



Diversity Councils



DEFINITION

A diversity council serves as an advisory board to an organization the membership of which comprises employees and/or external experts who “lead, advocate for, coordinate, inform, and/or monitor the Strategic Diversity Management process.”¹

- **Council Charter:** A council charter outlines the diversity council’s vision, mission, objectives, leadership assignments, membership criteria and responsibilities, and operational procedures.²
- **Executive Diversity Council:** Membership for this type of diversity council consists of leaders representing all business functions within the enterprise and is usually led by the chair or CEO and chief diversity officer. This team is responsible for developing a company’s overall integrated diversity strategy.³
- **Local Diversity Council:** Local councils focus specifically on locally or regionally implemented programs and participate as sub-teams to ensure visibility in program implementation. They are usually led by a general manager who reports to the executive diversity council.⁴

WHY HAVE A DIVERSITY COUNCIL?

Diversity councils are popular vehicles for creating organizational change and providing focus and strategic direction to workplace initiatives. Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) initiatives are intended to increase the demographic diversity of employee populations and leverage that diversity to improve organizational performance.⁵ Diversity councils, as part of your strategic diversity management plan, are an inclusive and effective mechanism for managing these changes. Ultimately, **diversity councils help to operationalize D&I efforts** into the day-to day workings of an organization from recruitment to product and talent development. As workplaces become more diverse and more global, diversity councils can be a key element of a D&I strategy that helps to build an inclusive corporate culture.⁶

HOW DO WE START A DIVERSITY COUNCIL?

First, define the scope and role of the council. Will the focus be on a specific demographic group, or will it focus on D&I more broadly? Diversity councils can be configured around key business units, employee constituencies, or a combination, depending on the reach and influence desired. Identify who will serve on the council and what each person’s role will be. Diversity councils can easily be adapted to different regions and cultures because they are designed around the D&I needs of a particular geography or office. Develop a council charter outlining the council’s vision, mission, objectives, leadership assignments, membership criteria and responsibilities, and operating procedures.⁷



TO SUCCEED, ALL COUNCILS, REGARDLESS OF THEIR SIZE, REQUIRE A FORMULA OR RECIPE WITH THE FOLLOWING PRIME INGREDIENTS.

Support From the Top Is Critical

While composition of diversity councils can vary from council to council, engagement from senior-level management—ideally the CEO—is vital if councils are to fulfill their mandate and achieve their goals. When CEO leadership is not possible, other senior executives should lead and participate on the team.⁸



LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Bank of America has a Global Diversity & Inclusion Council that is headed by the CEO and leaders from each business area and geography.⁹

The CEO of **Procter & Gamble** chairs its Global Inclusion & Diversity Council, which is composed of the Chief Diversity Officer and top line leaders.¹⁰

IBM has an Executive Diversity Council composed of an SVP executive sponsor, council co-chairs, an HR VP, and global leaders.¹¹

Linking to Overall Business Strategy

Councils that link the organization's D&I strategy with the overall business strategy demonstrate the importance of diversity and inclusion within the organization.



LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Kaiser Permanente launched its National Diversity Agenda to make diversity and inclusion central to the organization's competitive advantage and its ability to deliver culturally competent health care to its members. Kaiser Permanente's initiative includes a National Diversity Council to oversee implementation of the Agenda and provide strategic direction for the Agenda through the development of national policy and initiative proposals. The Agenda helps inform how culturally competent care is delivered to members through a diverse workforce that mirrors the member base.¹²

Diverse Representation on Councils Works Best

A diversity council's members should mirror the diversity within the organization or represent the organization's aspirational diversity. Tapping a cross-section of thought leaders can help an organization clarify D&I's meaning and importance to the organization's overall culture and business strategy. Leaders of employee resource groups (ERGs) may also be part of the council.¹³ Councils may include individuals with diversity expertise who do not work for the organization; these external resource people can provide expertise or offer a customer's perspective in council discussions.¹⁴

Use Metrics to Measure Progress

Councils need to measure progress and change through human resource (HR) metrics, including how teams and employees experience inclusion, recruitment, retention, engagement, and advancement. Regardless of a company's size, diversity councils are most effective when the company's need for a council is determined by its employees. Employee surveys and informal conversations can supplement HR metrics, business climate assessments, and focus group data that may be helpful in determining how best to address inclusion issues.¹⁵



LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Northrop Grumman uses D&I councils to establish action plans and set metrics, and it is accountable for D&I efforts throughout the company.¹⁶

Procter & Gamble's Global Inclusion & Diversity Council reviews metrics quarterly and is accountable for progress toward gender representation.¹⁷

Provide Consistent Communication

Once data is collected and accurately analyzed, organizations should share results and/or the plan of action based on the findings with their employees. When change or inclusion initiatives are communicated regularly and transparently, employees are more likely to lend their support to the efforts. This demonstration of procedural fairness leads to positive experiences among the staff¹⁸ and benefits the organization's bottom line.¹⁹ Thus, diversity councils should be mindful of the need to communicate not just upward to executives, but across their organizations as well.



