

# Trends in D&I & PR research and trade press discourse

## Main themes and highlights (1990-present)

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“Knowing where to look and knowing how to recruit and retain a diverse workforce are among the most critical steps in improving diversity. Diversity training, mentoring and organizational changes are also essential elements. **And perhaps most important, those in leadership positions must become advocates for diversity.**” (PR Coalition, 2005, p. 1)

### EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A broad review of academic research on D&I in the PR profession since the 1990s revealed some noteworthy trends. A review of key trade press coverage over the last five years was also conducted to further inform the review of academic research. Several themes emerged, most of which indicate that the PR profession is far behind in reflecting the actual diversity in U.S. society. While studies and projections indicate that the population segments currently considered to be minorities will constitute a slim majority in the next few decades, and that diversity enhances innovation and increases productivity, these segments constitute only a little over 10% of the PR workforce. While some progress has been made in terms of recruitment of minorities and advancement of women to more senior executive positions, very little has changed since the 1990s.

Caucasian men still dominate senior positions in firms and corporations, and Caucasian women constitute about 70% of the workforce. While race, ethnicity and gender remain important categories, the definition of diversity needs to broaden to include various types of cultural differences. PR agencies and corporations need to set clear and measurable D&I goals and systematically measure the outcome. Diversity needs to be a part of organizational culture rather than an add-on, and accountability is needed for D&I initiatives. Those who are in a position of power need to reevaluate current practices and why things have not changed much in the last two decades. Those in charge of D&I initiatives need to be given more authority, and more resources need to be devoted to D&I goals. Despite slow change though, the good news, according to the review, is that there is now a much greater understanding in the industry that major D&I changes are urgently needed. It is the “how” part that is the main struggle. More best practices examples are needed from those organizations that have made successful strides in D&I. *The theme repeated over and over in the trade press and academic research is that top leadership needs to care and get personally involved in D&I, and that more efforts need to be made to diversify top leadership. Without change in the D&I realm, the PR profession will fall behind other sectors, and its lack of diversity will be increasingly questioned.*

### ACADEMIC RESEARCH

#### 1990s

<p><b>PR should be at the forefront of D&amp;I efforts in the workplace.</b> Changing demographics and markets are emphasized, as is the point that the PR industry itself far from reflects these changing demographics. The business case for D&amp;I is made.</p>
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<p><b>Practitioners seem to understand the D&amp;I argument in terms of new markets/publics but not so much in terms of the industry itself.</b> Very few</p>
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corporations/agencies have D&I programs in place.
<b>Recruitment/hiring and training are important</b> (1992 PRSA task force suggested that PR leaders go through diversity training).
<b>Exclusion and discrimination.</b> Diverse employees report pigeonholing, tokenism, lower salaries, and slow progress. Some report feeling socially excluded and unwelcome work climate. Some are okay with serving as liaisons with cultural groups they are members of. Some see being a minority as being advantageous since this standpoint allows one to see issues from multiple viewpoints.
<b>Leaders must be actively involved in and committed to D&amp;I efforts.</b>
<b>D&amp;I discourse and research focus is on traditional categories (gender, race/ethnicity).</b> Most of the research focuses is on gender, followed by race and ethnicity. But gender is treated as a monolithic category, and studies focus only on women and do not include men's views. This provides a partial view of the "gender" situation in industry.
<b>Straight white men dominate senior positions in the PR industry.</b>

### 2000s (early)

<b>There is increased awareness about the importance of D&amp;I but not much is being done about it.</b> For example, there is a great deal of confusion and ambivalence among PRSA chapter leaders as to what diversity is, why it's beneficial, and also about the importance of investing money, time and energy to achieve it. Yet many practitioners affirm it's something that must be done.
<b>Men still dominate senior management positions in the industry.</b> Women and minority practitioners have made some gains, but the numbers are still heavily tilted in favor of men.
<b>Managers tend to report they are doing well in terms of diversity – the numbers and minority employee views do not support that optimism.</b>
<b>The lack of a diversity pipeline continues.</b>
<b>Diversity should not just be about compliance. It is about being open to differences of many kinds.</b> The need to open up of the definition of diversity is emphasized – but there is still a tendency to fall back on race/ethnicity, and gender.
<b>While the business case for D&amp;I should be stressed, D&amp;I is ultimately a moral and social responsibility</b> for businesses and organizations in order to be good citizens in the societies in which they exist. A CSR case for D&I is made.
<b>Diversity is still conceived of as an add-on, and not as a vital part of an</b>

