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Incorporating ESG Strategy in DEI for Leadership Roles in Higher Education

Vianka EstevesMiranda[1], Weiwen Liao[2], Elizabeth AbingtonPrejean[3], Carmella Parker[4]
[1,2,3,4]*College of Business and Technology, Northwestern State University of Louisiana, U.S.A*

Abstract
There are miles to go before any human resources (HR) professional can rest since individuals who identify as women, people of color, and/or LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning) remain underrepresented in positions of authority and influence. This is particularly true in higher education. It has not been exempted from these concerns.HR cannot exist in a silo. Administrators have moved to address an old problem with new awareness. As the keepers of knowledge, it is imperative that current higher education leaders scrutinize leadership roles to determine if decision-making processes reflect the institution's community.A review of the existing archetypes of the chief diversity officer structure indicates the need for a committee structure in which higher education leadership implement policies that center around ESG (Environmental, Social, and Governance).Leadership in higher education institutions must adopt policies that embrace ESG and the principles of DEI to facilitate a more inclusive learning environment.

Keywords: *DEI, ESG, Higher Education, Human Resource Management, Leadership*

I. INTRODUCTION

Human Resource Management (HRM) consists of an organization's "people practices," which include policies, practices, and systems that influence employees' behavior, attitudes, and performance." Social media brings instant attention to discrepancies in what people perceive as normal behavior. Examples of injustice are highlighted daily. In a recent study published in the Diversity in Tech: 2021 US report by Mthree, half of workers between the ages of 18 and 28 years left or wanted to leave because of “company culture made them feel unwelcome or uncomfortable” (Mthree, 2021). Percentages were higher among minority group, 53 percent of Asian and female respondents reported having left or wanted to leave, as did 56 percent of Black respondents and 58 percent of Hispanic or Latino respondents (Mthree, 2021). Additionally, 68 percent of workers between the ages of 18 and 28-years old said that they have felt uncomfortable in a job because of their gender. Ethnicity, socioeconomic background, or neurodevelopmental condition.

It is essential to plan to address perceived discriminatory practices and bring awareness to elements that may promote constructive change in the workplace and society. Human resource managers have expanded duties to keep the workforce flowing and inclusive (Noe, et al., 2020, pp. 1-2). The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) publishes articles to help employers with current workers issues. One of the recent articles discussed workers' satisfaction with diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) citing that is the newest workplace rating on employer review site Glassdoor. Glassdoor CEO Christian Sutherland-Wong stated that “job seekers and employees today really care about equity, and for too long they've lacked access to the information needed to make informed decisions about the companies that are, or are not, truly inclusive” (Maurer, 2020). Glassdoor is a website issuing ratings on companies creating a platform for transparency for job seekers (Maurer, 2020).

Concepts such as adverse selection often used in recruitment and exaggerated in team production need to be addressed and highlighted replaced by more quantitative analysis citing employees' skills and contributions. The concept that corporations have a responsibility towards society (CSR) can be traced back several centuries (Carroll, 2015). The term CSR is also listed as other subjects such as: Corporate Sustainability, Corporate Social Performance, Creation of Shared Value, Corporate Citizenship, Environmental, Corporate Social Responsibility, Environmental Social and Governance Criteria, among others (Latapí-Agudelo et al., 2019).

However, in the twenty-first century, greater interest in whether there is a "business case" for corporate social responsibility apart from altruistic and ethical justifications arose and caused a shift to the concepts of "sustainability" and environmental, social, and governance (ESG) practices and risks. "ESG is used to refer not only to sustainability measures or to environmental, social, or governance practices specifically, but to all nonfinancial fundamentals that can impact firms' financial performance, such as corporate governance, labor and employment standards, human resource management, and environmental practices" (Harper, 2016; Pollman, 2019).

II. ESG JUMPS TO THE FOREFRONT OF BUSINESS

Today, every corporation must have a policy regarding ESG criteria to ensure compliance with the needs of external stakeholders. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are a part of the social aspect of ESG, and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) are housed in the social aspect of ESG. In the following pages, we will introduce the concept of ESG. We will also explain its role in higher education as our future business leaders need a stronger understanding of the role and its effect on business and industry.

