

RESEARCH

Disconnect exists between brand commitment and execution of diversity and inclusion initiatives

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Gartner's new report found that only 12 percent of HR leaders think their company is effectively increasing diversity. Image credit: Gartner

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Even as many brands have taken a stand with Black Lives Matter and committed to more equitable hiring practices, there is a disconnect between intentions and actions when it comes to diversity and inclusion programs.

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In fact, only 12 percent of HR leaders believe that their organization has been effective at increasing diversity representation, according to a recent report from Gartner. The research which included feedback from corporate heads of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) found that 69 percent of these executives are prioritizing advancing underrepresented talent, especially amidst the COVID-19 pandemic.

"While the intent is there, there is no two-hour training remedy for this challenge," said Lauren Romansky, managing vice president in the [Gartner HR practice](#), Boston.

"Organizations need to assess their current systems and processes to mitigate bias and address organizational factors that prohibit equal opportunity for advancement," she said.



Gartner found that diversity programs are not where they should be. Image credit Gartner

Brand commitments

When the most recent wave of Black Lives Matter protests started up again in June after George Floyd was killed while in police custody, luxury brands turned their Instagram pages black to show support for the movement.

Gucci, Chanel, Louis Vuitton, Marc Jacobs, Nordstrom, Neiman Marcus and the Ritz-Carlton were among the hundreds of brands to take a stand promising to weed out racism in all aspects of their business.

Critics suggested that these companies were just paying lip service to a popular cause, and some consumers complained on social media that brands were not always doing everything they could.

Still, brands promised to improve their diversity programs and many are doing just that.

That said, while most companies have a diversity and inclusion program, many HR departments do not feel that these efforts are enough to actually create a more diverse workplace.

Almost 90 percent of HR leaders said that their organization has been ineffective or flat at increasing diversity representation, according to Gartner.

Gartner identified three organizational barriers that are holding things back for underrepresented talent: unclear career paths and steps to advancement, too little exposure to senior leaders and a lack of mentors or career support.

"HR and DEI leaders must address the systemic bias embedded in their systems, processes and stakeholders to truly increase the diversity of their managerial and leadership benches," the Gartner report said.



Gartner found that 69 percent of companies are prioritizing diversity programs. Image credit Gartner

Overcoming obstacles

Despite that fact that these barriers do exist, companies can adapt their programs to increase the effectiveness of their DEI efforts.

Gartner identified several steps that brands can take to ensure that their workplaces are more equitable.

First is to fix the manager-employee ties. Companies should cultivate relationships between managers and employees that set a strong foundation for advocacy and advancement.

This includes teaching managers how to build personalized support for direct reports and helping them to be effective coaches, building awareness among managers about the employee experience for underrepresented employees and building trust between underrepresented talent and their managers.

"Our research and conversations with HR and DEI leaders show that managers are unable to effectively execute critical advocacy and advancement-related activities if they do not have a solid working relationship with their employees, which can be more challenging when manager and employee come from different experiences," said Ingrid Laman, Los Angeles-based vice president for advisory in the Gartner HR practice.

The next step that companies should take is to redesign processes to weed out bias. This includes challenging hiring managers on need-to-have versus nice-to-have requirements, expanding labor market opportunities to consider new talent pools, exploring job design to accommodate diverse talent, rethinking performance evaluations and changing internal hiring methods.

Finally, companies should create intentional self-sustaining, growth-focused networks to help a diverse group of people improve their role, skills, level and experience. This should involve senior management and executives that can help promote growth.

Employees should be educated on why networking will improve diversity and inclusion.

Additionally, underrepresented talent should be authorized to actively network, and teach managers how to build and support them with their performance, development and advancement. There should be accountability for this kind of cross-organizational networking.

"When underrepresented talent has diverse networks, the organization wins," Gartner said in the report.

"Gartner research reveals that organizations that create networking programs for underrepresented talent, HR leaders are two times more likely to report they are effective at improving organizational inclusion and 1.3 times more likely to report they are effective at increasing diverse employee engagement."