



Elevating D&I with Tech: a CHRO's Guide

Reducing bias, increasing diversity, and
gaining perspectives through AI & the
democratization of the workplace

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Megan Smith

Former CTO of the United States

“Right now, as an industry, we’re working hard on understanding bias against women and minorities that has been with us through all of history and trying to—in our tech way—debug that.”

Awareness of diversity, equity and inclusion (known alternately as D&I and DEI) as an important, mission-critical business function is constantly growing – but in many companies, it’s still seen as “just” a part of employee care programs, and not as a function that should permeate every aspect of an organization, helping form its goals and activities from the most strategic down to the most tactical.

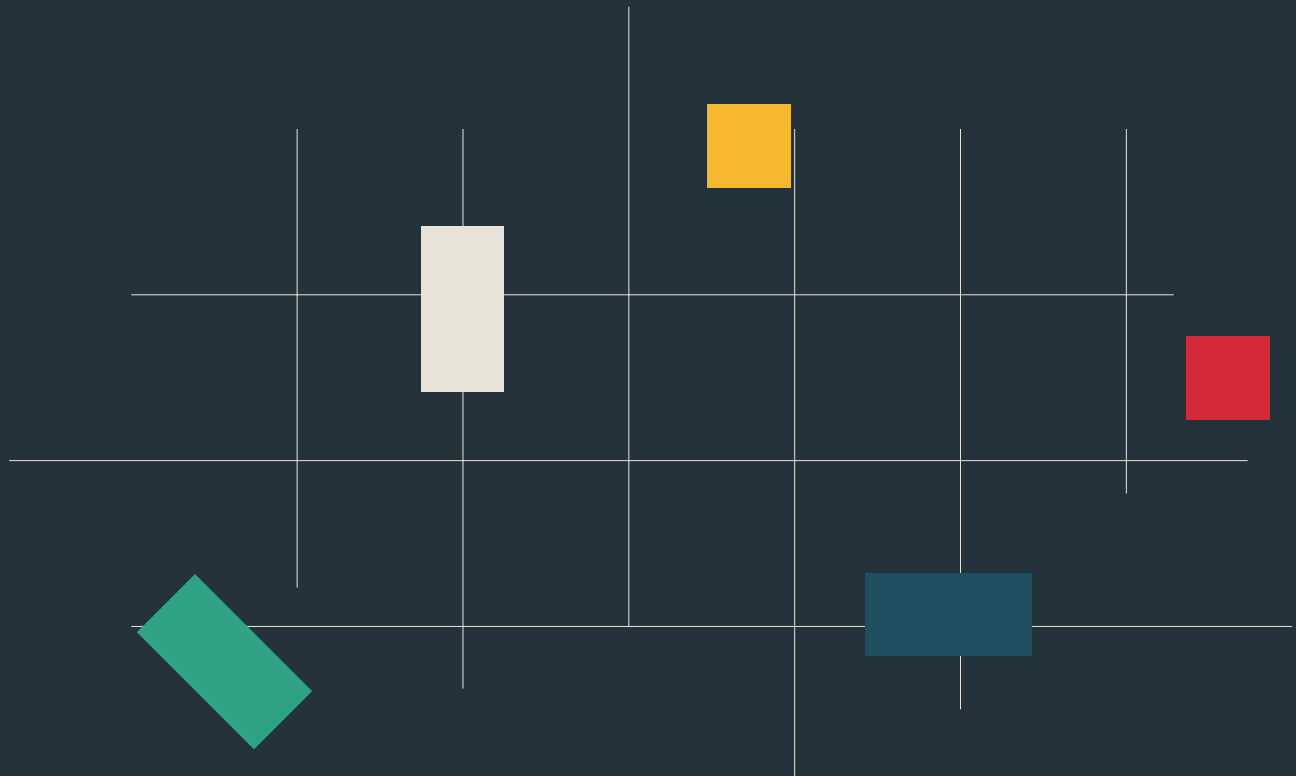
In recent years, automation and technological innovation has changed every aspect of business and management, and the D&I function is no exception.

