



DI DIA DIVERSITY  
CONSULTING GROUP LLC

*C-suite Coaching, Advisory & Collaboration*

# Building & Ensuring Resilience in DEI

*How CDIOs and Influencers Manage  
Through Unprecedented Times*

2024



## Foreword

After three decades of leading diversity, equity, inclusion, culture, belonging, and change within organizations, I was compelled to ask how some of my fellow champions were enduring a world marred by the aftermath of a global pandemic, political polarization, social inequities, and hybrid work arrangements.

This compendium, “How CDIOs and Influencers Manage Through Unprecedented Times,” captures the challenges and triumphs of DEI leaders and practitioners through a period of profound change and ambiguity. Informed by thought-provoking discussions, it acknowledges the unwavering resilience of these influential leaders to steer the ship through uncertainty by building psychological safety from the C-suite to entry-level positions.

Over the past four years, DEI practitioners have undergone a metamorphosis in their roles, becoming architects of organizational change, DEI champions, and nurturers of a culture of belonging. In the following pages, we explore not just how they’ve adapted, but thrived amid change, shouldering new responsibilities with grace to create lasting impact.

During times of turmoil, weaving resilience seamlessly into the organizational fabric has been a relentless pursuit for these leaders. We examine how they assumed new roles, adapted their strategies, and fostered unity among their teams.

Through their innovative approaches, it's clear that they have not merely weathered the storm; they have also emerged more robust, leaving behind a blueprint for conquering adversity.

Whether it was dealing with the intricacy of hybrid models, holding "safe" spaces for employees to engage in bold conversations, or addressing emerging dimensions of diversity such as neurodiversity and how it plays into the employee lifecycle, CDIOs and practitioners showed flexibility and discipline as they guided their teams through the "new normal."

As we look to the future, today's CDIOs stand ready to assume an even more transformative role in shaping the destiny of DEI amid external and internal backlash. As employee-led activism over issues such as #MeToo and #SocialJustice grows and public discourse over DEI policies continues, CDIOs are joining general counsels, communications teams, and business heads to determine the appropriate response to these pressures.

I hope the collective wisdom and experiences of these DEI trailblazers who have navigated unprecedented times inspires you to not just adapt to change, but to also embrace it by cultivating resilience and becoming belonging, equity, diversity, and inclusion champions in every facet of our lives. Let's use these valuable perspectives to propel us forward in our shared mission to craft a more inclusive and equitable future for all.



**Nancy J. Di Dia**  
**Founder and CEO**  
**Di Dia Diversity Consulting Group, LLC**





# Compendium Contents

<b>Foreword</b>	1
<b>Djuana C. Beamon</b>	4
<b>Kathryn Burdett</b>	6
<b>Christopher Bylone</b>	8
<b>Desiree Dancy</b>	10
<b>Isis Fabian</b>	12
<b>Ethan Huckel</b>	14
<b>Stephanie Huckel</b>	16
<b>Stephanie Quappe</b>	18
<b>Acknowledgments</b>	20



# Djuana C. Beamon

CHIEF DIVERSITY & CORPORATE  
SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY  
OFFICER, FINANCIAL SERVICES  
INDUSTRY  
(she/her/hers)

## Leveraging multiple C-suite champions

Over the past few years, DEI practitioners have had to find ways to deal with social injustice and other events in ways that we haven't had to before. I think one of the most important ways we can address these issues is to think more broadly about the impact these events can have on our employees—regardless of their geographic location.

For example, we recently learned that two of our employees were impacted by a mass shooting in Maine. One of the individuals who was shot was a father to one of our employees and an uncle to another. Although we don't have a large geographic footprint in Maine, we still connected with these employees to ensure their wellbeing during that extremely difficult time.



*One of the most important ways we can address these issues is to think more broadly about the impact these events can have on our employees.*

During these challenging times, I'm sustaining the momentum and ensuring effectiveness by leveraging my C-suite champions, including the President and COO and other business leaders to confirm that they're continuing their commitment to DEI. By leveraging multiple champions, I can help ensure that I have others to depend on to move the work forward—even if the CEO or another senior leader decides to leave the company tomorrow.

## **Building a collaborative culture, while maintaining flexibility**

Rather than requiring our employees to return to the office after the pandemic, our organization provided them with a choice of whether they would like to work from their offices or not. Right now, 70% of our workforce is either fully remote or hybrid. The arrangement created some cultural challenges for our organization and impacted the manner in which our employees partner and interact with one another.

