Nonprofit**HR**

WEBINAR TRANSCRIPT

Persevering for Progress: EDIJ 2024 & Beyond

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In this webinar, Nonprofit HR's Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Justice (EDIJ) experts dissect the critical role DEI plays in aligning mission-driven organizations with their workforce, values and external accountabilities. Nonprofit and association leaders work to balance their mission-centric operations, many times within talent and resource constraints. This session illuminates cost-effective approaches that maximize impact along the journey of building and sustaining an equitable and inclusive workplace. Join us and explore ways to anticipate and stabilize disruptions with forward-thinking DEI strategies. This webinar will help participants understand how to fulfill the ethical imperatives of nonprofit missions through inclusion and enhance organizational resilience and performance in an ever-evolving landscape.

The discussion will focus on:

- Strategies for integrating DEI initiatives seamlessly into the fabric of nonprofit people management practices and missions
- The multifaceted reasons behind executive leaders' commitment to DEI
- How to utilize metrics and measurement as a strategy for thriving through external disruption
- Pinpointing strategies to reignite stalled efforts and prevent regressions, ensuring sustained progress towards DEI objectives
- Realigning the unique values and professional dedication of your workforce to your organization's DEI practices
- Leveraging limited funds for maximum social and organizational impact
- Navigating external stakeholders' expectations and compliance measures, fostering transparency and accountability

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WEBINAR PRESENTERS

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Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Hello, everyone, and welcome. Thank you for joining us this afternoon for Nonprofit HR Virtual Learning Education Event. Today's session is entitled Persevering for Progress: EDIJ in 2024 and Beyond.

My name is Atokatha Ashmond Brew and I'm Managing Director for Marketing & Strategic Communication for Nonprofit HR. I will be your conversation moderator for today. We have a lot of great content to cover on this very important topic.

Before we get started, I would like to go over a few housekeeping items, so you know how to participate in today's event. You have joined the presentation listening using your computer's speaker system by default.

If you would prefer to join over the telephone, just select telephone in the GoToWebinar audio pane, and the dial-in installation will be displayed.

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Today's event is being recorded and you will receive a follow-up email within the next few days with a link to view the recording. Along with those assets, you will receive a recertification code for SHRM credit.

Just a brief note about Nonprofit HR.

Since 2000, Nonprofit HR remains the country's leading and oldest firm focused exclusively on the talent management needs of the social sector, including nonprofits, associations, social enterprises and other mission-driven organizations.

We focus our consulting efforts on the following practice areas: Strategy & Advisory, HR Outsourcing, Total Rewards, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Justice and Search. Again, you will be able to ask questions of our presenters throughout the webinar by using the questions pane.

And now a little about our presenters.

Dr. Antonio Cortes, our Managing Director for Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Justice, is a business psychologist with extensive experience in the nonprofit sector. In his current role, he provides strategic and operational leadership to the EDIJ practice area. Areas of support include organizational equity assessments to uncover oversights and operations that lead to inequities; strategy development to solve unique organizational issues in the EDIJ space; global application of EDIJ concepts for multinational organizations; and training on topics such as building a business case for EDIJ, implicit unconscious bias, microaggressions, and systems theory application to workforce development.

Dr. Rachael Forester is a Senior Consultant of EDIJ. Dr. Forester provides subject matter expert advice, insight and strategic direction to clients. She oversees complex client engagements, manages projects to completion, and designs and facilitates EDIJ training solutions and assessment services for partners and stakeholders.

And Je'Nai Talley Jackson is our Team Leader & Project Manager in Operations for EDIJ Je'Nai brings over 15 years of experience in the field of education, youth development, and equity, diversity, inclusion and justice. Je'Nai has provided technical assistance to organizations all around the country with the goal of centering equity in organizational strategy and fostering equitable environments. Je'Nai's success lies in her emphasis on collaboration, communication and relationships. And at the heart of everything, what she focuses on is building connections with people and listening to all stakeholder voices.

Again, you will have an opportunity to ask questions of our presenters throughout this presentation using the questions pane on the GoToWebinar control panel. Now without further ado, I will turn it over to you, Antonio, to get us started with today's program.

Antonio Cortes: Thank you, Nana Atokatha, and I appreciate you doing some light introductions for us to ground today's webinar.

I definitely want to convey that the content here, the ideas, the thought, the direction, definitely was kind of sourced primarily through the three of us here on the screen today. But we actually have a broader team that we work with on a regular basis, that we also have collected insights to better inform this conversation.

So what we're really looking to do today is to kind of assess where DEI or EDIJ is today, talk about some of the things that are happening in real time within the organizations, talk about things that are happening out in the environment that are potentially beyond our control. But also, talk about things that are very within our control, and some actions we might be able to take as organizations that are interested in advancing equity, in terms of processes, practices, systems and experience.

The other thing, I want to share is that a good portion of today's content is actually derived from a paper that we recently published on the future of EDIJ, and how this work will persevere, and how that looks potentially for the near term, and the midterm and the long term. So, as you hear what we have to share today, just know there's an additional resource available to you that you can read at your own pace, and share with colleagues to get a better sense of, again, the current state in early 2024. What's going on? What are the things that are top of mind? What are the current events, if you will? And then what do we predict for the future?

So [for] today's agenda, we want to cover — [we're going to] start [with] beginning to engage in what are the contextual challenges of advancing DEI. What are some of the things that we learned from research, from other premier consulting partners that we work with and collaborate with and learn back and forth from? What are the things that we're seeing?

We're going to start there and unpack those, then we're going to get into a model for embedding equity, diversity, inclusion & justice in organizations, and Dr. Forester will give us an overview of that model. It's something that she's been working on formulating as we've been doing a lot of research over the last few months, so really excited for her to share about that.

Then we'll also get into a case study about a client organization that we partner with, and Je'Nai Talley Jackson works very closely with this client. And they've been one that has weathered the storm, if you will. They've seen economic downturn, they downsized staff, they've had to restructure how they operate but they still have not wavered from their investment and engagement in EDIJ or DEI. And just kind of talking through, what are the benefits that they've experienced because of that from a workforce standpoint.

Will also get towards the tail end into strategies that are how you, potentially, at your own organization might reignite or lean in deeper into DEI efforts. And then, we want some time at the end to answer questions, to hear what you have to share with us, and to kind of use that time however makes sense for all of you that are participating today.

And thank you all for joining. [We] really appreciate you taking the time out of your day to engage with us and in this discussion. I think we have some really powerful things to share with you all today.

So, if you want to advance the next slide, Je'Nai, the thing that I think is important to start with is, what is going on today?

What are the things that we're seeing and experiencing, and I would say probably for the last year or so, resources and being the source constrained is probably something that some of you have been experiencing in real time, right?

You may have reduced budgets, in general, for just general operating procedures and the other things that your mission is essentially trying to contribute to. So, limited funds are available, and in general, almost universally for most organizations and especially nonprofits today.

We've also seen inflation impact, how existing resources and funds are going to be impactful in terms of when we get to use them, right? So, limited funds [are] one of those things that has been a very common pain point for organizations that are seeking to invest in DEI or EDIJ. And, if you have less dollars to spend on something, you just get less back. Right?

