From **Resistance** to **Results**

The Executive Playbook for Leading Through DEI Backlash

seramount

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DEI Experts:

Subha Barry
President, Seramount

Katie Oertli Mooney
Managing Director, Advisory

Bridgette Scales
Managing Director, Advisory

Laura Sherbin, PhD
Managing Director, Consulting

Project Director:

Michael Nicholson, PhD
Strategic Research, Seramount

Designer:

Kelsey Stoneham
Senior Manager

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Introduction

15 Questions for DEI Experts

The recent rise in anti-DEI rhetoric has many concerned about the future of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). False and inaccurate narratives about DEI efforts are on the rise, ongoing legal challenges and skepticism about existing frameworks are making headlines, and companies are rethinking their DEI and talent strategies. Meanwhile, in the wake of global conflicts and rising political polarization, the scope of the work is constantly being expanded.

15 Questions for DEI Experts

The conversation around DEI may be louder than ever,
but amidst the noise, there's opportunity.

We sat down with four DEI leaders at Seramount for a conversation
about how to effectively champion DEI's value and turn the tide today:

▶ **Subha Barry**
   President, Seramount

▶ **Katie Oertli Mooney**
   Managing Director, Advisory

▶ **Bridgette Scales**
   Managing Director, Advisory

▶ **Laura Sherbin**
   PhD, Managing Director, Consulting

The Result: A strategic executive playbook specifically designed to equip Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs) and Chief Human Resource Officers (CHROs) to lead through backlash, transforming resistance into results.

Executive Summary

Leading Through Backlash: Navigating the DEI Landscape Now

From leveraging data, outcomes, and allies to own the story to reframing the conversation to increase leadership investment and buy-in, this research explores how today's DEI and talent leaders can propel organizations forward by countering the narrative, creating space for good-faith questions, and navigating evolving DEI definitions.

Breaking Through: Key Challenges and Opportunities

- ▶ **Understanding Resistance:** Reducing concerns about DEI now requires recognizing root causes and unlocking opportunities for productive conversations, targeted programs, and broader engagement.
- ▶ **Reframing the Narrative:** Moving beyond misconceptions and emphasizing DEI's true purpose is business critical in the current climate: fostering a culture of inclusion, understanding, support, and equitable outcomes for all ultimately leads to enhanced engagement, increased innovation, and overall organizational success.

Building Stronger, More Resilient DEI Programs: A Strategic Roadmap

- ▶ **Leadership:** Inclusive leaders build cultural competencies, promote a sense of belonging, and empower allies.
- ▶ **Data-Driven Approach:** Leverage data to combat misinformation and demonstrate the positive impact of DEI efforts.
- ▶ **Addressing Concerns:** Acknowledge anxieties and focus on informed solutions with empathy.
- ▶ **Moving Beyond Labels:** Foster a culture of inclusion, where all employees can engage and thrive.
- ▶ **Empowering Advocacy:** Empower everyone, including leaders, allies, and employees, to advocate for workplace inclusion.

Beyond Backlash: Toward Proactive Progress

- ▶ **Shifting the Narrative:** Frame DEI in terms of tangible business benefits such as improved market access, increased market share, or enhanced product or service quality.
- ▶ **Building a Stronger Foundation:** Integrate DEI across the organization, address technological bias, and cultivate inclusive work environments.
- ▶ **Staying the Course:** Commit to sustained efforts, transparency, and communication to navigate tomorrow's challenges and achieve lasting progress.
- ▶ **Turning the Tide:** Recognize the urgency of supporting DEI, addressing societal inequities, and creating an inclusive future for all.
- ▶ **Going on the Offensive:** Proactively shape the narrative, promote the value of DEI initiatives, and develop action-oriented solutions.

Moving On: The Future of DEI

By reframing the narrative, taking concrete actions, and adopting a comprehensive, proactive approach to DEI, organizations can build forward momentum, creating truly inclusive workplaces benefiting both business and society.

Understanding the Landscape

1 Unpacking Fears: Roots of the Present Crisis

Question: *What fuels the current backlash against DEI? What anxieties drive resistance now, and how do they compare to historical challenges?*

Bridgette Scales: The recent surge in negativity and fear-mongering surrounding DEI initiatives stems from a complex interplay of factors, primarily rooted in anxieties about power dynamics and potential change.

George Floyd's murder served as a tipping point, bringing issues of racial inequity to the forefront of public consciousness in an undeniable way. This widespread awareness ultimately triggered a fear of real change among some who felt their power or privilege might be threatened. Today this fear often interrupts constructive engagement, manifesting as an anti-DEI narrative often weaponized to manipulate public perception.

This narrative frequently employs tactics such as these:

- ▶ **Denial:** Dismissing the existence of systemic inequities
- ▶ **Shaming:** Publicly criticizing individuals or organizations supporting DEI efforts
- ▶ **Bullying:** Pressuring organizations to abandon DEI initiatives

These approaches are increasingly finding support from influential figures in business, government, and even the media, further amplifying the anti-DEI message.

At the core of the resistance lies a fear of losing power:

- ▶ **Zero-sum mentality:** Viewing DEI as a competition where gains for one group come at the expense of another, rather than a collaborative effort to create a more equitable society
- ▶ **Resistance to sharing power:** A reluctance to relinquish control or cede privileges associated with dominant positions

This fear extends beyond traditional notions of power, encompassing anxieties about:

- ▶ **Loss of status:** The fear of being seen as part of a less powerful group after historically occupying a position of privilege
- ▶ **Changing demographics:** Anxiety about societal shifts that challenge traditional power structures based on race, gender, sexual orientation, or ability

Katie Oertli Mooney: While it's important to acknowledge the unique challenges leaders of DEI efforts are facing today, historical context reveals related struggles. Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) emerged from the racial tensions of the 1964 Rochester riots, as "Safe Space" discussions took root at Xerox. These conversations directly led to the formation of the first ERG, Xerox's National Black Employee Caucus.

These early meetings often took place out of sight with employees hesitant to openly participate due to the prevailing racial tensions. The conversations about workplace equity that these groups initiated have been and will continue to be crucial forces for change.

In today's workplace, previously "off-limits" topics are becoming increasingly commonplace. Conversations surrounding race, politics, social justice, and other sensitive issues will inevitably emerge at work. Regardless of whether we use specific terminology such as "DEI," employees will seek avenues for these discussions.

With these new concerns comes a new emphasis on transparency, accountability, and authenticity. With employees increasingly eager to engage in open discussions about sensitive issues at work, leadership silence can send conflicting messages. Perceptions of executive apathy or disconnect often leave employees feeling unheard and questioning their commitment.

