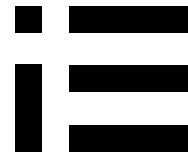


**WHITE WOMEN
WORKING IN EQUITY,
DIVERSITY, AND
INCLUSION:
ACKNOWLEDGING
YOUR PRIVILEGE(S) &
AMPLIFYING THE
VOICES OF OTHERS**

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Working in EDI is not about achieving perfection; it is about continuous growth, education, and the understanding that creating a truly inclusive society is a long-term effort requiring collaboration, humility, and unwavering commitment to justice.

Introduction

Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) are integral components of modern organisational culture, reflecting an effort to create workspaces that are equitable, welcoming, and free of discrimination. For a white woman working within this field, the journey of promoting and instilling EDI practices is often intertwined with personal growth, challenge, and responsibility. Given the privileged position white people often occupy in societal hierarchies, particularly within the context of race and power dynamics, it's crucial to reflect on the complexities involved. This short piece delves into the unique perspective and experiences of a white woman in the EDI field, exploring the challenges, benefits, and strategies for navigating this work while being mindful of one's own positionality and power.

The Problem: Women and the Significance of EDI in Today's World

The drive for EDI stems from an acknowledgment of the systemic inequalities that exist across various societal domains, including education, employment, healthcare, and politics. In recent years, issues related to racial, gender, disability, and sexual identity/orientation inequalities have gained significant attention, particularly as global movements like Black Lives Matter and #MeToo have highlighted the intersectional nature of discrimination and the urgent need for social change.

Organisations and institutions have increasingly recognized that implementing policies, practices, and culture that promote EDI is essential not only for moral reasons but also for

improving performance, fostering creativity, and ensuring long-term sustainability. Diverse and inclusive environments promote innovation, higher employee satisfaction, and retention, and often result in better decision making, as teams with varied experiences bring different perspectives to problem-solving.

For white women in particular, working in the EDI space may involve managing a fine balance of advocating for social justice while being conscious of one's own inherent advantages due to their race. The necessity for self-awareness, empathy, and an understanding of power structures is crucial for being effective in this field.

Challenges Faced by White Women in EDI

1. Navigating White Privilege

White privilege refers to the set of privileges that provide advantage to those identified as white in comparison with those who are non-white (Miller, 2016), described by McIntosh (1988) as 'an invisible package of unearned assets from which I can count on cashing in each day, but about which I am meant to remain oblivious' (p.1). For a white woman working in EDI, acknowledging this privilege is vital. While gender inequality may place a woman at a disadvantage, the experience of racial privilege can sometimes mitigate this. White women may find themselves occupying spaces where their voices are valued or amplified simply due to their race, even as they face discrimination or bias based on gender.

Recognising white privilege in the workplace

and in the broader societal context is absolutely necessary for understanding how to advocate for meaningful change. It can also be difficult for white women to navigate the fine line between leveraging their privilege to push for broader diversity and inclusion initiatives and unintentionally perpetuating the status quo by maintaining a voice that might overshadow those from more marginalised backgrounds. This dynamic can also manifest in EDI spaces where, despite being an ally, a white woman's position of authority may limit the agency or visibility of people of colour or other marginalised groups.

2. Addressing Intersectionality

Intersectionality, a term coined by Crenshaw (1989), refers to the interconnectedness of social categorisations such as race, class, gender, sexual identity/orientation and others. In the field of EDI, understanding intersectionality is pivotal – Hill Collins (2019) argues that this is social action as a way of knowing, dedicated to social justice. A white woman may be able to identify with aspects of marginalisation due to gender or sexual identity, but she may never fully comprehend the compounded challenges faced by women of colour, Black women, or Indigenous women. These women experience oppression not only on the basis of gender but also due to race, culture, and history.

Being aware of intersectionality means recognising the layered nature of discrimination and working to elevate voices from different perspectives, ensuring that EDI initiatives are comprehensive and inclusive of all identities. For white women, recognising, understanding and outwardly acknowledging how their experiences are different from women of colour

and others facing multiple forms of oppression is crucial for truly creating a culture of inclusion.

