

Empowered to **LEAD** through **DIVERSITY,** **EQUITY & INCLUSION**

By Laneika K. Musalini



Diversity is essential for successful leadership in times of crisis. During crises, the presence of diversity and the practice of inclusion is essential to challenge us to look at problems differently (Why Leadership Diversity, 2020). Instead of feeling stress and defeat, view these times as an opportunity to empower and be empowered.

Leaders are now faced with making unprecedented, complex decisions which require diversity in life experience paired with diversity in rich professional expertise, along with the willingness to be inclusive of other ideas. During these times, strategic diversity and inclusion initiatives may fade into the background, falling behind more urgent matters such as reopening the institution and maintaining a certain level of productivity. However, allowing diversity and inclusion to fall by the wayside screams loudly to minorities in the

institution as well as to the surrounding community that these issues are not important, which will have potential adverse effects in the future. In fact, inclusion and diversity are necessary for renewal and growth positioning.


Research has proven that diversity and inclusion foster a more innovative and resilient workplace. These characteristics are imperative for organizational recovery. Indeed, companies may unlock the power of inclusion and diversity as an enabler of business performance and organizational health and contribute to the wider effort to revive economies and safeguard social cohesion (Dolan, Hunt, Prince & Sancier-Sultan, 2020).

COVID-19

COVID-19 has presented the world with a health crisis that has never been experienced before. Employee health and safety, as well as the health

and safety of students, must be the primary consideration of any organization during the coronavirus pandemic. One of the greatest challenges is understanding the needs and circumstances of employees who themselves are diverse in all of the traditional measures but also are affected by widely varying life, work and family conditions (Why Leadership Diversity, 2020). Circumstances such as virtual schooling children, caring for elderly parents, and lacking broadband access may all pose issues that require managers and organizational leaders to be equity champions during these times. As an equity champion, leaders must be understanding and willing to accommodate employees with the necessary resources and support they need to successfully and efficiently perform their jobs.

Understanding and compassion begins with active listening. Be careful about listening only to



respond. Be present in the conversation. Have conversations with your staff to find out how they are being affected both personally and professionally. This allows you to make more informed, equitable and accommodating decisions.

Accommodations & Access

During the time of COVID-19 many people are working remotely. Generally, decisions are made based on the majority. As leaders, you must practice mindfulness and know that not everyone has access to internet, computers/laptops, printers, and other equipment that may be necessary for them to be successful in performing their jobs efficiently. When having conversations and making decisions at a high level, it is important that decision-makers are mindful to not unintentionally exclude people. Premier accommodations and access are key to ensuring performance efficiency. Offer hotspots and laptops to all employees. Additionally, allow employees to operate on a flex schedule so they can be more productive.

Communication

Communicate, communicate, communicate. When people cannot be in the same space, effective and consistent communication is vital in ensuring that your employees are informed and engaged. In conversing with fellow diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) practitioners, they all express the importance of constant communication. Communication keeps the lines of trust, opportunity, and access open for all. Communication also provides a sense of care and loyalty.

Safety & Social Distancing

When people return to work in a traditional office setting, it is leadership's responsibility to make certain that all employees and students are safe and practicing Centers for Disease Control (CDC)/World Health Organization (WHO) guidelines. At this point, more than one million people have died from COVID-19 worldwide. If employees feel afraid or unsafe, they cannot be productive. Leaders are to be proactive by providing resources for employees to talk with an expert to assist them with navigating these trying times, as well as supplying employees with personal protection equipment (PPE). Do not deflect to ignore the issue(s). Instead work to ensure that all employees feel safe, protected and calm.

Intersectionality

Although COVID-19 has taken center attention in the media, there are other major issues that have

managed to decenter COVID-19 in the United States. Intersectionality is the interconnected nature of social categorizations, such as race, class, and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage. Due to intersectionality many are facing multiple pandemics, whether or not acknowledged across the broad spectrum, as evidenced by protests concerning racial injustice.

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Racism & Protests

The world witnessed protests globally in response to the continued racial injustice displayed in America. The angst, the disgust, the fear, and so many other emotions surfaced during the pandemic as many witnessed the senseless murders of Ahmaud Arbery, Breonna Taylor, and George Floyd, all of which were encapsulated by racism. Having observed these violent murders during a pandemic likely heightened the attention and emotion displayed during protests. Additionally, many Chinese, Chinese Americans and immigrants became victims of xenophobia as a result of COVID-19 being referenced as the "Chinese virus." All of these things caused those encompassed by multiple life intersections to become exhausted, which could potentially impact their normal functionality.

