness and based on the provision of opportunities to **fully participate** in decision-making processes as well as formal and informal practices. (pp. 8-10)
- ▶ **Reasons for introducing D&I management:** Besides legal requirements, the main reasons for introducing D&I management are of an economic and social nature. While the **business case** stresses the economic benefits from a diverse workforce (e.g., increased creativity and thus the strengthening of innovative power, adaptation to a diverse clientele), the **justice case** emphasizes

the social responsibility of companies to treat all (prospective) employees equally and to enable them to develop their full potential. Even though the dichotomy of business and justice is often emphasized, our findings clearly show that the two cases are interdependent in that economic rationales and resources pave the way for a company's involvement in social justice issues. (p. 11)

- ▶ **Development and main ingredients of D&I management:** To establish D&I management, the overt **commitment of the management board** is vital. The development of a D&I strategy that is aligned with the corporate strategy requires a thorough analysis of the status quo (both internally and externally) to subsequently create a D&I vision from which goals can be derived. **Involving and listening to employees** at all hierarchical levels and external stakeholders in the development process is crucial to identify problem areas and subsequently develop a strategy and measures to achieve the set objectives. Central measures include **fair HR measures** regarding recruitment, development, and promotion, **competence development**, **barrier-free infrastructures** (spatial and digital), quota policies as well as the introduction of diversity sensitive corporate language and trust-based working hours. Furthermore, several companies offer their employees **resources** to carry out D&I-related projects and events. The implementation of **inclusive leadership** is also a key factor in fostering an inclusive culture. (pp. 19-26)
- ▶ **The necessity of strategic and authentic communication:** Establishing D&I management needs strategic communication delivered authentically. Accordingly, communication needs to be an integral part of the corporate D&I strategy right from the word go. Organizational **listening** (e.g., surveys, interviews, focus group discussions) lays the foundation for the "right" communication strategy and the corresponding measures because

knowing the needs and wants of the diverse workforce is necessary to engender D&I-embracing attitudes and behaviors. To communicate D&I content, **storytelling** is a particularly promising approach to reach and engage employees and to motivate them to speak up and take action. (pp. 31-37)

- ▶ **Interpersonal communication facilitates inclusion:** Interviews with employees show that interpersonal communication has a greater impact on the development of employees' sense of inclusion than mediated communication (e.g., articles on the intranet, videos, podcasts, email circulars, newsletters). While mediated communication is often desired by employees to obtain relevant information on D&I and stay up to date, it is interpersonal communication in a formal context that fosters a sense of inclusion most strongly. Although informal conversations about D&I-related issues among peers are also important, it transpires that perceptions of **exclusion** are related to a **lack of formal interpersonal communication on D&I topics** (e.g., in the form of training, workshops, meetings, events), which may lead to frustration and dissatisfaction with the work situation as a whole. (p. 34)
- ▶ **D&I management as an enabler:** Effective D&I management means not only strategy development and implementation but also enabling and advising all organizational members. In this sense, it is first and foremost a matter of providing executive personnel with the necessary tools to foster an **inclusive leadership style**, which is indispensable if a company wants to develop an inclusive organizational culture. Managers should also be provided with **resources** such as budgets, time, and know-how to engender a D&I-embracing climate in their teams.

Another aim of D&I management is to empower the workforce. In addition to **training and**

**mentoring programs**, employees are often provided with resources such as project-based budgets, know-how, and time to actively engage with D&I issues. Furthermore, **issue-specific networks** and **gamification** elements such as competitions (e.g., D&I awards) are implemented to make employees active participants in D&I management. (pp. 27-29)

## RESEARCH DESIGN

The research project “Let’s talk about Diversity & Inclusion” was overseen and conducted by Daniel Wolfruber and Sabine Einwiller from the Department of Communication at the University of Vienna. In the course of the project, an extensive literature review and three empirical studies were carried out between February and December 2020:

### 1 Literature review

The project started with a systematic literature review. In addition to practitioner-oriented literature on D&I, scientific publications from the disciplines of communication studies, management and organizational studies, business ethics, psychology, and sociology were examined and amalgamated. These insights provided the basis for the empirical parts of the research.

### 2 Semi-structured interviews with 84 employees

This first empirical study pursued two goals: firstly, to investigate employees’ experiences gained with D&I-related measures and communication in their companies. Secondly, to determine the extent to which organizational communication on D&I issues impacts the perceived inclusion/exclusion of employees and what types of communication promote a sense of inclusion. To identify and compare a wide range of perspectives and experiences, a sociodemographic quota system was created to ensure that employees with and without various diversity characteristics

were included in the study. In total, 84 persons employed in Germany and Austria were interviewed between March and May 2020. The sample comprised:

- ▶ 21 persons without minority-characteristics (i.e., “white” males and females; eleven of them in management positions),
- ▶ 26 persons with non-observable diversity characteristics (e.g., homo- or bisexuals, people with a low education level; eight of them in management positions),
- ▶ 19 persons with observable diversity characteristics (e.g., people of color, people older than 55 regardless of gender; six of them in management positions),
- ▶ 18 persons with non-observable and observable diversity characteristics (e.g., homosexual person with observable migration background; three of them in management positions).

### 3 Survey of 1,000 employed persons

The goal of the online survey was to ascertain the extent to which an organization’s handling of and communication about D&I issues impact employees’ identification with the organization and subsequent behavior patterns. To increase the explanatory power and generalizability of the results, quotas were predefined concerning company size (number of employees), gender, and age. Other sociodemographic variables were gathered in the survey to determine the diversity of participants including ethnicity, physical and mental condition, sexual orientation, and position in the company. A total of 1,000 people employed in for-profit and non-profit organizations in Germany and Austria were surveyed. The unrepresentative sample was composed of 503 females (103 of them in management positions) and 497 males (35 of them in management positions). No participants reported a “diverse”

gender identity. Moreover, 130 participants reported a migration background (52 females, 78 males) while 154 respondents had a physical or mental impairment (84 females, 70 males). Based on the literature review and findings from the qualitative interviews, a questionnaire was designed for the survey of employed persons. In order to ensure the high validity of the results, established scales were used, some of which were adapted to fit the D&I context of the study. The measurement tools used included the Organizational Authenticity Scale by Men and Hung-Baesecke (2015), Mael and Ashforth’s (1992) Organizational Identification Scale, as well as the Climate for Inclusion-Exclusion and the Diversity Climate scales developed by Mor Barak (2017). The survey was conducted in cooperation with a panel service provider between August and September 2020.

### 4 Semi-structured interviews with 20 D&I experts

In the fourth phase, we conducted 20 interviews

with experts in the field of D&I in Germany and Austria (17 D&I managers, 2 D&I consultants, and the spokesperson of Charta der Vielfalt e.V.) between October and December 2020. To ensure systematic sampling, only D&I managers whose companies had previously signed the Diversity Charter were invited to participate in the study. The most relevant results of the literature review and the studies conducted beforehand were taken into consideration when developing the interview guide to ultimately draw a holistic picture of the status quo of D&I management and the concomitant organizational communication. The interviews addressed various dimensions of D&I and included questions about the reasons for establishing D&I management, the development of the D&I strategy and corresponding measures, the conception and implementation of communication measures to engender company-wide support for D&I management, as well as the (long-term) impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on D&I management.

## Interviews with D&I experts - a selection of organizations that participated



Twenty interviews with experts in the field of diversity and inclusion in German and Austrian companies and consultancies were conducted by the University of Vienna.



# WHY DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION MATTER

## THE CORNERSTONES OF THRIVING ORGANIZATIONS AND SOCIETIES

We first introduce and differentiate the concepts of diversity and inclusion (D&I) with emphasis on the organizational context. As a rationale for promoting D&I, organizations must emphasize the specific benefits of the business case and the justice case. A discussion of various (psychological and behavioral) outcomes of D&I management concludes this chapter.



## WHAT ARE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION?

Diversity and inclusion started in the USA in the 1950s and 1960s during the civil rights movement. What began with **affirmative action** and **equal employment opportunity** strategies led to the emergence of two different approaches to reduce ethnic and gender inequality: (1) a **liberal** approach and (2) a **radical** approach. While the former approach refers to rather voluntary “positive action” initiatives, the latter emphasizes controversially debated “positive discrimination” initiatives such as the implementation of quotas (Hansen & Seierstad, 2017). The evolution of such initiatives and concepts of action has (partly) found its way into legislation over time. It has helped more women, members of ethnic minorities, people with disabilities, members of sexual minority groups, older workers, and members of other marginalized groups become part of the labor force (Mor Barak, 2015). Eventually, diversity management was born and embraced, particularly by large multinational corporations, simply because they operate in numerous countries that often

differ in terms of cultural norms, political and education systems, as well as legislation. However, with societies becoming more diverse due to globalization, the free movement of people, progressive equality policies, and medical advances, all organizations are challenged to deal with this social fact. Moreover, people expect corporations to give something back to society. Thus, D&I is also an inherently moral obligation.

### Diversity: Reflecting social facts in the workforce

The concept of diversity in organizations refers to the (sociodemographic) differences among people in an organization on grounds of observable (e.g., gender/ gender identity, age, ethnicity, physical disability) and (mostly) non-observable (e.g., education, sexual orientation, religion/worldview, cognitive abilities, social background) characteristics (Charta der Vielfalt, 2021; Mor Barak, 2015; Roberson, 2006). The German Diversity Charter defines seven diversity core

Most common diversity dimensions in D&I management



**Diversity Dimensions**  
**Outer Dimensions**  
**Organizational Dimensions**

Source: Charta der Vielfalt (2021)

The diversity dimensions of the German Diversity Charter represent the main criteria on which corporate D&I management can be based. The seven core dimensions are usually given the most attention.

dimensions that add up to an individual personality (see figure on p. 9). This charter is part of the European Diversity Charter network comprising 26 national diversity charters across the EU.

One of the main goals of D&I management is to bring in and promote members of **minorities** in particular – in comparison to the sociodemographic majority of society, industry, or an organization. However, it must be borne in mind that individuals often combine multiple diversity dimensions at once. For this reason, the term **intersectionality** has recently been introduced in research into diversity and equality issues (Hansen & Seierstad, 2017). Consider, for example, a woman who is discriminated against not due to her gender, but because of her skin color and **creed**. Diversity in organizations should thus be considered a reflection of the diversity of society in the respective workforce.

### Inclusion: Empowering employees from all walks of life

Michàlle Mor Barak (2015), one of the world's most renowned researchers in D&I, defines inclusion as employees' perceptions that their unique contribution to the company is appreciated and their full participation encouraged, and thus as a sense of belonging. Therefore, both inclusion and exclusion refer to either a favorable or adverse psychological state, resulting from an organization's structure, practices, values, norms, and above all communication.

A central goal of diversity management is to give all employees a sense of inclusion regardless of gender

(identity), ethnicity, disability, sexual orientation, religion, etc. To accomplish this goal, organizations have to remove all (potential) tangible and intangible obstacles that may hamper employees' full participation and contribution, which are considered crucial aspects of inclusion (Roberson, 2006). Possible obstacles that impede a sense of inclusion are the unjust dissemination of (work-related) information, diversity-insensitive (i.e., sexist and discriminatory) language and practices, nepotism, and unfair chances for promotion.

