

REPORT BRIEF

Leadership Perspectives:

Leading and Looking Ahead Through COVID-19

The full e-book features 30 profiles and interviews with communication executives about the impact of COVID-19; the increased importance of internal communication; return to work; future of business and the industry; diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives; impact of Black Lives Matter protests; and corporate purpose. **This brief focuses on one specific theme in the ebook.**

Theme: Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Key findings for how diversity, equity, and inclusion in companies have been affected by COVID-19:

- Leaders said DE&I programs remained a priority throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, with some stating that DE&I is embedded in their corporate purpose.
- While leaders acknowledged the ongoing importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) in their companies, the death of George Floyd and the global protests were a “turning point” or catalyst for more inclusive programming. Some noted that their companies still have some work to do to improve DE&I.
- Most executives who discussed DE&I programming said their organizations are working on improving or expanding these initiatives. Executive messaging, anti-racism education programs, and avenues for listening were adopted. Companies also worked with their internal employee impact and affinity groups, and donated money to nonprofit organizations.

“One aspect often overlooked but vitally important to supporting your employees as they work from home: a continued focus on diversity and inclusion initiatives. Often, this falls by the wayside when more “urgent” needs arise, but as we are reminded time and time again, D&I considerations should be at the very center of employee policies and communications.

Keep in mind that working from home may not necessarily be an equitable circumstance for many. Parents homeschooling young children, BIPOC facing renewed uncertainty in light of recent civil unrest and young workers in small, shared accommodations are all facing different challenges on a day-to-day basis. Not every situation is the same, so ensure the communication and implementation of new policies is as equitable as possible, keeping empathy at the core.”

-Barbara Bates, Global CEO, Hotwire

“At Macy’s, we embed DE&I into how we think, act and operate. Our commitment to DE&I has been a priority for years and it’s an investment in the work we continue to do every day. Our Chairman and CEO has addressed the company’s support of racial equality externally on social media and in an open email to customers. We’ve also committed \$1 million to our social justice partners to combat social and racial injustice, including National Urban League and National Action Network.

Our colleagues are as richly diverse as the communities we serve and DE&I efforts remain a priority. As we continue to look to the future, our strategy to drive DE&I is integrated into the work we need to accomplish. We expect our colleagues to hold us accountable to the goals and commitments that we have made to prioritize DE&I. The pandemic does not change our ultimate pledge to promote diversity and inclusion at Macy’s and respect everyone who walks through our doors.

For our internal colleagues, our CEO hosted a “Can We Talk?” session with Dr. John Fitzgerald Gates, Vice Provost for Diversity and Inclusion at Purdue University. This session invited all Macy’s, Inc. colleagues (regardless of furlough status) to attend and listen to an open conversation about systemic racism inherent in the recent acts of racial injustice. As a follow up, we held a series of smaller discussions with colleagues to continue to listen and better understand how we ensure Macy’s, Inc. has a culture where every colleague is seen, is safe, and has the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Colleagues were encouraged to participate in a period of silence for George Floyd, his family, and other black lives that have been lost, pausing for eight minutes and 46 seconds in silent reflection. Anti-racism and allyship resources have been provided to all colleagues for further education. People Leaders are conducting open and candid conversations with their teams and creating safe, supportive environments that foster compassion and empathy.

As America’s Department Store, we remain committed to DE&I and cultivating a workforce that is as diverse as the communities we serve. We still have work to do. On our agenda is to attract and retain top multicultural talent, both by developing the potential of our internal talent, and through our external recruitment efforts. Our goal is to have 30% of VP and above roles held by

minority talent by 2025. We continue to listen and learn from our colleagues, and while we cannot always control what happens outside of our stores and facilities, we can shape the culture within. And that is one of inclusion that welcomes and respects all, believing and acting on the principle that all of us are created equal.”

-Jill Carapellotti, Group Vice President, Corporate Communications, Macy's Inc.

“DE&I has been one of our top five corporate issues for the last ten years; it didn't go away. The biggest casualty for us was that we won the Catalyst Award, which is one of the preeminent corporate inclusion and diversity awards in the country, but the date of the award celebration fell on one of the first weeks where COVID was coming down, so they had to cancel. It was in New York City. It was a bummer that we couldn't celebrate that recognition, because that's a major accomplishment. But, it hasn't stopped our fundamental momentum. Every time we do a town hall, there is a focus on inclusion and diversity. It's in our top five goals for typically every VP. Nothing there has stopped.

I think the corporations here are at a bit of a loss of words right now, other than we all recognize that the fundamental issues with race and bigotry are unacceptable and have to be rooted out. In terms of what to do next, we'll invest in business redevelopment, and things like that. But clearly, there's something much deeper here. I think the frustration is that this community and our community partners have tried so hard, and yet we still do have the largest wealth disparity in the country. We have the biggest achievement gap in the country. There's a huge dichotomy in this community.

The wealth disparity between African Americans and the rest of Minnesota has always been an issue. We have not solved it. Clearly what we've been doing is not working. I think what we're doing at Medtronic is a little bit of the back to the drawing board. We are thinking, with our assets and resources and expertise, what's our contribution toward solving the underlying problem?”

