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People First: Emphasizing Culture over Counting

In many organizations, diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) decisions are made and evaluated on numbers and ratios. Companies only count bodies! Diversity *We have this many women on staff, that many African-Americans in leadership, this many people identifying as LGBTQ employees or managers.*

DEI is not about counting people—it's about making sure people count. The numbers are relevant – no doubt about it. But they paint an incomplete picture of the culture and the people who make up the culture. The goal of DEI is to help organizations achieve excellence through inclusion by all employees are valued, respected, and engaged. One of the best ways to achieve this goal is to have a strategy to attract, develop, and retain highly skilled talent from an emerging diverse workforce and, at the same time, enhance the engagement, knowledge, and skill of current employees.

The ability to attract and retain talent from many different backgrounds and perspectives hinges upon an organization's ability to value differences and leverage them in the workplace and inclusive work environment for competitive advantage – not just to have a count of how many. Representation matters, but it's not where the conversation should end. To keep more of your valuable people from different backgrounds and perspectives, you need to ensure that you have the right culture supporting different perspectives.

One way we can more closely examine workplace culture is through an organizational survey on DEI. The results can point to different levers available to an organization that supports or prohibit inclusion, directly linked to the recruitment and retention of diverse employees. For example, a company can identify HR practices and policies that are a barrier to women and people of color being promoted. Organizations should conduct regular audits to determine if promotion criteria are demonstrably objective and lack bias. Conversely, this same audit can uncover if hiring managers' perceptions and perspectives are individual or organizational biases.

DEI assessments and audits help uncover the facts without judgment. It compels the organization to ask tough questions: "*Why are only 15% of women in management?*" "*Why are People of Color being promoted less often?*" If most hiring manager selections are coming from disproportionately from one group– age, race, gender, or generation–the answers to the questions are most likely: "*Because the hiring process doesn't encourage more objectivity or the process relies too heavily on only certain inputs.*"

When an organization can understand the internal DEI drivers, they can address or enhance them. Attracting and retaining more diverse talent requires fostering a more inclusive work environment. Achieving this requires more than good intentions. An objective, measurable criteria in people practices help demonstrate why certain decisions are mitigated, mitigating bias, and leading to great retention of diverse employees.