<b>organization's culture.</b>
<b>There is a growing interest in the LGBTQ population, but more as publics/markets rather than as part of the industry.</b>
<b>Leaders have to be actively involved and committed to D&amp;I efforts.</b> They must lead in building open and inclusive cultures.
<b>Retention is as important as recruitment.</b> Minority employees should not feel forced to assimilate to dominant industry culture. It is the dominant culture that needs to change.

### **2000s (more recent)**

<b>PR researchers are hesitant to talk about power.</b> There is a white status quo in the PR industry and education. Whiteness in PR needs to be decentered. The “white leader prototype” (Logan, 2011) needs to be challenged, and leaders of all backgrounds (including white leaders) should be involved in this work of self-reflection and critique.
<b>More Caucasians practitioners tend to see D&amp;I as working; non-Caucasians don't.</b>
<b>Less than 50% of firms and corporations have D&amp;I directors or have integrated diversity into their business strategy.</b> Meager resources (budget and personnel) are dedicated to D&I. Although D&I literature best practices states tying D&I to manager compensation works, this is not favored among PR practitioners. The quota system is not favored either. The lack of clear D&I goals, measurement and accountability continues (Jiang, Ford, Long, & Ballard, 2016).
<b>More formal spaces for D&amp;I discussions within firms and corporations are needed.</b> Also, D&I's significance and value need to be explained to majority employees in ways that lead to cultural buy-in.
<b>Each organization must have its own (clear) take on diversity within the larger D&amp;I mission.</b> Diversity issues and needs are different for different organizations and corporations.
<b>The definition of diversity needs to be diversified beyond traditional categories.</b> A sense of multidimensional diversity (Tsetsura, 2011) needed. There is a <b>need for 2D diversity</b> – a mix of primary and secondary (or inherent and acquired) diversity is healthy diversity (Hewlett, Marshall, Sherbin, & Gonsalves, 2015; Sha & Ford, 2007). This approach to diversity takes us beyond the notion of “requisite variety” without abandoning it, and also helps with better global engagements with stakeholders.
<b>Millennials have difference expectations regarding D&amp;I.</b> They expect diversity and inclusion. Difference is more normal to them than to previous generations.
<b>Men still dominate senior management positions in the industry.</b> Women and

<p>minority practitioners have made some gains, but the numbers are still heavily tilted in favor of men.</p>
<p><b>Agencies have high opportunity for recruiting diverse employees (compared to corporations) due to high rate of turnover, but they tend to “hire own kind.”</b></p>
<p><b>Industry has meager to no diversity pipeline to senior positions. Mid-level positions are faring better.</b></p>
<p><b>Young African American and Hispanic professionals are generally satisfied with their jobs, but they’re not sure how long they will stay on.</b> They feel the climate could be more inclusive, and they continue to face microaggressions. More mentors and affinity groups, and genuine appreciation and respect for difference are needed. Training for <u>all</u> employees on these matters is recommended. In general, new diverse employees can find environment unwelcoming.</p>
<p><b>Despite increases in numbers, Hispanic practitioners report that the PR profession feels culturally unwelcoming to them.</b> Given the focus on English writing skills, they feel their bilingualism hurts them. They also tend to opt for less “fluffy” professions.</p>
<p><b>Meager research on LGBTQ practitioners. Findings show that they have to code switch to fit mainstream heterosexual culture of industry.</b> They report the need for a more open work environment, pro-LGBTQ policies and networking with professional groups.</p>
<p><b>While some practitioners shudder at the thought of diversity training, others support meaningful training.</b></p>

