

EMBRACING OUR DIFFERENCES



While most companies have one mission, their customers and employees are individuals. And meeting the first means recognizing, accepting and celebrating the latter. Addressing diversity and inclusion in the workplace has accelerated over the past two years as a pandemic, social movements and events that spawned civil unrest gripped the country. And that's a good thing for businesses and communities, says this group of experts working on the frontlines of the D&I movement. *Business North Carolina* magazine recently brought them together to discuss what needs to be done, how it should be carried out and its importance.

Fidelity, Gallagher, Lenovo, N.C. State University, Smith Anderson and Truliant sponsored the discussion, which was moderated by *Business North Carolina* Publisher Ben Kinney. It was edited for brevity and clarity.

**Anita Brown-Graham**

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WHEN AND HOW DID YOUR ORGANIZATION BEGIN ADDRESSING D&I?

JEFFREYS: Wendy John, a 25-year employee of Fidelity, was named head of global diversity and inclusion two years ago. She reports to Maggie Serravalli, chief financial officer. Everyone has to own D&I, not only the D&I enterprise team. While Fidelity's D&I journey began more than 20 years ago, it has become more intentional in many respects, especially hiring. We recruit from historically black colleges and universities and connect with diverse organizations and partnerships. We see D&I from a business imperative standpoint. Our customers are diverse. Our marketplace is diverse. We look at D&I starting with the end in mind. It's not all about the pipeline, putting diverse talent in entry level positions. If diverse candidates do not see themselves in senior leadership positions, then they don't consider them.

DEWBERRY: My role as chief diversity officer at Smith Anderson is new, but the firm has had a diversity committee for 20 years. Two of its strong equity partners serve as its chair, both female, one Black and the other part of the

LGBTQIA+ community. That says a lot for a 110-year-old firm in the Southeast. There has been a big push for D&I from our clients and staff. We need to focus on our clients' demands. It's good business all around.

STILLWELL: Prior to joining Gallagher, an insurance, risk management and consulting organization, I did risk management and human resources for small and midsize businesses. Over the course of about 10 years, I witnessed a diversity, equality and inclusion evolution from focusing on compliance to intentionally putting in place systems that drive change. We continue to examine those systems that drive change. We should continue to examine those systems, innovating along the way to ensure we create cultures where everyone can thrive long term.

QUIRE-MCLOUD: Our D&I journey officially began in January of 2021, but Truliant has been developing its D&I practices for several years. Our initial efforts were focused on education and ensuring all employees had a common understanding of where the organization was and its commitment to having an intentional DEI strategy. As was the case with many organizations, the

murder of George Floyd, a man killed by a Minneapolis police officer in May 2020, was the impetus for many to take a more formal stance in support of understanding difference and the value of inclusion and belonging. While having a dedicated DEI leader is fairly new to us, we've always had a great workplace culture and are layering on top of a strong foundation of employees and leaders who view building relationships as a core value. I want to create safe and brave spaces for insightful dialogue to occur and for employees to know it's OK to have questions and to be vulnerable. Diversity can't be a dirty word in a place where we spend so much time together. We plan to introduce our first Business Resource Group this year and will continue to educate, train and build quality momentum not only because it's the right thing to do, but because our employees and communities are better for it.

LOPEZ: Lenovo has been focused on D&I for a long time. We started our first employee resource group — WILL, Women in Lenovo Leadership — about a decade ago. Now we have 13 ERGs represented at sites worldwide, including BLAST, Black Leaders Achieving Success in Technology, and HOLA,



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Hispanics of Lenovo Association. We also have NEMO for new and expectant mothers. ERGs improve the employee experience by creating shared identity communities. Discussions of a product diversity office were underway in 2019 and accelerated in 2020. I've managed it for about 18 months.

BROWN-GRAHAM: We've been on an evolution, thinking about this issue, for at least 30 years. 2020 was a remarkable inflection point. It caused all of us to consider the D&I progress that we've made and how to accomplish what we want. I'm a lawyer by training. I graduated law school in the 1990s and started work at a big firm. I was the first African-American lawyer it hired in its 135-year history. And like many of my counterparts, I was part of a revolving door. I went in, and I left. We can no longer hire people to simply check a box. We need pipelines that show people that they have a future at a company, where they can create a career over a long period of time.

HOW DO YOU TRACK D&I PROGRESS?

LOPEZ: Some numbers come from who you're hiring. We examine gender

diversity in our workforce pipeline. Do women see themselves in tech roles? What role do women play in company leadership? How do we prepare them for those roles? So, we set goals, deadlines and a way to track our progress. This year, we wanted women holding 20% of leadership roles. We're currently at 21% and want to reach 27% within three years. Look at your senior leadership's demographics. Your company should be as diverse as your customers. That's how you understand their needs. When you hire an employee, you don't want that employee to be the only one of that identity community. It's good to join a company where you feel you belong; you can connect with someone. Some of that is hiring practices, including who is doing the hiring. Is it a panel of different people? How does the candidate feel? It's important to walk the talk when it comes to D&I.