DACA

In June of this year, the Supreme Court blocked the current presidential administration's plan to end the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals (DACA) program. Although temporary, the Supreme Court provided a bandage that can be abruptly ripped off at any minute, exposing the fear, anxiety and danger over 700,000 "Dreamers" have had to live with for so long (Cardona, 2020). This is just another example of how intersectionality plays a major role in people's everyday lives.

Natural Disasters

In addition to the many ways in which people are affected by intersectionality, the world has been ravished by natural disasters. The Australian bushfire burned an estimated 18.6 million hectares, destroyed over 5,900 buildings, and killed at least 34 people, while over 400 people were killed due to the residual smoke inhalation. There have been devastating floods in Indonesia, the eruption of a 43-year dormant volcano in the Philippines, massive earthquakes across the globe, locust swarms in East Africa and parts of India and Asia, and a cyclone in India and Bangladesh. In addition, we've seen floods, forest fires, tornadoes, and ravishing hurricanes, all of which precede the damage (emotional, economical, and physical) and lasting effects of them all.

Effects & Response

Intersectionality examines how factors experienced at individual and group levels are shaped by processes and structures of power (i.e., capitalism, globalization, patriarchy, racism, nationalism, and xenophobia) to create an interplay of advantages and vulnerabilities (Hankivsky, 2012). The effects of all of the different happenings in the environment can be overwhelming, particularly by groups whom find themselves at multiple intersections. Consider the actual impact of all of these things taking place simultaneously. The staff that you lead and colleagues that you work with have potentially lost loved ones to COVID-19, injustices, and natural disasters. These events may very well lead to depression, stress, anxiety, fear, chronic inflammation (USC, 2019) and a lack of sense of belonging.

For leaders, the proper response to all of these things should be guided by cultural sensitivity, compassion and empathy. As mentioned earlier, leaders should offer flexible work schedules for those in need, perform mental health check-ins with staff, as well as encourage staff to check on their peers. Remind staff about employee assistance programs. Host themed virtual meetings to lighten the mood. Act as an ally by challenging bias at all times. Be a voice for the voiceless. Intentionally engage your staff in decision-making and feedback. Learn about other cultures to be better prepared to address a wide array of issues. Become a system change agent to eliminate systemic oppression. Encourage your staff to take a day off and to step away from the computer throughout the day. Further, self-care is important. Take care of yourself in order to lead positively and effectively for the long haul.

Overwhelming, yet exhilarating, may be an understatement to describe the majority of 2020. For the first time, people of all races and ethnicities from many countries stood together in solidarity to fight demonstrated injustices and prejudices. Amongst the many organizations and corporations standing against racism, our beloved NCURA made the decision to stand with its many members impacted by racial injustice, racism, and hate and have committed to doing the work to provide a safe and equitable space for all NCURA members. Thank you!

Regional Diversity & Inclusion Features

NCURA has been working to create and promote diversity initiatives at every level of the organization. Each of the eight regions has a responsibility to its regional membership to practice diversity and be intentional about inclusion while providing equitable opportunities to volunteerism and leadership roles. Congratulations to the regions featured below for supporting national diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives.

Region I by Louise Griffin

On July 30th, Region I hosted an online discussion on Diversity and Inclusion, facilitated by Alexis Stokes, Director of Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging from the Harvard University School of Engineering and Applied Sciences. Alexis graciously agreed to lead the discussion group for Region I members. In advance of the session, participants reviewed several timely articles:

- How Higher Education Can Fight Racism, Speak Up When It's Hard
- How Implicit Bias and Lack of Diversity Undermine Science
- Top 10 Practical Steps for Advancing Diversity, Equity and Inclusion in Higher Education
- What does it take to make an institution more diverse?

Specific to research administration, Alexis advised the following:

- Make faculty aware of available grant supplements for underrepresented groups (i.e., NSF REU program)
- Publicize grant opportunities for underrepresented minorities (i.e., NSF Louis Stokes program)
- Provide faculty and students with assistance in navigating the rules and bureaucracy as well as the “unwritten rules”
- Sponsor lunch meetings for graduate students and postdocs
- Make hiring of post docs a process and not an “unofficial network”
- Highlight and promote the work being done by underrepresented faculty
- When recruiting staff, be mindful of the recruiting process (i.e., consider if there bias in the application or interview process, actively work with human resources to ensure a diverse applicant pool, and always have multiple people involved in the interview process)

The discussion group was very engaged and appreciated hearing Alexis’ perspectives on a variety of topics relevant to diversity and research administration.

Region II by Katie McKeon

Region II is always looking for ways to engage all regional members. At Region II’s Fall Regional Meeting 2019 and at AM61, the steering committee developed a survey to poll regional members regarding ways to improve volunteerism and initiatives related to diversity and inclusion in the region. In 2020, Region II hopes to analyze and respond those results by creating a Diversity & Inclusion working group that will devise a strategy for Region II to engage with diversity and inclusion. If any Region II member is interested in volunteering or sharing ideas, please contact Region II’s Chair-Elect, Catherine Parker at caparker@umd.edu.