To engender a sense of inclusion, it is vital to give all organizational members the opportunity to engage in formal and informal activities and practices which are inherently communicative. Three aspects concerning communication and interaction have to be considered when organizations genuinely want to foster an inclusive work environment for all employees (Downey et al., 2015; Mor Barack, 2017):

- ▶ Enabling employees to take part in decision-making processes
- ▶ Granting access to relevant information networks
- ▶ Assuring a high level of participation and involvement

When these three aspects are ensured for all employees, organizations can speak of an inclusive work environment that facilitates a sense of belonging. This implies that diversity management aiming to facilitate an inclusive work environment for all employees, which we term D&I management hereafter, is in large part a strategic communicative endeavor.

» *Inclusiveness is a culture where diversity feels valued and where a sense of belonging and openness is pervasive. Diversity management only makes sense when companies place great value on equity, equal opportunities, and want to reflect the diversity of society, while at the same time deriving economic benefit from it.* «

**Hans W. Jablonski, Diversity & Inclusion Expert, Owner of Hans Jablonski Consulting**

## BUSINESS CASE VS. JUSTICE CASE? NOT A BATTLE AT ALL!

Organizations should address both the business case and the justice case for further diversity and inclusion as they are interrelated and not opposites. Several experts we interviewed recommended initially emphasizing the economic advantages of highly diverse staff to convince and motivate top management to invest in D&I management. However, it is also important to recurrently address social justice issues. This is because merely focusing on economic objectives as drivers of D&I management can reinforce or yield inequalities by regarding human beings simply as a means to an economic end (e.g., Bendick et al., 2010; Bleijenbergh et al., 2010; O'Leary & Weathington, 2006). Neglecting ethical and social justice issues can also backfire because employees may

reject D&I management that exclusively focuses on a company's bottom line (Jones et al., 2013).

Research findings indicate that there is indeed a positive relationship between D&I management and economic benefits such as increased sales revenue, more customers, and a greater market share (Herring, 2009). However, the impact of D&I management on the bottom line is considered rather multicausal and often mediated by psychological variables (Ravazzani, 2018; Van Dijk et al., 2012). For this reason, the organizational context, as well as employees' wants and needs, must always be considered when establishing D&I management.

### Reasons to establish D&I management



### Overcoming the business-justice divide

- ✓ Attracting the attention of (top) management by highlighting economic benefits
- ✓ Thereafter, highlighting the social responsibility of the organization through emotional work
- ✓ Consistently communicating the interdependency between economic and societal benefits of D&I
- ✓ Repeatedly assessing hard and soft facts to underpin the cohesiveness of business and justice issues

*To establish veritable D&I management, organizations should highlight and reconcile the specific benefits of the business case and the justice case.*

## FAVORABLE (PSYCHOLOGICAL) OUTCOMES OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

D&I management can affect individual employees, workgroups, and, ideally, the whole organization. Yet, the presumed impact of D&I management and an inclusive work environment on economic variables such as enhanced productivity and performance as well as innovative strength are hard to detect (Van Dijk et al., 2012). This is because these effects are usually mediated by psychological factors such as organizational commitment or job satisfaction. In our survey among employees, we tested the effects of some relevant psychological and behavioral variables to explore the outcomes of D&I.

### Effects of D&I: State of research

An inclusive work environment has several direct and indirect favorable outcomes. The results of an online survey carried out by Acquavita et al. (2009) identified a highly significant positive correlation between perceived inclusion and job satisfaction. Going a step further, studies show that an inclusive work environment (Hwang & Hopkins, 2015) and a pro-diversity climate (McKay et al., 2011) have a highly significant positive impact on employees' commitment and job satisfaction, which consequently have a negative effect on turnover intentions. This means that the desire to leave the organization decreases if employees perceive a diversity-embracing work climate and/or feel highly included. Moreover, research indicates that perceived inclusion has a highly significant impact on employees' well-being and that employees feel safe in inclusive work environments.

Further, D&I management leads to a higher level of trust towards the organization, which subsequently positively affects employees' engagement (Downey et al., 2015; Jaiswal & Dyaram, 2020).

### Effects of D&I: Our research findings

In our second study (i.e., an online survey of 1,000 employed persons), we were also interested in the effects of diversity climate and organizational inclusion on psychological and behavioral outcomes, respectively. One psychological variable of interest was organizational identification, which refers to an employee's sense of "oneness" with the organization (Mael & Ashforth, 1992). We hypothesized that a pro-diversity climate may positively impact an employee's identification with their employer. However, we assumed that the organization also needs to be authentic (i.e., genuine, reliable, trustworthy, and open to diverse viewpoints; Men & Hung-Baesecke, 2015) for the positive relationship between diversity climate and organizational identification to emerge. Furthermore, we aimed to investigate (indirect) D&I effects on behavioral outcomes, namely organizational citizenship behavior (OCB), which comprises behavior that is (1) non-mandated, (2) based on individual initiative, and (3) contributes to the best interests of the organization (Bienstock et al., 2003). Hence, we hypothesized that a high level of inclusion leads to organizational citizenship behavior once employees identify with their organization.

## Authenticity is key to successful D&I management

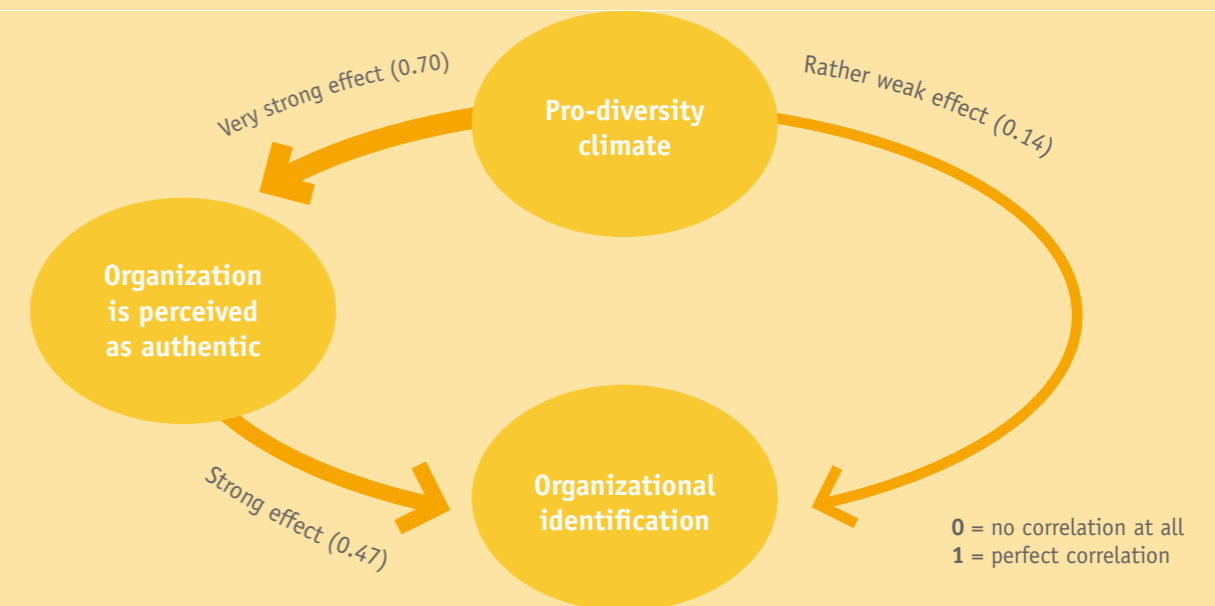
Our **first hypothesis** – that a *pro-diversity climate exerts a positive influence on organizational identification via organizational authenticity* – is **supported** (see figure below). The strong, highly significant indirect effect indicates that employees must be convinced that the employer is serious about D&I to identify themselves with the respective organization. It is worth noting that the features **fairness** and **enablement**, in particular, induce this positive psychological effect. Interestingly, people with a migration background feel significantly more identified compared to natives if the organization is fair and provides opportunities for all employees to flourish.

## How we measured it

To measure the impact of an authentic diversity management on how employees identify with their organization, numerous questions were asked, such as:

- **Pro-diversity climate:** "Managers here give feedback and evaluate employees fairly, regardless of employees' race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, age, or social background." "The company spends enough money and time on diversity awareness and related training."
- **Organizational authenticity:** "I believe that my company's actions are genuine."
- **Organizational identification:** "When someone criticizes my company, it feels like a personal insult."

## Authentic D&I management as leverage factor for organizational identification



Employees who perceive a pro-diversity climate strongly identify with their company. However, the organization must be perceived as authentic for this effect to be achieved.

» For me, diversity and inclusion mean equal opportunities. That is, regardless of a person's ethnic background, religion, gender, or age – everyone must be given the same opportunities. At the same time, diversity should be consciously perceived and used, because heterogeneous teams have better problem-solving skills and innovative strength. «

Theresia E. Pircher, Head of Corporate Social Responsibility, PORR AG

» The goal of our internal networks was to bring people together and create a space for like-minded people to connect and share. Now we have over 80 networks that are also involved in the development of policies. This means we don't just ask them for their opinion, but we ask: 'What would that ideally look like from your point of view?' This creates a sense of inclusion and belonging. «

Katja Ploner, Corporate Diversity & Inclusion Advisor, Siemens AG



## A climate for inclusion leads to employee loyalty

The **second hypothesis** – that *employees who feel highly included show self-initiated behavior that benefits the best interests of the organization if they feel highly identified* – is also **supported** (see figure below). There is a highly significant relationship between organizational inclusion and loyalty in particular – one dimension of organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) – if employees feel highly identified with their organization. However, the results only apply to the two OCB dimensions of loyalty and participation. Notably, the latter dimension has major overlaps with inclusion, as participation is a cornerstone of an inclusive work environment. No significant correlation was identified for the third OCB dimension, obedience. Interestingly, employees older than

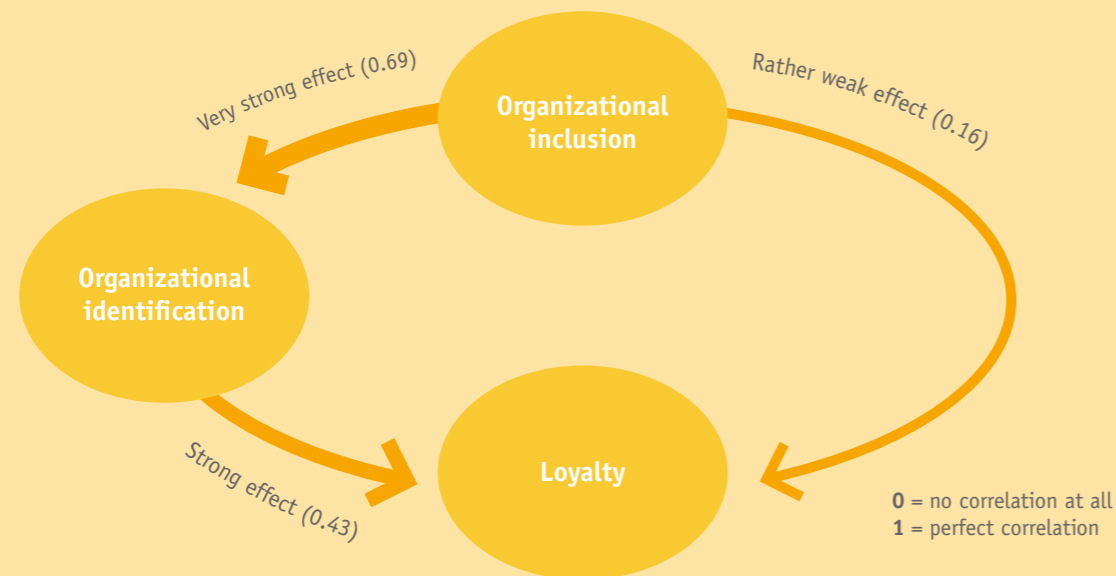
55 show significantly more proactive behavior than their younger colleagues if they feel highly included.