STILLWELL: You have to examine quantitative data, but that only tells part of the story. Your organization has to be ready for the conversations about belonging and inclusion. Employees need the capacity to handle or apply what you are throwing at them. All of it is important. We recently worked with a client on a project that simulated the

recruitment experience. It followed applicants through the hiring process. I love hands-on understanding of the employee experience. Our tools to do that are improving every single day. It's exciting to be able to put those into practice.

BROWN-GRAHAM: You need tools that resonate broadly. I'm watching several organizations that measure employee engagement to determine belonging. They've found that women and people from ethnic minority backgrounds have become more engaged over the last couple of years, but white males are becoming less engaged. We need to work this in a way that causes everyone to see why diversity is a good thing. That's the challenge moving forward. We have to pay attention to that.

QUIRE-MCLOUD: One of the first things an organization can do is to look at their employee demographic data. Small actions can enhance retention strategies, inform hiring practices and support career development. Your data will identify gaps that need to be addressed across the entire spectrum. Surveys can inform leaders of employee sentiment about D&I. That sentiment can be measured and tracked for trends and areas of improvement. It's tough to

quantify how an employee experiences the workplace with complete accuracy as it can change, based on a variety of interactions that can occur within a single day. Where the consistency has to be solidified is in the commitment of the organization to be inclusive and respectful of difference, no matter what that is or one's personal feelings. I see this commitment as a non-negotiable that is key to achieving desired outcomes.

JEFFREYS: Fidelity's first diversity, equity and inclusion report was published last year. Its second was released earlier this year. The report outlined workforce representation, programs, training and efforts to evangelize D&I. The report also detailed where we need to improve. It's about transparency and accountability. We can measure the impact, so it can be sustained year over year. Other companies share the same information, allowing us to benchmark our progress. So, for us, it starts with transparency and accountability. Not only is it the right thing to do but we know the impact will be measured by our ability to sustain, expand and scale our progress year after year.

DEWBERRY: Many businesses talk of having a certain number of diverse people, and that causes many lawyers to see red flags because of Title VII of the Civil Rights Act, which makes it illegal to discriminate against people for a host of reasons, including race, gender and sexual orientation. Smith Anderson is part of the Mansfield Rule program, which requires us to consider at least 30% diverse candidates during hiring. That doesn't mean a diverse person is automatically chosen. It ensures that we're looking at the best slate of candidates. The Mansfield Rule also requires us to draft transparent job descriptions and paths to leadership for diverse lawyers. Many diverse people don't see a path for promotion. We have documentation that shows them the way. These three aspects help diverse candidates succeed and allow us to measure our efforts.

WHAT CHALLENGES DOES D&I BRING? WHAT ARE WAYS TO OVERCOME THEM?

QUIRE-MCCLLOUD: A recent LinkedIn study found that the number of diversity leaders doubled from 2015 to 2020. That's a lot of organizational change. The evolution of D&I, particularly within the past two years, can pose challenges for organizations unwilling to respond to what's needed to drive real inclusion. Life and world events inevitably find their way into the work environment, which may automatically place some organizations in reactive mode based on where they are on their D&I journey. One way to overcome this is to increase awareness across the organization through training and education. Organizations should review their policies and guidelines for gaps and be intentional about making changes that address the intersectional needs of all employees. Truilion is in the process of updating its onboarding documents. We have revised language in our employee guidebook and will be sharing employee-centered enhancements that we believe are necessary to foster belonging.

STILLWELL: Leaders need to be agile. They must possess an emotional intelligence that allows them to check professional norms, and sometimes their ego, at the door. That opens up conversations, though sometimes as soon as you jump in, you realize you have to go back to square one. You must develop those skills before you can have meaningful conversations that include all participants. That unlearning and relearning can be challenging, but it's needed.

JEFFREYS: There is lots to focus on with everything being put through a D&I lens such as dynamic working. As people start returning to the office, there is much to adjust to, and in the spirit of inclusion, there are many things we have had to learn and be intentional about. Also, it's not all about diversity. Inclusion needs equal attention, too. We're really focusing on that through our ERGs, allyship

connections and mentoring initiatives. Equity and equality are very different. Some people think everything is OK if everyone has the same opportunity. But the playing field isn't level for everyone. People want authentic leadership. If I see you in the morning, simply asking how you're doing isn't enough. I need to inquire about what I can do or how I can help. That's showing up authentically as a leader.