So, if I have enough funds to do training, then that's all I get to do is training. If I have more resources, maybe I could invest in working with a consultant partner to help us stand up employee resource groups. Maybe I could invest in an equity assessment or some benchmarking work.

Unfortunately, resource constraints and having limited funds is one of those pain points that is a barrier for a lot of organizations to advancing and investing in DEI and EDIJ.

The second one that we've observed and researched and concluded on is that there's some compliance barriers as well. And a lot of this currently is on a state-by-state basis. But there's increasing legislation around prohibiting DEI. And last year with the Supreme Court's decision to pull back on affirmative action, specifically in higher ed institutions, that has spurred a number of different conversations from a compliance standpoint that [for] organizations, depending upon where you operate, might be a barrier.

So, very, very clear that that is an obstacle.

Another thing that is becoming — this the third one's an interesting one for me because I remember early on in my career, a lot of the DEI work or EDIJ work that I engaged in was around generational differences. That topic [has] resurfaced again, but in a little bit different way. We're looking at how Gen Z is impacting the workplace, and we're looking at how millennials are now the largest segment of the workforce.

And so, sentiments have shifted, and expectations are starting to shift as well with how we experienced the workplace, and how we expect organizations to be led and kind of engage in the work that they're doing. And so generational differences are becoming, once again, a pain point, but also an area where we can learn a lot on how we can further improve and gain the benefits of a diverse workforce, which is kind of the reality at this point for most organizations.

Additionally, current DEI sentiments are a mixed bag, I would say, in our research.

And so, there are definitely segments of the population, the workforce, that are definitely in favor of advancing DEI and investing in engaging in DEI in the workplace, and doing things that will allow us to further bring the human back into the workplace, and being a human in the workplace.

But there's also sentiment in the opposite direction. And, in some areas where there are certain individuals that believe that we should leave our emotions and our experiences and our baggage at the door when we come to work.

And I'm not one of those people, as you would assume. As a psychologist, I believe that we are human at all times. And so, we carry with us the stress of what's going on in our personal life, we carry the experiences that we've had throughout our life, and we carrying the experience we're having in the moment.

And so, all of those things intersect with doing DEI work, and engaging with people as we build relationships and have interactions with them.

But there are people [who] believe differently, and I think that that's an acceptable place to be in. And I think we're just acknowledging that in this moment and the research is kind of alluding to the greater sentiment, [which] actually is that more people believe that DEI is important than not.

So, something notable to think about as your organizations are deciding to invest more or not.

Additionally, nonprofits especially, are having to navigate external stakeholders' kind of a mixed bag of expectations. What should you be focused on as an organization? Should you be putting out statements on different conflicts that are happening out in the world at different events, that are happening and impacting the world?

There's a there's not a kind of a universal sentiment. It kind of depends on the specific mission you serve, and what your demographic of stakeholders is. It also depends on how you're resourced, where do you get your dollars from? Where do you get your revenue from? Is it from individual donors? What are their individual perceptions and expectations of what your organization should be doing? And how does it influence and drive how you make decisions? So, the external stakeholder perspectives can be very influential on whether or not you're able to invest freely in DEI or EDIJ work, or if you're feeling constrictive.

Obviously, politics is on the list here. The political divide, as portrayed in the media, is an interesting one because, I think [in] a lot of instances, people believe that if you are conservative leaning, you feel one way about DEI work. If you're liberal leaning, you feel a different way. And the research that we've done actually tells us that, again, the broader sentiment across political lines is more in favor than not. And there is a slight correlation between political alignment and sentiment. But it's not as different across political lines, as one might assume, based off of what we see in the media.

So, it's important to think about those networks, those groups of people that hold different belief structures. What do they really think? Do they believe that DEI is a bad thing, or are they neutral on it? And what we're finding, more so than not, is that if you're not in favor of it, more often than not, you're neutral on it. You maybe don't understand the benefits or the ROI, the return on investment, for engaging and investing in DEI.

So that's been an interesting learning for us as well.

The other thing, another thing that we've gleaned, and I've watched and it's been very interesting is the ramifications of Band-Aid solutions that some organizations have engaged in in the last couple of years specifically. And, an example of a Band-Aid solution would be potentially appointing someone to hold a DEI position within your organization as the inaugural position, right? A lot of organizations decided to create DEI positions or diversity and inclusion positions where someone would be responsible for that body of work. And in a number of instances, I remember either coaching someone or hearing about someone that was appointed, but they didn't have relevant experience. And I think this is another important thing to share as, we are consultants in this work. This is not my first rodeo. I was doing this work before it was in style, I did it before it was the pandemic. I've been doing it for a long, long time, just as my colleagues, Je'Nai and Dr. Forester have been.

And so, appointing someone that doesn't necessarily have the skill set for organizational change management and strategic prioritization of equity focused policies and practices and having [to] relationship build across difference. Those are complex things. And I think we're starting to see the ramifications of the Band-Aid solutions unraveling, and definitely the elimination of DEI positions in this past year is a really good example of kind of a consequence of that.

And then, the last thing that we've observed and researched and experienced firsthand is the trauma and fatigue of doing the actual work. And so, sometimes, if we are not skilled at engaging in difficult conversations in the workplace, they can end poorly.

And for those of us that do have experience and have successfully been able to create space and navigate, over time it does wear on you. For most DEI practitioners and consultants, a lot of the strategy centers around talking about your own experience and giving that firsthand perspective over to who you're working with and saying, "I've been there. I've experienced it. And this is what it looks like."

And to kind of go back over negative experiences over and over again for years on end, I would expect most people would have, at some point, a not so great experience, a not so great time doing that. Because it's not always a positive conversation, or not always a fun conversation, I should say, but it's a necessary conversation, in most of my experience.

So, again, just laying the foundation her. [It's] a lot to take in, I know, but this is kind of where we've landed in terms of research, in terms of observation of current state. This is a tough time to be working in this field, but at the same time, it's also kind of the foundation of why it's so important. It's because it is hard work, and it's because we need to do hard work to be successful at creating the workplaces and spaces that we want to be a part of.

So, while there are barriers, there are also solutions to barriers. And we also wanted to make a little bit of space here for those of you that are participating, and we landed on these as the kind of the things that are probably most permeating in our observation and research. But I'm curious now, feel free to add, post in the chat: What are barriers that your organization specifically is experiencing the most? Which one of these on this list is the one that is the most pervasive for you?

Additionally, we would welcome you to share what are something that your organization is experiencing or you're experiencing that is not on this list that is absolutely causing you grief or stress as it relates to advancing DEI or EDIJ within your organization?

So, we'll pause for a quick moment just to let folks respond to — either one or both of those questions: Which one of these on the list are you experiencing the most right now in this moment? And then secondly, what did we not include on this list that you think we need to be adding to it?

Because part of this discussion is to make sure that we're making space for growth and learning, and adding to how we partner with nonprofits.

So now, Atokatha, I'm not sure if you've gotten some responses yet, but we would welcome anything that has come in already at this point.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Not just yet, Antonio. I think some are starting to come in though, so if you can check back soon, that'd be great.

Antonio Cortes: Perfect.

Je'Nai Talley Jackson: Antonio, do you mind if I jump in for a moment?

Antonio Cortes: Please do.

