



## Thriving Through Global Diversity \_ Inclusion Core Values

Diversity and inclusion are core values that provide the springboard for global inclusiveness. It takes a comprehensive approach that includes developing allies, ERGs, culturally intelligent leaders, and safe communication and learning opportunities.

In the United States, diversity and inclusion (D&I) is a familiar core value. The challenge is bringing the core value to life throughout an organization when it goes global, crossing borders and cultures that are very different. One of the key tenets is keeping D&I as a non-negotiable core value no matter where the business operates.

However, developing and implementing a strategy that embraces D&I without offending a culture can be a balancing act. People in other countries have myriad perspectives on what defines diversity, the appropriate language to use, employee-employer relationships, and leadership roles.

One approach is to develop allies who communicate the D&I values and exhibit inclusive behaviors. Other strategy elements include developing effective eLearning modules that address diversity from a global perspective – from language to behaviors to enhancing feedback systems, training leaders on appropriate behaviors, and developing employee resource groups (ERGs), to name some best practices.

### Build a Platform of Global Equity and Respect

A D&I strategy for a global business can begin with the basic tenets of equity, fairness and respectfulness for differences. On that foundation, a strategy is developed.

One of the first actions required is learning about each culture the company operates in because each culture has different ideas about diversity and acceptable inclusion behaviors. There is a fairly long, ongoing learning curve for leaders. It has been proven time and time again that assuming a transfer of D&I strategies to other cultures will work often does the opposite – it creates ill feelings among the international members of the workforce.

Leaders must learn about identities in various cultures. For example, operating in a country that criminalizes LGBTQ+ makes it challenging to extend non-discrimination protections and things like health benefits seen as encouraging LGBTQ+ community members. It is important to develop inclusive policies and then train leaders on the policies and their implementation on a local basis.

The support of leadership is crucial to globalization of D&I. If local managers are not supportive of diverse people, the company's top-down effort will fail to make any progress. One strategy is to put people in leadership positions who are personally motivated to promote D&I. Leaders can become allies.



## Levels of Support Drive Strategic Approach

The reality is there are various levels of global environments in terms of supporting diversity. Some have national restrictive laws and cultures that exclude certain people based on their identity, i.e. ethnicity, gender, race, sexual orientation, etc. There are also many cultures where D&I ideas are not clear or the country is in transition.

This can create a confusing setting, but this is where adherence to core values, like always maintaining a respectful workplace and fairness, creates calm out of havoc. Establishing a safe communication system is equally important because it gives people a voice without fear of reprisal.

If the country's D&I environment is murky, or the local culture does not support inclusion despite the laws, the organization should focus on areas of opportunity. They include global diverse leaders who understand the local culture and ERGs

If the country supports D&I with strong laws on equality and anti-discrimination, an organization naturally has an easier time developing and implementing strategies. They can use local ERGs, allies, networks, advocacy organizations, and other businesses willing to share and network.

Allies are particularly valuable sources because they can be people who are knowledgeable of the daily challenges that employees face in the workplace. Allies are often from a majority group and publicly support people from a minority group, though an ally can be from any group in practice.

Implementation of a global policy is important, but laws and local cultures require some specific actions that "localize" the overall core value. For example, learn the right language. The term "diversity and inclusion" in India or Japan implies gender-focus. In the Asia region, inclusion and harmony is the focus instead of celebrating differences.

Allies can be a source of information about appropriate inclusive language. Language can become a barrier to progress because its improper use can cause so much confusion and even harm.

### Allies are Key Contributors to Inclusion Around the World

Inclusive leaders as allies can have a powerful impact on D&I in many cultures, especially in Asian cultures where seniority is always respected. An ally does not have to be a leader, but the degree of the ally's effectiveness may be influenced by the local culture.

Choosing the right allies is important. They must be comfortable expressing their support for diverse people, empowered to promote organizational events and learning opportunities for D&I, and willing to always offer leadership through appropriate behaviors. Allies are willing to talk to people about their challenges and experiences. Not everyone is willing to be an ally, mentor, or sponsor because there is always the risk of offending in some manner. An ally must be able to develop trusting relationships, and that is not something everyone can do.

Some additional elements of globalizing D&I include sharing information from the home country initiatives with employees in the assignment country, and establishing an information sharing



system for sharing news about diversity events and a communication system, like social media, that encourages global employees to go online and talk about themselves and encourage others.

However, a business must be careful to avoid publishing information on global platforms that can backfire on the employees and the company. Also, if employees are encouraged to use social media to discuss D&I experiences, it should be on an intranet and carefully monitored.

### [Learn from the Leaders](#)

Today, some of the companies that have operated globally for many years are far advanced in managing D&I and responding to a plethora of emerging trends in various countries.

IBM, for example, relies on D&I to engender innovation, so it extends the company's strategy on a global basis by going beyond traditional diversity based on identities like gender and race. Diversity includes culture and different perspectives, among other characteristics. IBM leverages data, analytics, and cognitive technology to hone its ability to develop an innovative and inclusion culture, no matter where operations take place.

While companies can provide the policies and resources for promoting D&I, strategies will only work when carefully adapted to country laws and local customs. Adapting does not mean being willing to violate core values. Establishing a respectful workplace in every workplace is the foundation of change, inclusiveness and innovation.