2 Reflecting on Resistance

Question: *According to HBR, understanding why people resist DEI efforts is key to effective DEI today. Why is understanding resistance key to impactful DEI in the current climate?*

Subha Barry: You're right; *HBR* highlights a critical point: resistance doesn't take just one form, and ignoring it can undermine DEI efforts. Anxieties about DEI are neither universal nor insurmountable.

Understanding their root causes unlocks several doors:

▶ **Productive conversations:** By acknowledging concerns and their origins, we can engage in open, respectful dialogue. This fosters empathy, clarifies misconceptions, and lays the groundwork for better solutions.

▶ **Tailored programs:** When we understand the "why" behind resistance, we can craft DEI initiatives that directly address employees' concerns. This might involve increased transparency and inclusivity, or more demonstrably fair practices, leading to wider support and buy-in.

▶ **Beyond preaching to the choir:** True impact requires engaging with individuals who may have reservations. Understanding their perspectives allows us to craft messaging and strategies that resonate with a broader audience, driving more meaningful change.

> **Remember:** Resistance stems from different motivations, from genuine anxieties about fairness to harmful biases. Oversimplification is dangerous. A nuanced approach is crucial. We don't need to surrender entirely to resisters' demands, but listening and addressing their concerns are key steps to building an inclusive workplace benefiting everyone.

Laura Sherbin: *HBR* hits the nail on the head. While awareness about DEI is at an all-time high, so is skepticism from some quarters. However, embracing a healthy skepticism can be a powerful catalyst for building truly impactful DEI programs.

Consider these tactics:

▶ **Challenging assumptions:** When advocates truly engage with skeptical perspectives, they are forced to scrutinize their own assumptions and refine their own arguments. This leads to more nuanced and defensible DEI initiatives addressing real concerns, not only perceived ones.

▶ **Building trust:** Openly acknowledging and addressing concerns fosters increased trust and promotes constructive dialogue. This can bridge divides and create a more welcoming environment where everyone feels heard and valued.

▶ **Identifying blind spots:** Healthy skepticism can highlight potential blind spots in DEI efforts. By listening carefully, advocates can uncover unintended biases or areas in need of improvement, ultimately developing better, more equitable solutions.

True DEI requires more than just blind acceptance. It thrives on critical thinking, open dialogue, and a willingness to adapt and improve. By embracing healthy skepticism, advocates can build stronger, more impactful DEI programs for all.

Reframing the Narrative

3 Addressing Concerns: Countering the Meritocracy Myth

Question: How can we effectively address misconceptions about the perceived conflict between meritocracy and inclusion? How would you respond to individuals who express concerns about DEI initiatives?

Laura Sherbin: It's important to acknowledge that some messaging around DEI may have been misinterpreted. It's crucial to emphasize that DEI is not about replacing merit with diversity. Instead, it's about expanding our definition of merit to encompass the valuable perspectives and experiences that historically excluded talent brings to the table.

Here's why:

- ▶ **Diversity fosters innovation and growth:** Countless success stories demonstrate the positive impact of diverse teams on innovation, decision-making, and market reach. By including diverse perspectives, we can access a wider range of ideas and solutions, ultimately producing improved outcomes.

- ▶ **Merit is multifaceted:** Traditionally, merit has been defined by narrow criteria, often favoring individuals from privileged backgrounds. Inclusion recognizes that talent and potential can exist outside these traditional boundaries and definitions.

- ▶ **Diversity encompasses more than just demographics:** Diversity is not just about demographics but also about the richness of thought and market knowledge individuals from a broad range of backgrounds can bring to the table.

- ▶ **DEI initiatives are not "one size fits all":** Different roles require different skill sets and experiences. A tailored approach to DEI is business critical. We need to carefully consider the specific needs of each position and identify the diverse pool of candidates who would bring the most value to the team.

Building a Truly Inclusive Meritocracy:

It's time to move beyond misinterpretations and focus on leveraging the full potential of your underrepresented talent. Remember, even those interested in creating a truly meritocratic system must first dismantle the systemic barriers that have historically disadvantaged certain groups.

By actively promoting inclusion and expanding our definitions of merit, we can create a level playing field where every employee has the opportunity to thrive.

4 Rebranding DEI

Question: *How can companies better communicate the true purpose and value of DEI initiatives? Does the current approach to DEI need a revamp?*

Katie Oertli Mooney: Is DEI "dead"? No, but it's definitely evolving. While the buzz around DEI that followed George Floyd's murder may have subsided, the work itself is far from over.

It's time to rethink our communication approach. Obsessing over the label ("DEI" or any other) at times distracts from our true goal: increasing understanding, support, and equitable outcomes in the workplace.

If "DEI" becomes a barrier to genuine conversation and action, explore alternative language that resonates better with your organizational culture. But whatever your approach to rebranding, don't lose sight of your core values: always address the needs of diverse communities and ensure fair treatment for all.

> **Remember:** True inclusion goes beyond lip service. It demands open dialogue, concrete action, and measurable progress. Today the focus for DEI leaders has expanded far beyond mere compliance, and rolling back efforts is not an option. Backsliding will only leave you with a bigger gap to bridge when you eventually regain momentum.

So, how do we counter the "DEI is dead" narrative? We rethink our communication strategy, especially in an era where data speaks volumes: a recent Pew poll reveals a majority of employees expressly value DEI initiatives. The challenge lies in effectively communicating and broadcasting this truth. Let's join forces to shout the benefits of inclusive workplaces from the rooftops: enhanced talent acquisition, increased innovation, and overall business success.

We, as DEI professionals, can do this by:

▶ **Highlighting the benefits:** Showcasing evidence and case studies demonstrating the specific ways inclusive workplaces empower all employees to thrive

▶ **Countering misinformation:** Using facts and figures to combat external forces pushing back against DEI progress

▶ **Sharing compelling stories:** Crafting powerful narratives connecting DEI efforts to real-world outcomes

By intently focusing on clear communication, data-driven storytelling, and a strategic approach to broadcasting the value of inclusion, we can ensure DEI continues to have a genuine impact.

By speaking to core values, moving beyond buzzwords, and demonstrating real results, we can ensure DEI remains a vital force, building a better future for everyone.

`Bridgette Scales:`

Shifting the Focus: From Labels to Impact

The term "DEI" has become a rallying cry for many, but it can also evoke specific visual and ideological connotations. This can at times limit its reach and effectiveness. In these contexts, we can pivot for progress. Shifting the focus can involve considering a strategic reframe from labels to impact—not to abandon core principles, but to broaden their appeal.

Historically, social justice movements have evolved their language and tactics. The fight for equity in the 60s and 70s focused on civil rights, later expanding to encompass diversity, equity, and inclusion. Today's climate presents another opportunity to rethink and reframe our work.

Instead of solely emphasizing the "D" in DEI, when necessary we can strategically highlight the work's universal benefits. When your employees feel engaged and appreciated, everyone gains from a richer, more innovative environment. This shift toward inclusive talent strategies can attract a wider audience, including those who initially might have been apprehensive.