Je'Nai Talley Jackson: Yeah. Of course, everything you shared resonated with me and one of the pieces that I've often heard as it relates to Band-Aid solutions [is] exactly the example you mentioned around, we put a DEI person in place.

One of the other pieces that's a challenge is that [that] person is in place, but they either don't have the levels of power to really make systemic change, right — so, it's kind of window dressing — or they don't have the resources to actually make the change. So, you have this one staff person, and absolutely, we believe that for accountability, you should have someone whose responsibility it is to take the lead on this, in addition with your senior leader. And also, it can't just be that one person, and they can't be under-resourced, whether it's in regard to funds or time or other staff members who can support the efforts. So also making sure that if you do have that key leader who is championing DEI in your organization, that you're positioning them for success.

Rachael Forester: Awesome, Je'Nai. That's exactly what I was thinking as well.

And another thing that is coming up for me in terms of that is the tokenization that we often have when we are elevating people to DEI positions that maybe don't have the necessary experience. But because somebody, I'm using air quotes and folks who can't see me, you look the part, right. Or you're considered to be a diverse person, which we know in reality, diversity has to do with our collection of differences. That also contributes to this level of trauma and fatigue that Antonio was talking about as well.

What are the ways that we get worn down, not only by engaging in conversations, but the ways that we're experiencing our identities and the response to our identities, not only externally to our organization but internally?

And I'm also seeing that we have some really great responses coming into this question, so we'll go to you, Atokatha.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Thanks, Rachael. Yes, here are a few.

Our team is feeling like they're getting a lot of education but having trouble turning it into meaningful action.

Another response is: Time and capacity for planning and strategizing. It's always the last priority on the list.

Here's something else: Barriers, in mostly remote organization across 11 states, determining exactly what the issues are and how to actively address them. The how is particularly challenging.

Back over to you all.

Antonio Cortes: Those are excellent adds.

I'll just anchor in the last one, because I feel like that one is probably one we should consider adding to our list here, is the kind of the hybrid or remote mixed environment that a lot of organizations have shifted to or are currently operating within. That is not something that comes naturally to everybody, so I often give this example on this topic comes up.

My first supervisor, when I started back when I was working at the YMCA National Resource Office, my supervisor was in Utah and I lived in Indiana. So, I've had a remote supervisor for them, pretty much the majority of my career, so for me, it's normal. It's just how things work. So, building relationships in a virtual environment is a skill that I had to develop over time, and eventually, I think I did a pretty good job.

I believe my team is well cared for and that they get of affirmation and feedback, and that they are having a positive experience as part of being at a Nonprofit HR. They will tell you firsthand if I'm doing a good job or not.

But the point is, that I had to work on that as a skill. And so, for those folks that have not had to do that, and that we're forced into a virtual or hybrid environment, that's really what I'm seeing as the pain point of this back-and-forth dialogue on returning back to the office and versus not. And then how do we foster a positive team experience in the virtual environment? I think there's more work to be done in terms of best practices being identified around that.

I also think there's a lot of opportunity for us to think about that in the context of a solution to advancing equity within the workplace. Because if we can relationship build across space and being in person versus not, I think that's going to go a long way for organizations going forward. And we definitely have ideas and some strategies to lean in on that topic. But that one probably resonated with me the most, just because I've had this conversation a number of times over the last couple of years.

So, anyway, I tend to ramble.

Je'Nai, feel free to take us to the next section here.

Dr. Forester, I'll turn it over to you to get into our, well the, model and really looking at a holistic approach to embedding EDIJ organizations.

Rachael Forester: Awesome. Thank you so much, Dr. Cortes and I, first and foremost, would like to echo the fact that we do feel very supported by you as a supervisor. And I'm not just saying that because we're on a public webinar, I am saying that because it actually aligns with the model that we're talking about today.

Right, the ways that we show up as leaders, the ways that we're engaging each other, the way that we're creating space, for context, is extremely important in this conversation around EDIJ; equity and justice; diversity, equity, and inclusion; whatever phrases, whatever words, your organization is using to talk about this. These are crucial, and I can't tell you how many times in the past year, I've had CEOs or leaders come up to me and ask, "Is DEI going away?"

There's this big fear that DEI is going away. And the reality is that DEI can't go away.

Because at the center of DEI is people. At the center of DEI is culture. At the center of DEI is optimal effectiveness. And so, we want to take you through this model that we created to talk a little bit more about how EDIJ is the driver for optimal effectiveness within organizations.

So, we're looking now at a model that talks about systems change approach for effective nonprofits. When we talk about systems change, we're talking about how all of the different pieces drive each other and impact the whole, right? I'm thinking about a pizza. Right? When I'm looking at a piece of pizza, I'm looking at all the different components down to the water that's used. I was raised in New York, and you can't tell me that New York pizza isn't different than other places, right? And that has to do with the water and the water pressure. And all of that are components to how we engage in this work.

So, where I would like to start is in this middle section, where you see this rectangle, right in the middle. And this part of the model really defines the four core factors that are necessary for optimal effectiveness within organizations, within nonprofits.

Number one, mission alignment. We do what we do because of the mission. We do what we do because we have people to serve, we have causes to serve, we have things that we need to amplify.

And being in alignment with our mission, or not, really is a determinant of how, or how far our organization is going to go.

The other piece is finance. We know that we are consistently looking at grants. We know that we're consistently looking at our financial situation to determine how much money we are able to bring in to further support our mission.

When we have strong financial operations within our organization, when we have strong revenue in order to continue the work that we're doing, then we're able to really lean into the programs. We are really able to lean into the education. We're really able to lean into the resources that we provide to people that are utilizing our services, that are utilizing our mission, to stay alive.

Next is this idea of resourcing.

All organizations, specifically nonprofits, really need to think about resources and how those resources are extended within the organization and outside the organization. Resources include everything from time to money, to people, to programs, to all of the different factors that allow us to act out our mission.

Then the last core factor, which, in my opinion, is one of the most important, are people. This idea that we have people that are driving our mission forward. We have people that are impacted by the work that we do. This is internal within our organization, so it's the staff members, it's my team. When I think about my team, I'm thinking about Antonio, I'm thinking about Je'Nai, I'm thinking about all of the folks that I work with a Nonprofit HR.

But I'm also thinking about the people in the organizations that I work with outside. For you, that might be members, for you that might be clients or patients, that might be students or teachers. Whatever that looks like in your industry, making sure that we're centering people in our work is crucial to making sure that we have an effective nonprofit organization.

And if we look at this, if we look at the center, where all of these four things combined, you see the word effective.

Right, and at the middle of effective, we have some drivers that actually create and allow us to be effective in all of the places that these things intersect. Our drivers here include transparency, operational accountability, people and culture, and power sharing. What are the ways that we are utilizing principles of DEI or EDIJ to share about our mission? How are we being transparent about it? How are we operationalizing it? How are we treating people through enacting our mission? How are we creating culture and an environment where we're able to share our resources where we're able to really center the financial well-being of our organizations? And these drivers are very core to equity, diversity, and inclusion injustice.

Je'Nai and Antonio, let me know if you're if you disagree, but most of the time, when we're meeting with organizations, either through an EDIJ assessment or we're engaging in focus groups, or we're having some kickoff initial conversations or coaching, a lot of what comes back is the fact that there isn't optimal communication. Or there isn't levels of trust within the organization. Or I don't feel a sense of belonging within my organization. Or there's no accountability measures within my organization for a variety of different things.