**TRADE PRESS  
(2010 - present)**

<p><b>While there is definitely a much better realization of the importance of D&amp;I, the PR industry is far behind where it needs to be with D&amp;I.</b> The industry needs to do a better job of walking the talk. Diversity needs to be part of strategy and given more authority and budget.</p>
<p><b>Changing demographics and the business and innovation case are repeatedly mentioned as is research on how diverse organizations outperform non-diverse ones.</b> PR organizational culture needs to change.</p>
<p><b>The PR industry needs to get beyond old understandings of D&amp;I –</b> just representation of minority bodies is not enough, but this is the common approach. Diversity is difference in action = innovation. Companies should not hire for diversity and expect people to conform (but that happens a lot). Diversity is unassimilable – the melting pot metaphor no longer holds true. There is a need for a cultural intelligence approach rather than the pure categories approach. Identities are multiple and</p>

<p>intersecting, and D&amp;I should focus on how to thrive through difference than try to control (fear) it. Diversity gets good results only if it is managed well and accompanied by a climate of inclusiveness and valuing of differences. Management styles have to be flexible.</p>
<p><b>Clear D&amp;I goals are needed for the PR industry, along with measurement.</b> Treat D&amp;I like any other issue (e.g., profit) and have real goals and measurements and timelines.</p>
<p><b>Millennials are more diverse and they expect diversity. They prefer to self-define than go with pre-determined labels.</b></p>
<p><b>Top leaders need to be very involved in creating inclusive environments for diversity to work.</b> D&amp;I should be an executive function and not an HR one (Van Camp, 2014).</p>
<p><b>Currently there is more focus on recruitment than on retention.</b> Both need to go hand in hand.</p>
<p><b>PR can learn from D&amp;I leaders</b> (e.g., Coke, Xerox, American Express and Sodexo). The Diversity Distinction in PR Awards (organized by <i>PR Week</i> and PR Council since 2011) offer good case studies.</p>
<p><b>Training is still important, but negative training that focuses on rules, reeducation and shaming does not work.</b> Positive training is needed. Diversity policies/training that is ineffective tends to threaten white males in power. Such policies are also simply used to protect companies during discrimination law suits.</p>
<p><b>There is an increase in mid-level diversity, but diversity at senior levels is severely lacking.</b></p>
<p><b>Torod Neptune</b> (PRSA Foundation president) gives the PR industry a B- or C for D&amp;I (McCorkindale, 2016)</p>
<p><b>Corporations do better than agencies with D&amp;I.</b></p>
<p><b>Social media is amplifying changing demographics along with the lack of diversity issue.</b></p>
<p><b>A company with good D&amp;I status gains good credibility in a fast changing country/world.</b></p>

## MAIN THEMES & HIGHLIGHTS

- D&I trends (1980s – present) – Legal issue, to bottom line focus and social responsibility, to D&I as part of process & strategy.
- Leaders definitely set the tone for D&I. In PR, they need to do a better job of being involved, accountable and creating inclusive cultures. Diversity begins internally with honest dialogue and strong leadership. Diversity should be meaningful, not just about filling quotas. It is about valuing different opinions/voices, and is important for job satisfaction and retention.
- Only 10% of industry is racially and ethnically diverse – Not much has changed since the 1990s. Straight white men are still promoted faster to management compared to any other group. The men/women ratio is still about the same (30%:70%). There are more women now in senior management position compared to the 1990s. Mid-level diversity has improved a bit as well. But the pipeline is still severely lacking.
- Most of the research from the mid-1980s – early 2000s focused on gender issues. Since then there has been more focus on race/ethnicity, and some growing interest in the LGBTQ populations other categories (e.g., dis/abilities, religion, veteran status, socioeconomic status, etc.).
- Millennials and following generations expect diversity.
- In the 1990s, about 12% of firms and corporations had D&I programs in place. That percentage increased in the 2000s (60-80% have D&I policies and goals, according to recent studies). However, practitioners remain generally dissatisfied with state of diversity, diverse practitioners more so. But there is still little to no movement toward D&I becoming a part of the culture and strategic function of firms and corporations. There are no clear goals and measurement criteria, and accountability is non-existent.
- Social media is amplifying the D&I issue.
- The need of the day is to spell out an inclusive definition of diversity and demonstrate commitment. Definitions should be such that most people can relate; they should not be too exclusive.

