

Ten Dials of Diversity™

When corporations define diversity in ways that are narrow, they put an invisible but unbreakable wall between employee groups. These artificial and unnecessary barriers are the fundamental reason why diversity programs have historically not had their anticipated impact. In order to launch a game changing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DE&I) effort, companies must rethink how they define diversity, reimagine how they use that newly formed definition to foster larger coalitions for action, and eventually, use those coalitions of allies to harness intersectionality to create the ideal: belonging.

The aspiration should not be to look for past DE&I best practices but to create them so that they are fit for our time and custom to the unique needs of each corporation. Corporate programs will not succeed until they get the foundation of their DE&I programs right. Rooted in real experiences and interdisciplinary research, this paper is your ultimate guide for defining diversity in ways that can organically expand diverse coalitions to drive true change. Doing so will not only set your programs apart but will build them from a rock-solid foundation.

by Uzair Qadeer

The Approaches of The Past Have Failed

Diversity was a top area of focus for companies in 2020. According to LinkedIn, in absolute numbers, the hiring of Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs) grew 51% in 2020. CDO appointments expanded at an even faster rate of 84% as a proportion of total C-suite appointments relative to 2019's share. That is the fastest expansion of any C-suite job in 2020.

Yet, despite such investment, diversity leaders and programs often fail, leaving companies and their new diversity executives frustrated and employees without the proper environment to bring their authentic selves to work. This frequently occurs when companies skip the most crucial step of defining diversity in a thoughtful manner, one that is custom to the needs of their employees, customers, and shareholders. Companies too often jump straight to action, accepting generic definitions of diversity to guide their programs. Neglecting to define diversity in holistic ways can alienate people and shut the door on the most powerful component for driving a world class diversity programs: a focus on intersectionality. Every diversity cohort can benefit from the expansion of its existing coalitions. The secret sauce of expanding such coalitions—let us call them coalitions for diverse action—sits at the heart of shared experiences and challenges, also known as intersectionality.

As human resources leaders, we must admit that boxes are for shoes not for people. When we define diversity in ways that are narrow in scope, siloed in focus, and structured around specific employee cohorts, not only do we put people in boxes, but we also further remove them from possibilities for expanding their coalitions to solve their greatest challenges. For instance, think about rural White populations in the United States or Europe. Due to years of trends triggered by globalization, many rural and mostly White towns have morphed into epicenters for failing economies—emblematic of booming drug abuse and mental health crises—and void of vibrant professional opportunities. Some of the challenges faced by rural White populations in 2020 are more akin to challenges faced by Black and Brown communities than by other White populations living in urban or suburban areas. The shared challenges between rural White populations and urban communities of color may include lack of access to education and skills, a high percentage of people who are first in their families to go to universities and pursue professional careers, and lack of readiness and support to thrive when given new opportunities. Could there be a world where minority communities and rural White populations, two groups that are uncommon allies, be united in an effort to combat their shared challenges? Yes, but it will require a revolutionary and systemic shift requiring those two groups to understand their shared problems, unite as allies, form a coalition, and attack their shared challenges together.

To usher such a positive change, corporations need to reimagine how they define diversity to bring unusual groups of employees together, expand existing diversity-focused coalitions, and unite diverse groups against their shared challenges. Such an effort will start with an admission of reality that approaches of the past have not worked and trying them again will likely not render a different result. We must rethink the whole system and then reframe it in context of our time and its unique challenges. Corporations will need to define diversity in a thoughtful manner to focus on commonalities, not differences, between diverse groups. Using the *Ten Dials of Diversity™* will prevent alienation of potential allies and tear down empathy silos that refrain people from congregating around their shared challenges with a desire to solve them collectively.

It Is Time To Rethink Diversity

In our quest to define diversity appropriately, it is crucial to separate diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging from one another and ensure that belonging, not diversity, is the goal. Think about it this way: Diversity is a fact, inclusion is an act, and belonging is a pact. It is belonging, the moment when every person feels included because of their uniqueness not despite of it, that matters the most. In addition to ensuring representation of diverse employees and customers, in order to create a sense of belonging, we also need to redefine diversity not as a checklist of projects, but instead as powerful dials that can be adjusted up or down based on a variety of factors including corporate goals, local culture, social issues, and employee or customer needs.

The *Ten Dials of Diversity™* are designed to help corporations define diversity in a universal manner for an entire workforce globally and then to turn each dial up or down based on unique needs of each local country, market, or office. The dials represent major dimensions of diversity needed to design and activate holistic DE&I programs. The concept of a specific dial, something that can be moved up or down, represents a notion that based on business goals, local conditions, or diversity goals, each dial has to be set intentionally—the higher the number, the higher the focus on that particular dial. The *Ten Dials of Diversity™* serve as a starter-kit; additional dials can be added to them at the market level, e.g., while military or Veteran diversity doesn't exist as a universal dial, in the United States it is a core component of diversity and can be added as an additional dial at the country level.