### How we measured it

To examine the impact of organizational inclusion on employees' loyalty to their employer, numerous questions were asked, such as:

- **Organizational inclusion:** "I have influence in decisions taken by my work group regarding our tasks." "I am typically involved and invited to actively participate in work-related activities of my work group."
- **Organizational identification:** "When someone criticizes my company, it feels like a personal insult."
- **Loyalty:** "I tell people that my organization is a good place to work."

## Inclusion strengthens the loyalty to the employer



Employees who feel included in their organization show a higher level of identification than those who feel less included. Subsequently, employees who identify with their organization due to their sense of inclusion are more loyal to their employer.

» We have a number of employee networks, and what is intriguing right now is the burning ambition of the younger generation. They always come up with their own ideas and are just bursting with energy and enthusiasm and want to do something about the injustice in the world. I find that incredibly valuable. «

Silke Heinrichs, Head of Diversity & Inclusion, Roche Diagnostics GmbH

## Much room for improvement to foster an inclusive work environment



The results of our survey show that there is still much room for improvement among companies in Germany and Austria when it comes to creating an inclusive, diversity-embracing working environment.

## Conclusion of the survey

To sum up, D&I management has a positive impact on employees if the organization is perceived as authentic. The results indicate that employees with a migration background in particular scrutinize the authenticity of D&I measures. Furthermore, the findings suggest that loyalty to the employer and

favorable behavior can be positively influenced by an inclusive work environment if employees identify with their organization. Older employees (55+) in particular are likely to appreciate a high level of inclusion with more proactive behavior than their younger peers.

### AT A GLANCE

- D&I management is the strategic coordination of practices that bring a diverse society into the organization and ensures that all employees, no matter how "different" they may be, feel included.
- When considering whether to implement D&I management in an organization, both the business case (i.e., economic benefits) and the justice case (i.e., the social responsibility of an organization) should be considered, linked, and well communicated.
- D&I management can engender positive psychological and behavioral effects like organizational identification, perceived inclusion, commitment, job satisfaction, and loyalty. However, it is important to ensure that the organization is authentic, i.e. genuinely serious about its D&I endeavors.





## » EVERYBODY CAN CONTRIBUTE IN THEIR VERY OWN WAY «

### A FEW MINUTES WITH KATRIN HARVEY, COO OF THE BAN KI-MOON CENTRE FOR GLOBAL CITIZENS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

*Katrin Harvey is the Chief Operating Officer of the Ban Ki-moon Centre for Global Citizens. The Ban Ki-moon Centre works for peace, poverty eradication, empowerment of youth and women, justice and universal respect for human rights, regardless of age, gender, identity, religion, and nationality. We talked to Katrin Harvey about how organizations can contribute to a world in which everyone can flourish as global citizens.*

#### Can you please briefly describe the Ban Ki-moon Centre for Global Citizens and its specific goals and fields of activity?

*The Ban Ki-moon Centre is a quasi-international organization based in Vienna, founded in 2018. It arose from the friendship between the former Austrian President Heinz Fischer and the erstwhile UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, who wanted to initiate a legacy project to push forward his two main achievements during his tenure: the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Paris Climate Agreement. Within these two frameworks, our Centre works in various ways to empower young people and women to become future leaders living by global citizenship values, understanding the SDGs, and knowing what they can do to help promote and realize them. We believe that by working with*

*young people and women, we can eventually give them the tools needed to identify and resolve issues in their communities. Divided between policy and direct cooperation with beneficiaries, our work is based on four pillars: education, leadership, advocacy, and peace and security.*

#### The Ban Ki-moon Centre strives for a world in which human rights are respected and observed, regardless of age, gender, identity, religion, or nationality. What role do you ascribe to companies in fulfilling your mission?

*First of all, the frameworks that we work with – the Paris Climate Agreement and the SDGs – are a call for everybody. The whole world signed up to them and we all want to reach these goals. It's really hard, and*

*Global Citizenship focuses on the unifying rather than the dividing elements between people. A global citizen is someone who self-identifies first and foremost not as a member of a state, a tribe, or a nation, but instead as a member of the human race, looking beyond the narrow scope of national or personal interests. Global citizens support peaceful solutions to today's global challenges.*

*The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) call for action by all countries to improve the lives of people everywhere. The overall aim is to end poverty, to build economic growth and to address a range of social needs*

*such as education and job opportunities while protecting the planet. The 17 SDGs include reducing inequality (i.e., empowering and promoting the social, economic and political inclusion of all citizens, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status), as well as achieving gender equality (i.e., ending all forms of discrimination against women and ensuring equal opportunities for leadership).*

*The Ban Ki-moon Centre wants to assist in the implementation of the SDGs.*

*(Source: <https://bankimooncentre.org/our-mission>)*

*we're probably not going to reach all of them by 2030, unfortunately. But we have to do everything we can to get as close to them as possible. Corporations have a huge part to play in this. They must understand the SDGs and integrate them into their everyday work. For example, the Ban Ki-moon Centre works actively with companies and is a member of the Austrian UN Global Compact Network, where I'm part of a working group to promote education for sustainability and global citizenship on the corporate level, meaning integrating the SDGs and educating their staff. Corporations play a huge role when it comes to shaping the public dialogue, and the language they use ultimately shapes reality. It's crucial to keep that in mind. Also, so many people spend many hours at their workplace, and corporations are responsible for creating a safe and inclusive environment. I think it should become easier to have a diverse workforce, including people with disabilities and different backgrounds. It shouldn't be a question of whether or how to include people in wheelchairs or to provide jobs and opportunities for blind or deaf people. This includes everyone from factory workers to office staff, and everybody can contribute in their very own way.*

#### In our research, we've learned that D&I management is often viewed as an HR matter. Only a few companies assign D&I to the CSR department. What's your view of this?

*That's quite surprising to me because the social aspect is even encapsulated in the acronym, so why pull them apart? However, when you think of diversity and inclusion, people tend to think of their staff and HR processes, such as how we can get more women in leadership positions, how we can create a harassment-free work environment, or how we can include more people with diverse backgrounds, as they may contribute to a more successful business. Another reason why companies emphasize environmental issues in their CSR agenda can be found in the activism taking place around the world. Besides, companies can declare things as environmental measures that they would have done either way. Did you change your light bulbs to save the environment or to save energy? The social aspect, however, is much more difficult. You see a lot of investment costs, for example when you build a ramp or make all hiring processes more inclusive, but you don't see the results immediately. I think a lot still needs to be done here.*



**In what ways could the Ban Ki-moon Centre support organizations to establish socially just and economically beneficial D&I management?**

*We've started building a very interesting pool of leaders and young activists that could participate in management processes. We host regular SDG training, online or in-person, depending on the circumstances. One of our key activities is advocating for the inclusion of sustain-*

*ability and global citizenship education across the world in all kinds of training. We're always very happy to get more support for this. We work closely with governments and regional institutions such as the City of Vienna to promote knowledge of the SDGs and then hopefully instill it in people of all ages, making them realize that they can do something to support the SDGs. These are some of the things that companies and institutions can also participate in and benefit from.*



**BAN KI-MOON CENTRE**  
for Global Citizens

**Katrin Harvey**, Chief Operating Officer of the Ban Ki-moon Centre, has over a decade's experience in sustainability, climate change, clean energy, and organizational management. Having led business development, strategic growth, and communications at an international non-profit organization for clean energy access, she now combines her academic background in language studies and international development to enhance the impact of projects and programs related to the Sustainable Development Goals.



## MODERN DIVERSITY & INCLUSION MANAGEMENT

### LISTEN, PLAN, PERSUADE, ENABLE, AND LET IT GROW

*Establishing effective D&I management requires a strategic approach combining analytical skills, creativity, empathy, communication skills, and business expertise. Developing and implementing a D&I strategy and corresponding measures are non-trivial tasks that can have a significant impact on the overall corporate strategy and business processes. This chapter therefore addresses the main ingredients of D&I management, the main steps of the strategy development process, the role of D&I management as an enabler, and the backlash that can occur when D&I management is considered or introduced.*



## INGREDIENTS OF EFFECTIVE D&I MANAGEMENT

Our results indicate that there is no blueprint for a D&I strategy and its management due to the manifold, frequently complex contexts and environments in which organizations have to operate. Nevertheless, there are several pivotal ingredients of D&I management, as our analyses have shown.

### The strategic role of D&I

First of all, effective D&I management has to be built on an elaborate strategic foundation. The efficacy of a D&I strategy increases when it is integrated into the overall organizational strategy and implemented in all business processes, as discussed in more detail on pp. 23-26. A **well-resourced team** responsible for D&I (and ethical) matters that directly reports to the board is the key element of an organization's D&I management. This team is in charge of the development of D&I-related documents such as a **code of conduct** and **anti-discrimination policies**, which set rules for organizational practices such as recruitment, talent management, performance appraisals, promotions, supply chain management, and how all organizational members should treat each other and external stakeholders. Other vital elements of effective D&I management are **competence development** in the form of training and mentoring programs (see p. 21) as well as a **barrier-free infrastructure** (spatial and digital). As the **compatibility of family and work** is receiving

more and more attention, an increasing number of employers now offer their staff flexible working time models, telework, company kindergartens, flying nannies, reintegration programs after parental leave, and the consulting services of **social workers**. This focus on the individual's desires and needs is at the heart of the **New Work** concept, which emphasizes agility, flexibility, participation, and sensemaking (Hays, 2021). Furthermore, the definition and constant monitoring of strategic **goals** and **KPIs** are vital to evaluate the effectiveness of D&I management. The development of a D&I strategy and corresponding measures and KPIs are discussed in more detail on pp. 23-26.

### Effective D&I management needs persuasion and communication

To ensure the alignment of the D&I strategy with the overall corporate strategy, the commitment of the management board is crucial. Additionally, continuous persuasion of and communication with all organizational members are key to engender a genuinely inclusive culture over time. Communicating the underlying organizational (moral) values and their embodiment in everyday work life is thus essential to successfully establish and maintain an inclusive work environment. Executive personnel in particular should continuously exemplify D&I values in their words and deeds to act as respected D&I role models for employees. Hence,

*» I don't think it's appropriate to do diversity management for such a huge company from the headquarters alone. My small team can ensure that we get attention and incorporate diversity in the business strategy. We provide advice on implementation, of course, and we also initiate some measures centrally, but ultimately, they are implemented independently in the various units. «*

*Christine Epler, Head of HR-Strategy, Innovation & Diversity, Deutsche Bahn AG*

**inclusive leadership** that appreciates diversity and facilitates participation and involvement is important if organizations truly want to become a workplace in which employees from all walks of life feel a sense of belonging and can therefore tap their full potential. However, D&I managers and communicators should refrain from putting a D&I label on all communication measures, processes, and practices, as an over-emphasis may also cause reluctance within the workforce. The key role of communication in fostering an inclusive organizational culture is explained in more detail on pp. 31-37.