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Region III by Emily Devereux & Laura Letbetter

Over the past year, Region III has acted strategically to advance diversity and inclusion in sustainable ways. Actions were initiated by a chair's initiative to increase the region's commitment, starting with the formation of an ad hoc diversity and inclusion committee for 2019-2020. This committee assisted the chair-elect and planning committee for the spring 2020 meeting's diversity and inclusion considerations, launched the Region III diversity and inclusion climate survey in June 2020, and in August 2020 became a standing committee of the Region.

The standing committee's scope promotes NCURA's commitment to diversity and inclusion through regional initiatives, representation, and action. The goals of the diversity and inclusion survey's data collection and assessment of regional climate are to better understand and serve the needs of the membership, to break down barriers for research administrators, and to provide information to the executive team for informed decisions and solutions for regional needs. The survey's feedback has revealed opportunities to increase members' understanding of the meaning of diversity and inclusion and will be a priority for serving the membership in 2020-2021. Preliminary findings were presented to the membership at the Region III business meeting during AM62. Region III's ongoing commitment mirrors National's statement on diversity and inclusion.

Region IV by Matt Richter

Region IV is proud to share several recent and ongoing diversity and inclusion efforts.

While we regrettably had to cancel the Joint Region III and IV Spring Meeting this past April, 2020, Region IV is proud of the combined efforts of both regions to plan what would have been a successful conference. The theme of the 2020 Spring Meeting was "Expanding the Circle: One Profession, Diverse Perspectives." Through this theme, Regions III and IV worked together to recognize and celebrate the diversity of both regions' memberships and the profession of research administration. Thanks to the time and talent of amazing volunteers from both regions, diversity and inclusion was incorporated into all aspects of meeting planning and program design, from selecting the keynote speaker to session and workshop topics to menu and activity options.

Continuing the momentum gained through planning the 2020 spring meeting, Region IV is assembling a taskforce to draft guidelines that can be used to assist others in being mindful of diversity and inclusiveness in all content that the region puts out for our members. Region IV is also proud to share that Bonniejean Zitske, former Chair of Region IV (2018-2019) and current volunteer, will continue to champion diversity and inclusion efforts on behalf of the region going forward, and new volunteers will be invited to contribute to this important work as well. In addition, Region IV has proposed that an entire track be devoted to diversity and inclusion topics for the next Region IV Spring Meeting in Minneapolis (April, 2021).

Region V by Becky Castillo

Region V is excited to announce its diversity and inclusion initiatives. The year 2020 marked the inaugural year for Region V's Mustang Mentoring Program (MMP). The program was designed for individuals in a leadership role to serve as mentors at the regional level while providing educational and professional resources for the development of MMP mentees. The MMP is open to the entire regional membership through an application process and the curriculum is based on *The Leadership Challenge: How to Make Extraordinary Things Happen in Organizations* by James M. Kouzes and Barry Z. Posner.

This year Region V also diversified the Region's Executive Committee by naming Jeffrey Garza as the Chair-Appointed At-Large Member. Jeffrey is from

Texas A&M University—Kingsville, a PUI and Hispanic-serving institution. He has been a member of NCURA since 2017 and has served as a volunteer on several committees. Here are a few words from Jeffrey about his experience with NCURA.

"I strongly believe NCURA recognizes the importance of diversity in research administration and is very inclusive of the different kinds of institutions represented in our field. Being an employee from a PUI who works in a small central office, I feel NCURA is a vital organization. It is exciting to hear from colleagues from different institutions. Attending webinars, conferences, or meetings, provides useful information and tips from other research administrators that can translate into our office. Research administration is constantly changing, and NCURA keeps our community updated and informed. I look forward to continuing my involvement in NCURA in the years to come."

Be on the Lookout

NCURA's Diversity & Inclusion (D&I) Task Force is working to ensure diversity, equity and inclusion for all. The desire is for national D&I initiatives to flow down to each of the regions. Given the 2020 presidential charges, the D&I Task Force has developed the [Diversity & Inclusion Collaborate Community](#), which is already active. Please be sure to join the Diversity & Inclusion Community in Collaborate. There will also be an organizational climate survey administered this fall. Please be on the lookout for the survey. It is imperative that all members participate in the survey. Data collected from the survey will help to inform decision-making in regards to programming, member opportunities, professional development offerings, and targeted member recruitment. Finally, the Task Force has worked to develop a virtual career development program for junior members who want to develop their leadership skills and abilities as inclusive leaders. That program should be forthcoming in 2021. ■

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