Recent attempts to stoke fear and spread misinformation about DEI efforts often rely on narrow interpretations and misperceptions. By broadening the conversation, we can demonstrate the positive value DEI brings to the workplace. Highlighting statistics and data on inequities remains crucial, but framing them within a broader narrative of shared success often resonates further.

This approach doesn't negate the importance of addressing specific issues faced by specific, historically excluded talent communities. However, by building a broader coalition of support, we can create a stronger groundswell against harmful narratives and amplify the positive impact of our work.

Together we can:

- ▶ **Expand the narrative:** encourage participation and engagement, highlighting the importance of inclusion for all.
- ▶ **Build bridges:** Partner with diverse stakeholders and address their concerns.
- ▶ **Reframe the conversation:** Move beyond labels and empower a wider community to embrace the true value of DEI.

`Subha Barry:`   Forget dry definitions, trendy jargon, and strawman arguments—let's move from abstractions to empathy, combing the real work of DEI with the power of storytelling. We know that personal connections create change. But we're stuck in a world of acronyms, failing to truly understand the human impact.

Instead of caricaturing concepts, let's open the conversation: tell stories, share experiences, and make DEI tangible. Rather than speaking in general abstractions, imagine if I told my story about being an immigrant, sharing my struggle with a thick accent, how I was constantly mocked and compelled to mute my voice. Would my personal narrative, transcending generalities, evoke a deeper, more authentic response?

Someone might think, "I never realized how my laughter could isolate someone." Our work is not about judging past actions but catalyzing future change.

Inclusion stories hold immense power. They sensitize, but they do not condemn.
People can't rewrite history, but they can evolve. That's why inclusion stories are so vital now. They reveal the real-life consequences of our words and actions, fostering increased empathy and connection.

My personal experience, with its raw emotions, paints a far richer picture than any sterile, generic call to action might. It allows others to truly perceive the situation through my eyes.

DEI leaders, let's make DEI real, personal, and lived. Let's move beyond acronyms, walking the walk and talking the talk, as we do our work and tell our stories.

5 Powering Through Pushback: The New Inclusion Imperative

Question: *How can DEI and talent leaders leverage inclusion to build stronger, more resilient DEI initiatives today?*

Katie Oertli Mooney: Despite today's shifting sands, ultimately the goal for DEI remains the same: promoting and practicing inclusion, which is crucial in divisive times. Instead of shying away from sensitive topics, create safe spaces for open and inclusive dialogue.

By fostering psychological safety and encouraging all voices to be heard, we can cultivate genuine connection and understanding. This approach empowers us to support individuals and groups facing challenges, regardless of the specific issue at hand.

Bridgette Scales: Inclusion isn't just about labels or categories; it's about setting up every individual for success. When employees feel truly seen and heard, regardless of their background or identity, they contribute their best ideas, creating a stronger organization.

Building cultural competencies today means leaving behind a one-dimensional understanding of "DEIB." It's important not to only focus on the crucial goals of diversity metrics ("D"), but also to foster an inclusive culture where everyone feels valued ("I"), has fair access to opportunity ("E"), and consistently experiences a sense of community and connection ("B").

By fostering open dialogue and embracing diverse perspectives, we can tap into a broader range of historically excluded talent and capture crucial global opportunities. After all, we're not a monolith, and everyone wants an equal chance as success. Fulfilling our true potential requires moving beyond negativity and compliance to champion the positive outcomes of equal opportunity.

6 Building the Big Tent: Expanding the DEI Conversation

Question: Does making the case for DEI now involve broadening the scope and impact of our work?

Subha Barry: DEI and talent leaders, imagine your efforts as a camera lens. What are you currently capturing? Are some talents, experiences, and perspectives out of focus, even excluded from the frame? When we widen our lens, broadening the scope of DEI, we expand our impact.

But amidst uncertainty, how do we make DEI feel relevant to everyone?

Let's start with three actionable steps:

1. **Empathy through experience:** Encourage "switching seats." Stepping into another's shoes fosters increased understanding and reveals hidden biases. Ask yourself: What challenges do others face? How can we create a truly supportive culture?

2. **Generosity of spirit:** Inclusion demands active effort and continuous learning. Actively listen, and challenge your own assumptions. Ask yourself: How can we be more receptive to different viewpoints and experiences?

3. **Continuous reflection:** Don't settle for "good enough." Regularly ask: Are we inclusive enough? Where are the gaps? Be honest, authentic, and data-driven. Celebrate progress, acknowledge shortcomings, and continuously evolve.

Bonus Tip: Unleash Courageous Fairness

Equip leaders with the tools and data to make bold but just decisions; inclusive leadership involves multiple perspectives and fosters a sense of belonging.

The future of DEI is in flux. Let's ask the tough questions and do the hard work. But let's also embrace the ever-expanding aperture, cultivating consideration to make DEI more inclusive. Only by building communities where everyone can contribute can we truly move the needle.

Laura Sherbin: While ongoing research and practice continually unveil numerous, powerful drivers of inclusion that remain under-discussed, we must connect every piece of the puzzle. True inclusivity requires an integrated vision.

My past research on social mobility, for example, exposed significant and under-discussed barriers, but there are many more unexplored and under-explored aspects in the field. Comprehensively addressing these is crucial for DEI now, work that is precisely the goal of our ever-evolving DEI efforts here at Seramount.

The challenge lies in navigating this expansion without losing sight of the core mission. Engaging with these broader issues actually strengths DEI discussions, making them truly inclusive. By contrast, diluting the conversation too much risks overlooking the fundamental systemic challenges demanding our collective attention.

Bridgette Scales: DEI started with tackling exclusion based on gender and race/ethnicity. Over time, the scope of the work has been broadened. From people with differing abilities to the LGBTQ+ community, the equity evolution is ever expanding. This broader coalition and pursuit of inclusion, however, has triggered new waves of anti-DEI rhetoric and negativity.

Navigating the Noise: "Reverse Discrimination"

The long-standing "reverse discrimination" myth, often weaponized against DEI, paints all efforts with a broad brush as biased and unfair. This pushback stems from fear: fear of losing power, fear of being marginalized. For those who've always been at the top, the idea of becoming a minority can be unsettling.

Amplifying the Truth: Affirmative DEI

Anti-DEI messaging is often strategically crafted to spread misinformation and misunderstanding. We need to be actively aware of this in order to disrupt it.
Let's remind folks to think critically, dissect information, and not blindly accept narratives.

We can remind others that the loudest voice isn't always the truthful one. But we must also offer a more compelling, affirmative, and comprehensive message than they hear on social media and in certain mainstream media outlets.