### Competence development as a crucial factor for an inclusive work environment

Certainly, D&I managers cannot assume that all employees are familiar with the meanings of diversity and/or inclusion, or the potential economic and social benefits. Therefore, the development of an inclusive environment heavily depends on competence development through training. Such training imparts the need for and importance of valuing diversity, and raise employees' awareness (Mor Barak, 2017). Moreover, developing competencies plays a crucial role in decentralizing D&I management, which is inevitable in large corporations.

**Diversity sensitivity** and **unconscious bias training**, as well as **train-the-trainer programs** for executive personnel, are especially conducted in corporations with a considerably diverse workforce. Such training

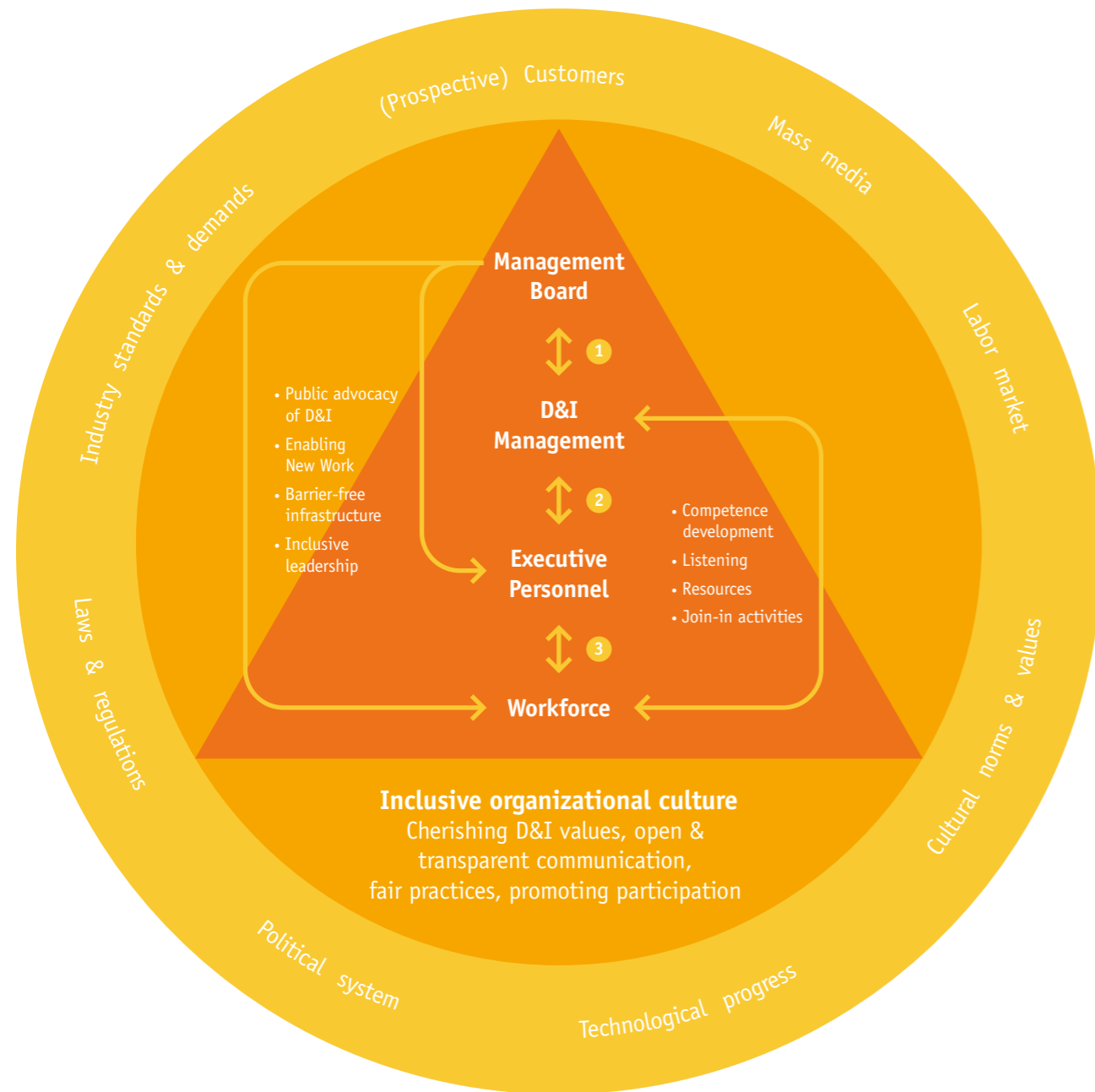
is occasionally intertwined with common **leadership training**. While sensitivity and unconscious bias training are mandatory for people in leadership positions in almost all the companies interviewed, only a few organizations offer such training to employees without a management role. Nevertheless, some organizations have adapted diversity training for employees to create "aha moments" in which the participants realize how biased they are against people who are different from them. Additionally, employees need to learn **intercultural competence** and **conflict resolution**, as – despite the numerous advantages of diverse teams – the conflict potential is fairly increased (Herring, 2009). It is important to keep in mind for training sessions that the group of participants should be diverse so that they can learn from each other in roleplays and share the insights gained (Jones et al., 2013). Ultimately, the goal of diversity training is to engender personal business cases that prompt participants to ask themselves why and how D&I could be beneficial to their own lives.

Typical (soft) skill training is another D&I measure, as diverse skills and competencies enrich the organization. This also holds true for **mentoring programs**, which can be used to gently integrate underrepresented (minority) groups. However, it is important to note that mentoring can also lead to people eventually adapting and thus losing their individuality (Trittin & Schoeneborn, 2017). Thus, mentoring programs should not be deemed the panacea for fostering an inclusive workplace.

*» Unfortunately, diversity management is often left to the HR department. We don't think that's good, because it needs to be at the very top. There has to be at least one person who is in touch with all the processes in the organization and who permanently examines and optimizes them through the lens of diversity. «*

*Stephan Dirschl, Spokesperson, Charta der Vielfalt e.V.*

## The D&I Management Model



- 1 D&I strategy  
D&I policies  
Resources  
D&I goals, KPIs & measures  
Periodic monitoring and reporting

- 2 Competence development  
Listening  
Resources

- 3 Competence development  
Listening  
Resources  
Inclusive leadership

Interaction between the board, D&I managers, executive personnel, the workforce, and the environment is vital to identify and manage D&I-related issues. The board's commitment to D&I, the establishment of New Work, the provision of a barrier-free infrastructure, resources, and development possibilities as well as the cultivation of organizational listening and inclusive leadership are essential ingredients of effective D&I management.

## D&I management means listening

The effectiveness of a D&I strategy and its management hinges on the interaction between the managers in charge and the organization's internal and external stakeholders. To ensure an inclusive organizational culture, the "polyphony" of voices (i.e., the organization listens to all relevant internal and external voices) is vital to achieve true diversity and inclusiveness (Trittin & Schoeneborn, 2017). Helpful listening measures include conducting employee and customer **surveys** and **interviews**, gathering **feedback in meetings**, implementing **reporting channels** in case of

discrimination and similar transgressions, or evaluating comments on internal and external **social media channels**. Competence development and listening are not only important ingredients of effective D&I management but also the cornerstones of its enabling and advisory function, which is discussed in more detail on pp. 27-29.

The D&I Management Model on p. 22 provides an overview of the main ingredients and processes of effective D&I management, which is considered the centerpiece of an inclusive organizational culture, which in turn is in constant interaction with its environment.

## HOW TO DEVELOP A D&I MANAGEMENT STRATEGY

Our research findings indicate that to ensure effective D&I management, its underlying strategy ought to be intertwined with the overall corporate strategy and the corresponding formal and informal practices. D&I managers need to keep in mind that the adoption of D&I management is a long-term **change management and learning project** with cultural change as the ultimate goal. To achieve this goal, changes in behavior and attitudes among managers and employees must be initiated so that D&I management is seen as an essential means to ensure societal legitimacy and sustainable corporate success.

### 1 Getting started: Making an abstract idea tangible

To even consider implementing D&I management, the veritable **commitment and support** of the board of management are required. After initial discussions on the topic with top management, where both the potential economic benefits and the social necessity are addressed (p. 11), **workshops** with board members are recommended to work out the **pros and cons** of implementing D&I management. If needed, those workshops can be moderated by external D&I consultants. Once

the board has decided to invest in D&I initiatives, it is important to appoint one or more people responsible for D&I affairs (Ravazzani, 2018). It is advisable to position D&I management at the interface between **HR, CSR, and corporate communications**, with a direct reporting line to the management board. This is important because D&I is both a strategic human resource and a sustainability issue that needs the support of the communications department to initiate and accompany the cultural change. Furthermore, it is advisable to investigate the **state of the art** and **best practices** in the industry and beyond as well as the **legal situation** on D&I-relevant issues to not only collect ideas but also obtain an overview of standards in D&I management and legal requirements.

### 2 Checking the status quo: Status analysis

A **profound analysis of the status quo** within the organization must precede strategy development. The starting point is to analyze the diversity of the workforce, including the gender ratio (at the management level), yet also the age structure and the number of employees with disabilities. If the information is available, the internationality of the workforce should be



assessed, too. Secondly, all relevant business processes and their underlying conditions concerning D&I need to be examined. In addition to **HR practices** and processes (e.g., recruitment, retention, promotion, development), **procurement, manufacturing, service and sales processes** should be analyzed for D&I compliance. Thirdly, **input from organizational members** at all levels regarding their perceptions of D&I needs to be assessed by employing systematic “listening” practices. Finally, it is useful to study the organizational environment. Besides examining **industry standards** regarding D&I, it is helpful to obtain **input from customers, suppliers, and other external stakeholders** on their perceptions and demands concerning D&I in order to be able to develop a holistic D&I strategy. This can be done by analyzing existing secondary data and documents on D&I as well as by conducting primary research using **surveys, interviews, focus group discussions, and guided workshops**. Based on all information gathered, a **SWOT analysis** can provide the necessary systematic overview of the current and desired status, opportunities, and risks regarding D&I in the organization (Jablonski, 2017).