In 2005, the United Nations Environment Programme on Finance Initiative presented the concept of ESG and justified the need for ESG to address the fuzziness of corporate governance (United Nations Environment Programme, 2005). ESG is defined as environmental criteria, social criteria, and governance. Environmental criteria (E) include the energy your company takes in and the waste it discharges, the resources it needs, and the consequences for living beings as a result. Social criteria (S) address the relationships your company has and the reputation it fosters with people and institutions in the communities where you do business. Governance (G) refers to the internal system of practices, controls, and procedures your company adopts to govern itself, make effective decisions, comply with the law, and meet the needs of external stakeholders (Heinsz, Koller, & Nuttall, 2021). Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, or DEI, is housed in the social aspect of ESG. Diversity is the presence of differences within a given setting (Skadden, Arps, Slate, Meagher &Flom, 2021). Diversity includes populations that have and remain underrepresented among practitioners in the field and marginalized in the broader society (City University of New York, 2021).

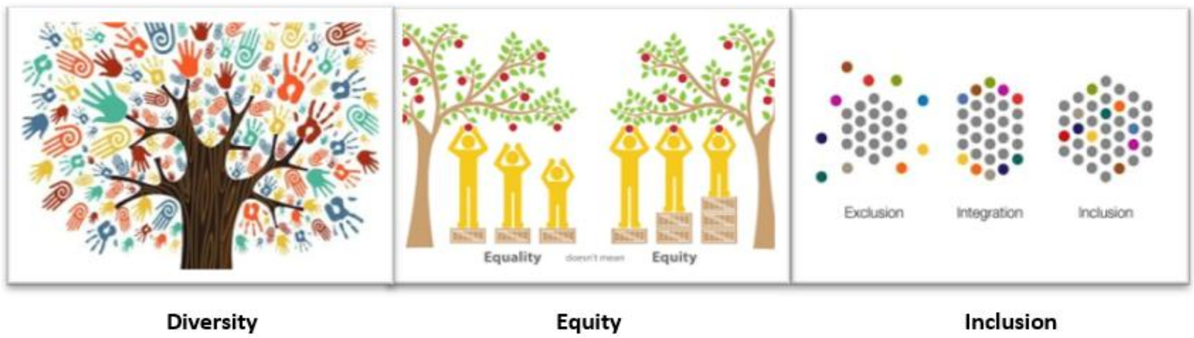
Cooperative Extension defines Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. *Diversity* is the presence of differences within a given setting. Diversity includes populations that have and remain underrepresented among practitioners in their field and marginalized in the broader society. *Equity* is the concept of ensuring that processes and programs are impartial, fair, and provide equal possible outcomes for every individual. (Cooperative Extension, n.d.; Gressitt, n.d.). Inclusionis the act of enacting diversity and equity practices. (Cooperative Extension, n.d.). Dr. Robert Sellers of the University of Michigan illustrates DEI using the example of a dance party (Sellers, 2021). Diversity is where everyone is invited to the party. Equity means that everyone contributes to the playlist; inclusion means everyone can dance(Sellers, 2021). The American Association of Colleges and Universities (2021) defines equity as "the opportunity for historically underrepresented populations to have equal access to and participate in educational programs that are capable of closing the achievement gap in student success."

ESG and DEI are integral components of sustainability planning (Semeraro & Boyd, 2017). According to Glazer and Francis (2021), Starbucks (increase in managerial diversity), McDonald's (increase in minority and racial minority leadership roles), Nike (increase in racial and gender Diversity) have announced actual compensation-based targets that will affect the CEO and Senior officer pay depending upon specific ESG DEI goal achievement.According to Gartner (2021), DEI leaders indicated that one of their main priorities for the year is to track DEI progress using data. To effectively track inclusion, organizations must measure employee sentiment with a considered definition of inclusion, ensuring the organization can act fast on the results. New Gartner's research outlines how to put numbers to the concept, what meaningful action looks like from leaders, and potential pitfalls to avoid in the process (Romansky, et al., 2021). In response to these initiatives, Gartner developed a model of inclusion based on qualitative feedback from 30 DEI leaders, academic literature, and existing indices. The findings identified seven critical areas of inclusion: fair treatment, integrating differences, decision-making, psychological safety, trust, belonging, and diversity (Gartner, 2021).

