Chris Kuechenmeister from PepsiCo asked the following question:

Building diverse teams and creating an inclusive work environment work hand-in-hand as we look to advance a meaningful D&E agenda for our industry. Do any organizations have best practices for creating a culture of inclusion to ensure longer-term success?

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Responses are included below.

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Response #1

Suggestions for creating a culture of Inclusivity:

- **Understand the current state** – Do some research to understand if your team members currently feel included, and/or if there are groups or individuals who may feel left out. To hone in on top line trends, consult any recent employee engagement survey results, or conduct one to measure inclusivity. If you already have an idea of which employee groups may be underrepresented, consider conducting confidential, 1:1 interviews with representatives from this pool that will allow them to share their candid feedback about what's working and what's not when it comes to your current culture and work environment. Having an outside, third party complete the interviews can help people feel even more comfortable sharing candid feedback. Use the results of your findings to inform leadership of the opportunities for improvement, and to guide your efforts.

- **Invest in People Managers** – People managers have the most immediate impact on employee experience and engagement, so focusing here is the most powerful tool you have in affecting employee perceptions of inclusion. Invest in tools/training that help managers understand how to create inclusive work teams and make them aware of opportunities for improvement (as identified in the research you've done, as noted above). Communication fundamentals like ensuring managers have 1:1 meetings with all direct reports, regular team meetings where all team members have an opportunity to speak, and making sure HR partners are available to offer individual team members support and opportunities to voice concerns should also be reinforced. Another best practice is to create private round table forums where managers can speak freely about how to make their teams more inclusive, challenges they are facing, and how to support each other. A representative from HR, D&I or the Communications team could facilitate the sessions and share emerging trends with senior leaders.

- **Forums for sharing, storytelling** – One of the most powerful ways to help employees feel seen and included is to create a forum for sharing personal stories. This could happen on a small scale – like a team meeting – or large – such as an all hands meeting.

The aim is to shine a spotlight on individuals and to give them an opportunity to share their personal experiences as people, highlighting their unique perspectives. One client we've worked with has created a whole program around the idea of employee storytelling, including a process for collecting and selecting story ideas, coaching sessions with employee storytellers to help them deliver Ted Talk style presentations, and a virtual event where the stories are shared with all employees.

Response #2

There are several ways to foster a culture of inclusion in the workplace. To start, examine your recruiting practices to ensure that you are directing effort to attracting and retaining diverse talent. When sourcing, be sure to pay attention to job boards and organizations that specifically serve diverse populations, and if hiring for an intern position, try recruiting from Historically Black Colleges & Universities (HBCUs) or Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSIs), among others. To further bolster recruiting efforts, make it explicit that your organization is an equal opportunity employer, and be transparent throughout the hiring process about the selection criteria. Finally, once you've hired diverse talent, ensure fair compensation and promotions for these employees to further elevate their voices and realize the rich benefits of a multifaceted team. – **Scott Baradell, founder, and CEO at Idea Grove**

Building diverse teams is an investment in the present – and the culturally complex future

Carol Watson
Source: WARC Exclusive, October 2020

Examines how to build teams that reflect diversity, and why they are important.

- As the world grows more diverse, brands will need to apply contextual intelligence, which understands the limits of our knowledge, and the ability to adapt that knowledge to an environment different from the one in which it was developed.
- They will also need cultural agility, being able to understand, incorporate, and successfully work within and between multiple different cultural contexts and locations.
- When building teams, diverse perspectives alone are not enough to encourage changes in brand reputation and employee engagement; it is also about how those cultural values and perspectives are valued, respected and leveraged in the marketing communications process.
- Brands including Prudential have focused on building multicultural teams, emphasizing a diversity of markets over the concept of a total population strategy.

Brand activism in the Black Lives Matter era

This article is part of a series of articles from the WARC Guide to brand activism in the Black Lives Matter era. **Read more**.

Why it matters

The world is not only growing more diverse, it is growing more culturally complex, creating pressure and opportunities for brands to build teams that not only reflect these audiences, but as a result can better connect with them.

Takeaways

- The cultures best prepared for sustainably embedding cultural inclusion have instilled a tolerance for debate, supporting constructive conflict on work-related matters, helping colleagues feel valued, and fostering empowered and committed teams.
- Leaders rooted in multiple cultures can be better placed than others to draw analogies among cultural groups, because they have been dealing with cultural complexities since childhood.
- It is not just customers and clients who are looking more critically at brand reputation and vendor choices based on how brands approach social justice, it is also employees and shareholders.
- Even as marketers learn to engage growing population segments, they will also need to embrace a polycultural perspective, which recognizes diversity across many intersections and dimensions of culture, focusing on similarities and interconnectedness rather than differences.

Even as the US will move to a majority-minority population over the next several years – in fact the youngest generation **hit that mark this year** – shifts similar to what's going on here are going on all over the world. And what this means for brands, and agencies, is that there will be a relentless need to build multicultural teams.

These demographic shifts and interconnections of key populations will continue and add to the complexity of marketing. Brands need to be aware that the increase in people of color around the globe will drive a greater need for **contextual intelligence** and cultural agility if they are to experience business growth.

A technology-driven, global world has already demonstrated quick and powerful consumer, employee and investor responses to tone deaf marketing. Global population trends demonstrate that the growth and influence of cultures of color will continue, and so the situation cries out for us to change our approach to the work of marketing and communications.