### 3 One step at a time: Developing a D&I strategy

Once all the necessary preliminary work has been carried out, it is important to map out a D&I **vision** with the associated **values** and put it into writing in the form of a **mission statement** and **D&I-related policies**. This should be done with the involvement of employees

at all levels and walks of life. Based on this, **flexible SMART goals** (i.e., specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, time-bound) have to be developed, which will serve as the cornerstones of a goal-driven D&I strategy. To monitor the effectiveness of the D&I strategy and its management, associated **KPIs** (hard and soft) should be defined. Hard KPIs include quotas regarding gender, age, disability, internationality, the fluctuation rate, and the number of participants in D&I training courses. Job satisfaction, commitment, perceived inclusion, and well-being are soft KPIs that should be measured regularly. In the best case, the D&I strategy complements the overall strategy in that D&I management optimizes the corporate strategy and processes. A way to facilitate this process is to employ a balanced (D&I) scorecard or **existing certified instruments** such as ISO 30415, GDEIB (Global Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Benchmark), or ÖNORM S2501.

An occasionally neglected task, but one that can have a major impact on the effectiveness of D&I management, is the development of a corresponding **communication strategy** that bolsters the D&I management strategy and the corresponding measures. The communication strategy for D&I must be aligned with the corporate communications strategy to avoid contradictions and increase the company’s authenticity. The achievement of the defined communication goals, which are derived from the respective D&I goals, largely depends on decisions regarding what content is packaged how (keyword: storytelling) and communicated via which channels (interpersonal and/or mediated communication).

» I would say that without the board’s commitment, such efforts are doomed to fail. I’ve been working in this field for 14 years now, and in those years, I’ve reported three times a year to the Group’s executive board to discuss the latest figures, data, and facts on diversity. To me, that’s key to success. Unfortunately, an executive board regularly putting diversity on the agenda is not a matter of course for many companies. «

**Ursula Schwarzenbart, Head of Talent Development & Diversity Management, Daimler AG**

## The development process of a D&I management strategy



To foster an inclusive culture, a well-wrought D&I strategy has to be developed, which above all requires the commitment of the management board. Based on this, it is necessary to define areas of responsibility, analyze the initial situation, develop a well-conceived D&I (communication) strategy, and derive D&I measures. The measures should be communicated, tested, and evaluated in a selected business unit before organization-wide rollout.

» There are already standards for implementing diversity. I am on the expert committee for ISO 30415, which is currently being developed. The ISO defines the core processes of the organization quite holistically and says: We should do something in the HR life cycle, but also with regard to product development, the treatment of customers and suppliers, and other stakeholders. And then there is a block called 'Inclusive Culture.' Here we ask ourselves how we want to or should deal with each other. «

Manfred Wondrak, Diversity & Inclusion Expert, Owner of factor-D Diversity Consulting

For this reason, continuously listening to the workforce is particularly important to be able to incorporate their (communication) needs and desires into the D&I communication strategy (p. 37).

#### 4 Be creative: Designing D&I measures

The next step is to develop D&I measures to achieve the defined objectives. Setting up a **task force** consisting of employees who represent the diversity of the whole organization can be very helpful. In the course of **guided workshops** and further **interviews and focus group discussions**, ideas for measures are developed, refined, and checked for feasibility. At this point, the available **budget** for D&I management plays a significant role in ensuring that the measures can be implemented. Even if the implementation of D&I measures requires investment, not all measures entail considerable additional expenses; examples include mentioning D&I issues in meetings, implementing flexible working hours, and incorporating D&I topics authentically and transparently into corporate communications to raise awareness. However, a precise cost calculation is indispensable to be able to estimate which measures are feasible and to what extent. Once the most promising measures have been drawn up, a **detailed rollout plan** should be developed.

#### 5 The band begins to play: Rollout of D&I measures

Before the strategic measures are implemented, the **necessary basic conditions** should be ensured. For example, to introduce mentoring programs, employees are required who have agreed to act as mentors. **D&I communication** plays a decisive role at this stage of implementation. By using the most suitable communication channels (interpersonal and mediated), well-wrought messages are conveyed that **announce and explain** the implementation of the respective measures **in good time** and in line with the expectations and accessibility of the target audiences. The communication measures are aimed (1) to generate attention and support for the D&I measures, and (2) to obtain feedback to improve the measures as needed.

As the implementation of D&I management is considered a **change project**, it is advisable to **test** (i.e., introduce, monitor, evaluate) the measures in a predefined organizational unit (e.g., a specific department) as this facilitates the active involvement of employees and possible adjustments based on experiences gained (Hays, 2021). For **transparency** reasons, the existence of this project and its progress should be communicated throughout the company to **create acceptance** at an early stage. When the D&I measures have proven effective, organization-wide rollout can be considered, which again needs to be evaluated and possibly adapted.

## D&I MANAGEMENT'S ROLE AS AN ENABLER

Since an inclusive culture thrives on all employees being able to participate and contribute to developing their full potential, it is also the task of D&I management to create the appropriate framework conditions. For this reason, D&I management should take on the role of an advising and enabling body since, as one expert claimed, "the ultimate goal of diversity management must be its abolishment, because a truly inclusive organization does not need diversity management any longer." Based on our research findings, various practices to enable the executive personnel and the workforce are presented below.

#### How to enable executive personnel

Successful implementation of the D&I strategy requires an **inclusive and competent leadership** style (pp. 35-36). As not all managers have all the necessary characteristics, D&I management needs to enable executive personnel to acquire the appropriate (leadership) skills. Based on the D&I **vision** and **policies** derived from it, managers should be trained in how to lead and communicate with diverse employees properly. To successfully display inclusive leadership, executive personnel should be provided with sufficient resources. That means in addition to a small **budget** (e.g., to organize team events on D&I), the provision of **time** resources is also crucial

so that managers can develop their leadership strategies for implementing D&I measures. Furthermore, the **provision of D&I-relevant information and know-how** (e.g., access to relevant D&I literature, continuous communication about D&I developments in the company) is necessary to give executive personnel the tools they need to understand and embody the organization's D&I strategy and lead by example.

#### How to enable employees: What executive personnel can do

To unleash the positive effects of D&I among all employees, D&I management and executive personnel must allow employees to become involved in D&I initiatives and to play an active role in maintaining and continuously improving them. To ensure this, managers should allow their employees to develop individually, for example by gaining new experiences through **job rotation and enrichment**, thereby increasing cognitive diversity. Managers should also allocate resources such as **time** (e.g., holding team meetings on D&I topics), and **access to D&I-relevant information and expertise** (e.g., giving updates on the company's D&I endeavors). Besides, they can provide **mini budgets** to their employees to enable them to realize team-internal D&I projects.

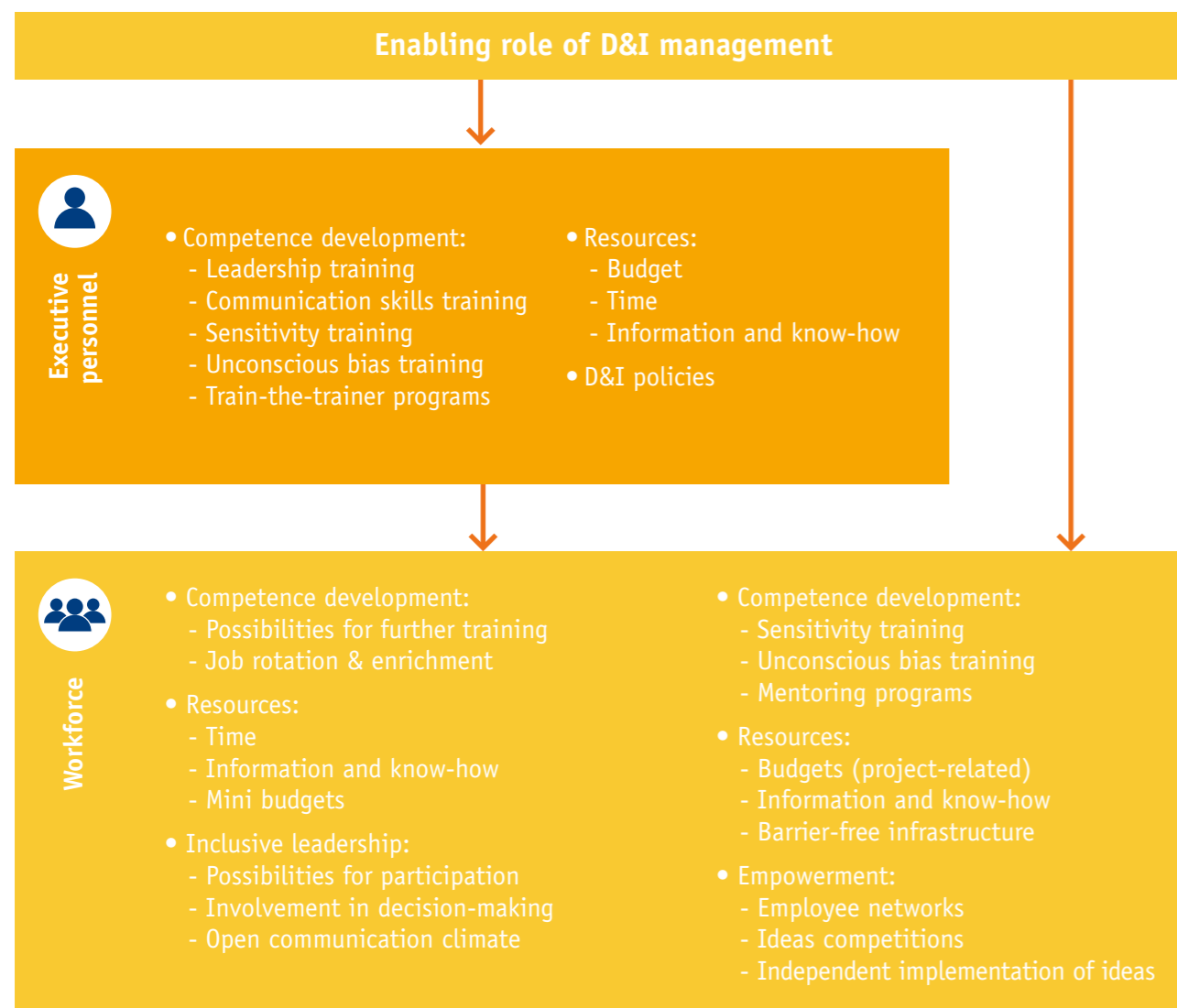
» We set up a train-the-trainer program where we trained local ambassadors, inviting managers in particular who were interested in spending two, four, six, or eight hours with their teams working on the topic. Eventually, quite a few departments then took the time to address the topic within their teams. That was terrific! «

Katja Ploner, Corporate Diversity & Inclusion Advisor, Siemens AG

» We have launched an internal Diversity Award. Colleagues can submit a concept that addresses a specific diversity dimension. The best concepts were selected and also awarded prizes. This has had a great impact in both directions. Eighty percent of the winners of the ÖBB Diversity Award implemented their concept completely independently in their areas. This means they were visible and intrinsically motivated, and we identified areas where we perhaps need to invest a little more or take a closer look. «

Traude Kogoj, Head of Diversity Management, ÖBB Holding AG

## Measures to enable executive personnel and workforce



To get all organizational members interested in D&I matters and to foster an inclusive culture, D&I management is required to take on the role of an enabler and advisor. In doing so, it is important to motivate and train both executive personnel and employees in order to get them actively involved and to create a D&I-embracing work environment.