Changing the way we think about talent, and increasing the involvement of AI can have radically positive effects on D&I programs - but to be done right, a change in perspective is required.

At this critical point in time, as cultural, organizational, technological and economic changes are converging, it’s become necessary to investigate, learn and highlight the importance of a new approach to Diversity, Equity and Inclusion.

**The quotes in this piece were taken from [Gloat’s discussion with leading HR executives](#) during GloatLIVE and [Divikiran Kathuria’s D&I interview](#) on the Gloat blog.*

Rethinking Diversity and Inclusion



By now, it's clear that diversity, equity and inclusion are an important part of every business function – but to do DEI right, having a diverse and inclusive workforce isn't enough, nor is it enough to tackle and routinely address biases towards under-represented groups.

True equity and inclusion demand a change in something much more fundamental, that touches on the very way we think about what a workplace is – and implementing it can revolutionize and improve every aspect of your business.



Divkiran Kathuria

Director of Talent Mobility &
Talent Technology, Seagate

“I think that for every organization, D&I is not a question. It should just be done. And this is where I would say that the talent marketplaces are especially necessary.”

So you've made sure your workforce is diverse by tuning up your hiring and candidate selection process, eliminating bias in the recruiting funnel and building a team made up of different ethnicities, socio-economic backgrounds and genders – but what happens to these people once they become employees? Does your company's culture change with them, treating them as equals in their ability to change and influence their environment, or do they begin work feeling like outsiders merely being accommodated by an already-established culture that wasn't formed with them in mind?

Sadly, more often than not, the latter is the case – and this can have severe repercussions, both for individuals and for the company as a whole.

“I get paid well to do something I enjoy, and...[I'm] surrounded by clever, funny, like-minded people. And for 45 or 50 hours every week, I feel isolated,” an anonymous UK employee *wrote in the Guardian*, highlighting what it feels like to not be included. On top of the difficult emotional state this potentially places employees in, it has a significant detrimental effect on their productivity and engagement. When an employee feels alone or excluded, their ability to relate to wider team and company goals is significantly diminished, and long-term responsibilities become much more difficult to stick

to and maintain. Ultimately, it's an unsustainable situation that hurts employee and employer alike.



Mislem Sabag

People Services Lead,
Walmart

“The Talent Marketplace is a golden opportunity to evolve talent practices. It helps us break bureaucracy and silos, as employees are applying for career experiences. It makes the process of applying more democratic, more self-service, and more agile.”

Successful implementation of D&I programs can not only create more inclusive and engaged environments; they actually *boost collaboration within the company*.

Inclusivity and a sense of belonging do more than just boost collaboration and engagement, though; D&I can be an important driver in almost any aspect of the business, enhancing everything from employee experience to *earnings* to *supply chains*.

“If you want to talk about benefits of D&I, I think there is no end to it,” says Divkiran Kathuria, director of Talent Mobility and Talent Technology, currently at Seagate and formerly of Schneider Electric, Deloitte and GE. “I think there are so many use cases across the board; take the automobile industry, for instance. They did not know that their seatbelts did not fit female drivers, or their seating arrangements did not fit female drivers, simply because there were no women in automobile industry at that point in time, especially in the design and testing phases.

Or, another example is that a lot of high definition cameras cannot recognize and identify people of darker skin; that's the result of a lack of diversity, because clearly if you're testing and developing it with a diverse workforce, you'll catch that error before you go to market. And this can have serious implications.

So I think that for every organization, D&I is not a question. It should just be done. And this is where I would say that the talent marketplaces are especially necessary.”

The Diversity Experience



As companies move towards flatter hierarchies and pixelated, skill-oriented work architecture, traditional job definitions are beginning to break down, and are being replaced by more personalized, skill-oriented approaches, which allow for AI-powered, ad-hoc collaborations that come together and apart as specific company needs arise and are resolved.