LEADING BY EXAMPLE

Deutsche Post DHL Group diversity council members act as promoters and ambassadors for D&I within their areas.²⁰

Sustainability Comes From a Long-Term Strategic Approach²¹

While often initiated to raise awareness of diversity issues or improve an organization's inclusiveness, councils may also be created in reaction to a specific issue, such as concern about turnover among underrepresented groups, or a lawsuit. Once the need is acknowledged and the initiative is proposed, the real work begins. A successful diversity council initiative cannot be accomplished as part of an executive's annual goals. Success is not measured by the launch, but by the continuous evolution of membership, demographics, and strategies.



LEADING BY EXAMPLE

In 2003, **Sodexo** established the Diversity Leadership Council (DLC), chaired by the CEO. The council consists of seven internal C-suite executives charged with providing leadership and guidance regarding maintaining progress on Sodexo's diversity and inclusion strategy. In 2008, Sodexo replaced the individual diversity councils, established in 2003 in each market, with the Cross Market Diversity Council (CMDC), which reports to the DLC on a quarterly basis to ensure that regions act in alignment with corporate plans. Members of the CMDC chair six regional CMDC councils and serve as "eyes, ears, and hands" to further the company's diversity strategy.²²

ENDNOTES

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2. Diversity Best Practices, *Diversity & Inclusion Councils* (January 29, 2019): p. 13.
3. Diane Landsinger and Barbara Deane, *The Diversity Councils Best Practices Study* (The GilDean Group, Inc., 2005).
4. Diversity Best Practices, *Diversity & Inclusion Councils* (January 29, 2019): p. 6; Diane Landsinger and Barbara Deane, *The Diversity Councils Best Practices Study* (The GilDean Group, Inc., 2005).
5. Jeanine Prime and Heather Foust-Cummings, "Strategy Matters: Evaluating Company Approaches for Creating Inclusive Workplaces" (Catalyst, 2010).
6. Catalyst, *Driving Your Diversity Initiative With A Council: Considerations for Getting Started*, (unpublished report) (2009).
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8. Diversity Best Practices, *Diversity & Inclusion Councils* (January 29, 2019): p. 4.
9. Catalyst, *Case Study: Bank of America—Investing in Women* (January 17, 2019).
10. Catalyst, *Case Study: Procter & Gamble—Everyone Valued, Everyone Included, Everyone Performing at Their Peak™* (January 23, 2015).
11. Catalyst, *Case Study: IBM—Leading the Cognitive Era Powered by the Global Advancement of Women* (January 18, 2018).
12. Catalyst, *Case Study: Kaiser Permanente—Achieving Our Mission and Growing the Business Through the National Diversity Agenda* (2011).
13. Diversity Best Practices, "Chapter 10: Employee Network and Affinity Groups," *Diversity Primer* (September 29, 2009); Association of Science-Technology Centers, "Establishing, Implementing, and Monitoring Diversity and Equity Policies," *Equity and Diversity Toolkit for Museums and Science Centers*.
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18. David De Cremer, Joel Brockner, Ariel Fishman, Marius van Dijke, Woody van Olfen, and David M. Mayer, "When Do Procedural Fairness and Outcome Fairness Interact to Influence Employees' Work Attitudes and Behaviors? The Moderating Effect of Uncertainty," *Journal of Applied Psychology*, vol. 95, no. 2 (2010): p. 291-304; Matthias Seifert, Joel Brockner, Emily C. Bianchi, and Henry Moon, "How Workplace Fairness Affects Employee Commitment," *MIT Sloan Management Review* (Winter 2016); Aperian Global, "Corporate Diversity Programs in 2019: What's Working & What's Not," March 14, 2019; Thomson Reuters, "Thomson Reuters D&I Index Ranks the 2018 Top 100 Most Diverse & Inclusive Organizations Globally," September 6, 2018.
19. Juliet Bourke, "The Diversity and Inclusion Revolution: Eight Powerful Truths," *Deloitte Review* (January 22, 2018).
20. Catalyst, *Case Study: Deutsche Post DHL Group—Women in Management* (January 17, 2019).
21. Diane Landsinger and Barbara Deane, *The Diversity Councils Best Practices Study* (The GilDean Group, Inc., 2005).
22. Catalyst, *Case Study: Sodexo—Making Every Day Count: Driving Business Success Through the Employee Experience* (January 1, 2012).