That's what we mean when we talk about drivers for equity, diversity, inclusion and justice. And that's why it's so important for us to really look at EDIJ as the cornerstone of effectiveness, and this is why it's so critical for EDIJ work to continue.

There [are] also contextual factors here. If you look at this outside circle, a lot of this overlaps with some of the things that Antonio was talking about in terms of barriers. But I want us to conceptualize this outer circle here as just the context that we need to be aware of within our organizations.

First and foremost, language.

With all of the rhetoric coming from media, if you were to search on Google right now, DEI headlines. What are you going to see? What are the things that are going to come back? Language is so important in how we continue this work.

If you were to ask me 8, 9, 10 years ago, I wonder if I have any former supervisors on this webinar. I was so attached to making sure that we only called equity and justice what it was: equity and justice, equity and justice. And what I realized is that I actually needed to ensure I was using language that was going to reach the people.

And within our current contexts, within our current climate, even within Nonprofit HR, there have been conversations about, how do we anchor the conversation in culture? How do we anchor the conversation in belonging? Because that's ultimately the work that we are, we're doing. And so, even when the going gets tough, we need to understand, as an organization that language is important.

This other piece with language, as context, is being able to understand that we work in a variety of different places, language looks different in different places. Not even in terms of the actual language that people speak within our organization, but the language or nomenclature that we use within specific geographical regions. Some other contextual things have to do with work force that directly correlates to this idea of generational differences, but it also relates to who make up our organization.

What are the identities that are represented?

What are some of the gaps that we have in our representation?

What are the needs of our workforce?

What are the needs of us holistically in this society, where we did experience COVID, where we are moving to [a] remote environment?

I'm thinking about environment as well, right? And all of these things interconnect and intersect with each other. What environment are we creating by either having conversations or not, about diversity, equity and inclusion?

What environments are we creating by having high standards for employment and accountability, but no time for connection?

We have a colleague here at Nonprofit HR, Bryan Jackson, we're giving you a huge shout out right now, who always says that it's so important to prioritize connection before content. And the reality is, is that when we feel seen, when we feel heard, when we feel valued, and when we see that we are really part of the team, what we're able to contribute is exponentially better than when we don't feel seen.

This other concept here is this idea of emotions. Emotions sometimes get in the way of DEI work, but emotions can also lead the way into DEI work. What I mean by this is I am a critical whiteness scholar. I do a lot of work around whiteness, a lot of work around white supremacy culture within organizations, and I do a lot of work around coaching, specifically white leaders, into understanding the ways that the ways that we've learned our white identity impact how we lead.

And some of those things have to do with being afraid of saying the wrong thing, or doing the wrong thing, or being found out that maybe I don't have as much content knowledge or that I haven't had as much exposure to different communities, different environments, different conversations. And so, oftentimes, when we react in that way, we shut down, because we're afraid.

But the most effective leaders actually show up in vulnerability and transparency, thinking about, how can I say, "I haven't really had this conversation before, I'm afraid of getting it wrong. How many of you can relate to that?" That's part of our context.

Also, being able to understand that we are whole people, there are a lot of things going on in the world right now.

You can't turn on the TV without seeing all of the world conflict, all the conflict within our own country, whatever country you're in. Being able to engage the fact that there's emotions attached to that, there are lives attached to that, make us effective number one in driving our mission, upholding our finances, allocating resources but it also allows us to center people, and really be able to say what's going on in the world probably impacts you too.

Technology, power dynamics, politics, current DEI sentiments. These are also really important contextual factors for us to think about.

Technology in terms of what are the ways that we are leveraging technology too enhance the way that we're operating within our organization and what might be some of the ways that that might hinder us. Technology has given us access to information, sometimes too much information. It also allows us to connect with each other from remote locations. I know Je'Nai, Antonio and I are in different states.

I'm on a whole different coast, I don't think Antonio are on the coast. I think y'all are somewhere right there in the in the middle, right? But being able to connect, how do we leverage what we know about how people are operating in this world of technology to enhance the work that we're doing? AI is part of that conversation. How are we utilizing artificial intelligence and generative AI to engage in this conversation?

One of the most important things for me on this context list is power dynamics.

I can't tell you how many times I've engaged with people across organizations that said that there's such a hierarchy within my organization. Or people don't understand the power differential because systems are in place. So even the best-intentioned leaders, often, if we aren't thinking about how our communication operates, how transparent we are, that becomes a barrier, which is why we need to lean even more into these drivers, right, of transparency and operational accountability.

Politics, Antonio, you touched on this, political divide is real. And that's part of our context. And how can we anchor our understanding of where we are, to the fact that, at the end of the day, I don't know anybody who doesn't want to have a sense of belonging within their organization. Whether or not they want to talk about things outside of work within the workplace, all of us have this desire to feel seen. All of us have this desire to feel valuable within our jobs, and that's at the core of DEI.

Then this concept of current DEI sentiments. What is the conversation that's happening in the world? And how do we, as nonprofit organizations, get behind our stance on where we are with DEI and how that serves us, and get clear about pushing back and saying, "You know, we're not going anywhere. We value our people, and that's really what this is about."

So, I know, I just spent a large chunk of time taking you through this model.

The last part of this model, if you see that there's this kind of light gray circle encompassing all of this. That's just the worlds' context, the fact that we were born into a world where things were already set in place. Everything that happens in the world impacts us in our organizations.

And the more clear we get, the more transparent we get, the more we hold ourselves accountable, the more we value our people and the more we are able to dismantle some of the power and hierarchy within our organizations, the better we are going to be equipped to really be effective.

So, I want to pause there for a moment. I want to let y'all digest the information.

If you have any questions about this model, or any reflections about this model, please feel free to go ahead and put that into the chat.

And [I want] to think about some questions that we may have gotten in. And so, I'm going to turn it to Atokatha to put out any questions that we might have, and then we can engage in conversation.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Hi, there. Thanks so much, Rachael. And we do have one question that's come in.

Have you seen any nonprofits shifting from or abandoning their DEIB efforts since affirmative action was gutted by the Supreme Court of the United States last year?

Antonio Cortes: That's a very timely question, I think. But, our experience, and I'll speak for myself, my observation is that most organizations have not really been impacted by that decision, in terms of their decision making.

Other than trying to reframe how they describe and talk about the work, and Rachael talked about this a little bit, in terms of attachment to the language and words. I think a lot of organizations will be hard pressed to say that it's a bad thing to focus on ensuring that your employees feel like they belong at your organization, especially for nonprofits, especially considering the mission focus that you all have in terms of what the actual work you're doing, the benefit to society that you're creating. Hard pressed to say that it's a bad thing to focus on enhancing belonging for your staff, so that way they could feel like this is a welcome place for them to be and that they can be more productive.

I think … just describing the work a little bit differently is probably the most notable change. But we're still working with the same volume of clients that we've worked with in previous years. The resources have lessened based off of budgets and different things going on in the economy, in different funding sources, so on and so forth. So they're getting a little bit creative. But I'd say the impact of that Supreme Court decision is more so on education decision making in terms of student enrollments, and that's really not necessarily impacting the workforce at the moment.