## How to enable employees: What D&I managers can do

D&I management also plays an important role as an enabler and advisor for the workforce. Just as with executive personnel, individual **competence development** is a top priority. Most D&I-related training focuses on enhancing awareness of the benefits of diverse staff as well as on gaining skills and knowledge to enable employees to deal with diversity and otherness in an unbiased way (Treven & Treven, 2007). **Mentoring programs**, primarily for employees belonging to groups that are underrepresented in the company, are another way of developing employees. Yet, mentoring should only be carried out for a limited period so that the mentees maintain their individuality (p. 21). In addition to **financial resources** to fund small D&I projects or events, **access to D&I-related information** must also be ensured. Furthermore, a barrier-free environment (spatially and digitally) helps every employee to actively participate.

Last but not least, it is also the task of D&I management to **empower** all employees interested in D&I issues so that they have the opportunity to network and share ideas. The implementation of **employee networks** (sometimes termed business resource groups) is a measure already established in many companies. In a protected setting, like-minded people share ideas and discuss how to improve D&I management or the framework conditions. Although not yet common practice in D&I management, measures with gamification elements can be promising. **Gamification** can increase employee motivation and engagement, and improve group collaboration in a fun manner (Wanick & Bui, 2019). Besides quizzes, quests, or challenges as part of D&I training, ideas competitions are a gamified way to promote the creativity of employees and at the same time to identify areas for improvement. To encourage participation, it is advisable to give the winners of the competitions the freedom to implement their ideas independently. Communication plays an important role in promoting such competitions and presenting the winning projects to demonstrate the organization-wide commitment to D&I to internal and external stakeholders.

## THE “WHITE MALE BACKLASH” AND HOW TO OVERCOME IT

Occasionally, D&I management leads to resistance from traditionally higher-status majority group members, who are afraid of losing their advantageous position due to their perception that hitherto underrepresented groups are receiving preferential treatment (Kidder et al., 2004).

In particular, listed companies have introduced quotas to meet their legal obligations and D&I goals, which are intended to ensure the representation of women at the management level or the inclusion of members of ethnic minorities and people with disabilities. Such quotas, however, can lead to a “white male backlash,” which usually occurs when white, well-educated men who are equally qualified feel discriminated against or marginalized. These feelings can lead to open or covert resistance, anxieties, frustration, or anger (Burke, 2005).

This emerging sense of unequal treatment on the part of thus far privileged males as a consequence of D&I initiatives is indeed a challenge for D&I management when it comes to promoting an inclusive organizational culture.

### Occurrence of the backlash phenomenon and the D&I manager’s response

Around half of the D&I experts interviewed stated that they had encountered “white male backlash,” specifically concerning female quotas and the use of gender-sensitive language in the workplace. Some men feel that they are treated unfairly when applying for management positions, and in some cases believe that an application is pointless as soon as a woman also applies for the same position. Thus, female quotas



» If a glass is 20% empty, so to speak, and some men claim that it is half-empty, then that's a case for the psychiatrist. And I'm allowed to say that as a psychologist. That's a distorted perception of reality, because even if I now appoint 30% women to management positions instead of 10% in the past, it's still 70% men. And then I always smile at them and say: 'Make an effort! You've got a little more competition, but if you're really good, you won't have a problem.' «

*Elke Heitmüller, Head of Diversity, Volkswagen AG*

are still a matter of debate, particularly in companies with a culture that still embraces conservative views and principles. This explains why D&I management is often seen as a long-winded change process by almost all the experts interviewed.

However, there are various ways for organizations to successfully handle the backlash phenomenon – and here, too, well-wrought communication is key. The overt commitment of the management board, active listening, and persuasion through interpersonal interaction are indispensable for breaking down old thought patterns and

attitudes. **Empathic and transparent communication** and an emphasis on both the justice and the business case, combined with the reminder that anyone can make it to the top through their efforts, are essential factors in counteracting the backlash. **Humor** can also be used judiciously to give D&I critics in the organization food for thought. Backlash effects usually result from prescriptive and implicit (gender) beliefs and often involve unconscious processes. Therefore, **educating employees** about the reasons and consequences of D&I management is one of the best ways to finally overcome the backlash phenomenon (Rudman & Phelan, 2008).

### **i** AT A GLANCE

- To establish effective D&I management, the commitment of the management board is vital. With this backing, those responsible for D&I matters can conduct profound analyses before developing a D&I strategy that is aligned with the corporate strategy.
- The design of D&I measures should be determined by the D&I vision and concomitant goals. A task force composed of organizational members at all hierarchical levels should be appointed to get an overview of the problematic D&I issues in the company.
- Implementing D&I management is a challenging change process, which is why D&I measures should be field-tested in a predefined organizational unit. As soon as the D&I measures have proven effective, organization-wide rollout can be targeted.
- D&I management is an enabling and advisory body that maps out a company-wide D&I strategy, lays down rules of engagement, promotes competence development, and allocates resources such as money, time, or (barrier-free) infrastructure to executive personnel and the workforce.
- To successfully cope with the “white male backlash” phenomenon, D&I managers are advised to invest in D&I-related training and to seek sincere dialogue with those who feel at a disadvantage. Empathic interpersonal communication, active listening, and the careful use of humor may convince skeptics of the benefits of D&I initiatives.

## SILENCE IS SILVER, SPEECH IS GOLDEN

### COMMUNICATION AS THE KEY TO AN INCLUSIVE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE



*D&I management is a long-term change process, which is the reason why the accompanying communication strategy should set the pace but also be flexible enough to adapt to an ever-faster changing environment. Factors such as immigration, aging, legislation, and changing educational standards elicit a greater variety of individual skills and experiences, which also have an impact on communication strategies and practices. Due to this complexity and the communication challenges inherent in D&I matters, this chapter is dedicated to internal communication in the context of D&I management.*

## COMMUNICATING D&I: STRATEGIC GOALS AND CHANNELS

Addressing and promoting an organization's diversity through strategic communication that values diversity's benefits and allows for different perspectives is an opportunity for improved business performance. Both practitioners and researchers point to the significance of strategic internal communication on D&I as a key to engendering and maintaining a diversity-embracing, inclusive culture. Communication measures that are in line with the D&I strategy help the organization capitalize on the strengths and differences in the workforce by supporting the development and full utilization of its HR potential, eliminating communication barriers,

and contributing to employees' problem-solving skills and increased productivity (Okoro & Washington, 2012).

### Communication strategy for D&I

A well-conceived internal communication strategy can strongly impact an organization's effectiveness as it facilitates the development of positive internal relationships and promotes employees' awareness of risks and opportunities as well as an organization's (changing) goals. Moreover, internal communication that aims to foster an inclusive culture contributes



to employees' commitment to and identification with the organization (Welch, 2012).

To achieve such positive effects, a company's communication strategy and concomitant measures typically aim at the acceptance and support of D&I initiatives at all organizational levels. This is the reason why managers who are responsible for D&I communication should ensure that the communication strategy is aligned with

- 1 the D&I strategy and its goals,
- 2 the overall corporate communications strategy, and
- 3 employees' needs and desires in terms of communication design, type, and channel.

According to D&I experts, it is essential to reach out to all organizational members and that every employee feels addressed and can derive personal benefits from D&I measures (i.e., personal business case). The use of diversity-sensitive language that aims to address every organizational member is also an important issue to consider. Due to the lack of uniform standards, however, this is often challenging.

### Common interpersonal communication practices in D&I management

D&I management usually adopts a variety of interpersonal and mediated communication measures to (1) convey D&I-related messages and (2) facilitate a

vivid discourse on D&I throughout the organization. The most common **formal interpersonal communication measures** encompass **discussion groups** dealing with the topic of D&I, which are occasionally attended by experts who provide input, followed by open debate among the attendees. Moreover, almost all the D&I managers interviewed stated that they organize **workshops** and **internal events** on the topic of D&I to raise employees' awareness of D&I matters. Besides, **team and town hall meetings** as well as performance reviews are also suggested occasions at which interpersonal communication about D&I issues can and should take place. As a rule of thumb, managers and executive personnel are advised to lead by example and cultivate a cooperative and inclusive leadership style with an open-door policy to engender a "speak-up culture," yet also to promote **informal discussions** about D&I issues among employees, for example during lunchbreaks or in the form of fireside chats.

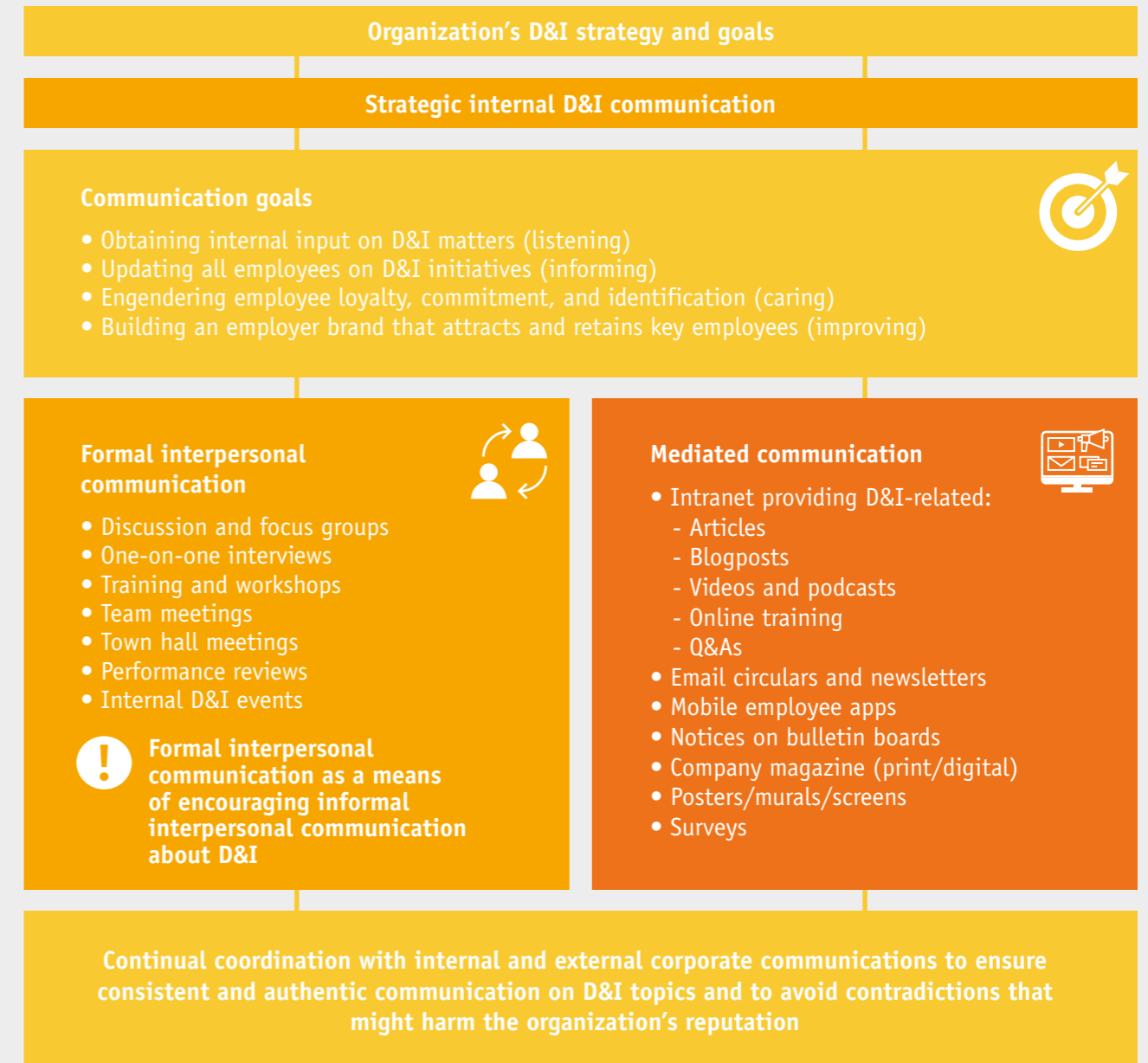
### Common communication channels in D&I management

Concerning **mediated internal communication** about D&I, the experts interviewed reported using the (social) **intranet** as the main communication channel. The intranet frequently features articles that address D&I in a narrative form (e.g. in the digital employee magazine), as well as D&I-related documents. Additionally, many organizations offer blog posts, videos, podcasts, online training, and provide Q&As about D&I matters.