LOPEZ: The world changed in 2020, and our language is changing to describe what is happening. Discussing these new experiences has been a challenge. The product diversity office considers how users experience Lenovo's technologies. So, we talk to users, ensuring the needs of different genders and ethnicities are met and the new ways that people identify are included and respected. Inclusive language was research project one. Do we say man or male? Do we say female or woman? Do we use nonbinary? Nonbinary was something that we needed to learn, including employees who were early in their career and passionate about change and new language. The internet is filled with information, but that doesn't mean it's correct. We needed the correct definition of inclusive, because we didn't want to be the one using it wrong. Once you have a handle on language, then you discuss accessibility. Is our software accessible? What about our onboarding and presentations? Many people didn't know what that meant, so we filled the knowledge gap there, too. We address D&I needs with education, using language and awareness to put everyone on the same page. That allows us to start conversations and changes to technologies. It was a bigger project than we expected. You have to think about who has the most rigorous standards and doing the right things for your users. That way, if there is a problem, you can say that you follow the highest standard, have user research and are genuinely doing this. It's not to avoid a lawsuit but to do the right thing for your users.

OUR COMMITMENT

To innovate for a diverse world, we must **cultivate a culture** committed to greater diversity.

LENOVO IS

- ✓ Championing diversity in workforce & leadership
- ✓ Progression toward our goals of 27% women and 35% underrepresented minorities in executive roles by 2025
- ✓ Annually, increasing spending with minority owned businesses by 24%
- ✓ Dedicated to our Product Diversity Office testing more products for accessibility
- ✓ Expanding our disability inclusion strategies to 8 global markets

Lenovo is leading the development of smarter technology for all.

<https://www.lenovo.com/us/en/about/social-impact/>

Grateful for perfect scores on the Human Rights Campaign Foundation's Corporate Equality Index (2018-2022)

Smarter
technology
for all

Lenovo

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UNIVERSAL RESPONSIBILITY

Everyone, regardless of how they identify, must find equality and inclusion regardless of where they work. And making that happen is up to all of us, says Sheri Schwab, vice provost for institutional equity and diversity at N.C. State University. She recently shared her thoughts on how businesses can be D&I examples for others, how employees can be encouraged to take up the D&I fight and where efforts should be focused first.



HOW CAN BUSINESSES BE ROLE MODELS FOR D&I?

It starts with leadership. Business leaders should be dedicated to self-learning and improvement and encourage others to do the same. We all need to be involved at both the individual and interpersonal levels, as well as the organizational and systemic levels of diversity, equity and inclusion work. Businesses also can be role models by demonstrating that by having a more inclusive and equitable workforce, their products and services will be more available, accessible and equitable for their clients and customers.

WHAT POLICIES ARE BEING PUT INTO ACTION TO ENCOURAGE PARTICIPATION FROM MANAGEMENT AND STAFF?

At N.C. State, we have added a section on every employee's annual plan of work to have individuals and their supervisors map out a plan for professional development related specifically to diversity, equity and inclusion. This helps demonstrate that diversity, equity and inclusion learning is an ongoing and expected part of every employee's professional development and their performance evaluation. All new employees participate in an orientation-level educational program within their first six months, and all managers must complete an additional training level once assigned as a supervisor. These trainings aside, we really want to encourage participation by creating an environment where people can demonstrate their growth. Rather than relying on policy, we have created numerous learning incentives so that individuals, as well as whole departments and divisions, can showcase their investment and participation. We don't want to use a top-down, policy-driven approach to diversity, equity and inclusion. We want to develop it as an integral and organic part of our culture at N.C. State, so we see it living in everything that we think and do.

WHAT ISSUES NEED TO BE ADDRESSED FIRST?

Primary issues that need to be addressed are that everyone — each and every one of us — has more individual and interpersonal work to do, more knowledge to be gained, more empathy and compassion to use as it relates to understanding others, and more skills to develop how we behave with authentic cultural compassion and competence. And, like most large organizations, there are systemic and organizational equity issues that also need to be improved or addressed. How and what do we prioritize? How do we make progress and show that progress? What does progress related to diversity, equity and inclusion look like within an organization and between individuals that exist in a societal context as well? We don't have all of the answers, but we're working toward our goal of being a more inclusive and welcoming community for all.

DEWBERRY: Diverse employees are tasked with creating diversity change more times than not. In the legal world, for example, law firms may only have a few diverse lawyers. And when that pool is small, a lot gets pushed onto each of them. We don't want to burn out these employees, who are extremely valuable. While most diverse employees are excited to help, organizations have to be reminded to pull in allies, too. That can be a big challenge, particularly in the legal space. The responsibility needs to be shared. At Smith Anderson, we make a conscious effort to pull in our internal and external allies and say OK, they can help with this and share the load.

HOW DO DIFFERENT GENERATIONS VIEW D&I?

