

## DIVERSITY & INCLUSION



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# Shedding D&I's 'Made in the USA' Label

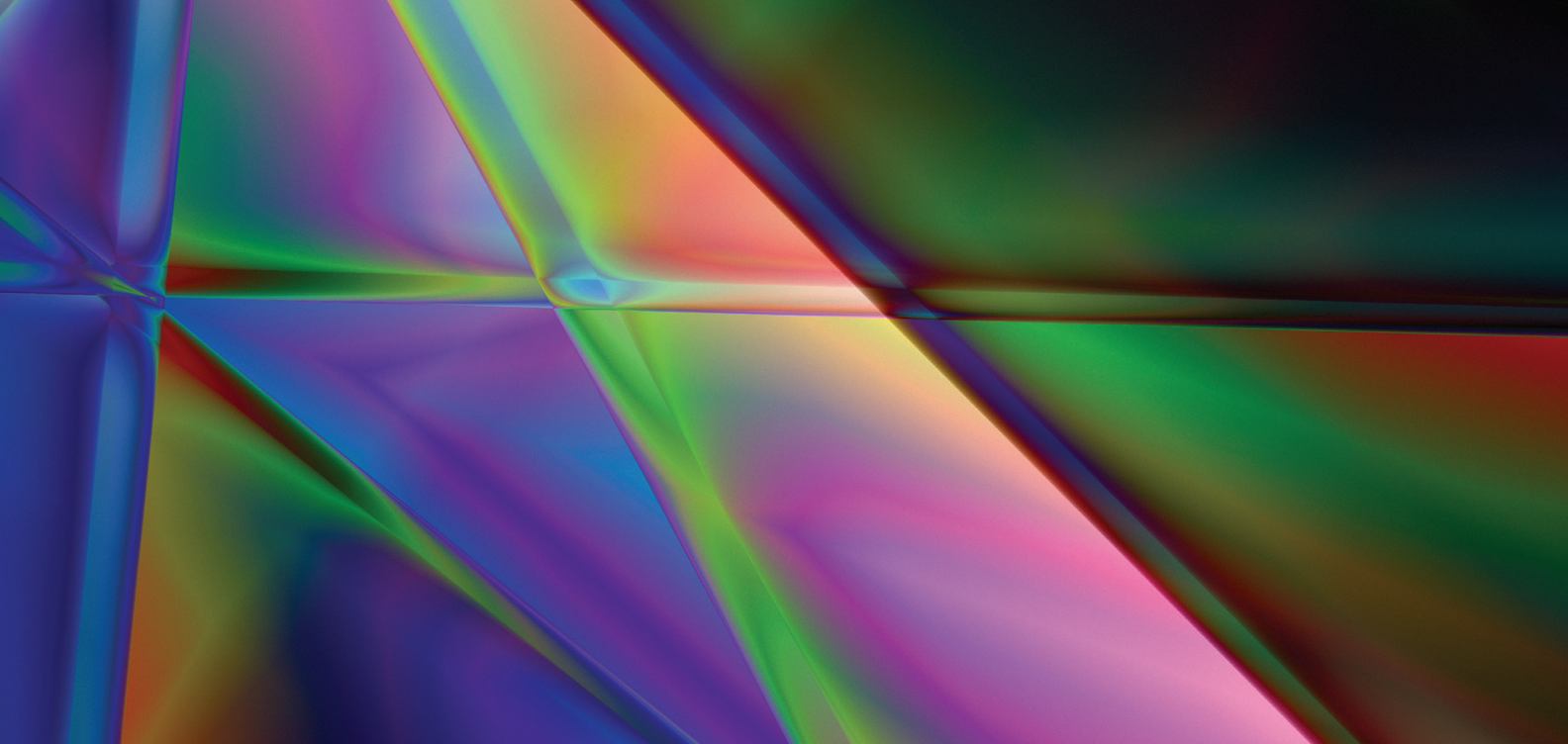
**I**t was supposed to be the start of a more effective workforce. In the London office of a US multinational, the British employees walked into a diversity and inclusion (D&I) training program. Some were genuinely enthusiastic about being there, others were very resistant. But the US-based trainers were certain their message would set the group on a path toward a more inclusive environment.

But within minutes, it was clear that the UK audience had tuned out. The trainers couldn't understand why. They had made what they had thought were the updates necessary to tailor their message to the British audience: spelling words such as "colour" and "favourite" appropriately, making references to the English national soccer team's nickname, the Three Lions, changing geographic references. But to no avail, another attempt to take a D&I program global had gone bust.

Around the world, private-sector organizations are increasingly understanding the true value of more diverse leadership and staffing, both from a

societal as well as a bottom-line standpoint. But efforts by US-based companies to take it world-wide, to offices from Brazil to Vietnam, aren't quite resonating as effectively as they do at home. It takes more than word changes to account for the entirely different perspectives each country may have, and when it's done wrong, D&I programs can actually end up being counterproductive and only lead to more exclusion and discrimination.

The first issue, of course, is that too many companies rely on D&I programs overseas—intended for non-US audiences—that were created and vetted exclusively in the United States. The inherent US culture bias becomes obvious. We aren't talking about presentations filled with references to the Kardashians or American football (although those don't help). Rather, it's the idea of putting out a D&I program that isn't relevant to the country in which it's delivered. Ageism may be an issue at home, but not so much in some progressive countries. Or, a program that emphasizes installing women in leadership positions may generate a lot of rolling eyes



among Scandinavian audiences. The reason? Denmark, Sweden, and Norway all have had quota systems mandating female representation in leadership roles for years. Pushing gender equity there would be a wasted opportunity. Furthermore, different countries have preferred learning styles. The American manner of favoring a lot of group discussion may not work in cultures that want to hear more from the wisdom and experience of the facilitator.

An easy fix to manage all these complexities and blind spots would be if companies have their D&I learning and development teams made up of people from various international backgrounds. The perspectives these non-US team members bring can go a long way to scrubbing out any US biases.

Organizations can go a step further by creating regional and local D&I councils that can ensure policies and presentations are localized into goals that are both relevant and realistic for their audiences. Even within a single country, there are massive differences between delivering a diversity and inclusion message at headquarters versus at a satellite office.

In addition to having a global D&I strategy, consider also having a systemwide accountability

framework to ensure the strategy is implemented consistently worldwide. For instance, the United Nations has an innovative model, the UN System-wide Action Plan on Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-SWAP), with 15 performance indicators for measuring gender equality. Companies can adapt this model for their D&I efforts around the advancement of women. Progress will vary from place to place, but main-

taining global standards creates a common framework for moving forward.

Finally, push diversity and inclusion efforts beyond just sit-down training courses. That always starts from the leadership at the very top, but from there can

spread to marketing and communications, which will find that incorporating D&I in messaging and campaigns can be a morale boost internally as well as widen the firm's customer base.

Just be sure to drop any "Made in the USA" label approach. Diversity and inclusion is about our common humanity and based on universal human rights that should apply the same to people everywhere around the world. But it must be conveyed with programs delivered not only in the local language but also in the local culture. ▀

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