Watson Stewart

Head of Talent Solutions,
Standard Chartered

“The talent marketplace is an enormous opportunity for D&I. We’re creating an inclusive environment where we can get diversity of thoughts from a variety of different people, and introduce them into the projects we run.”

From a D&I standpoint, this is a huge opportunity for employees from marginalized and under-represented groups to fully belong and realize their potential within the company. By providing them with unfiltered access to every relevant opportunity within the company, regardless of how good a fit their managers may think they’ll be, platforms like the Talent Marketplace are already undercutting significant hurdles faced by traditional D&I approaches. But they do more than that.



Divkiran Kathuria

Director of Talent Mobility &
Talent Technology, Seagate

“If you visit some of your customers and look into their talent marketplace, and look at a few jobs listed as ‘remote,’ you’ll find that just looking at the pictures and the names that pop up is a diversity experience.”

“Humans are an experience-based species. Once you start getting more diverse people in the team, once you start meeting them, once you start working with them, you realize the potential, you realize the capability, you realize what they bring to the table. And if you haven't seen a diverse workforce, it definitely helps experientially for people to realize what they are missing,” Divkiran Kathuria explains.

“If you visit some of your customers and look into their talent marketplace, and look at a few jobs listed as ‘remote,’ you’ll find that just looking at the pictures and the names that pop up is a diversity experience.” Providing these diversity experiences to the workforce, simply by virtue of making an already diverse workforce more visible to both managers and itself, has tremendous D&I implications. But basing this system on AI can seem counterintuitive. After all, if the goal is to make humans more visible, shouldn't human sensitivities be driving this process?

AI Is Not the Enemy



Bias is an inherent part of human mentality, and uncovering, acknowledging and addressing it is a constant effort. That's one of the reasons D&I is such an important business function; if we could simply stop being biased, we would – but addressing bias is an ongoing process, not an “over-and-done-with” deal.

The fact that bias is so inherent to human thinking also means that even the most informed and well-meaning managers are fallible when it comes to opening up new opportunities for inclusivity, and can accidentally overlook relevant individuals, even in a diverse workforce. For under-represented employees, that kind of oversight, even if it isn't malicious, can make the work environment feel non-inclusive, inaccessible and even hostile, undoing D&I efforts and diminishing the organization's ability to benefit from the diversity of its human capital.

So if the “human element” is the problem with bias, AI-based tools just might be the solution.

“Machine learning is objective, and is way faster than human learning. So to detect bias and to completely eliminate it from humans is impossible,” says Divkiran Kathuria. “And whatever training efforts we do, whatever D&I efforts we introduce, they will never be as effective. We are getting there, but we are still struggling with it. So to truly manifest that right talent at the right place, and to have the whole world as your talent pool, it's really important to shed that bias. And without the augmented intelligence from these technologies, it'll be really, really slow because I don't think humans will ever be completely unbiased.”



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It's true that AI doesn't “see” the “human element” in whatever decision making process it's involved – but that also means it doesn't insert bias into that process, either.

If used correctly, AI can therefore create a truly inclusive, color-gender- and background-neutral work environment when applied to HR, and allow individuals to flourish on the merit of their professional abilities alone. In fact, if they perform as intended, AI-based HR platforms have the potential to significantly raise the confidence and trust of employees in their organization, ensuring they're treated equally and fairly by the "institution," and, perhaps more importantly, that they have access to a system which allows them to be seen and heard when they need to be.

It's not just employees who benefit from this, either; managers within the company may have their attention brought to employees they would not have considered viable candidates for projects and jobs before. An inclusive, bias-free HR platform doesn't just open up opportunities for employees – it unlocks previously under-utilized parts of the workforce for the organization.

But while all of this sounds idyllic, AI is not without its pitfalls when it comes to bias – which is why the way AI is implemented needs to be thoroughly thought through.

"I think in both Seagate and Schneider, we had the chance to nip it in the bud right from the start.