3. Dealing with criticism

The work of advocating for equity, diversity, and inclusion can come with resistance, particularly in environments where entrenched norms and attitudes are difficult to challenge. As a white woman advocating for EDI, one might face criticism from colleagues or superiors who do not understand the importance of these values, or who might view such initiatives as divisive or unnecessary.

Additionally, white women in the EDI field may face criticism from individuals within marginalised communities who may feel that white people are intruding or speaking over their struggles. This can create a sense of alienation, as some might question the authenticity of their motives or efforts. A white woman in this space must navigate the delicate balance between being an effective advocate while not overshadowing or co-opting the experiences of those she seeks to help.

4. Working with Guilt and Imposter Syndrome

It is possible for white women working in EDI may struggle with guilt, particularly when it comes to their racial privilege. This guilt can lead to imposter syndrome - feeling as though they don't deserve to be in the EDI field or that they are not doing enough to make meaningful change. The responsibility of deconstructing systemic injustice can feel overwhelming, and this may be accompanied by a fear of getting things wrong.

However, imposter syndrome can be mitigated

by recognising that doing EDI work does not require perfection. It's about ongoing self-education, acknowledging mistakes, and striving for progress rather than striving for an unattainable standard of "doing enough."

Making Meaningful Change: Personal Growth and Learning

1. Developing Cultural Competence

For a white woman in EDI, developing cultural competence is essential. Cultural competence involves reflecting on one's own thoughts and behaviours whilst also understanding respecting and effectively working with individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds. This includes awareness of one's own biases and prejudices, which may be shaped by societal conditioning, upbringing, or personal experiences.

Ongoing learning, unlearning, and listening to marginalised voices are critical to cultural competence. Attending workshops, reading books by authors from diverse backgrounds, and engaging in dialogues about race, privilege, and intersectionality can help white women strengthen their cultural awareness and sensitivity. These actions demonstrate a commitment to understanding the complexities of identity and the importance of inclusive practices beyond cultural tolerance.

2. Building Strong Alliances and Partnerships

White women in the EDI field should aim to build authentic partnerships with individuals from marginalised communities, a strategy Miller (2024) defines as 'outbound allyship' (p.1). When these partnerships are formed,

they can be used to create spaces where diverse voices are centred, ensuring that members of marginalised groups have the opportunity to speak, lead, and advocate for themselves. Allies can be instrumental in amplifying these voices and supporting them in taking leadership roles within EDI initiatives.

Furthermore, collaborating with colleagues and stakeholders from various backgrounds helps to create a more inclusive and empowering environment, one where different perspectives are not just heard but are actively integrated into decision-making processes.

3. Developing Emotional Intelligence: Leading with Empathy and Humility

Emotional intelligence is essential in the work of EDI, and it must be at the core of any strategy to create meaningful change. For white women, this means being able to listen actively, validate the experiences of marginalized people, and show humility in recognizing the limits of their understanding. Leading with empathy involves taking the time to learn about and understand the issues that others face, without assuming that one's own experiences will map directly onto those of others. Equally important is humility, the acknowledgement that no single individual can fully grasp the complexities of all the social issues at play. By adopting a posture of humility and a what Mertens (2009) describes as a transformative approach (especially in approaching research), white women in EDI can avoid the trap of saviourism, recognising that their role is to support and amplify the work already being done by marginalised communities, rather than positioning themselves as the primary agents of change.

Conclusion

Being a white woman working in Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion is a role fraught with complexities, challenges, and responsibilities. Recognising one's own privilege and limitations is crucial for making meaningful contributions to the EDI movement. Through ongoing self-awareness, humility, and a commitment to cultural competence, white women can play an integral role in dismantling systemic inequalities and fostering more inclusive workplaces and communities. However, it's essential that they remain mindful of the power dynamics at play, ensuring that their efforts truly serve the needs of marginalised groups rather than unintentionally perpetuating the status quo. Working in EDI is not about achieving perfection; it is about continuous growth, education, and the understanding that creating a truly inclusive society is a long-term effort requiring collaboration, humility, and unwavering commitment to justice.

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