It's an interesting thing to observe in real time, but Dr. Forester, Je'Nai, feel free to add some thoughts or your own experience to this question. I think it's a good question.

Je'Nai Talley Jackson: Antonio, what you shared resonated and that's been my experience that the majority of the clients I've been supporting have been able to continue moving forward their efforts.

And, I, quite honestly, have been so relieved about that because I think I was feeling a little bit of anxiety when all of those decisions were being made.

Similarly, I've seen a re-adjustment and how we might speak about the work, right? And this is all the way from internal communications to when, we are having continuing education opportunities with clients who have training series with us. And, I had a client literally the day before call and say, "OK, we're not comfortable. We think we should change some of the language." And so, we got really creative at the ninth hour to say, how can we still reach the same outcomes and the learning objectives that we set for this training session. And maybe change the language so that we are safe guarded by any concerns that that client had.

Rachael Forester: I definitely echo those sentiments, Je'Nai and Antonio.

I think the other part of me when I hear this question — my answer is a little complicated or a little complex.

I have seen leaders that have been afraid. I have seen leaders that have been worried about what this might mean for external donors, or what this might mean for ensuring that our organization can really move forward.

What I also know is that the organization is still pushing for it, the organization often pushes back against leadership, and says, "No, this is something is that is crucial to us, and crucial to our mission."

And so there becomes this interesting tension as well as to, like, what do we stand for? What are the things that we're really willing to do in order to uphold our missions, and so that fear is real. If you're on this call and you're like, "Oh my gosh, that's me," I just want to normalize that.

We care so much about our missions, we care so much about the work that we're doing, that sometimes we get jostled by these external factors.

And so, hopefully, this serves as an opportunity for us to think about ways that you can harness the belief in your people and pour that love and energy back into your people to continuing this work, even when it's terrifying.

I used to work in higher education. That's an area that has been highly impacted by the creativity that's necessary for moving some of these things forward after that ruling came through, and even there the work's not stopping. Again, it's shifting. It's taking different shapes because the reality is, is that it's a need. It's a basic human need at the end of the day, and so whether or not there are restrictions on how we do it, it's going to get done.

And it just becomes easier when there are resources involved. It becomes easier when there is buy-in involved and we ultimately have greater impact when we're all on the same page about where we're going.

So, I really value that question, I think it was a really great question to ask and wanted to ask — Atokatha, anything else that's come through for us?

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Yes, Rachael, another question has come through. How do you work with groups who see maintaining hierarchy?

Antonio Cortes: Tough love, sometimes.

Hierarchy serves a purpose, and I think if you unpack why a hierarchy exists and you can rationalize that, that's the right protocol. I think about the military as a prime example, right? There's clear hierarchy, it's for clarity of role, it's for folks to have the least amount of need to make decisions so that way they can focus squarely on their job.

So, if you can explain a hierarchy and say that this is the purpose that it serves, I think hierarchy in and of itself is not necessarily a bad thing.

But what we find in most organizations is that hierarchy doesn't necessarily serve that purpose, but hierarchy serves to remove access to power. It removes access to influencing decision making.

And, I use the same examples over and over again. So … if I've been your consultant before, you know, I've used this one.

I often talk about, when I worked for YMCA, how leaders in the larger associations, they're responsible for decision making in the organization, but they would make and do make way more informed decisions when they're talking to the frontline staff who are actually interacting with the members on a day-to-day basis.

And I've learned that over the years, that the most effective leaders, the ones that make the best decisions, are the ones that break down the hierarchy, and they have information access to those folks that are most close to what's happening with your stakeholders, so that's kind of my take on hierarchy. I don't know if I went a little bit left on the angle there. But feel free, team, to add your own perspectives here too.

Je'Nai Talley Jackson: Yeah, I'll jump in and share that, often, when I hear about concerns around hierarchy, it's because there is a lack of trust, and there's a lack of psychological safety, right?

So, unfortunately, I will encounter organizations where staff, who are maybe more entry level or newer in their careers, don't feel like they have the same ability to share candidly, to share openly, without repercussions, without pushback, without kind of the shushing, and discouraging them to be candid and truthful.

And oftentimes, the higher level you are in the organization, you have a little more freedom and ability to share and be candid and be open. And that trust might be there a little bit more. So, my concern is, often when folks bring up those power dynamics, and what's really at the root of it is a lack of trust within the organization, and a lack of psychological safety within the relationships.

Rachael Forester: I think all of that makes sense, and the question that I then ask myself has to do with … how do we do this effectively? Because we know that hierarchies exist within our organizations.

We know that in many ways, different positions are necessary. If we didn't have a leader of our organization, there would be potentially less alignment on mission and vision of where we're headed, right? So, all of us functionally serve a role, what we're talking about here in terms of shared power that we do effectively and efficiently, it's going back to engaging in, number one, decision-making models. What are the ways that you are communicating with your staff about why a decision was made?

Are you asking — and my team probably is tired of me asking these questions. I joke. I know that y'all appreciate me. But one of the things that I think about is, I ask the leaders. I ask people — and leaders, when I say leaders, I mean across the organization, whatever your role is, whether you have people reporting to you or not, you can be a leader within your role and within your position. When we're making decisions, we need to ask ourselves, whose needs are being met by these decisions? Whose needs are not being met by these decisions? Who's benefiting from these decisions? And who might be harmed? If we don't have answers to those questions, the right people aren't in the room.

So, when we're thinking about reducing power dynamics, what we're saying is, "Hey, I see you and I trust you, and I want you to go out and do what you do best." Right? And, "I'm going to equip you with resources in order to do that," or "I'd like to include you in this meeting because your insight is valuable, and I'm not going to do that just because I'm tokenizing you. I'm not just going to do that, because I want to make you feel like you're seen and heard."

We also see this through formation of committees that actually have power within the organization, power to make decisions. So, one of the things that we do on the Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Justice team is, we work with a lot of organizations to create DEI strategy and specific key implementation activities.

Being able to get a committee involved or being able to get people across the organization involved, and then trusting them to get that done without it needing 17 levels of approval, right? And so, when that's done effectively, we have an opportunity to really look at space and time and resources in a different way, right? Because we're all responsible for the work that we're doing.

And we're actually going to, we're going to give you an example here. I'd like to share a little bit about an organization that we work with. And I think that that might help us to better understand this concept of power-sharing as well.

So, we work with this organization that primarily services, children, youth, families [and] education. You can see some of the information about the organization there, and their reach is across the U.S., and also international partnerships.

The focus of this specific organization is to provide support to students through primary and secondary school around social emotional learning, which also has very close connections to diversity, equity [and] inclusion.

One of the things that we want to share about this particular organization is that we work with them … we find them extremely effective at engaging equity, diversity, inclusion [and] justice by navigating the different contextual factors that are at play and by leaning into some of these effective drivers, right? So, transparency, operational accountability, people and culture, and power-sharing.

This is an organization that has had to deal with some financial constraints, some conversations at the leadership level about limited funds coming in and thinking about what restructuring within the organization looks like.

And time and time again, they committed as many resources as they could, to amplifying diversity, equity [and] inclusion. The way that this is operated is through ensuring that there was time for conversations in affinity spaces, some of those employee resource groups.