One of ways we've helped address the impact on our culture and teamwork is through quarterly Culture and Collaboration weeks. By scheduling town hall meetings, team building exercises, volunteer activities, and other events during these weeks, we give employees the opportunity to schedule face time with their colleagues without having to come into the office five days a week. These events have helped build a collaborative culture where people can connect and engage with their colleagues, but still maintain their flexibility.

## **Building a strong legacy of DEI leaders**

Looking forward, I think it's imperative for us to build a legacy of leaders that can continue to do DEI work in impactful and effective ways. So many up-and-coming practitioners believe they will be successful based on their strong passion for DEI work. I believe that passion is important, but if they lack the executive presence and institutional knowledge of how to interact with senior leaders or CEOs, that passion is not going to help them make an impact on their organization.



# Kathryn Burdett

HEAD OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY,  
AND INCLUSION, AMERICAS,  
DEUTSCHE BANK  
(she/her/hers)

## Integration with the company's People strategy

The DEI leader role has evolved from being seen as a special interest, nice-to-have function to being an integral part of the company's people strategy. There is a greater understanding of the broad scope of DEI work, the different internal partnerships needed to drive the agenda both in and outside of HR, and its relevance to clients and other stakeholders.



## Developing a data-informed strategy is key

I believe that developing a clear longer-term, data-informed strategy is essential to making DEI sustainable. Setting clear and measurable aspirations and holding leaders accountable for making progress keeps DEI on the business agenda. It's also important to celebrate milestones and incremental progress to build momentum about what is possible when the organization is focused.

DEI initiatives must have a clear purpose and leadership commitment. My focus is on ensuring that our interventions are justified through the data and the results are measured. If the outcomes are not tangible and if there are too many questions about why we are doing something, then why would any business leader continue to invest in it?

As DEI leaders, we need the trust of our constituents and that cannot be taken for granted. Regular feedback loops and greater transparency with ERG leadership teams is very important. If they are not bought into the DEI strategy and do not feel that they have a seat at the table, then we're setting ourselves up to fail.

## **Embedding belonging into our leadership DNA**

We have defined our "North Star" for leadership rooted in eight behaviors, one of which is "promoting a sense of belonging." A sense of belonging is an outcome of DEI and embedding this into the company's leadership DNA automatically makes the book of work more sustainable.

## **Staying clear-eyed on our purpose**

We are facing the biggest challenge now with the real and perceived existential threats to DEI. How the profession adapts to the increasing backlash and perhaps redefines itself remains to be seen. I look to thought leaders like [Kenji Yoshino](#) and [David Glasgow](#) who have outlined a roadmap for how to review DEI practices and make them "weatherproof". DEI leaders who can start reframing some of the more polarizing aspects of the work will be more successful. However, we must remain vigilant and clear-eyed on our purpose and not let the detractors control the narrative.

*How the profession adapts to the increasing backlash and perhaps redefines itself remains to be seen...DEI leaders who can start reframing some of the more polarizing aspects of the work will be more successful.*





# Christopher Bylone

GLOBAL HEAD OF  
BELONGING, KRISPY KREME  
(he/him/his)

## Embedding belonging into our organization

The biggest shift in my role over the past few years has been infusing the concept of accessibility, and embedding the belief of belonging across everything we do.

I have the honor of being the first person to be the Global Head of Belonging at Krispy Kreme tasked with building a program from ground zero. Our leaders knew, as we continued to expand our business globally and became a publicly traded company, that they needed belonging to be part of the conversation from Day One. My role was created to not just ensure a strategy was in place, but also to ensure that an accountability structure was active so that we achieved our stated ideals. Now, I'm focusing on building pay equity into our compensation structure and career framework.



I'm sustaining momentum by being strategic about my role. I can't make every change overnight, nor can leaders expect change to happen tomorrow. It's important to be honest about where we are on our journey, where we intend to go, and how long it's going to take us to get there. When I'm asked what I'm doing to change diversity at the top of house, I say that we have programs that we're trying to put in place, but you can't expect changes to occur from these

programs tomorrow. We're not here to exit people; we're here to put diverse succession plans in the organization and hold people accountable to those plans.