Next, Gartner interviewed 10,000 employees (about the seating capacity of Cameron basketball stadium at Duke University) worldwide (Gartner, 2021). The employees were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements related to the seven elements to derive seven ideas to gauge a holistic view of inclusion from the workforce (Gartner, 2021). In general, the seven statements indicate that the greater the degree to which employees agree with the statement, the more inclusive the organization is (Gartner, 2021). While there may be takeaways for people processes or the organization, at the leader and business unit level, Gartner's research shows that organizations that confidently measure DEI, create accountability, and embed inclusion into talent decisions and processes report up to 20% more organizational inclusion than their peers without those approaches (Gartner, 2021; Romansky, et al., 2021). ESG and DEI are integral components of sustainability planning in Higher Education (Semeraro & Boyd, 2017).

So many decisions about managing teams and talent processes are in flux right now, changing to accommodate a hybrid workforce or new business approaches emerging in a post-pandemic environment. While tackling these challenges, leaders must ensure measuring and managing inclusion stay on the to-do list. (Romansky, et al., 2021). ESG and DEI are integral components of sustainability planning in Higher Education (Semeraro & Boyd, 2017). Explaining DEI in greater detail, the factors can be considered as illustrated by Cooperative Extension (n.d.). See Figure 1. Diversity is the presence of differences within a given setting. Diversity includes populations that have and remain underrepresented among practitioners in their field and marginalized in the broader society. Equity is the concept of ensuring that processes and programs are impartial, fair, and provide equal possible outcomes for every individual. Inclusionis an outcome to ensure those that are diverse feel and/or are welcome (Cooperative Extension, n.d.).

Figure 1
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion



Source: Cooperative Extension (https://dei.extension.org/)

III. BUSINESS AND HIGHER EDUCATION STRATEGIES COLLIDE

Given the strides made in the business world, ESG and DEI should be integral components of sustainability planning in higher education. Administrators have moved to address the lack of inclusivity on many fronts with a new awareness in education, training, climate, and infrastructure to build cultural competencies across the organization to create academic and work environments that effectively support the success of all faculty, staff, and students. (Semeraro & Boyd, 2017). These bold moves reflect higher education inculcating business best practices. Hence, strategies may include recruitment and retention to include active and aggressive recruitment and retention of a diverse faculty, staff, and student body. Research and scholarship initiatives to build and enhance opportunities for research and scholarship in diverse fields. Promotion and support of strategic partnerships that respect diversity, include diverse groups, and support the advancement of Diversity and Inclusion for both(Redd, et al., 2020). Leadership support and development to facilitate top-down support for diversity & inclusion and create a pipeline of culturally competent academic leaders(Redd, et al., 2020).

As the keepers of knowledge, it is incumbent for current higher education leaders to scrutinize leadership roles to determine if decision-making processes reflect the institution's community. The industries are feeling the effects of not making enough strides in elevating marginalized voices. Higher education administrators may look to industry to address these issues to determine which strategies may be utilized to begin or continue their work in making the workplace more equitable.

After the brutal death of George Floyd, whom a police officer murdered in May of 2020 in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, USA, the American political landscape seismically shifted. The 2020 spring and summer, despite the COVID-19 pandemic, brought sustained protest and reckonings for not only federal, state, and local, but also international governments to change policies that have, and continue to have, oppressive outcomes for diverse members of society. Floyd's untimely death was also a catalyst for businesses to begin to seriously and carefully review their internal guidelines to rout out discrimination of any kind. Companies alarmed at what they discovered even discarded real brand names to reflect the heightened awareness of long-standing insults that had become so familiar that they were unnoticed prior to these events.