Building Momentum and Impact

7 Taking Action

Question: *Navigating a polarized environment where employees feel unheard and excluded is a crucial challenge for leaders today. What immediate steps can DEI and talent leaders take to foster belonging and counter "DEI under attack" narratives?*

Bridgette Scales: The best defense against the "DEI under attack" narrative is to demonstrate your commitment to inclusion through concrete actions. Toward that end, let's review some practical steps for leaders, considering both long-standing and emerging DEI initiatives.

Building Upon Established Efforts:

▶ **Amplify your achievements:** Remind employees of your long-term commitment to DEI, sharing specific examples of past and ongoing initiatives. Showcase how these efforts align with your company's values, market reach, and business outcomes.

▶ **Authentic communication:** Don't shy away from highlighting the impact of your ongoing DEI achievements. Share success stories and data demonstrating positive impact.

▶ **Data-driven approach:** Showcase concrete workforce analytics insights demonstrating the positive impact of your DEI efforts on employee engagement and retention relevant metrics.

Addressing New Initiatives:

▶ **Vulnerability and transparency:** If DEI is a new focus, acknowledge past shortcomings and be open about your journey toward improvement. Authentic communication and transparency build trust and encourage genuine engagement.

▶ **Commitment to learning:** Publicly commit to learning and growing in your understanding of DEI. Encourage employee feedback and participation in developing new initiatives.

▶ **Action with humility:** Don't claim to have all the answers. Instead, emphasize your commitment to action and continuous improvement. Focus on progress, not perfection.

Additional Tips:

▶ **Lead by example:** Demonstrate inclusive behaviors and hold yourself and others accountable for fostering a respectful and welcoming environment.

▶ **Champion inclusive leadership teams:** Ensure a wide range of voices and experiences is represented in leadership positions, sending a powerful message of commitment.

▶ **Empower Employee Resource Groups (ERGs):** Support and empower ERGs to provide a platform for employee voices and to facilitate cultural exchange.

By taking these steps, leaders can move beyond rhetoric and build a more inclusive workplace. Remember, actions speak louder than words, and consistent, genuine efforts are key to countering negative narratives.

Building a world-class culture of inclusivity takes time and effort. By taking consistent, authentic actions and valuing open communication, leaders can overcome the pushback narrative and foster a genuine sense of belonging in the workplace.

Subha Barry: Every leader needs to actively consider diverse perspectives, fostering a truly inclusive environment. Imagine you're leading an auto company such as GM. Understanding your workforce is crucial for success. You need engineers, designers, factory workers, marketers, and more.

But how do you attract and retain your fair share of top talent from all backgrounds?

1. **Start by analyzing demographics.** If 14% of the population is Black, ask yourself: Do 14% of my engineers identify as Black? If not, a new approach is necessary.
2. **Second, actively recruit historically excluded talent.** Don't wait for others to do it. Partner with universities with strong engineering programs that have historically attracted and supported Black students.
3. **Third, invest in the future.** Endow scholarships and internships for underrepresented communities. Encourage and nurture top talent from the ground up.
4. **Once diverse talent joins, focus on inclusion.** This means going beyond mere representation. Create a welcoming environment where employees are supported, valued, and coached to excel.
5. **Provide constructive feedback and mentorship opportunities.** Do this for everyone, not just for specific groups.

The ability to see the bigger picture, recognize imbalances, and actively create solutions is what makes you an inclusive leader. This applies to all departments, not just engineering.

As an inclusive leader, tune your equity radar to constantly scan your organization. Never stop asking the following questions: Am I attracting my fair share of underrepresented talent? Do any hidden biases tilt the playing field unfairly?

Laura Sherbin: The only real solution is to actively listen to all employees. We haven't been great at this, and it shows. Today's employee listening sessions often leave some feeling unheard and voiceless. This breeds frustration and further resentment, fueling the "backlash."

> **Let's be clear:** we need a specific strategy for gathering insights from historically excluded talent. But we also need to move beyond justifications for excluding certain groups. A major concern today is neglecting to make everyone feel included and empowered within our culture.

Differences go beyond easily categorized demographics, and multiracial identity is on the rise in an increasingly complex world. We need a deeper understanding of each employee's unique perspective and experience.

True inclusion requires a multi-pronged approach that goes beyond simply collecting feedback.

Here's the action plan:

1. **Expand listening channels:** Make open forums, surveys, and suggestion boxes accessible to all, encouraging anonymous feedback to remove fear of reprisal
2. **Foster ongoing dialogue:** Facilitate regular interactions between groups to build empathy and intersectional understanding
3. **Move from listening to action:** Measure engagement and satisfaction, using data to continuously refine your approach

But listening is just the first step.

We need to:

1. **Understand:** Analyze feedback at the department, team, and individual levels to capture nuanced perspectives. Don't simply rely on generic statistics.
2. **Process:** Prioritize "quick wins" for immediate impact, building trust and showing responsiveness.
3. **Incubate change:** Address larger issues through "incubators of change" such as sponsorship programs to begin driving long-term cultural shifts.
4. **Achieve long-term transformation:** Pursue more challenging culture shifts over time, keeping focused on the distant finish line. But don't let the pursuit of perfection overshadow progress.

> **Remember:** It's not just about making changes; it's about demonstrating progress. Quick wins with readily available solutions show employees their voices are being heard while longer-term transformations are underway.

8 Data-Driven DEI: Combating Misinformation with Metrics

Question: *In an age of misinformation, is a data-driven approach the key to silencing DEI's critics? Can numbers alone change hearts and minds?*

Subha Barry: Take a rigorous, objective approach to inclusive workplace transformation. Our work at Seramount, for example, draws on deep research and tangible data, empowering organizations with the insights necessary to achieve lasting change.

Data-Driven DEI: Strategic Considerations

1. **Data is crucial, but it's only the first step.** Showing why DEI matter requires leveraging data to drive demonstrably positive results. To achieve this, leaders must move beyond lip service and dig deep into workforce demographics.

2. **Ignore assumptions and opinions—let the numbers speak.** Analyze representation by role, department, and level of seniority. Facts can spark honest conversations, replacing misinformation with clarity.

3. **Data empowers you to engage in persuasive, productive dialogue.** Hard data helps address concerns, debunk misinformation, and build bridges where assumptions once blocked progress.

4. **But data alone isn't enough.** We must also actively ask about opposing viewpoints, even those that seem disagreeable: What drives such perspectives? Are there valid concerns hidden within the noise? Examining the data behind such claims drives informed, fact-based discourse and decisions. Listening doesn't equate to agreement. We can maintain our convictions while acknowledging and considering opposing viewpoints.

Remember: DEI is a journey, not a destination. Continuously gather data, listen actively, and engage in open communication. By firmly committing to facts and understanding, we can move beyond backlash to build a truly inclusive future.

Laura Sherbin: The key to avoiding unproductive DEI conversations is rigorous measurement and data-driven action. Listening is key, as we need reliable data to identify genuine issues and prioritize inclusion efforts effectively.