Understanding and starting with the *Ten Dials of Diversity™* to shape a corporate DE&I strategy will aide in setting a clear and universal definition of diversity, creating a shared and purposeful understanding across the organization, and ensuring that diversity efforts are holistic and highly inclusive.

TEN DIALS OF DIVERSITY™

AGE OR GENERATION



As people live and remain in the workforce longer, age diversity (how old someone is) has become critical. Generational diversity remains closely linked with age diversity, though not all people associate with the generation of their numeric age

RACE



Race is often used to define someone by their skin color, as well as other physical, social, and biological attributes. When considering what the different types of races are, the options are usually: White, Black, Asian, etc.

ETHNICITY



Ethnicity refers to the way in which one identifies learned aspects of themselves, i.e., language and culture. For example, French is both a nationality and an ethnicity, but someone raised in Panama may identify as racially black but also as ethnically Panamanian

NATIONAL ORIGIN



In the age of cross-border, remote, and a large expat workforce, national origin is a key dimension of diversity; national origin may impact where people can work and how they work. It also can include birthplace, ancestry, culture, nationality, and language

GENDER



Gender is the spectrum of characteristics pertaining to, and differentiating between, masculinity and femininity. Depending on the context, these characteristics may include biological sex, sex-based social structures, or gender identity

BELIEF SYSTEM



Belief System is a set of principles or tenets which together form the basis of a religion or philosophy; belief systems may include affiliation with an organized religion or lack of affiliation with any religion at all

SEXUAL ORIENTATION



Sexual orientation is a person's identity in relation to the gender or genders to which they are sexually attracted; the fact of being heterosexual, homosexual, etc.

DISABILITY / ABILITY



A person with a disability is a person who has a physical, mental, cognitive, or developmental condition that impairs, interferes with, or limits one or more major life activities

SOCIOECONOMIC STATUS



Socioeconomic status is a combined total measure of a person's work experience and of an individual's or family's economic and social position in relation to others

NEURODIVERSITY



Personality or social style is the behavior that one exhibits when interacting with others; differing psychological preferences in how people perceive the world and make decisions is driven by neurodiversity

The Age of Belonging Has Begun

These dials frame diversity in a manner that includes everyone in the equation, and as opposed to leaving people behind, unites them around common causes. But simply framing diversity in a powerful manner does not necessarily create inclusion or ignite belonging. The next step is to put these dials into practical use. It is an imperative that each company carefully consider the relevance of each dial related to its unique strategy and goals, customer and employee needs, as well as local laws, regulations, conditions.

While it is key to consider all *Ten Dials of Diversity™*, it is belonging, not diversity, that is the eventual goal of DE&I efforts. Belonging, in some ways, begins with acknowledging representation as table stakes. Every company should strive to address each of the dials for a range of voices, perspectives, and experiences. The application of these dials as well as the framework and structure that sit underneath them serve as a starting point to create belonging. Consider the following four steps leveraging *Ten Dials of Diversity™* to bring your diversity ambitions to life with a goal of fostering belonging.

START WITH A SOLID FOUNDATION

1

Start with the *Ten Dials of Diversity™* to ensure that your efforts include and magnetize every employee. Doing so will declare to the organization that your DE&I efforts are in service of all employees. This will, in turn, eliminate resistance and increase broad support for your efforts.

2

BUILD ON THE TEN DIALS OF DIVERSITY™

Add additional dials to account for the needs of your business, employees, customers, or local factors. For example, in the United States, Veteran focus is a common additional dial and a key element of diversity. This will further deepen your corporate diversity network.

3

ADJUST THE DIALS INTENTIONALLY

Turn the dials up or down based on needs of your business, employees, customers, or local factors. For instance, on a 1-10 scale, a higher number on a dial denotes a higher emphasis on that area of diversity. This will allow you to create programs globally, roll out programs most relevant to specific markets, and in turn prioritize investments and reach maximum impact.

4

TEAR DOWN EMPATHY SILOS

Structure all your efforts around shared challenges to harness the power of intersectionality and to galvanize groups to unite and solve shared problems, creating belonging. The more you focus on the intersection of two dials, the larger your coalition of allies becomes to solve for the problems that are shared. This will usher your diversity efforts into a highly dynamic and engaged state.



How to Adjust the Dials?

Illustrative Company Z is a biotech with large footprints in Boston, Basel, and Tokyo.

While developing a global DE&I strategy, the company has set the dials for **RACE** and **ETHNICITY** at 10 for United States, a racially diverse market, but at 2 for Japan which is a homogenous market. Similarly, the company has also decided to set the dial for **NATIONAL ORIGIN** at 8 for Switzerland, a country with a massive foreign workforce, but only at 1 for Japan. Finally, while completing an assessment of all ten dials, the company has also decided to set the dial for **AGE** at 9 for Japan, nation with oldest population. Similarly, all other dials are set between 2-8 based on the dial and the market.