For example, Quaker Oats had historically fended off any criticisms regarding its pancake mixes and syrups brand, "Aunt Jemima." (Alcorn, 2021). However, believing themselves a part of the issue, the company has recently shed the name that harkened back to slavery and has embraced a new name and logo (Alcorn, 2021). Another century-old company took deliberate measures to address its name "Dixie," which was the nickname of the Confederate states that fought to keep the institution of slavery (McNulty,2020). However, after the 2020 national and international racial awakening, the company engaged many community stakeholders, specifically black and brown leaders; the business decided to rename the company "Farbourgh" to be inclusive of all the communities in the New Orleans area (McNulty, 2020).

This move becomes essential because a business now is being compelled to report ESG factors to attract or sustain investment. Thus, the industry is relying on the external valuation of ESG factors instead of corporate social responsibility factors that were internal and not made public for decision-makers to make key decisions. In application, DEI does not have only qualitative but quantitative data points to see where key performance indicators show that businesses are implementing strategies that effectively close the gap between represented and not. The higher the scores for ESG companies are attracting the attention of institutional and retail investors. (CFA Institute, 2020; OECD, 2020).

Some universities have quickly followed suit. These universities are adopting ESG as a best practice for the higher education industry. More stakeholders are beginning to question leadership regarding these issues. As such, ESG is making its way into European universities' frameworks for quality assurance. (European University Association, 2020) European Union institutions are reviewing ways to incorporate these factors into their educational landscapes. These bodies find that these factors are "major drivers for more professional, transparent and streamlined quality assurance processes both at the level of higher education systems and institutions" (European University Association, 2020).

On the other hand, American universities seem to apply ESG related to financial situations and have been challenged on this notion. Students have consistently issued calls to end support for the fossil fuel industry and promote support for eco-friendly companies (McKenzie, 2020). New research indicates that an increasing number of higher education institutions include ESG factors in their traditional investment strategies. Initial indications are that these investments are performing better than conventional investment approaches debunking the long-held belief that divesting from fossil fuels will result in lower investment returns (McKenzie, 2020).

Thus, a college sustainability movement could be expanded beyond traditional elements to include people, buildings, ground, policies, and community, to name a few. (Proctor, 2010). To date, American colleges are still in the process of considering ESG wholistically. Still, they are simply embracing its subcategory of DEI. (Busta, 2020)

IV. ARGUMENT TO INCORPORATE ESG IN HIGHER EDUCATION

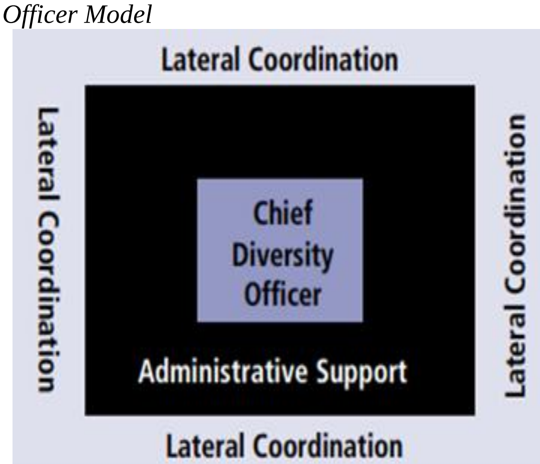
However, this approach may be short-sighted. The Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education sustainability policy states that sustainability may be obtained "in an inclusive way, encompassing human and ecological health, social justice, secure livelihoods, and a better world for all generations." (Association for the Advancement of Sustainability in Higher Education, 2021). In that vein, higher education institutions can work to ensure that diverse voices are heard in leadership roles that impact all facets of the university from environmental, financial, corporate, and quality of educational outcomes. Why? In 2020, less than 17% of school administrators were nonwhites as the keeper, so knowledge is incumbent upon current education leaders to scrutinize roles to determine if decision-making processes reflect the institution's community (Brown, 2019). Develop a stand-alone DEI strategic plan instead of simply incorporating diversity into a general strategic plan (Russell, 2020). The critical components of an effective DEI strategic plan are practical and capable leadership in linking to the organizational strategy. They also measure results using qualitative and quantitative data to understand the environment. A DEI strategy with a clearly defined purpose and initiative. Available resources to adequately funding implementation and follow through on initiatives. And, most importantly, have a physical office of DEI. (Russell, 2020). Thus, a diverse and broad coalition of individuals could make impactful decisions if seated at the governing board of institutions. These collective decisions can run the gamete from environmental topics to lobbying efforts.

