



Five steps to forming successful EDI committees

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Without a clear purpose, goals or buy-in, employee networks that aim to improve equality, diversity and inclusion can lose enthusiasm and effectiveness.

In the wake of the death of George Floyd and other global events that have highlighted the race discrimination that persists in society, increasing numbers of businesses have set up diversity committees for minority groups.

However, as many employers have experienced, establishing an effective diversity committee can be easier said than done. These are five key points to consider.

1. Set parameters and expectations

Firstly, it is vital to set clear parameters and expectations of the committee early on. Confusion and conflicts over its purpose can lead

to individuals losing faith.

Consider what the committee's key objectives are. For example, is it to:

- Provide a safe space to share experiences?
- Support individuals facing particular equality, diversity and inclusion (EDI) related challenges?
- Raise awareness of EDI issues?
- Raise issues to management or partners, encouraging them to initiate change?
- All of the above?

These goals should be documented so they are clear to all involved, otherwise conflict can arise between the business and committee or between committee members who may have very different ideas about what the objectives are. For example, if some staff believe the aim is primarily to share experiences, the committee might focus disproportionately on this to the exclusion of other objectives which can be unproductive, frustrating, and even painful for others.

2. Provide support and training

One important function of diversity committees can be to provide a safe space for colleagues to share their experiences. Employees who lead committees are likely to be seen as a trusted first point of contact for individuals with issues or complaints. This means it is important that they know how to handle sensitive discussions.

It is also important that they are clear on how internal processes work, what support is available, and their remit and role. This is so committee members can not only listen to concerns but so they can also signpost staff with concerns to appropriate processes and support within the business, such as HR or line managers. Otherwise, there is a real risk that concerns may not be escalated appropriately, which can compound issues.

Bearing this in mind you may want to consider providing training on:

- **Handling sensitive conversations:** This should also cover the need to treat any information they receive confidentially and sensitively
- **How your internal processes work:** Including your grievance and disciplinary procedures
- **Support available:** Such as any employee assistance and support via mental health first aiders, HR or trade unions.

3. Develop a strategy and metrics

Sadly for many diversity committees, initial enthusiasm can dwindle away. To help maintain momentum it is important to align the committee with strategic business goals and the broader EDI strategy. For example, if one of the organisation's strategic goals is to increase diversity in senior roles, how might the committee help support this? Goal setting, plus tracking and monitoring the progress of those goals, will help give the committee longevity.

4. Think about resourcing

This doesn't just mean budget, although allocating a specific budget for the committee's work can help reinforce that your business is serious about supporting DEI long term and allows the committee to plan and provide appropriate training.

It is also worth thinking about how the committee itself is resourced. Are committee members expected to do this work on top of their normal day-to-day role, such as over lunchtimes, without any recognition or credit for this time? This effectively places an additional burden staff, who are often minorities and the very groups the committees are there to support. Instead, you could look to recognise their work on diversity committees as part of the appraisal system or make clear that such meetings can take place during working time.

5. Get buy-in from leadership and beyond

It is essential to have senior staff championing the diversity committee. This will help ensure the committee has credibility and purpose. Ensuring that a member of your senior leadership is accountable for the committee can be a powerful way to help ensure metrics are tracked, goals are met, and any wins are publicised.

Finally, outside of senior staff, actively encouraging a broad range of staff to support the committee can maintain momentum. This would include not just those from minority groups but also allies, such as white cis-gendered males, who can also be effective advocates for the committee's work.

EDI committees can be successful when given proper thought, resourcing and support from across the organisation. Following these five steps will help ensure your organisation's committees can have a real and lasting impact.