BROWN-GRAHAM: There is an issue of intergenerational aptitude for this amount of change. For many young people, this is the world they were born in, and they're curious about it. They're comfortable with it, though they may not have all the right answers or language. One thing that has struck me as curious is it doesn't really break down on conservative versus progressive ideology. It's fascinating to watch.

LOPEZ: One thing that we took into consideration when making these changes and measurements is that we wanted to continue to grow. We want to continue to meet our users' needs. We need to hire talent from different generations and appeal to them, too. We need to create an environment that offers a sense of belonging, where everyone feels valued. As we live longer, we can work later into life. I want to be able to accommodate that talent and experience. Sometimes as we get older, we have more needs. But we want to work and enjoy that sense of purpose. Why shouldn't we? We can use technology as an equalizer to provide those opportunities.

JEFFREYS: As people return to the office as the COVID-19 pandemic wanes,

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5,601 first-year students
at NC State this year

30% are students
of color

19% are the first in their
family to go to college



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we're intentionally thinking about being inclusive. There's a lot going on with that. Millennials seem to want to be in the office. More seasoned employees are happy working remotely. That presents some interesting dynamics in regard to increasing inclusiveness in the workspace that we're creating.

STILLWELL: In terms of accessibility, for example, if you're sitting next to the CEO in the office every day, you'll likely have a much better relationship than someone who's sitting on the other side of the office. That's a small thing, but it can make a large difference when we're talking about opportunities. It goes back to your employee value proposition. Are you shifting your thinking to that mutual relationship? You can't lead with fear of what you're doing. Things change rapidly in our current world. You have to be willing to fail. You have to be willing to do things wrong, recognize that and quickly course correct without dwelling on how you personally feel about that failure. That's a huge challenge.

HOW DOES D&I AFFECT A BUSINESS'S BOTTOM LINE?

JEFFREYS: We know that diverse teams produce better results, better and more relevant products and services for our diverse customer base. Deloitte, McKinsey and other business consultants have looked into it. There is so much research that supports the fact that when you have an inclusive environment, you have happier people, people who are invested in the outcome of the organization. That is the catalyst for business success. We don't have to guess anymore about the impact of the employee experience and the bottom line, because we have the data that measures the impact.

STILLWELL: If you don't do it, it's a clear detriment to your business. Research points to the importance of your relationship with your employees. The more a company focuses on how

D&I impacts the bottom line, the less attractive it becomes to workers who fall into those check boxes. They see the business is only concerned with its bottom line, so it isn't a place they want to work. They want to see everyone in the organization working toward D&I, not only those few employees responsible for it. They want to know the business has systems to ensure their experience is positive.

QUIRE-MCCLLOUD: People are at the heart of every organization's success. Their daily work experiences are a strong driver of retention and influence the effort they choose to apply in their roles. By itself, diversity won't impact much; however, when packaged with intentional inclusion and belonging, the collective effort of the workforce can drive innovation, strengthen financial performance and improve business outcomes. It just makes good business sense.

LOPEZ: Employees with disabilities — neurodiversity — are sometimes overlooked. Accessibility includes many things. It can be having a screen reader or the ability to use Braille on a computer. If you have a mobility issue, do you have what you need to get to your job and do it? Many Americans with disabilities are underemployed, and it's not necessarily because of a lack of talent. The scope of the product diversity office is making products accessible. So, when an employee has an accessibility issue, we're called on to become the ally, the advocate. If we care about a customer with a disability, then we must care about colleagues with a disability, too.

HOW CAN SMALL BUSINESSES ADDRESS D&I?

LOPEZ: Small businesses can't hire as many people as large companies. But technology and tools can allow them to hire more diverse employees. If you hire a great candidate who has mobility issues, for example, then buy a desk

that's designed for their needs. When you consider tools that accommodate employees, then your candidate pool expands.

QUIRE-MCCLLOUD: Small businesses may not be able to be as agile as large organizations, but they can be just as successful with D&I through valuing difference and building inclusion. You don't need a million-dollar budget to treat employees with dignity and respect. Small businesses can start by creating a value statement that speaks to their commitment to a workplace culture that values the voice of employees. They also can survey their workforce to understand employee sentiment then use that sentiment to make decisions that advance the goals stated in their value statement. Diversity breeds innovation and is not limited to race, gender or employers of a certain size. It is inclusive of experiences, opinions and perspectives, all of which can help to solve real business problems. By creating a culture that is inclusive, every organization can address D&I with success.

STILLWELL: You need to be aware of your identity bias. Are you more likely to promote people who are like you? If you recognize that, then you can start the empathy process. It allows you to consider situations from other viewpoints. That's an important first step toward leveling the playing field, especially at small businesses. ■

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to creating meaningful strategies that foster belonging,
and to serving our community with intention and grace.



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