## **Tying your strategy back to your brand and company values**

During this period of uncertainty, we're always going to tie everything we do back to the brand. There are organizations out there that partner with influencers for little reason beyond money. So, when they receive pushback on their campaigns, they have to cancel them because they know they will lose money. But organizations that take a stand on issues that align with their brand don't need to worry about those issues. Rather, they have the wherewithal to dig in deeper in the face of pushback because they know they are building the foundation of who they are as an organization.

The power of "no" is cathartic and important. You must be able to say "no" and be okay with it. That's how you build the resilience. I tie it back to our mission: To touch and enhance the lives of individuals with the joy that is Krispy Kreme, and to be the most loved, sweet treat brand in the world. So, I ask myself, "By what I'm doing in the belonging space, how am I meeting this mission?"

In the future, I believe we will continue to emphasize data-driven decisions. I also believe we're going to have to become smarter in how we talk and do the work we do. Amid the political attacks that are out there, there are people gunning for our profession. We need to be sure our strategies and initiatives can weather the storm that comes our direction. Directly tie your strategy to the values and brand of your organization and it will come out of the storm stronger and more impactful than it ever was before!

***Directly tie your strategy to the values and brand of your organization and it will come out of the storm stronger and more impactful than it ever was before!***



# Desiree Dancy

GLOBAL FINTECH CDIO  
(she/her/hers)

## Providing supportive responses to current events

The biggest change in my role has been the way I respond to social justice and current events in the workplace. To avoid provocation relating to topics that are rooted in opinion, I closely partner with organizational leaders and the Chief Human Resource Officer to frame supportive responses to these situations. We strive to focus on what matters to different communities in our workplace, and to provide resources for their mental health and support.

Working with our benefits team to ensure that our providers take different workplace communities into consideration has been a very illuminating experience for me. My goal is to ensure that providers have access to caregivers that understand the different needs of these communities. For example, we want to ensure that they have EAP counselors who can speak to Black, Latino, LGBTQ+, and other communities.



*Ensure that providers have access to caregivers that understand the different needs of these communities.*

I continuously build on my understanding of what matters to communities by connecting to best practice organizations that focus on DEI in the workplace. And, to ensure we're not working in a vacuum, we conduct employee engagement surveys, ERG discussions, and focus groups, and use those data and metrics to develop employee engagement initiatives and programs which address the concerns that come from these discussions.

## **Collaboration with HR is key**

Partnering with Human Resources colleagues and collaborating across the organization where DEI is not a standalone effort is important to maintaining sustainability and effectiveness during uncertainty. It's important to prioritize goals across the organization to make sure DEI has a seat at the table by being part of the business conversation—not just part of the HR conversation.

Looking forward, I think DEI will play a big role in the employee proposition—that is, every aspect of what it means to be an employee at the organization. Our role will be to make sure that we empower employees by having the appropriate infrastructure and resources for professional development in place and hold leaders to account.

*Make sure DEI has a seat at the table by being part of the business conversation—not just part of the HR conversation.*



# Isis Fabian

FRACTIONAL DEI PARTNER &  
NEURODIVERSITY COACH  
(all pronouns)

## Leveraging the younger generation for culture change

The oldest members of Generation Z are now in their mid-20's and quickly becoming an important focus for leaders, managers, and HR. This generation is more genderqueer and neurodivergent than any generation before them. They have also been shaped profoundly by their experience of the pandemic: On the one hand, they had to grow up fast as they accepted the loss of formative rites of passage such as in-person college and in-office internships. On the other hand, the centrality of their online lives and relatively meager opportunities to build interpersonal and professional soft skills leaves many corporate environments chafing at how they show up in the workplace.

One way or another, workplaces will need to adapt to the needs and work styles of Gen Z. The upside of this for DEI practitioners is that Gen Z is especially tapped into social justice issues and acutely aware of many inequities perpetuated by cultures of



individualism, competition, and “work-over-everything.” As the progenitors of the poorly-named movement toward “quiet quitting,” they have tremendous power to shape future workplace norms. For DEI practitioners and inclusive leaders, this is a fresh opportunity to dislodge the stubborn cultural norms that continue to systematically marginalize so many groups. However, it’s critical that they show up in partnership with the business and be able to demonstrate

how they can upskill Gen Zers and their managers such that cross-generational clashes in attitudes, expectations, and relationships to work in general lead to productive, inclusive culture change rather than turnover and mistrust.