That's something that often doesn't cost an organization a lot of money, but it does have to do with time and being able to ensure that we're engaging in those conversations.

Making sure that they're allocating all of the dollars that they possibly can to do benchmarking surveys, because they understand that when their employees are experiencing an organization that has them feeling a sense of belonging, their mission is going to be greater because of it. Their impact is going to be greater because of it.

And so, this is an organization that we saw time and time again, when pressed with some of these hard decisions with some of this pushback — you can imagine the pushback, especially around this idea of critical race theory within education, is what comes to mind for me, I'm thinking about all of the pushbacks for education — time and time again, they stayed committed to their mission. They stayed committed to ensuring that they were communicating effectively and not wavering or questioning the need for this work.

So, I'm going to pause there to see if Antonio or Je'Nai had anything else that they might want to add around this particular organization and seeing them within our model.

Antonio Cortes: Yeah, I would say, I want to weigh in about this organization but also just in general about our client partners that we work with that have been consistently engaging and leaning into this work.

What we're seeing as a kind of an output about investment in that intentionality is that the employees are having a more positive experience. They're reporting back that they have greater connection with the colleagues, that they are appreciating that the organization is making space for, again, the human at work aspect of what we all experience.

Giving space to that [has] been something that's been very powerful. It's been very — I've just really had an amazing time learning about our client partners and, really, the environments that they're creating for their staff to be able to show up in the most effective way that they possibly can in this moment, with everything else that's going on in the world. Because depending upon who you are and what identities you have, you may be experiencing certain current events and the environment a little bit differently. And that's OK.

But I think the organizations that we work with really try to do a good job of making sure that your staff understand that it's OK. And if we're doing something that could be done more effectively, that we're open to exploring how that might look or how we might do something differently. Maybe will change a leave policy, for example, right? These don't need to be complex things.

But, know that, and say, this kind of case study, in particular, is probably one of the best examples of, regardless of what's happening in the world, this does not lose priority for them. And … the whole list of things that I started off with in this webinar, they've navigated those successfully.

And that's really impressive, but also a testament to if you don't deprioritize this, there are positive impacts to be realized.

Je'Nai Talley Jackson: I just want to jump in and share a little bit about how, for me, observing and working with this organization directly, seeing the executive director, the way that that person leaves the organization, the way that they center the experience of their staff members, the ways that they are intentional about building trust broadly, and specifically encouraging the people managers to do so within their teams, created a space for there to be openness from staff members who, when the organization had to make some pivots externally, to address some of the broader political context and legislative changes that were happening that directly affected the organization. Some of the team members say, "No, we actually don't like the direction that we're going in." "No, we don't feel like this aligns with who we are and our values."

And there is great value in being able to have staff members feel comfort in doing that, to question leadership. And obviously, always at the heart of respect, and with the greater good of the organization. But there was psychological safety there, where folks felt like they could kind of challenge what was going on, and have open conversations about, is this the right way forward? And then, also anchor back in I'm trusting leadership to do what's best, but keep those lines of communication open. So, it was a really great example for me to see.

We're not lifting up this organization to say they are without challenge, or they are without internal conflict, but they have built up the trust in a way where they can sustain that. And it's not like, "OK, we're canceling you, because we don't agree. But we're figuring out the intersection so that we can move forward together."

Antonio Cortes: Nana Atkoatha, is there a specific question that has come through that you think is appropriate for us to weave in here? And some responses too.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Yeah, absolutely. There's one regarding shifting between organizations as equity work leaders, especially when one may be moving from one organization that could have more of a toxic environment into another organization. And any effective ways or strategies you have seen leaders put in place to ensure that they're moving forward with their lived experience and all that they have gained, but also starting afresh in that new organization to address the challenges that they may be experiencing,

Antonio Cortes: OK, that's a heavy one.

I'm going to name workplace trauma as a thing, and this actually goes for DEI practitioners, but also for folks, in general. I've worked with and alongside of the folks that have come from organizations that we're not fun places to be at. And they come with workplace trauma, and we need to start using that phrase a little bit more frequently in describing what that looks like and talking about what it is and how it shows up.

Because, when someone comes into a new organization, that is a different context, that is a different environment, potentially. But you're bringing your personal and professional experiences with you, and sometimes, you're not ready to experience an organization in the way it's actually operating. And the workplace trauma is what gets in the way of that and sometimes it's because you had a really toxic work environment. Maybe, there were a lack of equitable policies in place at that formal organization. Maybe you had a supervisor that wasn't super adept at providing feedback and support to you and your role. Lots of reasons why it happens.

But I think one of the tough things is, is that folks need time to process that that happened to them and to try to let it let it not be the anchor of their reference point as they're experiencing their next organization. So definitely a lot of self-work there.

The other thing that I will say as someone that supervises a team that you have to be able to understand that sometimes what folks are seeing and observing and giving you feedback on, is not necessarily about you specifically. It's about what they've experienced, and what triggering for them, right?

So, practical example: I've lived through many, many reorgs in terms of structure, in my career, over in my professional life. And so, I'm a little bit desensitized to it in some ways, and that it could be me, it could be you, we're going to focus on whether or not we feel like we've made good decisions on restructuring our team, restructuring our departments, et cetera. So, I think anchoring in what is useful, what is helpful is also really good. And … I say this a lot, too. I'm really good about saying the same things over and over again, just so we get repetition here and memory going.

But, facts and information. If we anchor our decision making and facts and information, and we share the facts and information as to how decisions are made, we can start to build back up the trust and the relationship with those individuals that are experiencing the workplace from, again, a place of not necessarily the best spot to be in because of what they've had to endure. But it's a good gesture to begin to trust build with those individuals. So ,I'll stop there.

Team, anything you want to add here. If we need to move to the next section, that's fine too.

Je'Nai Talley Jackson: Yeah, Antonio, I think we'll move ahead and then definitely we'll have time right after this section to open it up for more questions.

But what we want to make sure you leave with is a little bit of context of what's next, right? We know that you all are joining us maybe from different perspectives in your organization. Maybe you are doing the work and you are here to learn more about other ways that you can move forward, or maybe you stalled your efforts and you're looking to re-engage.

We want to give you a little bit of that context. And Rachael acknowledged several different contextual considerations that we need to keep in mind by going through the model, and some of those things might make it harder for organizations to advance DEI. And yet, like Rachael and Antonio have shared, we know that DEI is not going anywhere.

Whether folks want to name it as such or not, that centering on folks and their experience in the workplace, that's what DEI is all about. Ensuring that sense of belonging, ensuring fairness. And we know that that's when staff members thrive, and in turn our organizations.

So [I] just want to share with you a little bit more about things that you can consider as you're doing this work. And again, these are all referenced in the paper, so that if you want to dig in a little bit more, you can download the paper and explore.

The first thing we always suggest is getting a pulse on the organization. I love to ask clients these two questions: Do you know how your staff members feel about working at your organization? And how are people experiencing the culture, the policies and the mission?

And if you don't know the answer to those questions, that's where you start, right? You engage in an assessment, whether it's a survey, whether you're conducting focus groups, to hear more of the perspectives of your staff members. It helps you to better understand where you're at, what's your baseline, and understand your strengths and opportunities.