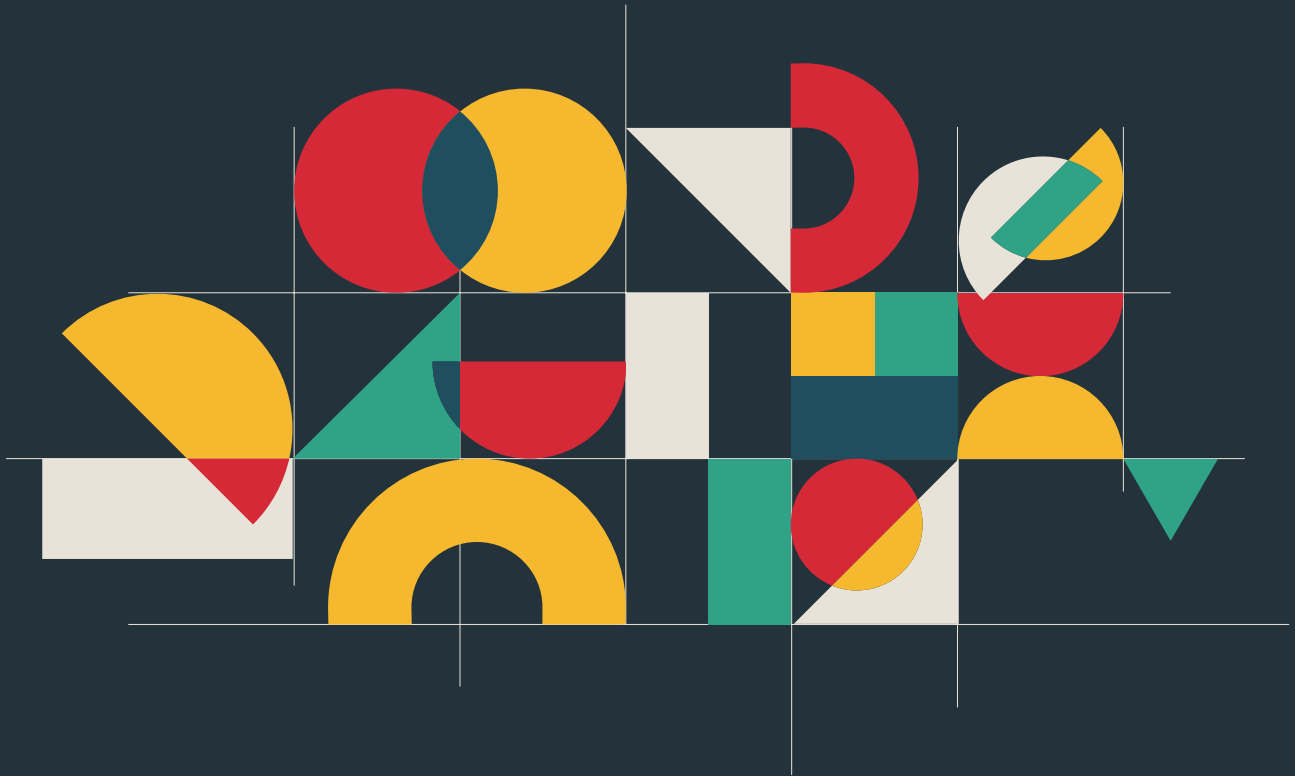
When you set up the system for implementation, you just keep all of these parameters out; you simply don't add the gender of your employees. You don't add race, or nationality, etc.

I think for us, it was a choice whether we even keep the names and pictures! We ultimately chose to keep them, but I know other organizations who've chosen otherwise.

I think the second thing, which I really like about Gloat and a few other similar products in the market as well, is that there is a bias detection mechanism – which is not very easy to do with humans, right?