## **Adapting to the challenges and opportunities of neurodiversity**

Neurodiversity will only become more central for DEI practitioners, HR Business Partners, and managers in general as professionals of all ages continue to obtain diagnoses of ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorder, and other forms of neurodivergence at record rates. These disabilities (though not all neurodivergent people identify as having a disability) often come with needs for accommodation that most workplaces are unfamiliar with. I see HR departments and managers get this wrong all the time, putting themselves at risk for discrimination lawsuits.

Being neurodivergent myself, I am acutely aware of the everyday bias toward this group that remains acceptable in most workplaces today. I also see the untapped potential that nonlinear thinkers bring to any organization. I would encourage any DEI or HR leader to see neurodivergence not as yet another identity group to read up on or legal/compliance issue to navigate, but rather as a tremendous opportunity to challenge the pernicious cultural norms that impede retention and advancement of all historically marginalized groups within your organization. All the DEI barriers that experts have already identified (such as lack of psychological safety, cultural homogeneity, and unspoken rules of professionalism) will only garner greater interest as rates of diagnosis and neurodiversity accommodations continue to increase. And, as leaders discover the innovative potential of nonlinear thinkers in the age of AI, solving those cultural problems will become more paramount than ever.

*All the DEI barriers that experts have already identified will only garner greater interest as rates of diagnosis and neurodiversity accommodations continue to increase.*



# Ethan Huckel

DIVERSITY CONSULTANT  
(he/him/his)

## Instilling pride and value in our work

We're at a turning point in the DEI space. After George Floyd was murdered, many companies faced internal and external pressure to jump very quickly into DEI initiatives for the first time. But after they realized that they threw resources at these initiatives without a plan, they are now taking a step back to assess how to implement programs strategically and effectively.

The companies that established programs well before 2020 will likely stay the course, but I believe those that have recently initiated DEI programs will probably peel them back due to resource constraints or public discourse over DEI in the workplace. For example, some companies want to establish effective programs, but in a way that doesn't attract too much negative attention.



*Some companies want to establish effective programs, but in a way that doesn't attract too much negative attention.*

## **Framing DEI through a wellbeing lens**

As companies look for ways to sustain DEI momentum with limited resources, I advise them to look to their sphere of influence and identify areas where they can be most effective. I also ask them to assess how DEI work relates to other areas of the organization and integrate it into those spaces. But, by saying that they will make DEI everyone's job, in reality, it becomes no one's job.

Rather, many companies have successfully framed DEI through a wellbeing lens. Addressing issues like systemic oppression (which can be a stress factor for employees) in the same way that we address work life balance and time management challenges, can help create buy in.

### **“First, fix your own house”**

To build resilient DEI organizations, it's important for companies to be honest about what they can achieve, so that their teams are not wearing themselves down working toward goals that can't be accomplished. Sometimes the goals of the organization don't always easily align to the values that those teams often bring to the work.

Begin by fixing your own house first. We need to instill pride and value in the work we do to create a strong sense of well-being within the team. DEI leaders often don't model those values, especially when they are so focused on what they're trying to accomplish that they forget that they need to model the workplace environment they're trying to instill in others.

Looking forward, I don't believe DEI issues will remain hot button topics in our political landscape. Additionally, I think DEI leaders will need to stay flexible as AI continues to automate many organizational functions. Although it's hard to assess its full impact right now, I think we should anticipate that AI will change the nature of work as we know it over the next five years.





# Stephanie Huckel

GLOBAL DEI PRACTITIONER  
(she/her/hers)

## Leveraging the power of allyship

Prior to 2020, companies were still laying the groundwork for DEI and I was part of a very small network of long-term practitioners. But after key events, such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the murder of George Floyd, it seemed like nearly every company hired DEI practitioners—often moving people from other areas of the company. Many of these practitioners weren't sure what they had walked into and had little idea of what to expect.



In my case, I was brought back in from furlough at the gaming company in which I was employed to support our workforce—even while half the company was still furloughed. We were under intense pressure to help employees deal with the community trauma. Fortunately, our preexisting department consisted of established, experienced practitioners, so we were equipped as much as anyone could be. I was grateful that I had the opportunity to work with that team in that moment.

