

DEI  
INITIATIVE



# 3 IMPERATIVES FOR A SUCCESSFUL DEI INITIATIVE

SEEK DIVERSITY, CREATE EQUITY, PRACTICE INCLUSION

GOVERNANCE + BEHAVIOR + CONVERSATIONS

*"Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion is often complicated, emotional, and very delicate. You need to think through the objective; why it is important and why it matters."*  
– Leah Dean, CEO of Conduit International

## IMPERATIVE #1 – STRONG GOVERNANCE

The goal of a corporate DEI Initiative is to integrate DEI into the organization's DNA.

Enterprise-wide integration of DEI policies or procedures only get approved with the endorsement and buy-in from the highest levels of decision - making authority. Whether that be the board of directors, investors, and/or executive leaders, the leaders' sponsorship is essential. Even more ideal is a leader-led DEI initiative where 'the people', not HR, take ownership of the initiative. With the right sponsorship in place a strong governance may take form.

Forming governance is not a cookie-cutter process. Each governance needs to build its structure based on the unique size and culture. There are five primary reasons why the DEI governance will, and should, look different for various companies:

1. Company culture
2. Global geography
3. Business model
4. Previous DEI knowledge
5. Unique factors to each company (size, employee diversity, age, etc.)

For example, a small company CEO may commit to DEI being one of the company's top priorities and a budget for long term resources is granted to HR, who then may provide various learning opportunities for employees regarding DEI knowledge and practice.

Another form of governance in bigger companies may be an executive sponsor who sets up a global council with local committees or employee resource groups (ERG's) for strategic implementation across the enterprise, and builds feedback loops for continuous improvement. Many progressive organizations like [Adobe](#) go the length to integrate their customers, partners, vendors, and peers into the overall fabric of their DEI governance.

Regardless of size and location, a DEI portfolio strategy is needed; built with input from the employees for both a centralized, and if applicable, decentralized strategy in partnership with their head of HR.

Customizing governance to the culture is ideal. However, the biggest challenge leadership faces (those with the decision-making authority) when considering a DEI initiative, is that they, themselves, don't know what they don't know about DEI. Most leaders in successful corporations are primarily made up of the majority, who are implicated in the inherent problems they seek to address. So they usually are slow to commit, and many times fearful they will 'do it wrong'.

Leaders also, and unfortunately, have the tendency to believe that those who do bring the needed experience to lead, will be pushing their own personal agendas. Here's a real example of this psychological, thus organizational, roadblock to DEI progress. In the USA or Europe, Caucasian males are the majority in leadership roles; it has been assumed a woman of color who leads HR, and the DEI efforts, is first and foremost leading her own agenda. So her perspective, her voice, is at best minimized, and at worst, dismissed all together. Leaving her, in the least, compromised in her role as leader of the DEI initiative, and at its worst, expected to work twice as hard and long to 'prove' the viability of the DEI plan, and her well earned career advancement.

So unfortunately, a great deal of time, years in fact, is spent educating those in power about the DEI challenge, how they are a part of that challenge, and what they may be able to do to engage in the solution. This self-awareness is part of the transformational process, many times necessary before the leaders themselves feel confident enough to buy into their own DEI commitment. Unfortunately some leaders move so slow, or don't move at all, that they end up being PUSHED into paying attention, e.g. [Loyds of London](#) and other [Fortune 500 organizations](#).

Governance is the first imperative to success and is enabled by assessing the readiness of the leaders, educating the leaders, and gaining endorsement of the leaders. Without their commitment, a customized governance is not possible, and efforts usually become mute, risking more damage than good.

## IMPERATIVE #2 – BEHAVIORAL CHANGE

Behavioral change is a transformation or modification of human behavior and needs to be the target for any DEI initiative. In a nutshell this means moving away from measuring the 'numbers of certain kinds of people' and moving toward shifting mindsets, habits, and daily workplace practices.

For example, if employees learn HOW to seek diversity, HOW to create equity, and HOW to practice inclusion™, then *seeking, creating, and practicing* becomes the organization's collective ACTION. Seeking, creating, and practicing are the new behavioral practices and strategies for change.

Given this behavioral change across the organization's culture, the *impact of this behavioral shift on the people, culture, and brand*, is then measured. The *outcome* of the behavioral shift will be more diversity in decision making roles for example, but it is not the target. The organization is DOING DEI in their daily routines, versus striving to increase numbers as if to check a box.

As Jennette Newman, president of the Forum of Insurance Lawyers (FOIL) and a partner at London-based law firm Clyde & Co. Sept. 2019, said in response to the Loyd's of London [gender scandal](#), "*I hope the Lloyd's (of London) culture survey sets a baseline for much-needed improvements in gender balance, standards of conduct and culture overall. Dashboards and targets are controversial – they can encourage a tick-box mentality and we need to move on from that,*" Newman continued.

Yes, indeed organizations need to shift to the development of human behavior and move away from a 'tick-box mentality', so that regardless of where an employee may be in the world at any given time, they are better equipped with DEI skills that they can apply daily across all cultures.