In review, the organizational structure is the system of tasks, workflows, reporting relationships, and communication channels that link diverse individuals and groups (Schermerhorn, 2013, p. 271). To have ESG, we need an organizational structure to ensure the dynamic and authority of the ESG strategy. Human resources must play a decisive role in obtaining this outcome. Human resources must embrace ESG through DEI. Practice in higher education institutions is to appoint a Chief Diversity Officer (CDO). In 2021, the National Association of Diversity Officers in Higher Education (NADOHE) has more than 1200 members representing 900 colleges and universities (Russell, 2021).

According to Williams and Wade-Golden (2007), CDO nomenclature is used to describe campus function and not rank. CDO is a senior administrator who guides, coordinates, leads, enhances, and sometimes supervises the institution's formal diversity capabilities to build sustainable capacity to achieve an inclusive environment and excellent for all. CDOs can have titles centered on academic affairs, student development, international affairs, or faculty development in addition to traditional "diversity" titles. They can also serve in various institutional ranks, such as the special assistant to the president, vice president, vice provost, vice-chancellor, associate vice president, associate vice provost, or the associate vice-chancellor. Although personal characteristics influence how CDOs approach their tasks, the organizational design of CDO positions can limit or enhance their capacity to fulfill their responsibilities (Leon, 2014). Williams and Wade-Golden (2007) identified three archetypes of CDO structure. Each archetype is a template for how an institution might design the vertical capabilities of the CDO's role.

Nearly all projects and initiatives are implemented through collaborative relationships and lateral coordination. (1) Collaborative Officer Model. Officers in this model have a small support staff (commonly characterized by secretarial personnel, student employees, and perhaps a special assistant) and limited ability to hire, terminate, supervise, and evaluate the performance of others (Galbraith, 2002). Since this model characterizes the limited human resources, the higher rank of CDO will be better to ensure authority and coordination. See Figure 2.

Figure 2
Collaborative Officer Model



Note. Source: Williams & Wade-Golden (2007), p.18.

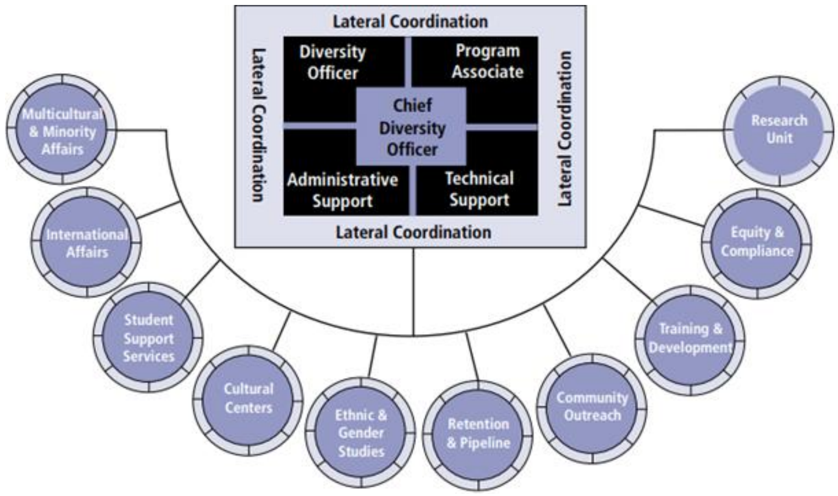
(2) Unit-Based Model. This model requires the same type of leadership as the collaborative officer model but is distinguished by a central CDO staff of administrative support professionals, programming and/or research professionals, and/or other diversity officers of lower rank. See Figure 3.