## **SUGGESTIONS**

(Gallicano, 2013, pp. 62-63)

1. Hire many qualified employees who are diverse based on race/ethnicity and include them, as well as Caucasian women, at top levels.
2. Create a mentorship program and other opportunities to advance the careers of diverse practitioners.
3. Establish a multicultural group that can work on improving diversity in the workplace.
4. Inspire a culture that promotes microaffirmations and discourages microinequities. (p. 58)
5. Change attitude toward diversity in the workplace. Build alliances across identity groups in workplace. People from all backgrounds should understand the importance of diversity.
6. Promote diverse practitioners to senior positions when they are qualified.
7. Ensure equal workload despite identity markers.

8. Intermix work so Caucasians can learn from diverse employees and the latter don't feel pigeonholed.

(Groysburg & Connolly, 2013)

Diversity is about having a mix, and inclusiveness is about making it work.

1. Measure D&I
2. Hold managers accountable
3. Have flexible work arrangements
4. Recruit and promote from diverse pool of candidates (quotas can help in beginning)
5. Provide leadership education
6. Sponsor employee resource groups and mentoring programs
7. Offer quality role models
8. Make diversity officer position count (report to top)
9. Lead by example – CEOs should be directly involved in D&I initiatives

(Executive Leadership Council, 2015)

The new leader should be culturally sensitive and empathetic, and possess agility and adaptability. S/he should be inclusive (not a dictator) and open to change. This new leader performs in a world-minded (rather than just US-American) way, and considers diversity to strategic, a must, not just the right or nice thing to do.

(PR Coalition, 2005)

- 1) Promote PR early – high school level.
- 2) Entry level employees need mentors and role models.
- 3) Communicate diversity as business strategy – dispel myths and promote it positively.

“...diversity truly transcends the notion that it is about color or gender, but of the mindset and the willingness to be open, to learn, and to grow. It is not a simple term to define or an issue that will have a singular solution.” (p. 19)

## CONCLUSION

In the PR industry today, power and the decision diversify is in the hands of straight white men, followed by straight white women. Many want to diversify. The communication/PR industry is “diversity aware” but not yet “diversity integrated” (Institute for Public Relations, 2006, p.6)

### Noteworthy quotes

Burrell (2015, paras 1, 4)

“The strength of diversity is set in motion when we respect and value differences. ... In order to unleash the potential of workforce diversity, a culture of inclusion needs to be established. This should be a culture that fosters enhanced workforce integration and brings latent diversity potentials to life; a culture that is built on clarified normative grounds and honors the differences as well as the similarities of the individual, self and others. Diversity is about balancing this natural tension in different organizational and cultural settings.

Diversity is the measure and inclusion is the mechanism. High-performing organizations

Choi & Hon (2002, p. 258)

“The real task is making organizations fit for women and men who embrace feminist ideals of egalitarianism, rather than women fit for male bastions of power.”

Hewlett, Marshall, Sherbin, & Gonsalves (2015, p. 3, Executive Summary)

Innovation is key to business success.

“But what drives serial innovation? CTI’s [Center for Talent Innovation’s ground-breaking research reveals the engine to be a diverse workforce that’s **managed by leaders who cherish difference**, embrace disruption, and foster a speak-up culture. Inclusive leader behaviors effectively “unlock” the innovative potential of an inherently diverse workforce, enabling companies to increase their share of existing markets and lever open brand new ones. By encouraging a proliferation of perspectives, leaders who foster a speak-up culture also enable companies to realize greater efficiencies and trim costs—another way that innovation drives bottom-line value.”

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