The other piece is that this supports sustainability of DEI efforts. When you have that data, you can begin making data informed decisions, and you can also set metrics for success so that if you know that maybe feelings of belonging are lower in your organization, what are you going to do to address that? And then, a year from now, two years from now, how are you going to check back in and measure against those metrics of success that you set? You want to make sure that you're able to relay that information back for folks.

And I always say, if you are going to ask people how they feel, if you are going to survey folks, you need to share that information back, right? Making sure that you are always focused on transparency is one of those key drivers that we talk about. And even when things aren't going the way you want it to, right? If you have to stall efforts, if you have to decrease resources allotted to efforts, are you making sure that you're communicating that with your staff members?

Understand your audience. Now, in every organization that we work with, whether it's staff members, board members or other stakeholders, all of them fall on a spectrum as it relates to levels of DEI knowledge and feelings about the importance of DEI in the workplace, right? So, one of the things you need to understand is the readiness levels, the awareness levels as it relates to DEI within your organization. Then also, as Rachael talked about, how do we adjust the engagement language so that we are speaking in a way that folks hear us?

I have certain organizations that I work with where just saying DEI for some of their association members, for some of their stakeholders, shuts down the conversation. They have something in mind when they hear the phrase DEI that shuts it down for them. How do we adjust things so that we keep the conversation going and aligned with the greater outcomes and goals that we have, right?

So maybe we're not explicitly saying DEI, but we're talking about a positive work culture and who can argue with that? Who can make a sound argument with that? I'll say that.

The other piece that I want to build on, Antonio mentioned how intergenerational focus in the organization is so important. There are five generations in the workforce right now. And we mentioned that millennials make up the largest portion, and that Gen Z is the newest generation that's coming in. How do we learn more about Gen Z, knowing that the ways in which they work and operate are really going to influence the future of our work environments? And how do we get ahead of that, so that we aren't being reactive, but that we are partnering with them to learn more?

And whenever we talk about learning about any group, we want you to do it with a lens of cultural humility, right? Not every Gen Zer is the same as the Gen Zer, so we don't want you to do any kind of broad generalizations. But get really specific with having focus groups, conversations [and] building relationships with those folks within your organization to figure out what matters most to them as it relates to building inclusive cultures.

I also want us to focus in on leaning into emotional intelligence. So emotional intelligence refers to how you or how your own emotions or other people's emotions and feelings affect, how you experience the world and how you connect and collaborate with other people.

This includes things like reactions about giving or receiving feedback, how we prioritize what matters, or understanding, quite honestly, how our actions or inactions can influence others.

And sometimes, we will get requests from organizations that say, "We want to do a DEI training," and when we talk more with them about what they hope to get out of the training, what really comes up is an opportunity to talk more about emotional intelligence.

So, making sure, particularly for leaders in the organization, how are you increasing your self-awareness as it relates to this? Whether it's through a coach, whether it's through your own learning or audits, if you will, how are you better understanding your self-awareness about this, so that you can show up as a better leader for the organization?

One of the things that I probably should've started with, quite honestly, is aligning EDIJ to your mission.

In those situations where we hear organizations, "Oh, we had to abandon our commitment to DEI for whatever reason." It's because it was positioned as this standalone thing that's separate of all of the other inner workings of the organization. How do you operationalize DEI? How do you embed it into the fabric of the organization so it can't just be pushed to the side when challenges come?

The other piece that's really important about embedding DEI into the mission is, this positions us to be kind of on autopilot on repeat every day type of situation so that we aren't just being reactive when things in the community or social issues bubble over and we're scrambling to put a statement out in response, doing actions that feel transactional, that feel like check the box, "We just had to do this." If it's embedded into the organization and connect it to the mission, it's just the way of doing things and the way of being.

Allocating resources and I think this is the piece that Rachael touched on. Think broadly about allocating resources. So, not just in the in the budget, what money am I putting aside for this? But also, the people power, right? Who is going to be leading the efforts as it relates to DEI or EDIJ? And what time are you allotting so that they can do that? Whether it's the person whose role is solely focused on advancing EDIJ or whether it's individual contributors, folks who want to lead the affinity group. Folks who want to lead the caucus group or the employee resource group, folks who want to volunteer for lunch and learns within the organization.

How are you making sure that their supervisors are making time for them to do this in addition to their normal workload, right?

And for organizations where I know it comes up, where it's like, "We really want to commit to this, but our resources are stretched thin." Are there opportunities within the community to partner with other organizations who are like minded? To network with them in ways where you can share resources, share learning opportunities and thought partner, quite honestly, as you work to move DEI forward.

And just, the last one, we want to ... kind of like the encouragement piece. Right?

Stay the course. I have to admit that at the end of the year, our team came together and we talked about, what have we learned from this year? What do we have to say as we think about the future of EDIJ? And, I felt like my response was a little somber. I was a little beat up. I was feeling quite discouraged with everything that was going on in the world. And it was a reminder to me to, as I stay the course, to focus on my health and my well-being — my mental health, as well.

But also, to just have respect for the overarching arc of this work, right? That it didn't start with me, it won't end with me.

That for decades and decades and decades, folks have been working very hard to advance this work and that I am standing on their shoulders, trying to do the same thing.

So there's this kind of pendulum swing that I think always happens as it relates to trying to advance DEI work. And so, I just try to focus on onward, right? Keep moving forward, even if it feels like sometimes, we have to take a step back that we still stay the course, because we know that there will oftentimes be pushback in certain seasons of this work and so, to that point, staying the course means finding your group of folks who are going to be there to hear you vent, to give you advice, to push you forward, to lock arms, and walk forward together as you try and figure out the best way to advance the work.

So, I'll end there, because I want to make sure that we have enough time to hear from you all with any questions that you've had.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Thanks so much to all of you for such an engaging conversation and enlightening conversation at that. We do have some questions that have come in, and a couple of follow-up questions to what you were just sharing Je'Nai.

The first one is, what are some strategies for educating and trying to overcome resistance to publicly supporting EDIJ initiatives from some of an organization's board members?

Je'Nai Talley Jackson: Yeah, this is a tough one, and this is a conversation that we are often having.

How do we, number one, normalize, quite honestly, that within our board, there are going to be varying levels of knowledge about DEI, interest in DEI, and belief that it is a relevant topic to focus on?

And so, I think the most important piece is to help equip organizations in just having those conversations. I'd never want folks to operate from spaces of assumption.

So, how do we make space? And sometimes this means bringing in an external moderator or skilling yourself up, knowing that it might result in a challenging conversation. But how can we put it on the table to say, "You know, DEI is something that's really important to the mission of our organization. And what is the board's role in advancing DEI?"

And I think often the first pieces to level set and hear from folks around, what are your thoughts on DEI? What [are] your thoughts on the role of the board? And then, getting that initial information to then be able to do a little bit of assessment around what educational needs might best support the board in advancing and moving forward, collectively and individually.

And, also, I've had leaders talk about how, when they came on and they really centered, DEI, some board members either shifted in their positions or chose not to stay on because the alignment, the misalignment, became a little more obvious.

So would love to welcome you and other folks if you have anything else to add to that. But that's often where the conversation goes with me.

Antonio Cortes: Yep. That this is another hot button topic. I think there are a lot of organizations and individuals, specifically within organizations, [for which] language can be triggering.