Many organizations fall into the trap of responding to the loudest voices, solely creating special interest groups with competing demands. This approach lacks strategic direction and risks neglecting truly pressing needs and priorities.

Our advice: Focus on data-driven equity, not just equality. Analyze your workforce demographics, identify areas where specific groups are underrepresented, and make proportional investments to address those gaps. While listening to everyone is important, prioritize solutions based on objective data, not noise.

Making the right differential investments means ensuring that you're not overly swayed by the "squeaky wheel." Instead, you're actively tackling the most crucial DEI issues and improvement areas to maximize your impact. Equity, informed by data, empowers informed decision-making and leads to better organizational outcomes.

Katie Oertli Mooney: Commitment to research-driven culture change empowers you to effectively address misconceptions about DEI initiatives. This work is crucial as we encounter growing amounts of inaccurate information that distort DEI's true purpose and fuel negativity.

Take the false accusations surrounding the Alaska Airlines midair panel blowout incident, one of the many instances of attributing unrelated technical, organizational, or leadership failures to DEI itself. Headlines such as these highlight the need for stronger, evidence-based approaches to DEI.

While criticism of DEI has mounted, an opportunity exists to reclaim the moral high ground by presenting a nuanced, data-driven case for inclusion. Instead of falling into a good-bad binary, we can showcase the real impact of DEI on specific careers paths and business outcomes, utilizing actual numbers to foster informed understanding and shape more positive conversations about DEI's true value.

9 Empowering Allies and Mobilizing "The Movable Middle"

Question: *In your experience, what are the most effective strategies to drive impactful change during turbulent times? How can DEI leaders balance long-term, systemic transformation and short-term, tangible wins to sustain momentum?*

Bridgette Scales: Allyship is as a critical component of successful workplace culture change today. When leaders wielding greater influence actively advocate for inclusion and offer support, they help accelerate progress toward real change. Witnessing such solidarity is an equally powerful phenomenon.

Consider billionaire Mark Cuban's recent response to Elon Musk's anti-DEI tweet: "The loss of DEI-Phobic companies is my gain . . . . Good businesses look where others don't, to find the employees that will put your business in the best possible position to succeed."

In such instances, strong allies, even within dominant groups, can tip the scales. Empowering others can create a counterforce against pushback and negativity surrounding DEI efforts. We need more of this active support today—let's work to cultivate it.

Subha Barry: Vocal, proactive allies are a vital force for fostering inclusivity in the workplace.

When witnessing an unfair situation, an empowered ally can confidently challenge harmful assumptions or practices.

For example, comprehensively taking stock of the achievements and breadth of underrepresented talent groups often highlights the fallacy of limited talent pools as a convenient excuse for underrepresentation. The question then becomes, "Why aren't we doing enough?"

However, simply advocating for a sense of fairness is not enough. The first step in creating true equity champions is equipping them with the knowledge and conviction to act.

DEI Leaders Need to Strategically Provide Allies:

- ▶ **Information and data:** Understanding the scope of the issue, its impact, and relevant statistics empowers allies to articulate concerns effectively.
- ▶ **Courage to speak up:** Even when armed with the right insights, voicing concerns can be daunting. Providing support, training, and safe spaces where allies can practice and gain confidence is crucial.

Ultimately, the success of any culture of inclusion hinges in large part on cultivating powerful, committed change agents with the courage to act.

Laura Sherbin: Our past research has shown that the "movable middle," a familiar concept in politics, is equally relevant to corporate DEI efforts. While it's important to support committed DEI champions and acknowledge the challenge of reaching the small number of employees who refuse to budge on DEI issues, the key to success lies in engaging the movable middle, the largest segment of the workforce.

Yet we often find ourselves focusing on the extremes. Instead of solely catering to advocates or battling resistance, we can shift gears for impact, dissecting the movable middle: What motivates them? What barriers can we address? How can we tailor our approach to resonate with their values and concerns?

Initial success might require reframing language: for example, replacing terminology such as "allyship" with language such as "supporting colleagues" or "championing fairness." It's not about watering down the message but about finding common ground to build consensus on.

The end goal is the same: promoting inclusive behaviors and competencies. At times we just might have to make our offerings more palatable to start. *Think of it as finding the right description for the medicine, not changing the prescription itself.*

Ultimately, the goal is to encourage connection, advocacy, and championing others across lines of difference, regardless of the labels we use. For best results, focus on action, not semantics.

10 Reimagining DEI: Catalyzing Business Breakthroughs

Question: *How can we shift from merely "bolting on DEI" to a transformative approach that redefines all stakeholder roles, fuels impact, and elevates the conversation, making DEI the cornerstone of business and technological success?*

Subha Barry: It's time to reimagine the DEI conversation. Instead of seeing our work as a separate patchwork or "bolted-on" fix, think of it as salt dissolving in water—as fundamentally altering the organization's DNA. Forget just "adding ingredients."

We're talking about unlocking an organizational transformation where inclusion ignites innovation, propelling us forward. The only way to do this is to fully integrate DEI throughout the organization, addressing everything from tech bias to inclusive customer engagement.

DEI isn't a program; it's a way of being. Let's ditch "bolted-on" DEI, embrace the chemical reaction, and change the conversation.

> **The Long-Term Vision:** Seamlessly integrate DEI into everything we do and how we succeed, from leadership and culture to investment and opportunity and business goals.

Bridgette Scales:

Shifting the DEI Narrative: Business Outcomes Take Center Stage

Effectively reframing DEI today often involves emphasizing its tangible business benefits. By placing business outcomes center stage, we can shift the DEI narrative.

In lieu of abstract concepts and intangible theories, we can talk about opening new markets, capturing wider demographics, and boosting market share. This strategy counters anti-DEI critiques by showcasing the work's concrete organizational outcomes.

For maximum effect, business leaders must own the narrative:

- ▶ **Demand inclusive outcomes:** Discover where DEI impacts your work, how it connects to business success, and where it's demonstrably impactful across your teams.
- ▶ **Tell the story:** Share how your work focuses on historically underrepresented talent or serving broader demographics. Inclusive leadership stories help demonstrate DEI's value.
- ▶ **Quantify the impact:** Demonstrate how DEI has expanded markets, increased market share, or improved service quality. This helps employees connect the dots between DEI and business goals.

True Success Requires Taking a Holistic Approach to DEI

Real DEI results require an integrated approach, ensuring diverse voices contribute at every stage of development. Actively invite diverse voices into decision-making processes. This preemptive engagement ensures that a wide range of perspectives inform all solutions, leading to better outcomes for all.