As a result, Company Z was able to decide which DE&I efforts to launch in which market and where to prioritize investments. It was also able to deliver diversity programs that were relevant to the local workforce and avoid the pitfall of pushing generic efforts to all the markets.

In turn, the company was also able to engage employees at the grassroots level into its diversity efforts and have a more focused impact.



Diversity Requires

Design Thinking

The *Ten Dials of Diversity™* framework is based on years of international professional work. This framework aims to unlock a transformative way to define diversity, starting with ten dials to shape holistic DE&I efforts. Considering diversity across these dials ensures that all people feel included in corporate diversity efforts, uniting them to solve shared problems and create a true sense of belonging for one another.

People have complex and multi-faceted identities and most people do not belong to just one group. Corporate diversity programs have a limited reach because they are organized around archaic ideas, such as employee resource groups (ERGs). These groups box people around hard and fast dimensions. It is counter to how diverse people actually experience their lives and the world around them. For instance, what group or ERG should a black lesbian join—the women's ERG, the People of Color ERG, or the LGBTQ+ ERG? People should not have to pick. Diversity programs should be designed to accommodate the remarkable, multi-dimensional identities of people.

Diversity programs must deliver an irresistible employee experience within an organization. In that vein, the *Ten Dials of Diversity™* applies design thinking to diversity efforts by positioning core dimensions as ten overlapping but customizable dials. These dials put the experiences of diverse people at the center of all corporate diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and ensures that these efforts are customizable at the grassroots level to deliver high-impact and relevant experiences to each diverse person.

It is crucial to consider how the recipient of a diversity program will receive and experience such a program. If the program isn't designed to meet the expectations of the recipient, then it is not going to succeed. Being able to adjust each dial on a scale, the ability to add additional dials, and to use the dials to funnel programs, efforts, and investments to the right areas allows us to deliberately deliver diversity efforts as transformative and deeply personal experiences.

The *Ten Dials of Diversity™* provides an exceptional framework to shape DE&I efforts at the corporate or global level and then deliver them as high impact experiences at a local level. Remember after all, it is belonging—not diversity—that is the end goal, and belonging is not a process or a program, it is a deeply personal and powerful experience.

About Uzair Qadeer



Uzair Qadeer

Qadeer currently serves as Chief Diversity Officer at Alexion Pharmaceuticals where he built a leading-edge diversity, inclusion, and belonging (DI&B) function at Alexion from the ground-up at an astounding pace. He reports directly into the CEO and is a member of the company's management team.

Prior to assuming the role of Chief Diversity Officer, Mr. Qadeer served as Vice President, Head of Enterprise Partnership, helping Alexion further build transformational capabilities in executive coaching, HR business partnership, workforce planning, and organizational strategies while shaping the company's preliminary DI&B strategy. Before joining Alexion, Mr. Qadeer worked in roles of increasing responsibility in Deloitte's Human Capital consulting practice where he advised clients across industries and geographies on forward-looking human capital topics spanning talent management, organizational development and design, human resources management, and DI&B. Prior to that, Mr. Qadeer worked at Bristol Myers Squibb Company, expatriating to Rome, Italy, to deliver global work while gaining insights around diversity and inclusion in an international context. Additionally, Mr. Qadeer served as an Adjunct MBA professor at Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey.

Mr. Qadeer received his master's degree as well as his B.A. and B.S. degrees from The Pennsylvania State University.

→ [LinkedIn](#)

*As human resources leaders,
we must admit that boxes
are for shoes not for people.*

Uzair Qadeer

Acknowledgements

Special thanks to **Christopher Johnson** for contributing to this paper with insights on the importance of design thinking for diversity. Currently a Senior User Experience Designer at Optum, Mr. Johnson is a global interdisciplinary design leader with expertise in human behavior and experience design. Johnson's designs with corporations, architects, and artists have been showcased at major events and forums globally. → [LinkedIn](#)

Special thanks to **Marja Fitzgerald** for editing this paper. Ms. Fitzgerald is a seasoned human resources leader who leverages cross-industry insights to support C-suite executives in identifying organizational strategies that drive value-creation across all stakeholder groups. → [LinkedIn](#)

About the Artwork

Qadeer, Uzair. Pantheon, Rome, Italy. 2019.

The artwork used in this paper is based on photographs taken by Mr. Qadeer of Pantheon in Rome, Italy. While Mr. Qadeer has lived and worked in three continents, Rome - Mr. Qadeer's former home - has been a major inspiration in his life and career. It was Qadeer's time in Italy that led to his research of diversity, equity, and inclusion in a global context.

All views reflected in this paper are personal views of the author and do not represent, in any form, any other individual, entity, corporation, or organization that the author may or may not be affiliated with. Any unauthorized use, application, or alteration of this publication without consent from the author is prohibited. This opinion article is not a substitute for professional advice or services, nor should it be used as a basis for any decision or action that may affect your business. Before making any decision or taking any action that may affect your business, you should consult a qualified professional adviser. The author shall not be responsible for any loss sustained by any person who relies solely on this publication.