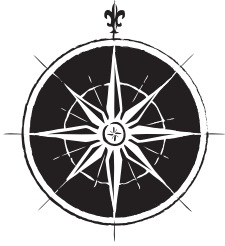


Diversity & Inclusion Trends in Public Relations Research and Trade Press Coverage

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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 diversity and inclusion in the public relations profession since the 1990s revealed some noteworthy trends. Several themes emerged, most of which indicate that the public relations profession is far behind in reflecting the actual diversity in the United States 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 more than 10% of the public relations 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.

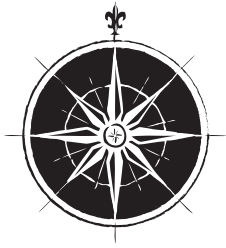
Public relations agencies and corporations need to set clear and measurable diversity and inclusion

goals to systematically measure the outcome.

Diversity needs to be a part of organizational culture rather than an add-on, and accountability is needed for 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 initiatives need to be given more authority, and more resources need to be devoted to diversity and inclusion goals.

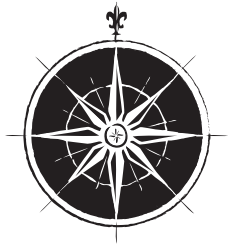
Despite slow change though, the good news, according to the review, is there is a greater understanding in the industry that major changes are urgently needed. **It is the “how” part that is the main struggle.** More best practices examples are needed from those organizations that have made successful strides in diversity and inclusion.

The theme repeated in the trade press and academic research is that top leadership needs to care and get personally involved in diversity and inclusion, and more efforts need to be made to diversify top leadership. Without change in the diversity and inclusion realm, the public relations profession will fall behind other sectors, and its lack of diversity will be increasingly questioned.



Main Themes & Highlights

- **Diversity and Inclusion trends** (1980s – present): Legal issue, to bottom line focus and social responsibility, to D&I as part of process & strategy.
- **Leaders set the tone for diversity and inclusion.** In public relations, 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 about 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 positions 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 and other categories (e.g., dis/abilities, religion, veteran status, socioeconomic status).
- **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)

- Hire qualified employees who are diverse based on race/ethnicity and include them, as well as Caucasian women, at top levels.
- Create a mentorship program and other opportunities to advance the careers of diverse practitioners.
- Establish a multicultural group that can work on improving diversity in the workplace.
- Inspire a culture that promotes microaffirmations and discourages microinequities. (p. 58)
- Change attitudes toward diversity in the workplace. Build alliances across identity groups in the workplace. People from all backgrounds should understand the importance of diversity.
- Promote diverse practitioners to senior positions when they are qualified.
- Ensure equal workload despite identity markers.
- Intermix work so Caucasians can learn from diverse employees, and the latter don't feel pigeonholed.

(Executive Leadership Council, 2015)

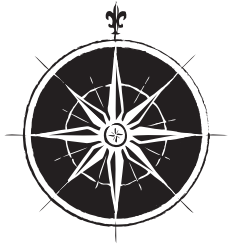
The new leader should be culturally sensitive, empathetic, and possess agility and adaptability. S/he should be inclusive (not a dictator) and open to change. This new leader performs in a world-minded (rather than just US-American) way, and considers diversity strategic, a must, not just the right or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

(Public Relations Coalition, 2005)

- Promote PR early – high school level.
- Entry level employees need mentors and role models.
- 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)

(Groysburg & Connolly, 2013)

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



Conclusion

In the PR industry today, power and the decision to 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)

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Citations:

- Executive Leadership Council (2015). 21st century global leadership: Black global leaders speak.
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