Actionable Tips:

- ▶ **Don't wait for feedback:** Avoid seeking feedback only after launching products or services. Instead, consult proactively with stakeholders from various backgrounds to identify potential blind spots.
- ▶ **Testing matters:** Consider testing prototypes with diverse communities to gain valuable insights before going to market. Comprehensive market research demonstrates a commitment to building inclusive solutions that resonate with a wider audience.

By following these guiding principles, we can effectively change the conversation around DEI.

> **Remember:** DEI isn't a separate program; it's the foundation for success in every business. By demonstrating how inclusion helps leaders achieve their goals, we can embed DEI as the cornerstone of high-performing organizations.

Laura Sherbin: While concerns around DEI initiatives exist, the business case for them remains strong.

For many consumer-facing companies, doubling down on DEI efforts is more strategic than cutting back. Today's risks of neglecting DEI outweigh any potential downsides.

Even if the term "DEI" is used less frequently in the future, its core principles will remain embedded in broader organizational goals. My initial foray into DEI stemmed from the realization of massive talent inefficiency within companies. Untapped potential across diverse groups represents a significant missed business opportunity.

Businesses that fail to leverage the full spectrum of talent available suffer from substantial, even staggering, inefficiencies. Wouldn't it be beneficial to have a wider range of perspectives on the team?

Numerous leading companies have achieved success by building diverse teams. For instance, Siemens, a German engineering firm, needed to understand how their train brakes functioned in Argentina's hotter climate. Argentine engineers on the team provided crucial insights that German engineers alone couldn't have offered—a perfect example of the value of diversity in building well-rounded, cross-functional teams.

DEI is not about quotas or checking boxes. Instead, it's about intentionally seeking the skills and experiences that best suit the needs of a particular role and the company's goals. This requires a shift away from simply matching resumes to past job descriptions toward identifying the specific characteristics and perspectives needed for future success.

Remember: A single person cannot embody true diversity; it's a collective effort. If a crucial perspective is missing from your team, consider incorporating it when making the next hire. By carefully considering the exact requirements of each role and the unique benefits diverse perspectives can bring, you can build a world-class team that is not only more representative but also better equipped to tackle future challenges.

This approach goes beyond simply fulfilling a diversity mandate; it's about strategically building the workforce you need in order to thrive in the ever-evolving business landscape. By intentionally seeking the right talent and fostering an inclusive workplace environment, you can unlock the full potential of your team, furthering your competitive advantage.

The business case for DEI is clear: maximizing talent utilization leads to increased innovation, great efficiency, and ultimately, success.

Katie Oertli Mooney: Amidst external chaos, DEI champions can control one thing: reemphasizing the proven business case for DEI. This is perhaps our greatest weapon against anti-DEI playbooks. We must amplify our voices, advocate for ourselves, and reassert DEI's proven business and technological value.

At its best, the work of drowning out the noise and driving business outcomes follows DEI's own evolution beyond the bounds of talent management: business leaders are increasingly recognizing the need to address new frontiers of bias in the workplace.

To cite just one example, without representation, we'll never achieve inclusive AI data sets. Just as DEI leaders have advocated for ethical hiring practices, they must now help guide ethical AI development.

This work takes a two-pronged approach:

1. **Return to the roots:** Develop new assessment methods for AI systems, grounded in the core principles of DEI.

2. **Champion inclusive algorithms:** Shape the future of work and opportunity by ensuring AI reflects the richness of our world's lived experiences.

As this lone example of the power of inclusive AI demonstrates, DEI will be core to redefining the future of work and opportunity, keys to success in any business.

Keeping DEI Strong

11 Navigating Risks: Inaction, Burnout, Reorganization

Question: *In a time of DEI pushback, what are the potential pitfalls of reduced investments, siloed "teams of one," and disruptive organizational changes?*

Bridgette Scales: In the current DEI climate, several potential risks arise from curtailed investments, siloed teams, and organizational reshuffles:

▶ **Diminishing commitment:** Scaling back DEI funding sends a clear message: the organization doesn't prioritize this crucial work. Imagine reducing the finance or tech teams to bare bones—the risks are evident to all. Shrinking DEI to a "team of one" signals a similar lack of commitment to the work's success and impact. From marginalization of underrepresented groups and decreased employee morale to damage to the organization's reputation, the risks of this visible shift are everywhere.

▶ **Burnout and high turnover:** According to *HBR*, DEI professionals experience extraordinarily high burnout and turnover, averaging only three years in their roles. Reducing resources further exacerbates this issue, jeopardizing the sustainability of DEI efforts.

▶ **Performative optics vs. systemic change:** When thoughtfully implemented, integrating DEI into a single department, such as talent, has great potential. But when done wrong, it risks tokenization. At its best, DEI is an organization-wide effort, embedded in all practices and departments. Assigning responsibility for firmwide efforts to a single individual or small team gives DEI a performative feel that can undermine its effectiveness.

▶ **Unsustainable burden and blame:** Making DEI the province of only one person or team, regardless of size, creates an unsustainable burden, setting them up for failure. Blaming a lone DEI leader for all cultural shortcomings ignores the collective responsibility for DEI success.

▶ **Sabotaging progress:** Ultimately, reducing investments, creating siloed teams, and reshuffling roles without proper planning hinders progress. These actions contradict the commitment needed for meaningful DEI change and can even backfire, creating further resistance and impeding progress toward long-term goals.

Key Takeaway: Investing in DEI is not just a trend; it's essential for organizational success and ethical responsibility. Siloed teams and reduced resources create significant risks, jeopardizing forward momentum and potentially harming the very communities DEI initiatives aim to support. A holistic, well-resourced, and integrated approach is vital to achieve lasting positive change.

Laura Sherbin: Diversity is a cornerstone, not a cosmetic afterthought or "add-on." It fuels organizational strategy and bolsters every team when embraced holistically.

Forget the Patchwork Approach

Ditch the talent strategy designed only for a select few, followed by diversity initiatives that try to bend it to fit the rest. This "one-size-fits-some" approach is broken.

Instead, aim to build a talent strategy and culture that capitalizes on everyone's unique strengths. This isn't about shoehorning everyone into a preexisting mold or placating those who feel excluded. It's about creating an extraordinary environment where everyone can flourish, leading to collective, continuous improvement.

> **Remember:** Diversity is about unlocking the full potential of your entire workforce. When diversity is a core principle rather than a retrofit, everyone wins.

12 Staying the Course, Building a Stronger Foundation

Question: What does "keeping DEI strong" look like today?

Bridgette Scales: Persistence and resilience are crucial to DEI progress. While there may be temporary setbacks, the push for DEI is a continuous journey, not a short-lived trend. Organizations with a long-term commitment to DEI remain unfazed by temporary pushback or legal rulings. They maintain consistent communication and transparency, highlighting their ongoing efforts and continued progress.