According to the just-released **ASDA'A BCW Arab Youth Survey**, 65 percent of Arab youth are under the age of 30, with women playing a greater role. Africa is the fastest growing and youngest population – followed by Asia, and **the United Nations notes** that European countries are facing a decline in population. It's not about the demographic shifts alone; these trends call for understanding cultural nuances, tone and the subcultural dynamics in marketing communications.

Building and nurturing diverse teams

The wisdom of building diverse teams isn't just common sense. There is quite a bit of research demonstrating they perform better. These teams have the ability to bring additional facts and information to the table, are more likely to be objective, and produce a greater variety of divergent ideas than homogeneous groups. **An article in the Harvard Business Review** lists just some of their advantages: diverse teams are more likely to adhere to facts, make better stock picks, and are more innovative.

That said, diverse perspectives alone are not enough to encourage change in commercial, brand reputation and employee engagement. A critical factor to enabling nuanced, hyper-resonant and precisely deployed content and campaigns is not just the diversity of teams – it is how those cultural values and perspectives are valued, respected and leveraged in the marketing communications process. Those perspectives and nuances need to be embedded at key inflection points, such as during focus group recruitment, research, design, cultural insight linked back to strategy, the creative brief, storyboard assessment, creative execution, casting and media

strategy.

The organizations most poised to leverage cultural inclusion both commercially and productively are driven by leadership that truly values a variety of opinions and insights. According to Culture Amp, a highly engaged workforce **can increase earnings per share by 147%**. **The cultures best prepared** for sustainably embedding cultural inclusion have instilled a tolerance for debate, support constructive conflict on work-related matters, help colleagues feel valued, and foster empowered and committed teams. Team members are required to possess higher levels of openness to experiences **(Homan 2008)**.

Yes, openness within the team structure is crucial to gaining the dialogue, understanding and perspective of cultural differences and the idea generation that can be gained from them. The inclusive leadership required to create this environment must be agile, and foster a safe space for underrepresented talent to thrive. If you're not sure if this is happening, engagement surveys can get at how and whether cultural differences are valued by primary race/ethnicity groups or whether the value of diversity is stifled. Companies are beginning to add interview questions and build competency skills for leaders based on their cultural agility and ability to navigate cultural differences and create safe spaces for divergent thinking (Source: **Korn Ferry**, **Deloitte**).

One example of a total market approach to consumer segments based on the value of diversity is **Prudential**. It abandoned a general-market-plus multicultural-approach in favor of exploring all diverse markets strategically. Implementation is seen through that lens – from product to sales team to marketing approach and community/partnerships.

Many cultures from many

Multicultural teams are not just an investment in the present, they are preparation for an increasingly complicated cultural future, where connections across cultures (race/ethnicity, heritage, age, religion, lifestyle, sexual orientation, influencers, zeitgeist) uncover common insights and connections. Even as marketers learn to engage growing population segments, they will also need to embrace a related shift towards this polycultural perspective, which recognizes diversity across many intersections and dimensions of culture, focusing on similarities and interconnectedness rather than differences. This certainly blurs boundaries and it shows up in behavior, values and choices.

For example, multiple groups feel similarly about wanting to be treated with human dignity, whether it is in the store or in the park. Brands and corporations can either decide to participate in the stereotyping of these cultural groups or tell a new story that gets at their nuances, and also the places where groups overlap.

For instance, even as Black people look for further empowerment in the country, it's no secret that Black culture has a huge influence on mainstream culture as a whole. **According to Nielsen**, the cultural influence of African-Americans is significant, with at least 73% of whites and 67% of Hispanics saying African Americans influence mainstream culture. This creates the need for different talent and leadership skills to effect change, as a polycultural approach assumes diversity across many intersections and dimensions of culture.

Steps toward building multicultural teams

Building a multicultural team requires not just diverse people, but creating a situation in which there is true

openness to absorbing different perspectives. One way to test this out is to use a multicultural team and a more homogeneous one on the same project to see how they differ. Here's how to go about it:

Step 1: Identify a marketing/creative challenge.

Step 2: Create a safe environment that values and respects different perspectives, regardless of level and role (this is critical). Ensure the conversation is not driven by the default leader but someone with the highest emotional intelligence, high sense of curiosity, active listening skills, cultural agility and cultural competency skills.

Step 3: Intentionally identify culturally diverse influencers (an internal or external influencer who identifies with their culture and inspires people to think, feel or act) who represents as many cultural dimensions and identities as possible.

Step 4: Present the challenge and see how the breadth of solutions compares between the traditional or homogeneous team.

The stakeholders who are placing a value on diversity and inclusion have continued to broaden over the last few years, as does the expectation of transparency and accountability from CEOs and organizations. It is not just customers and clients that are looking more critically at brand reputation and vendor choices based on how brands approach social justice. It is also employees, who are making their voices heard to senior leadership and choosing their employers based on the authenticity, actions and transparency of organizations. The communities served are speaking up about the inequities and making their voices heard like never before, and investors and shareholders are measuring sustainable social impact and incorporating diversity and inclusion indexes into their investment decisions. The current size of the global impact investment market is more than $500B in 2020 and **forecasted to grow by 18%**, according to The Bain Report.

Building multicultural teams is one pathway toward being part of it.

About the author

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Read more articles from the WARC Guide to brand activism in the Black Lives Matter era.

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