

Taking Diversity & Inclusion Global

Balancing Alignment and Flexibility



Introduction: Blending the Global and the Local

As the global economy continues to evolve, multinational organizations face important talent challenges, including **how** to manage diversity & inclusion (D&I) across different regions and countries. Many leaders today understand that D&I constitutes a competitive advantage in the “war for talent”¹ and that lack of both can be an important reputational risk.² Research consistently links effective D&I strategies to increased revenue and productivity, greater innovation, and a more engaged and committed workforce.³ Notably, diversity alone is not typically what drives positive results; inclusion and sense of belonging are key to reaping the benefits of diversity.⁴ In addition to business goals, D&I can support positive organizational values and workplace cultures as well as corporate social responsibility.⁵

Taking D&I global requires aligning complex enterprise-level strategies and priorities across multiple businesses and regions, while also adapting them to unique local needs and contexts. D&I leaders tasked with rolling out global initiatives often face the challenge of figuring out how to balance standard policies and customization. On the one hand, they must ensure their business divisions and regional operations remain aligned with global D&I efforts. On the other, strategy and execution must also be adaptable to local contexts and needs.⁶

What organizations can do to achieve both things—alignment and flexibility—is the focus of this report. Based on interviews with D&I leaders from global companies headquartered in Europe and North America, it presents interviewees’ perspectives on the interplay between global D&I strategy and its local execution. We describe structures, roles, and processes to connect the hub (corporate D&I) and spokes (regional or business-specific D&I teams and other stakeholders), as well as tools to support D&I alignment and flexibility. The report concludes with practical recommendations of what to consider when taking a D&I initiative global.

The Conference Board Definition

Diversity and inclusion refers to organizational strategies, policies, and programs that encourage representation and participation of workers across both visible (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity, age) and invisible (e.g., disability, religion, education, sexual orientation) dimensions of diversity. Inclusion ensures that individuals feel respected and valued for who they are. In an inclusive culture, people do their best work, and organizations can gain the full benefit of a diverse workforce.

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- 1 Gad Levanon, Elizabeth Crofoot, Frank Steemers, and Robin Erickson, *US Labor Shortages: Challenges and Solutions*, The Conference Board, January 2020.
 - 2 “The Business Case for D&I: Ask Catalyst Express,” Catalyst, October 4, 2019.
 - 3 *Bottom Line* research series, Catalyst.
 - 4 Boris Groysberg and Katherine Connolly, “Great Leaders Who Make the Mix Work,” *Harvard Business Review*, September 2013; Mary B. Young and Marion Devine, *Defining and Measuring Inclusion: Using Metrics to Drive Progress*, The Conference Board, December 2018.
 - 5 “The Business Case for D&I,” Catalyst.
 - 6 Charles Mitchell and Stephanie Creary, *Diversity and Inclusion: Global Challenges and Opportunities*, Council Perspectives, The Conference Board, January 2010.

About the Study

The report is based on a qualitative analysis of 12 in-depth interviews with D&I leaders from 11 global organizations headquartered in Europe and North America. Participants were asked about their perspectives on the interplay between global D&I strategy and its local execution, the engagement of local stakeholders through employee groups such as councils and networks, and the tools they use to support their efforts. The analysis integrated themes from two separate research briefings conducted with D&I executives who are members of The Conference Board's Executive D&I Councils, accounting for 30 organizations in Europe and North America. These companies operated in a range of industries, including transport and logistics, pharmaceuticals, chemicals, packaging, aerospace, construction, and food services. They were headquartered in the US or Europe (France, Denmark, Switzerland, and Germany) and operated in multiple countries. With the exception of one organization (which employed 18,000), they were large employers, with between 56,000 and 460,000 employees.

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