» When we actually talk about a systematic change in staff behavior, you can't do that with an article – neither on the intranet, where you can post 100,000 articles, nor in the company magazine, etc. Even though these are important communication tools to convey the key messages to the broader organization, real change can ultimately only be achieved through constant training, personal feedback, and measurable goals that staff can be benchmarked against to identify underlying drivers – some of which are even unconscious to the individual leader. «

Lucas Kohlmann, Global Head of HR Strategy, Leadership, Talent Management, and Diversity & Inclusion, Henkel AG

## Communicating D&I internally: Strategic goals & channels



Effective internal communication on D&I topics requires a strategy that is aligned with both corporate goals and the goals of D&I management. To establish an inclusive organizational culture, interpersonal and (fully) mediated communication channels should be deployed, and their application always aligned with overall corporate communications.

Employees also have the opportunity to comment on the information provided or to share views virtually on D&I topics. D&I-related messages are furthermore communicated in email circulars, newsletters, and on the mobile employee app. For employees without a computer, some organizations still post notices on bulletin boards or

distribute the printed version of the employee magazine with articles on D&I topics. Another form of mediated communication is the use of posters, murals, symbols, or screens in the buildings to convey the importance of D&I in the organization. Lastly, employee surveys are also used as strategic listening tools.

## THE IMPACT OF INTERPERSONAL COMMUNICATION ON EMPLOYEES' SENSE OF INCLUSION

Organizations are advised to use all means of internal communication – whether formal, informal, interpersonal, or mediated – to engender a climate in which all employees feel appreciated and highly included. While documents such as codes of conduct or anti-discrimination policies set the rules of engagement, mediated communication mainly aims to inform employees about D&I initiatives and developments. Yet, interpersonal communication ultimately tips the scale for establishing a truly inclusive work environment, as the results of our studies show. Its effectiveness stems not only from talking about D&I-related topics, but also from giving employees access to important information, involving them in important decisions, and actively encouraging their participation and involvement in various activities inside and outside work (Mor Barak, 2017).

### Inclusion through formal and informal interpersonal communication

The context in which interpersonal communication takes place also influences the extent to which employees feel included. In the course of interpersonal communication, **formal** and **informal** turns of talk at the workplace can be distinguished. While formal interpersonal communication refers to the exchange of exclusively work-related information in an official context, informal interpersonal communication denotes “off-record talks” such as chit-chat, joking, or supportive feedback among colleagues in informal settings. Informal interpersonal

communication usually takes place horizontally on a peer level (which does not categorically exclude occasional informal interactions between people at different hierarchical levels), whereas formal work-related interpersonal communication mostly occurs vertically between managers and employees (Fay, 2011; Holmes & Marra, 2004).

### Interpersonal communication in a formal context engenders inclusion

Our research findings support the assumption that a sense of inclusion depends to a large extent on interpersonal communication about D&I matters. It shows that employees who feel included to a lesser extent or not at all perceive a lack of formal interpersonal communication much more often than highly included individuals. While informal interpersonal (peer) communication about D&I matters is still an essential element to engender a sense of inclusion, it seems that the absence of formal interpersonal communication about D&I-related topics in **training, workshops, official meetings and conversations with executive personnel, or corporate events** hampers the development of a sense of inclusion. Discussions about D&I issues among staff should take place and be stimulated in more formal contexts to make all employees feel included and taken seriously, with executives in particular playing a decisive role in creating an open and inclusive communication climate.

» It is essential that all employees are respected in their individuality, because if you manage to do that, you can also give them the security of knowing that ‘it’s okay to speak up!’ And that’s why, in my opinion, diversity management has a lot to do with corporate culture, and only open communication and leadership can create an inclusive culture. «

Julia Valsky, Head of Group Diversity Management, Erste Group Bank AG

## A LEADER’S WORD CARRIES WEIGHT: INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

Leadership plays an essential role in shaping the work climate in a team, department, or the organization as a whole. Since leaders serve as role models, they influence the way individuals treat one another or others in the workplace. People often learn vicariously, which means that they observe higher ranking individuals and imitate their behavior if it has been rewarded in one way or another. Role models illustrate the commonly expected behaviors to employees and new recruits in particular (Bandura, 1985). Therefore, whether it is the CEO, a department head, or a team leader, leadership by example that not only accepts but also promotes diversity is immensely important.

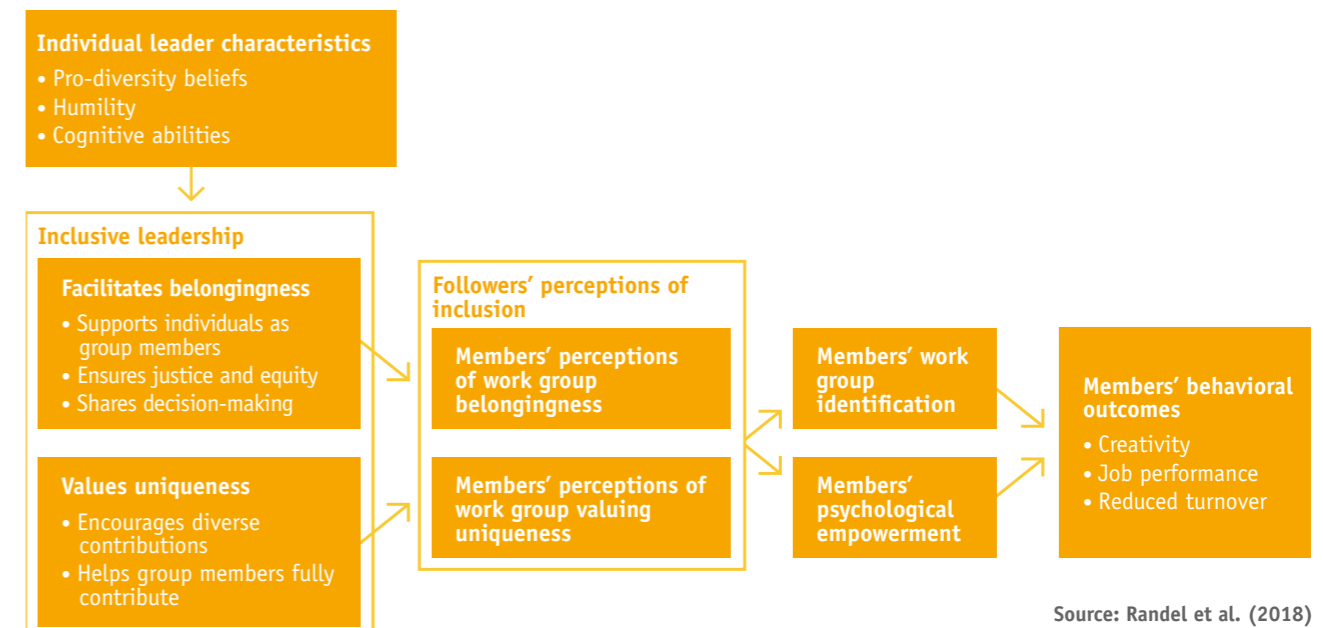
### Inclusive leadership is the name of the game

Despite the many benefits of diverse and heterogeneous teams, conflicts and disputes can also arise due to differing views and opinions. Research findings show that inclusive leadership not only reduces the poten-

tial for conflict in diverse teams but also facilitates an inclusive climate (Ashikali et al., 2020). Moreover, inclusive leadership has a significant positive impact on employees’ psychological safety (i.e., they feel able to show their true selves without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status, or career) and consequently on innovative work behavior (Javed et al., 2017).

To achieve the aforementioned positive effects, managers who are in charge of a diverse team have to cultivate behaviors that facilitate group members’ perception of belongingness in the team while maintaining their uniqueness (Randel et al., 2018). Executive personnel who lead inclusively involve their employees in **decision-making processes**, communicate **transparently**, and grant all members access to relevant information. They **encourage** them to participate and be proactive in both the team and the organization (Mor Barak, 2017). Managers are advised to delegate competencies, listen to concerns, motivate, mediate in

### The premises, practices, and effects of inclusive leadership



Inclusive leaders have a positive attitude towards D&I and sufficient cognitive abilities to successfully interlink different views. To create an inclusive climate, managers have to value the uniqueness of all members and create a sense of belonging through supportive actions. Once an inclusive climate has been developed, positive psychological and subsequent performance effects are expected.

» Leaders are important because they naturally act as role models for their employees. The team members observe the behavior of their manager and ultimately orient themselves towards what they have seen. There's no point in saying that we are all fair and inclusive and then the manager does something else. That's going to fail. That's why I'm convinced that managers are a key success factor in diversity management. «

Manfred Wondrak, Diversity & Inclusion Expert, Owner of factor-D Diversity Consulting

conflicts, and lead without prejudice. Leaders should affirmatively address D&I matters occasionally at meetings and performance reviews to demonstrate the importance of D&I to the functioning of the team and

the company. Believing in the benefits of diverse teams is pivotal to be authentic. The diagram on p. 35 depicts Randel et al.'s (2018) model, which illustrates the basic elements of inclusive leadership and its ramifications.

## CONTENT IS KING AND QUEEN

Content is what counts most when organizations want to communicate messages effectively, persuade people, and elicit behavior change (see also Communication Insights No. 6: It's All About Content). D&I topics can be rather sensitive and trigger both positive and negative emotions. For this reason, managers in charge are advised to carefully ponder on how D&I issues should be communicated internally – but also externally – to generate support and enthusiasm for D&I initiatives. Although facts and figures are fundamentally important to illustrate the workforce diversity of an organization along with its initiatives and measures to engender an inclusive culture, it is ultimately the stories of affected individuals that can bring about change in attitudes and behaviors. This was pointed out by all the experts interviewed.

### Success stories and testimonials

For thousands of years, people have been telling each other stories to pass on their respective cultural identities from

generation to generation. Stories and narratives, however, are also pivotal in organizational communication to represent personal, social, and corporate perspectives. Organizational storytelling, which is inherently action-oriented, helps reduce uncertainty among members by disseminating information, frame organizational events through their value-laden features, and promote organizational identification by developing a social context against which employees can orient themselves (Barker & Gower, 2010).