You can't really track all of their movements as humans or who they are rejecting or who they are liking. We cannot really keep these tabs on humans, but with AI, you can pick up on trends like that. So if there is, say, an IT department where the men are all being rejected by hiring managers, it's very easy to pick up on that trend based on data, and mitigate it, thanks to dedicated technologies which detect the bias, introduce noise into that data pool, and then say, okay, let's start again, and see if we see more bias patterns."

More Than Identity Politics



When we talk about DEI, the main benefits that are usually brought up are the critical added perspectives members of under-represented groups can bring to the table, in addition to their professional expertise.

This kind of contribution can catch and address potential problems with a product or a business approach early on, thereby saving time, effort and money in a ripple effect that can ultimately influence company bottom lines in otherwise unforeseen and unexpected ways. But when you let professional expertise be the only criteria which dictates how teams are formed in the first place, you're missing out on two important DEI factors.



Daniel Dreyer
Senior Director of HR
Operations, PepsiCo

“One of our motivators for embracing the talent marketplace was raising the bar on talent and diversity, having employees act as owners, and much more in terms of empowerment and transparency.”

The first is that even within companies with robust DEI programs, bias still exists, and can still be reflected in diversity within a given profession. So while you may have a DEI program that's attempting to address bias by promoting diversity, a team of engineers on the ground may still be quite homogenic from a DEI perspective. That means that until the DEI program attains its planned results, your teams and your products will still suffer from a lack in that critical added perspective.



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The second is that DEI works better as a holistic approach.

This means that it's not enough to just have a diverse team of similarly trained professionals; what you really want is a team and process that are informed by various perspectives, both personal and professional. A truly DEI-minded enterprise will therefore include support professionals in its product design process, QA specialists in their marketing efforts, and so on and so forth.

By doing this, companies can not only ensure a more diverse and inclusive workforce that's fully involved in and informing all of their activities – they can also ensure professional diversity, which lends itself to a deeper understanding of all processes within the company, as well as creates greater potential for original solutions borne out of shattering silos and heightened interdisciplinary thinking.

At the heart of DEI lies the understanding that employees and professionals are, first and foremost, people. And just as people want equal opportunities to be seen and to influence their environment, it's important to remember that people are also dynamic, with developing and changing aspirations in their personal and professional lives alike. That dynamism is a major driving force behind career development and professional interests – and when done right, it can be harnessed to drive DEI and professional diversity efforts as well.

So when you're looking to diversify the professional and personal backgrounds of previously homogenous teams, overlooking personal aspirations as an engine in that diversification process does more than just deprive your company of new perspectives and opportunities – it's wasteful from an organizational standpoint as well.

“Overall, the organizations where these different professionals come together, give inputs and work on a product together, do better. Personally, I feel intent and capability are way above skill, because if you are an agile learner, if you have interest in something, if you have ideas, you bring a lot more to table than someone who has the skill, but is really not interested in the big picture.



Divkiran Kathuria

Director of Talent Mobility &
Talent Technology, Seagate

"Today, if you're not an agile learner, if you don't have an intent to develop, you will not succeed."

The fact that the focus shifts to learning is also a very, very interesting thing about the talent marketplaces. Today, if you're not an agile learner, if you don't have an intent to develop, you will not succeed. Two, three years down the line, you will be obsolete - and the talent marketplace helps you put that in perspective and say, 'I know this, but I also want to learn something more.' The same goes for hiring managers; it helps you see what the intent of the person is, and whether they are from the same professional background or not, you can really focus on that intent and agility in learning."



About Gloat

Gloat's pioneering Talent Marketplace platform has been adopted by some of the world's largest and most innovative employers, including Unilever, Schneider Electric, Standard Chartered Bank, PepsiCo, Walmart, Nestlé, HSBC, and more. The Talent Marketplace empowers enterprises to democratize career development, unlock skills, and future-proof their workforces using a powerful, purpose-built AI and consumer-grade user experience. Founded in 2015, Gloat is headquartered in New York, with offices around the globe and a large R&D center in Tel Aviv, Israel.

For more information, visit www.gloat.com.