Here's how these organizations stand out:

- ▶ **Staying the course:** They continue their DEI initiatives without disruption, regardless of external pressures.
- ▶ **Transparency and communication:** They openly discuss their DEI work, progress, and future goals with all stakeholders.
- ▶ **Long-standing history and commitment:** They emphasize their history of involvement in DEI and its positive impact on the organization.
- ▶ **Linking DEI to success:** They showcase how DEI contributes to their core strengths, be it better service delivery, innovation, or employee satisfaction.
- ▶ **Leveraging challenges:** They utilize "turbulent times" as an opportunity to amplify their commitment and stand out from those hesitant to embrace DEI.

Organizations pulling back from DEI are unlikely to openly communicate their decision. This silence speaks volumes about their lack of commitment and its potentially negative impact on their long-term goals.

Remember, true DEI requires sustained effort and unwavering commitment, even during trying times. By staying true to their values and effectively communicating progress, organizations can emerge stronger, continuing their journey toward a more inclusive and equitable future.

Subha Barry: The road to DEI progress is paved with challenges, but the journey is worth the effort. Those who abandon these critical efforts now might have jumped on the bandwagon but failed to recognize the work's long-term importance.

Unfazed by naysayers, organizations with sustained commitment are doubling down, understanding the marathon nature of this work. To those who initially hesitated but ultimately joined the DEI effort: patience and perseverance are key.

Data paints a clear picture: the Brookings Institution predicts the United States will become "minority-white" by 2045. This truth necessitates a shift toward inclusive practices, not a retreat.

> DEI is not a sprint to a finish line. Instead, it's marathon training. Long-distance runners don't quit after a few setbacks; they persevere through them, knowing the reward awaits.

Done right, DEI is a training ground for a more engaged and effective organization. The process may be painful, but the ultimate result—a sense of achievement born out of hard work and enduring commitment—is undeniably worth it.

While effective DEI efforts ultimately leverage this hard work to create workplaces where everyone feels respected and valued, a truly successful DEI strategy fosters acceptance without mandating total agreement.

How to Build a Truly Inclusive Workplace:

- ▶ **Set standards for respectful behavior.** Establish clear guidelines that foster acceptance and inclusion.
- ▶ **Provide constructive feedback.** When addressing unacceptable behavior, offer specific guidance on how to improve rather than only criticism.
- ▶ **Encourage proactive solutions.** Empower employees to present potential solutions alongside problems. This tactic promotes collaboration and growth.
- ▶ **Emphasize trust and respect.** Mutual trust and respect are the foundations for healthy work relationships, even when there might be disagreements.
- ▶ **Cultivate empathy.** Encourage employees to understand one another's perspectives. This promotes compassion and reduces workplace conflict.

Remember: The challenges you face now lay the foundation for a more equitable and prosperous future tomorrow. If we embrace the marathon mentality and think critically about how we interact with our colleagues, we can build a more inclusive world of work. Step by step, staying the course and truly committing to a DEI-focused workplace benefits everyone.

`Laura Sherbin:` From generation to generation, the needle on DEI has shifted. Today, Gen Z is a powerful force for accountability and change in the workplace. Their commitment ensures that DEI progress will continue in future, even if not at breakneck speed today.

Here's why:

- ▶ **Gen Z is the most diverse and socially conscious generation yet.** They value fairness and inclusion deeply and won't tolerate bias or discrimination.
- ▶ **They hold organizations accountable.** Gen Z isn't afraid to speak up and demand change, both through activism and career choices.
- ▶ **They're digitally native and networked.** They easily connect and share experiences, building a powerful collective voice for DEI.

This doesn't mean instant solutions. Change takes time, and there will be setbacks. But Gen Z's unwavering commitment to DEI ensures the needle will keep moving forward, even if at a slower pace than the initial burst of enthusiasm following the murder of George Floyd.

`Katie Oertli Mooney:`

Major Organizations Remain Committed to DEI Despite Pushback

Pushback is real, but DEI momentum persists. An overwhelming majority of the world's leading companies remain committed to creating diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplaces. This is according to a number of sources, including the Seramount Inclusion Index, a recent Conference Board survey of 194 CHROs, and a recent C-suite survey by Littler Mendelson.

The Conference Board survey shows that no CHROs plan to scale back DEI initiatives, programs, and policies, while 91% of Littler Mendelson survey respondents said the recent SCOTUS affirmative action decision did not cause their organization to de-prioritize DEI.

The World Economic Forum Annual Meeting Highlights the Importance of DEI

The World Economic Forum's annual meeting in Davos, Switzerland, also recently highlighted the importance of DEI. The program's emphasis on global health equity and equitable AI upskilling shows that the world's brightest minds still see DEI as crucial.

DEI Leaders Are Adapting, Not Retreating

DEI leaders recognize that the need for inclusive workplaces remains constant, even if the terminology and approach may change. They are committed to finding new ways to address the same goals, from workplace fairness to freedom from discrimination.

Business Leaders' Actions Speak Louder than Words

While business leaders may be less explicit about their DEI and ESG initiatives today, their actions speak volumes. Their focus on broader social issues and continued community building shows that they are still committed to the core principles of DEI. They know that the impact of inclusion remains undeniable and that the business case for DEI is proven, from talent acquisition and team performance to increased innovation.

Turning the Tide

13 Making DEI Matter: The Urgency of DEI

Question: *As our social, workplace, and political landscapes continue to evolve, highlighting growing inequities and the need to foster inclusive communities, why is DEI more critical than ever?*

Laura Sherbin: DEI remains an essential concept that defines a "triple bottom" line framework: Culture, Customer, and Community.

Financial success remains critical, but a holistic approach acknowledges DEI's impact on:

- ▶ **Culture—people success:** Businesses with strong DEI practices benefit from a wider talent pool, leading to improved decision-making, efficiency, and professional growth for all individuals, regardless of background.

- ▶ **Customer—market success:** Understanding and responding to the diverse needs and preferences of a wide range of consumers is business critical in today's competitive landscape.

- ▶ **Community—social impact:** Everyone benefits from products, services, and social impact initiatives that better cater to their needs.

DEI's interconnected impacts highlight its multifaceted value, the triple bottom line.

Bridgette Scales: DEI remains an urgent concern because our society still faces significant inequities. Systemic biases, historical disadvantages, and inequitable policies continue to shape an unequal landscape. We can't erase the past, but we can choose how to respond to it. DEI empowers us to build a future where everyone has a chance at success.

Our demographics are rapidly shifting, and true change is inevitable. Yet we've yet to dismantle the remaining legal and cultural vestiges of past injustices, from discriminatory laws to outdated historical monuments. The need for DEI remains more pressing than ever today.

At its best, DEI acts as a powerful signal for social and community advancement. It challenges us to question unconscious biases and work together to overcome deeply ingrained historical injustices and inequities. This collective effort is what defines DEI done right.