For this reason, in addition to conveying information on D&I goals and measures, stories about employees or managers who have achieved something that was not necessarily to be expected due to pervasive biases and prejudices should be considered an integral part of the communication strategy. The general tenor of such success stories is: "You, too, can do it!". Such narratives can have a considerable impact on the self-esteem of members of underrepresented or minority groups and thus foster an inclusive work environment.

» We also do a lot of home stories because people who talk about their experiences are the best way to get the message across. We have a woman who used to be a man and who also works in a tough technical field. We asked her once if she wanted to do a brief interview in connection with Christopher Street Day. She did it and it was a bombshell. «

Elke Heitmüller, Head of Diversity, Volkswagen AG

## WHAT EMPLOYEES WANT ...

Having looked at communication strategies and measures from the vantage point of the experts interviewed, it is important to consider what employees want and expect in terms of internal communication on D&I issues. The in-depth analysis of 84 interviews with jobholders helped us gain insights in this respect.

### Inclusion requires human interaction

Employees generally expect and demand more formal rather than informal interpersonal communication about D&I topics, which is in line with the findings shown above (p. 34). The data indicates the following:

- ▶ Employees with an average or low degree of perceived inclusion demand more formal and informal interpersonal communication compared to highly included individuals.
- ▶ Unsurprisingly, employees who feel moderately or (almost) not included demand more interpersonal communication about D&I matters in formal settings. In this context, regular meetings and training on D&I issues such as racism, discrimination, bullying, or sexism, at which managers initiate a discussion

among employees, were mentioned in particular.

- ▶ Regardless of the degree of inclusion, team-building activities were requested relatively often to reduce prejudice and improve the chemistry among team members.
- ▶ Concerning the desires and needs of employees in terms of mediated communication about D&I matters, no differences were found between people who felt highly, moderately, or (almost) not included. Unsurprisingly, employees who feel highly included have no demands for further communication about D&I.

To sum up, D&I managers and employees in charge of communicating D&I-related content are well advised to focus on interpersonal communication to establish an inclusive work climate. While mediated communication is a vital element to inform all employees about D&I goals and initiatives and to tell success stories to persuade employees of the personal and corporate benefits of a diverse workforce, human interaction and open discussion about D&I matters at all organizational levels seem to be key to fostering an inclusive organizational culture.

### i AT A GLANCE

- To communicate D&I matters effectively, the communication strategy must be aligned with the objectives of D&I management and the overall corporate strategy. Constant coordination with corporate communications plays a major role in ensuring consistent and credible communication.
- Open, transparent, and empathetic leadership communication at all hierarchical levels is key to an inclusive culture. For this reason, it is crucial to bring the right people into leadership positions and to familiarize them with the concept of inclusive leadership.
- Every communication measure should serve a certain goal. To convey D&I-related information, mediated communication works well. To generate enthusiasm and support for D&I, well-wrought success stories should be narrated - either in the written form or via video formats or podcasts.
- Ask and listen to your employees! Dialogue-based communication with employees at all levels is pivotal to (1) identify (further) action fields and improve D&I management, (2) to find new D&I-related stories that need to be told, and (3) to get feedback on the communication measures.





## THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC AND ITS CHALLENGES FOR D&I MANAGEMENT

The COVID-19 pandemic that started spreading around the world in 2020 has had severe impacts on economies worldwide and the job situation of millions of people. Many have lost their jobs (at least temporarily) or had to work reduced hours. Remote working was implemented on a large scale wherever possible, while **key workers and employees in the service sector** were often exposed to the risk of COVID-19 infection due to physical contact with customers or patients. In addition to the impact on the individual work situation of many people, the pandemic has also posed challenges for D&I management in many organizations.

### People disadvantaged by the pandemic

Interviews with employees revealed that **chronically ill and older employees**, in particular, felt unfairly treated and excluded because – depending on the

sector they worked in – they were often the first employees to be ordered to work from home or were put on short-time work since they belonged to risk groups. Furthermore, the temporary closure of kindergartens and schools has forced many **women** back into their traditional roles as caregivers and housewives, as they are often the ones to bear the brunt of homeschooling and household chores – in addition to the professional work they are expected to do from home. Moreover, men have been quicker to return to the office when possible, with women tending to continue working from home. The snag is that working from home reduces **visibility**, which can harm one’s career.

According to the Hays HR report 2021, companies that were not yet familiar with **New Work** structures before the COVID-19 outbreak were preoccupied with implementing flexible and remote work, which is the

» I think the pandemic has brought a shift in the organizational priorities and people back to the fore. What we learned from the crisis is how important it is to focus on people and their needs and to bring more humanity and employee experiences into our organizations. We’ve put a lot of effort into it, and we’ve got lots of great feedback, which was very motivating and also touching at times. In my opinion, we currently have an exciting opportunity to rethink work. «

Verena Binder-Kriegelstein, Head of Employee Experience, A1 Telekom Austria AG

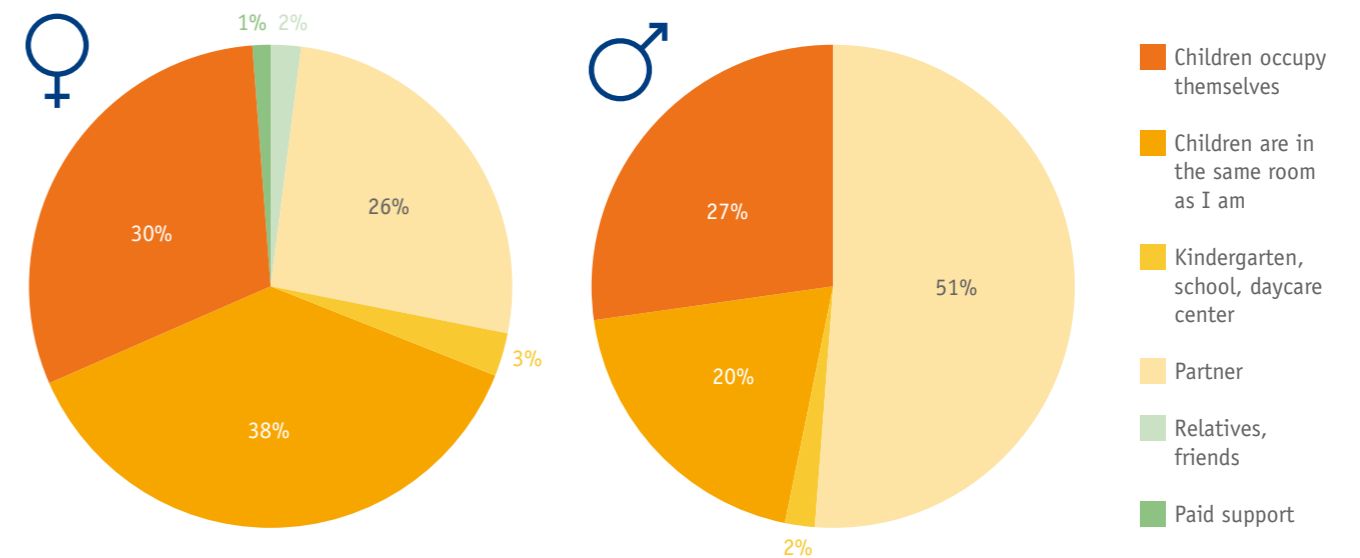
reason why D&I topics have been deferred in numerous “conventional” companies. Organizations that had already established agile working structures and offered their employees telework opportunities found it much easier to deal with the pandemic. As a result, they were better able to focus on social and interpersonal issues to help their employees through this difficult time.

### Remedies to get through the pandemic

The provision of workplace nurseries, flying nannies, and counseling by psychologists and social workers as well as the introduction of shared leadership have been particularly effective during the pandemic according

to various D&I managers, especially when already in place before. Furthermore, **employee networks** have proven useful. Women’s networks, for example, have provided great support for mothers in this tiring situation. Also, appropriate **skills-based training** (e.g., software or time management training) has been held, and **Q&As on telework issues** have been made available on the intranet and continuously expanded to include the needs and experiences of employees. Once again, communication measures in the form of active listening and providing relevant, timely information and training have clearly proved to be the be-all and end-all of effective D&I management and the fostering of an inclusive work environment.

### Gender roles reaffirmed: Childcare and working at home during the Covid-19 pandemic



N = 2.113 women and men in Austria with children under the age of 15. Survey in April/May 2020 by Mader et al. (2020)  
The results of the survey show that working at home does not change gender roles and the allocation of unpaid work such as childcare. Twice as many men indicated that their partner takes care of the children during working hours. Striving for gender equality requires new opportunities for the reconciling of work and family life.



## CONCLUSION & OUTLOOK



The findings of this research project confirm the growing importance of D&I management in general and in companies in the German-speaking area in particular. The drivers lie both in the economic benefits resulting from a diverse workforce, and in the imperative to do justice to the social responsibility of fostering diversity and inclusion, which is increasingly demanded by society.

### Wrap-up

The implementation of D&I management is a pervasive **change process** that affects all areas of an organization. D&I issues should be tackled strategically and in accordance with the **overall corporate strategy**, so that the organization and its internal and external stakeholders can benefit. Thus, the commitment of the management board is a vital necessity if D&I management is to be pursued seriously. Furthermore, the results indicate that accompanying communication measures should be aligned with the D&I and corporate communications strategy to avoid contradictions that might harm the company's authenticity and trustworthiness. The involvement of employees in the development of the D&I and communication strategies and measures is indispensable to gain insight into their

desires and needs. This is necessary to successfully raise their awareness of or even enthusiasm for the topic. Creating an inclusive culture is the overarching goal of D&I management and can only be achieved through **fair, dialogue-based communication** on equal terms and the implementation of adequate D&I measures and initiatives.

### D&I management trends

The interviews with experts revealed which topics will be particularly relevant for D&I management in the upcoming years.

- ▶ First, the superannuation of the population will require the development of **novel work models** and the definition of new roles for older employees.
- ▶ Secondly, employees' physical and **mental health**, an issue supercharged by the COVID-19 pandemic, will also become more of a priority.
- ▶ Thirdly, the establishment of a **diversity-friendly language**, which also includes genders other than male and female, is also an issue that D&I managers will continue to address.

- ▶ Fourthly, the **compatibility of family and work**, which has already been facilitated by teleworking as well as the establishment of flying nannies and also reintegration programs after parental leave will continue to receive great attention.
- ▶ Lastly, teleworking opportunities, which will continue to be offered in many companies after the pandemic, pose new challenges for communication and inclusive leadership. For this reason, **new management styles** and **competence development**, especially of executive personnel, will persist in playing a major role.

### Future research

Since D&I management is a complex, cross-cutting issue that cannot take effect overnight, **longitudinal studies** are a good way of providing scientific support for the introduction and implementation of D&I management. In addition to interviews, focus groups, and surveys, the method of **participant observation** can also provide valuable insights into how an inclusive organizational culture may be fostered, as well as what factors may hamper or undermine this challenging undertaking. Moreover, **comparative research** across different cultures with different demands regarding D&I would be a fruitful avenue for future studies.

## FURTHER READING

### Books



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