## Phasing out DEI roles during HR transformation

As many HR departments undergo transformation and move roles offshore, DEI is now in a state of contraction. Companies that quickly filled DEI roles during the pandemic will likely phase them out due to resource constraints or negative public discourse over DEI policies and initiatives.

The pandemic created an unprecedented opportunity for collective political action with the moment's combination of immense discussion of racism and personal availability due to COVID-related remote work. But we've moved past that period as discourse quiets down and personal and professional schedules are as demanding as they were pre-pandemic. As everyday employees do more with less support, time, and staff, they have less energy and time to be involved; they don't have the same capacity to request that their companies act as a force for good.

*The pandemic created an unprecedented opportunity for collective political action...But we've moved past that period as discourse quiets down.*

### **Maintaining a strong network**

There's a growing expectation for me to lend strategic insight, but it's become very difficult given limited resources and the challenge of day-to-day work. You can't offshore tasks such as leadership coaching or ERG management. And while many have the ability to review data for opportunity gaps, a commitment to doing so through a diversity lens is rare without encouragement for formal DEI commitments.

Amid these challenges, maintaining a strong network provides me with key support in critical moments. I started cultivating allyship in college and carried it with me into DEI roles in corporate environments. I have developed a strong network of allies and sponsors, including CFOs, Chief Medical Officers, and the CEO. It's particularly valuable (and fun) to have these executives as sponsors or allies because they are not typically the individuals that people expect to have my back.

### **Integrating DEI and wellbeing**

In the future, I believe more and more companies will focus on integrating DEI with wellbeing. It makes sense from a holistic perspective because wellbeing is about addressing the stress, anxiety, and conflict that can arise when employees question whether they can really be themselves at work. The challenge for many of these organizations, however, will be leading and managing the integration without losing the DEI momentum...if that's what they really want.



# Stephanie Quappe

DIRECTOR OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY,  
INCLUSION, AND BELONGING,  
FRIED FRANK  
(she/her/hers)

## Refocusing on the “why” and what brings joy to my role

During these tumultuous times, I’ve been refocusing on the “why” and what brings me joy in my role: making a difference one person at a time by caring for our need of connection and belonging. On an organizational level, I’m working on strengthening relationships and spending quality time with colleagues individually and collectively through deeper conversations.

## Engaging partners and leaders as allies

Fried Frank has a longstanding commitment to Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging. Challenging events have not stopped our programming. Our mission is for everyone to have equal opportunities to achieve their full potential, which benefits our people, clients, and communities. So many of us are suffering emotionally from



*“Our mission is for everyone to have equal opportunities to achieve their full potential.”*

world events and stressors in society and our personal lives. To adapt to the prolonged impact of events, we need to pace ourselves and ensure that we don't burn out. Education on the "why" of this work and how everyone is a part of creating inclusion and belonging is important. I plan to continue a dialogue with our partners and business services leaders as allies in creating a stronger sense of community.

### **Fostering individual connections**

I'm dedicated to creating a sense of belonging one person at a time. We are multifaceted individuals with unique backgrounds that contribute to better team outcomes. As DEI leaders, I think we need to get back to focusing on the individual connection and caring for one another, knowing that building on each other's experiences and perspectives will always make us a stronger organization. By focusing on the "why" of diversity, I believe we can provide an enduring sense of stability and belonging for everyone.

*We need to get back to focusing on the individual connection and caring for one another, knowing that building on each other's experiences and perspectives will always make us a stronger organization.*



# Acknowledgments

Thank you to all of the participants who graciously accepted the invitation to participate and volunteered their time, energy, and expertise.

Thank you to Isis Fabian, Carol Carangelo, and Susan Shier for your tireless support, guidance, and insights on this project.



DI DIA DIVERSITY  
CONSULTING GROUP<sup>LLC</sup>

*C-suite Coaching, Advisory & Collaboration*

To continue the discussion and work with Di Dia Diversity Consulting Group, LLC, please text Nancy at [\(203\) 246-6869](tel:(203)246-6869) or email [nancy@didiadiversityconsulting.com](mailto:nancy@didiadiversityconsulting.com).

© 2024 Di Dia Diversity Consulting Group, LLC.

All rights reserved. Unauthorized reproduction or transmission of any part of this publication in any form or by any means is prohibited.

The analyses and opinions represented in this compendium are solely those of the authors.