Figure 3
Unit-Based Model

Note. Source: Williams & Wade-Golden (2007), p.20.

(3) Portfolio Divisional Model. This model is characterized by aspects of both the collaborative officer and unit-based models. It is distinguished by the presence of several direct reporting units in a vertically integrated portfolio. See Figure 4.

Figure 4
Portfolio Divisional Model

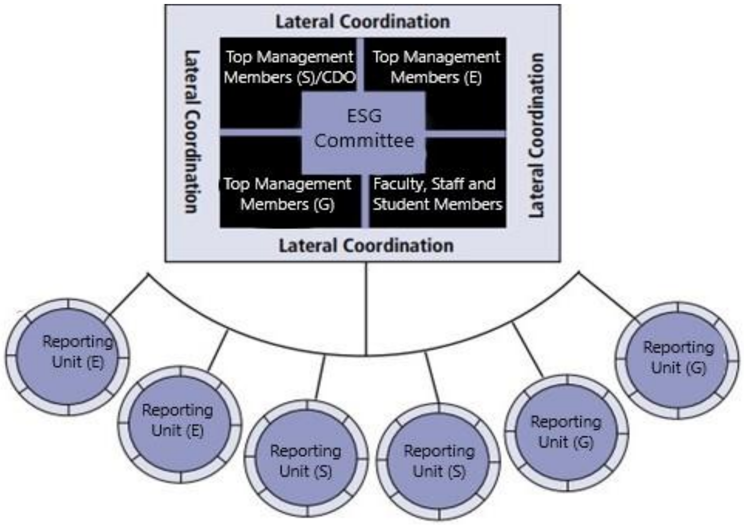


Note. Source: Williams & Wade-Golden (2007), p. 21.

The reporting system is fundamental in each of these three models to increase DEI. This is an area for HE institutions to make structural changes to incorporate ESG strategies.

While a CDO can mainly oversee the social criteria in the ESG strategy, an established and accepted top management position in HE organizations, either the E or the G area has not clearly under the control of a solo specified management position in practice. The concepts related to ESG, such as diversity and inclusion, are commonly found in a university's mission and vision, but implementing these concepts into practice can present a challenge (Elliott, Stransky, Negron, Bowlby, Lickiss, Dutt, Dasgupta, & Barbosa, 2013). To close the gap between an ESG strategy and its implementation, HE institutions can establish and articulate the organization structure where the E and G reporting units, along with the S reporting units, exist and are controlled. It will also be practical to include or create top management positions such as Chief Sustainability Officers to address the organization's approach to environmental responsibility to minimize its environmental impact.

Figure 5
ESG Committee Structure



Note. Source: Williams & Wade-Golden (2007), p. 22.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper explains the concept of ESG, citing its importance in human resource management while connecting the concepts to education systems. Mauer, R. (2020) suggested that recruiters can increase diversity efforts by removing the GPA requirement as many candidates come from low-income households and are required to work while attending college. Leadership should add more resources for relocation and interviews providing other options if supportive technology is not available to candidates. There are many examples and suggested improvements to ensure that long-term values amongst all stakeholders are acknowledged. Business training for the future begins in higher education. Students are taught and take part in experiential learning practices to prepare future leaders to contribute to business and industry effectively and meaningfully through corporate boards, commissions, and other executive functions, therefore, the importance of this change needs to begin at the educational level, prior to participation in executive level functions. It is imperative to involve academia in teaching these concepts, which will allow more diverse corporate boards. Research has proven that diversity provides a healthier organization and gives depth to decision-making. Companies must comply with ESG, which includes DEI, in their investment decisions, and students or academia need to start the process. This will allow more effective leadership and provide a better setting for change and sustainability in organizational development.

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