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Harini Pallavi (harini.pallavi@friggp2c.com) is the Co-Founder of Frigg Business Solutions in Sheridan, Wyoming, USA, and Hyderabad, Telangana, India.

Integrate diversity, equity, and inclusion within your organization

By Harini Pallavi

Every organization needs diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) to thrive and grow in a highly competitive environment. Remember, when your personnel represent DEI, it means you can tap into a larger talent reservoir than most. When you embrace equity and inclusion, the dividends are richer for varied reasons—chief among them, you attract people from diverse social, cultural, and economic backgrounds. This, in turn, leads to a richer diversity of perspectives, giving you the benefit of perceiving situations and issues in a fresh light.

DEI legal and ethical obligations of organizations

Probably the biggest hindrance to ensuring DEI in organizations is that many people think it is a moral or ethical obligation rather than an issue with compliance implications. So, you can do without adhering to such norms. However, you should ignore certain compliance obligations at your own peril. Primary among these is Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which prohibits discrimination based on various parameters such as age, religion, race, physical disability, and gender, among others.^[1] This prohibition has been interpreted by different courts to include prejudice founded on gender identity or orientation—especially the bias against the LGBTQ+ community. For example, the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) has pointed out that prejudice against transgender individuals is tantamount to sex discrimination.

Put bias and prejudice behind you, especially when hiring

It is critical that inclusiveness is central to your organization's culture. Otherwise, it would make personnel feel *apart* from it rather than *a part* of it. This inclusiveness should be reflected in workplace policies and practices, like promotions and other forms of recognition. A worrisome finding has been that fewer women are promoted after the entry level, creating the “broken rung syndrome.”^[2] There is something heartwarming about companies that celebrate the festivals of different religions, not just the local ones. Similarly, when organizations host functions or events that are integrative—and encourage everyone to mingle and learn more about each other—it goes a long way toward encouraging both diversity and inclusiveness. Unfortunately, when selecting appropriate candidates for a job profile, quite often, a measure of bias creeps in—albeit unconsciously. These could be caused by gender, race, religion, styling, educational qualifications, clothing, or social class. Ironically, more than anything else, styling such as haircuts, footwear, and clothes tends to create certain preconceptions that generate biases—even if it is unintentional.

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