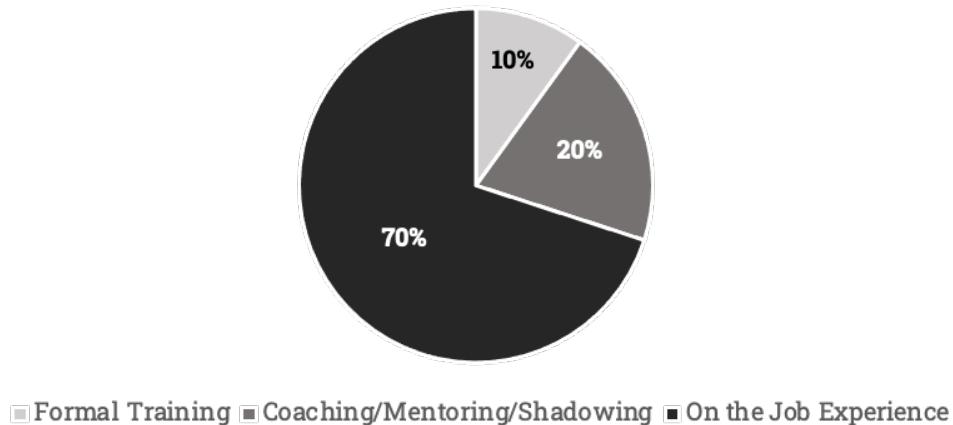
However, there is a challenge to ensuring behavioral change as well; behavioral change happens over time and on a continuum. Depending on the size of an organization, to shift human behavior, and a collective culture, it may take years, which requires patience, and specific expertise. Organizations need to seek professionals who have both an extensive business acumen working at the highest levels of leadership, as well as subject matter expertise in the behavioral sciences. Building new habits and new behaviors across an entire enterprise is the aspiration, and needs experienced practitioners to assist this change management landscape.

## IMPERATIVE #3 – CAPACITY FOR INTENSITY

The third imperative is the building of an organization's capacity for intensity. [Pwc's report on DEI](#) states that DEI Initiatives invite discourse for the sake of richer outcomes. However, most people are not prepared to engage in the discourse that DEI implementation may invite. So, in addition to building skills that perhaps enable employees to seek diversity, create equity, or practice inclusion, the organization must also learn to expand its capacity for intensity.

This is where the formal development [rule of 70/20/10](#) applies to DEI Initiative implementation.

**Formal Development Applied to DEI Initiatives**



- 10% of development time and money needs to go into formal training classes, e.g. unconscious bias classes, skills to seek diversity, create equity, and practice inclusion.
- 20% of the development efforts need to be spent engaged in internal or external coaching, mentoring, or shadowing efforts.
- 70% of development is intentional and strategic 'on the job' experience that only repetition of being in role can provide, e.g. 'real life experience that builds capability'.

But how do you get DEI on the job experience if the company lacks the context to create that experience? You start by creating on-going opportunities, for facilitated conversations across the company (usually starting with external professionals, then as capabilities expand, leader-led from the inside).

Conducting *Necessary Conversations™* about DEI is the catalyst to Imperative #3. This practice of ongoing conversations builds a person's capacity for intensity while simultaneously taking the organization where it needs to go to achieve systemic and sustainable change.

Like with all things when it comes to enterprise-wide initiatives, there can be barriers to progress. Conducting the ongoing *Necessary Conversations™* is not easy work given people and cultures are different regarding their interest, willingness, and ability to engage in dialogue about race, sexual orientation, gender, age, diversity of thought, just to name a few. The level of a culture's 'capacity for intensity' may determine the speed the organization can take with such conversations. Some organizations will be more capable than others, however, to ensure inclusion of 'all', the right pace needs to be determined. Having professional facilitators working with employees to design the context for conversations is an important first step to longer success.

In summary, without a strong governance, a target to change behavior vs checking boxes, and the facilitation of the Necessary DEI Conversations, an organization's ability to implement and sustain a DEI initiative and any significant progress will be limited.

by Ann Michael Dorgan  
CEO, Gumball Enterprises

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*Ann Michael Dorgan is CEO of [Gumball Enterprises](#). Gumball Enterprises is a leadership development company in Seattle, WA whose expertise is executive coaching and strategic advising in innovation labs and rapidly scaling organizations. Over the last 25 years, Gumball has served fortune 500 companies around the world and worked with over 51 C-Suite leaders and business owners in the last 3 years alone. Most leaders were simultaneously scaling the business, readying the company for sale, and learning how to lead from their new position. Gumball specializes in building global DEI initiatives and created its own workshop called [Necessary Conversations™](#)*

Gumball



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We hope you enjoyed this informational download and found it helpful. Let us know if you have any questions or would like professional assistance with creating and implementing your DEI Initiatives or desire more information about our services and products. People who enjoyed this product also enjoyed our DIY DEI Handbook & DIY Succession Plan Template.

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