So, sometimes, reframing to focusing on the outcomes that we're trying to collectively accomplish is helpful.

So, I mentioned earlier most organizations will be hard pressed to say that they don't think it's important to have a workforce that feels like they belong in the organization. That's DEI work, that's EDIJ work. All day, every day. But we're focusing on what we're trying to accomplish and recentering the conversation in that direction.

So, if your board feels like it's not important to have a workforce that feels like they want to come to work, I would say it's probably a good time to start looking at retention numbers, and see how good you are doing there, because there's probably some correlation between lack of attention to something and some outcomes that are being caused in the organization. So, I look for data, I look for facts to understand what's happening.

And I think if we look at some of those, I would call them more traditional data points, like satisfaction, belonging [and] retention. Those are things that are a little bit more universal. And if we can positively impact and move the needle on those things in the direction that we want them to be in, that is the same work. At the end of the day, it's about making people feel like they are valued and that they can come to the workplace and apply their skills.

I just reframed DEI for you, right there.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Thanks so much. Here's a follow-up question. We're you going to say something Je'Nai? Sorry.

Je'Nai Talley Jackson: No, I'm sorry.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: OK, here's another follow up question.

How can we incorporate [and] respond to questions across generations in our EDIJ work, especially when those questions may be counter to culture or counter to values?

Rachael Forester: Sure, and I think that this is a really important question to consider. And a lot of this has to do with communication, and relationship building and trust.

Oftentimes, the language that we use across generations are different. I often challenge people to think about when you were entering into the workforce, no matter what generation you are, what were some things that were really important to you? What were some of the things that you wanted to get out of your job? What are some of the things that you want potentially for your children or the children in your lives as they're entering into the workforce and using that as a unifying conversation?

The other thing that's important for us to think about is that context is important. So, the context of our lives are really important and being able to bring in relevant points of discussion, similar to what Antonio and Je'Nai were saying around this idea of, well, how much do we care about the people within our organization? How much do we value that people within our organization? How much do we want people to have a sense of belonging and really engaging in conversations about what's a time that you didn't feel like you belonged? What's a time that you did feel like you belonged, and what were some of the things that people did or said to make you feel this way? And being able to cross generational lines through conversation and communication without using words that might be hot buttons for certain people.

The other thing is I encourage cross generational conversations in the workplace. It's important, especially one of the things that I consider within organizations is affinity groups or employee resource groups. Being able to have spaces where people can talk to each other that are in similar age ranges, similarly race, similar gender, similar sexual orientations and so on and so forth. And then being able to kind of build a bridge and bringing certain groups together to engage around some of the same question prompts, just for better understanding and better clarity on why people are viewing the work the way that they're viewing it.

Because oftentimes it's miscommunication, it's the words or the language that we're using and not necessarily the components. But I know Antonio does a lot of work and research around generational differences, so I wanted to pass it to him.

Antonio Cortes: I would say, the only other thing I would peppering here is, if the sentiment of your workforce is shifting, it might be time to evaluate certain perspectives that are being held in the organization about what's important and what needs to happen, versus what we can maybe let go of in terms of culture, right?

So over time, millennials, I'm one of them, have shifted kind of the workplace expectations. I lead differently than my managers lead, hopefully. And I'm creating a more positive experience for my staff because of that. That's the intention.

So because sentiments and strategies can shift with those that are now entering the workforce, it's an opportunity for us to learn. And I think it's an important opportunity that we shouldn't shy away from.

So, Atokatha, any additional questions that you think we need to answer before we begin to wrap?

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Hi, yes, and I think there's one other follow up question to what you all were sharing earlier regarding retaliation.

What advice do you have for collecting feedback or input from staff about DEI-related concerns they have in a way that is empowering and eliminates fear of retaliation or other negative outcomes?

Antonio Cortes: Yeah, excellent question. I'm going to put my researcher hat on for this one.

Protecting anonymity and confidentiality is definitely something that we actively practice here at Nonprofit HR, but we encourage the same kind of mindset with our clients, too. And so, when we collect survey data, we collect focus group data, we come to the table with the agreement that we're going to keep the raw data, but we're going to tell you back what the themes were in terms of sentiment and what your staff told us as an example.

Something else that we do from a quantitative standpoint, or from a numbers standpoint, is that we don't report back sentiments from groups if there are less than five people in a category. So as an example, if your organization only has five men, which is definitely some of our client partners. Men tend to be less represented in nonprofits, but if they have less than five, we wouldn't report back that the three men in your organization have a different sentiment than the rest of the organization on this question around feelings of belonging are whatever we're probing about.

So, there's certain kind of data restrictions that you can engage in to ensure that we're allowing folks to provide feedback in an environment where their identities are protected. And we're also holding space for whatever they have to share with us. And if it is a different sentiment than others in your organization, it's important for us to surface that and try to figure out if there's something we need to do, an action there.

But the team, anything else you'd add on that one? That's a really important question.

Je'Nai Talley Jackson: Yeah, I just really quickly want to jump in that, one of the main pieces we talk about whenever we have conversations around, are biases present in the environment? Are microaggressions happening? We try to encourage folks to be up standers, to be allies, whatever you want to call it. If you are saying something, take the pressure off of your colleagues and be the one to surface it, right?

Because of our different identities in different areas in which we have privileged, it might sound a little different, if Rachael leans in and lifts something up that I'm having a challenge with than if I were to say it, right?

So, we encourage folks to not only be able to, and number one, organizations need to have clear processes, right, for how someone can lift up a concern, whether it's going directly to your supervisor or feeling like there's a clear process, as it relates to lifting things that the HR, when the situation arises, right?

So transparency around process and policies is important, but also folks feeling like they have the psychological safety, to name it for themselves.

And then, how do we strengthen allyship? How do we strengthen upstander positioning and say, "I noticed this, it's not OK. I know what we've aligned to as it relates to an inclusive culture, and this person is counter to it. And I'm going to call them in."

So that's also something to consider.

Rachael Forester: I think the only other thing that I would add here is that transparency and emotional intelligence from leaders is really important, too. Right?

So being able to share that, this is something that you know that people might be concerned about, and that the whole point is that you want to put accountability measures into place so that people aren't afraid of the fear of retaliation.

The other thing is that anything you collect, being able to share it back out, that starts to build trust within the organization, and then doing things to actually solve for those things.

This question might be a long game, right, depending on the level of trust within your organization. But you need to start somewhere, and the way that you start is through this conversation around transparency, this conversation around vulnerability, and being able to say, we don't have the culture that I want us to have, and here's how I want us to get here. Here's what we're going to do in order to make that happen, and here's the accountability measures that we're putting in place so that we can push back against anything that's counter to it.

Atokatha Ashmond Brew: Thanks so much, everyone. That's all the time we have today for Q&A.

We want to thank you all as attendees for joining this webinar. We hope you found it valuable. We also want to thank our panelists on our EDIJ team, Antonio, Rachael, and also, Je'Nai. We hope you enjoyed this dynamic discussion.

There are more webinars coming your way in 2024. Be sure to check our events calendar at nonprofithr.com/events. And also, please be sure to complete the feedback survey that will pop up once this webcast has ended. Your comments do help us with our planning, and also, they do inform the topics we cover as well.

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