14 Building Beyond Backlash

Question: Beyond the immediate challenges, could any aspects of the current backlash ultimately strengthen the DEI movement, turning setbacks into growth opportunities? How can we create space for genuine questions about DEI while distinguishing them from malicious attacks?

Katie Oertli Mooney: The current climate may require some adaptation and adjustments to our approach. But it also presents an opportunity for DEI advocates to facilitate constructive conversations guiding individuals who are genuinely interested in fostering inclusivity in the workplace.

By engaging constructively in difficult conversations, DEI practitioners can potentially:

- ▶ **Educate and address misconceptions:** Engaging in good-faith conversations can effectively combat misunderstandings and negative perceptions of DEI initiatives.
- ▶ **Create champions:** Courageous conversations can build crucial support and understanding among those who are truly curious but may not yet fully grasp the complexities.
- ▶ **Refine strategies:** Fostering open dialogue can reveal areas where current approaches may need adjustments or require clearer communication.

Ways to Create Space for Good-Faith Questions about DEI:

- ▶ **Foster a safe and respectful environment:** Encourage open communication by emphasizing respect, encouraging genuine inquiries, and withholding unnecessary judgment.
- ▶ **Practice active listening:** Demonstrating a genuine willingness to listen and understand without interrupting or dismissing can help bridge the divide.
- ▶ **Seek clarification:** Work to clarify the intent behind questions to ensure they stem from genuine inquiry and not malicious intent.
- ▶ **Provide resources:** Freely disseminating resources and educational materials can empower individuals to learn more and to grow independently.

Above all, let's not lose sight of our foundational aim: to build a future of work where everyone is engaged and empowered to thrive.

While we may experience setbacks at times, even when present discussions feel particularly charged, it's crucial to let history serve as our guide. Fellow DEI practitioners, remember: our past efforts have laid the foundation for continued success.

Reflecting on the gains for underrepresented communities and the acceleration of social progress won by past movements serves as a powerful reminder of our collective capacity for positive change. Together we can ensure that our commitment to developing positive and inclusive work environments remains a core component of organizational success.

Subha Barry: Speaking candidly about DEI challenges and opportunities can help move the needle. DEI and talent leaders can spearhead these efforts by actively exploring alternative points of view. This collaborative, open-minded approach ultimately results in more effective and inclusive solutions for all.

When facing resistance to DEI initiatives, leaders should focus on the advantages of embracing diversity and inclusion. In certain contexts, telling resistant individuals that systems are biased in their favor only heightens defensiveness and creates further division.

A more productive approach often focuses on the practical benefits and outcomes of DEI, including how embracing inclusion creates better leaders and outcomes for all. After all, the ability to work with people from different backgrounds is an essential leadership skill that ultimately benefits everyone.

15 Going on the Offensive: Proactive DEI and Perfecting the "Serve"

Question: Some argue that DEI professionals have primarily focused on responding to criticism, neglecting a proactive approach to shaping public perception and combating misinformation, including weaponization of DEI efforts. How can DEI leaders effectively shift their strategy to address current challenges and promote the value of DEI initiatives?

Katie Oertli Mooney: It's fair to say that some DEI leaders haven't fully embraced the proactive approach. While actively responding to concerns and criticism is vital, it's equally important to preemptively frame conversations and counteract misinformation or misuse of DEI principles.

The game of tennis presents the perfect metaphor for the state of the DEI profession. Traditionally, we've been effective at reacting, "volleying" back every ball thrown at us. However, perfecting the "serve," i.e., taking the initiative and presenting forward-thinking, action-oriented solutions and narratives, is crucial for long-term progress.

Instead of solely focusing on "pushback," we need to champion a compelling and clear message around the countless benefits of DEI for individuals, organizations, and society. This requires active engagement with a broad range of voices and perspectives, ensuring we fully comprehend and effectively address the concerns of the entire workforce.

> By proactively shaping the narrative and demonstrating the positive impact of DEI, we can counter negativity and ultimately strengthen the foundation for lasting workplace change.

Conclusion: Beyond Business as Usual

As political polarization heats up and demands for inclusive leadership are amplified, CDOs and CHROs must remain hypervigilant about DEI's present state and future. The future of workplace inclusion hangs in the balance.

In this make-or-break period, the executive playbook for leading through backlash has never been more necessary. Turning the tide on backlash now hinges on solidarity, allyship, leadership buy-in, and above all, clearly communicating the value and importance of DEI.

Ready to future-proof your inclusive workplace strategy? Join us at Seramount as we, alongside our global industry partners, work to provide best practices for navigating this turning point.

Together we can prepare for the workplace of tomorrow, ensuring that this period of unprecedented disruption doesn't just witness resistance but is transformed into real results—an opportunity for meaningful progress.

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DEI Research Partnership Empowering DEI and HR Leaders Through Today's Toughest Workplace Challenges

What Factors Make DEI and Talent Roles So Challenging?

Tense Workplace Dynamics

- ▶ Shifting demographics lead to competing priorities
- ▶ Evolving legal landscape
- ▶ Divided employee sentiment around socio-political issues

Risk Around Every DEI Decision

- ▶ **Risk of Abandoning Commitments:** Pull back can cause disengagement and friction
- ▶ **Risk of Inaction:** Holding steady can be perceived as non-commitment
- ▶ **Risk of Misstep:** Forging ahead might turn positive intentions into unintended consequences

Balancing Two Equally Vital Roles

- ▶ Maneuver Corporate and Cultural Risks
- ▶ Safeguard Non-Negotiable DEI Investments

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Rigorous Research with a Global Reach

Deploying proven research methodology to identify how to make change happen

- ✔ Resources to educate stakeholders and accelerate impact
- ✔ Custom research to answer your up-at-night questions

Collective Experience of a Peer Community

Convening DEI and Talent leaders to guide and shape our search for breakthrough ideas

- ✔ CDO roundtables and experience labs
- ✔ DEI practitioner roundtables and hot-topic webinars

Commitment to Applying Lessons Learned

Facilitating buy-in for change and customizing implementation of lessons learned

- ✔ Access to expert advisors to increase your capacity
- ✔ Partner intensives bring insights to your broader team

▶ Learn more about how the DEI Research Partnership can propel your strategy forward by scheduling a call with one of our experts.

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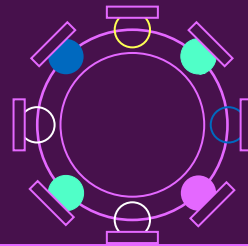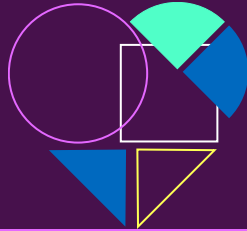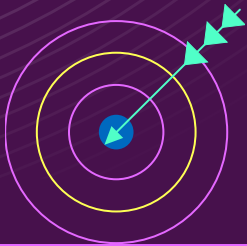
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