

7 Questions to Assess D&I Readiness: Is Now the Right Time for Your Organization?

Picture this: You're personally committed to diversity and inclusiveness. You have a few allies in the C-suite. You've just returned from an eye-opening, inspiring conference with the fervor of the converted, eager to report back to the CEO who sent you there. You're ready to hit the ground running and move change in your organization. You see clearly how badly it's needed, and you even have a draft strategic plan!

Sounds like the ideal moment to embark on a formal D&I journey, right? Maybe. Enthusiasm, a few allies and some subject matter expertise are a good start. But many D&I leaders in large organizations – myself included – learn the hard way that this isn't enough. Pushing D&I change when the timing or the circumstances aren't right can lead to lip service and an anemic “program” at best and disastrous outcomes, battered credibility and left-of-zero buy-in at worst.

Set yourself and your organization up for success by answering the following seven questions before starting out on a D&I journey:

1. **What is your organization's motivation to embark on a D&I journey?** Is it superior results in what matters? Or is it checking a box, complying with requirements, looking good, winning an award or placating a constituency? If the motivation is anything but superior results, it's not time (or you need to be realistic about if, when and how the organization can get there).
2. **Is there a written organization-wide, results-oriented plan for D&I** that not only outlines specific goals and actions for at least three years, but also the superior results that are anticipated as a result of D&I, and how those results will be measured? If not, it's not time (yet, so start working on the plan!).
3. **Is the CEO committing words, time, people *and* money to D&I?** If not, it's not time – you need all four, not just words. People who think D&I change can happen bottom-up will find their progress slow and frustrating. As long as your organization is a hierarchical non-democracy, you need full, genuine commitment from your top leader to drive change.

4. **Is your D&I journey dependent on the personality, positional power, effort or expertise of a tiny handful of people?** If so, it's not time, because the journey will stop when those individuals burn out, leave the organization or change their position. If not immediately, D&I needs to be quickly integrated into the organization's basic operations on a par with other areas, and not treated as the pet project of a few, or as an extracurricular endeavor. If superior results are the goal, broad integration is the only way to make them happen.
5. **Are your top HR leader and your top finance person on board or neutral?** If they are actively or passively resistant to D&I, it's not time. You and your CEO need time and creativity to obtain genuine buy-in from these key players, or the CEO needs to set clear expectations and hold them accountable. The success of D&I depends in large part on a successful partnership with HR and finance.
6. **Is your larger organizational culture one that supports accountability, fairness, clear communication, respect and high performance?** No organization is perfect, but if you have moderate-to-severe deficits in these areas, D&I efforts will amplify these weaknesses, which will derail D&I. Make sure you substantially improve these deficits first, or ensure there is adequate leadership commitment, time and resources dedicated to address these issues along with D&I.
7. **Are you, your allies and your senior leadership prepared to handle inevitable conflicts as they arise?** If your organization needs D&I, it needs change. Change means doing things differently – different behaviors, words, decisions, processes and beliefs. Such change can and will strain even supportive, trusting relationships. If your culture lacks sufficient safety, transparency and the practice of effective communication behaviors to recognize and address conflict and threats to the status quo, it's not time. It's time to build a climate where dialogue is safe and open, those with power listen and agreements are made and kept.

Set yourself, your D&I journey and your organization up for success. Ensure you're fully prepared before setting out. It's a worthwhile, rewarding adventure, but the road is often bumpy.

Let's talk about how to set you up for success! susana@susanarinderle.com