

ONE YEAR INTO OUR RACIAL RECKONING:

The Latest on What Corporate Leaders Should Know.



In 2020, the world experienced one of the largest social justice and equity movements of our time. As we approach the one-year mark for many of the tragic incidents that catalyzed that movement — the murder of George Floyd, the shooting of Jacob Blake, the aggression that ultimately cost Belly Mujinga her life and regrettably many others — it's time to reckon with and reconcile what has and has not changed in our societies and workplaces.

The picture that emerges will look different across geographies, where culture, history and context bring to life nuances on diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I), and where the societal role of corporations varies. Yet, at the same time, the principles that will allow organizations to push progress forward with concrete action and authentic commitment should be universal.

In the next year, scrutiny of corporate behavior will go from high to higher, and DE&I, with all its facets, will be squarely at the center of that. Companies should expect that racial equity will continue to be an urgent priority and that they will need to address it as it relates to the multiple historically marginalized communities where they operate. They should also expect that equity and inclusion will need to be inherently incorporated into how they think about the other urgent issues at hand — ranging from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and the future of work to the global climate crisis.

Whether a company made a firm commitment to action in 2020 or not, it should expect to be questioned on everything from diverse representation in its organization to the inequities that its business model may create or reinforce, to the company's efforts — or lack thereof — to achieving racial equity in its communities.

Here's what to keep top of mind to guide your actions and decisions in the months ahead:



Show progress and demonstrate humility, not hubris.

Companies should not view the accountability that's required to advance DE&I as an accounting exercise. It must be more than a box-ticking exercise, built around facts and figures. Remember DE&I is about people and their lived experiences. Leaders must center humility and honest reflection in their DE&I communication in order to show employees and others what they have learned and how it is changing the way they lead.



Put people first and be sure to see and respect their intersectionality.

People all over the world have been through a lot in the last 12 months. Some of the reasons for that are shared experiences and others are based on individual circumstances. Organizations should consider the time, emotional-support resources and space that employees might need, and think about what help customers and other stakeholders expect from them. Particular attention should be paid to:

- **The intersectionality of identities:** Identity is not one-dimensional and many people identify themselves across multiple cultural and social groups. This impacts their experience of the world, the challenges they struggle with most and what type of support they need. All these pieces must be taken into consideration when seeking to connect and engage.
- **The mental health toll:** Those who already struggle with mental health challenges have found it even more difficult during the pandemic and with the repeated instances of civil unrest. This is especially the case for Black and Brown people, for members of the LGBTQ+ community, and for those living with disabilities. For those whose identities intersect across these groups, the impact and challenges are magnified.
- **The inequitable impact of COVID-19:** The pandemic has brought to light deep global inequities in healthcare access and outcomes. These inequities can be driven by the intersections of race (significant health disparities for Black and Brown Americans), sexual orientation (limited access to HIV prevention care and medical gender transition treatment) and geography (earlier access to vaccines for the developed world).



Prioritize the recruitment and advancement of diverse talent into leadership.

Diverse representation in leadership is an element of DE&I that organizations have immediate and direct control over. In 2021, elevating talent with diverse lived experiences at the intersections of race, gender, sexual orientation and ability into leadership — and ensuring equitable pay — will set the course for future progress. The advancement of diverse leaders should take place across business units and functions — as the recent appointments of [Rosalind Brewer](#) and [Thasunda Brown Duckett](#) to CEO roles at Fortune 500 companies demonstrate — so that diverse representation can do what it's meant to: drive strong business outcomes while fueling the aspirations of future leaders.



Contribute to the emerging blueprint for leadership in this era of action, activism and advocacy.

When paradigms shift like they did in 2020, new standards and expectations of leadership emerge. The blueprint of leadership that will define the next five to 15 years is being shaped now by those leaders and organizations that embrace equity and inclusion, combat bias, and reflect the diversity of our world as it exists as integral to what they do. Some organizations have had a DE&I leader for several years, but now other companies are going beyond HR and corporate DE&I functions to embed social justice into their business offerings and operating model. This is the path that organizations will either forge or follow in the future.



Commit to progress, not perfection.

The problems we are seeking to solve are complex and, in nearly all cases, deeply entrenched in the ways our economies and societies function. From burnout to bias, there will be challenges in maintaining momentum, yet we must remain steadfast in the pursuit of progress rather than be paralyzed by the inability to achieve perfection.

There is time, in the next several weeks, for organizations to audit their progress and prepare for the inevitable questions. Proactive approaches should feel right and authentic; reactive approaches should be no less thoughtful or considered. In both cases, it is essential to have clarity about where the organization is in its DE&I journey and on the story that it wants to tell.

This is a once-in-a-generation defining moment. If an organization doesn't speak for itself, then it will be up to others to judge which side of history it is on.

Our True MOSAIC global DE&I practice is 100+ counselors strong and reflects a team with diverse lived experience and professional expertise. We'd love to connect with you. Please reach out to Adiya Mobley (adiya.mobley@fleishman.com) and Leela Stake (leela.stake@fleishman.com) with any questions or for more information about [True MOSAIC](#).



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