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Three ways compliance can promote diversity, equity, and inclusion

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Advancing your company’s efforts in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is a key to unlock innovation and business growth. It’s also what consumers, investors, and employees demand.^[1]

The work traditionally performed by compliance (e.g., promoting a speak-up culture, educating employees on ethical behaviors) is undoubtedly helpful. To make an even greater impact, Gartner has identified three new opportunities to make further DEI contributions.

Audit for consistent application and enforcement

Start with auditing existing policies, including codes of conduct, harassment and discrimination, and leave/time off. Pay attention to language that might alienate members of the workforce, including those often underrepresented, or create an environment in which some employees do not feel psychologically safe and supported. Clarify specific “zero-tolerance” examples for zero-tolerance policies, and communicate the consequences of those verified complaints. In addition, keep track of actions taken in response to employee complaints to ensure consistency in corrective measures or in disciplinary enforcement, especially if you have a global program.

Prepare managers to receive and escalate concerns

Employees most frequently bring misconduct reports to managers, yet almost 40% of managers still feel underprepared for handling these concerns.^[2] This can leave DEI issues unaddressed, exposing companies to greater risks.

To better prepare managers, offer practical tips, scripts, checklists, and decision tools so they can navigate sensitive reporting situations, such as microaggressions and harassment. Ensure managers understand when and how to escalate serious matters to relevant departments. Remind them to be mindful of their own behaviors and attitudes after receiving employee reports. For sensitive matters, they may need to check in with the reporter regularly to ensure the person experiences no retaliation for speaking up.

Build a more consistent and transparent investigations process

Fairly and effectively investigating DEI is an important way to further your company’s efforts, which also earns employees’ trust. Revisit your organization’s processes and procedures for conducting investigations. Evaluate how concerns are taxonomized, check criteria for case scoping, and clarify criteria for tapping qualified internal and external investigators.

Equally important: Showcase the transparency of your investigations without compromising privacy constraints by providing regular, brief updates for key stakeholders of ongoing cases. Share aggregate data and lessons

learned from past investigations. These will raise awareness of the company's commitments to DEI over time.

1 Anna Powers, "A Study Finds That Diverse Companies Produce 19% More Revenue," *Forbes*, June 27, 2018, <https://bit.ly/3fZlrOr>.

2 Gartner, "2018 RiskClarity Benchmark."

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