-Rob Clark, Chief Communications Officer, Medtronic

“We have a very active and robust inclusion program and a network of five Business Resource Groups. The program hasn't taken a backseat to the crisis and in fact we are nearing the completion of a rebrand for our inclusion program that will roll out in the next few weeks.

In addition to our robust inclusion program, we will be adding anti-racism specific employee programming and education, as well as enhancing overall inclusion programming. As for our response to recent events, our CEO sent an internal message to all-employees and commented on social media via his Twitter handle. The company provided an official response on all owned social channels (Twitter, LinkedIn, Facebook and Instagram) and the company also announced financial support for organizations including the YWCA of Chicago, the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the National Urban League, the Equal Justice Initiative, the Bail Project among others. More importantly, we had a leader call addressing the overall environment and how to facilitate team conversations and racism.”

-Geoff Curtis, Executive Vice President, Corporate Affairs and Chief Communications Officer, Horizon Therapeutics

“We live the mantra diverse people bring diverse ideas, and that is representative of how Stagwell has and always will operate. As advocates of diversity, equity and inclusion, we have in place a Stagwell DEI initiative, which includes recruiting, hiring, retention, supplier diversity and celebrating works that embodies our commitment. In addition, members of our leadership team have held positions on various DE&I councils, including Adweek’s Diversity and Inclusion Council and PRSA’s Diversity Action Alliance.

Our leaders have been very active internally and externally underscoring our values and our absolute commitment to an inclusive business environment and a world where everyone is valued and respected. This has been the way we have operated since our founding, and it will continue. To us, the solution is less talk about diversity and inclusion and far more action – and we are committed to being part of the solution.”

-Ray Day, Vice Chair, Stagwell

“Our D&I efforts have increased, and we’ve gotten good feedback. We have been proactive in our communications with employees, using all of the vehicles mentioned for COVID-19.”

-Paul Gennaro, Senior Vice President and Chief Communications Officer, Voya Financial

“D&I priorities have not been put on hold. Communications partners with D&I to continue to analyze our approaches and processes across the business and work to ensure that they are all equitable, diverse and inclusive.

It's heartbreaking and unacceptable that racism and racial injustices exist around the world. Our goal at Conagra is to work together in a peaceful and constructive manner where everyone has a voice and must be heard. We have used our internal and external channels to underscore our belief that racial injustice is wrong and to promote our timeless values, which include integrity, broad-mindedness, and leadership.”

-Jon Harris, Senior Vice President and Chief Communications Officer, Conagra

“D&I has remained a priority for Astellas throughout the pandemic, with our Employee Impact Groups providing continuous guidance to our employees related to mental health and offering webinars and other resources to combat discrimination. Early on in the stay at home order, our Asian Employee Impact Group held a company-wide forum to educate and discuss the pressures faced by people of Asian descent during COVID-19. Most recently, we issued an internal and public response to recent national events, reaffirming our values and commitment to a diverse and inclusive workplace and mindset.”

-Moyra Knight, Vice President Corporate Communications, Astellas US; President, Astellas Global Health Foundation

“I’m fortunate to manage a team where I’m the exception, as a western white male, with a majority of my team female, Arab and largely Emirati. It’s a reflection of the company as a

whole, but our particular goal here is to continue to develop talented Emirati investment professionals in sectors which are new and strengthen the country's future – that emphasis will certainly continue.”

-Brian Lott, Chief Communications Officer, Mubadala

“Even while we are struggling with the staggering losses and worry caused by the pandemic, people around the world have been horrified by the video showing the brutal death of George Floyd, an African American man, at the hands of a group of police officers in Minneapolis. This misuse of force by those in authority has led to protests in the U.S. and around the world over continuing racial injustices and disparities. Our CEO Ken Frazier shared his thoughts on this with all employees, and with a broader audience externally, calling for unity and meaningful action. So, in addition to our COVID-19 efforts, we have been reflecting on the actions we are taking to support our community and close racial inequities – and committing to do more.

We plan to grow our current diversity and inclusion efforts in four key areas: our internal work environment, health equity, our workforce development efforts and economic inclusion. Our collective goal is to create change within our company and deliver meaningful impact in the fight against systemic racism.

Employees are also now looking to their organizations to drive the changes that are so badly needed in the fight against racism. As communicators, we are in the prime position to connect across our organizations and ensure what we do actually makes things better. This has been a time of unprecedented tumult, but it has also wiped the slate clean, so to speak – cut through the noise – to remind us all what really matters.

This pandemic and the tragic death of George Floyd have shaken up the status quo and laid bare a lot of our country's deep-seated problems – from massive economic inequality to ongoing racial disparities to a lack of basic health care for people who need it. With so much uncertainty, with everything suddenly up for grabs, we as communicators can play an important role in leading to what comes next.”

-Jennifer Mauer, Head of Global Corporate Communications, Merck.

“Unfortunately, sometimes in times of crisis or extreme pressure, two things so important as D&I do go out the window. But the flip side of that is diversity, equity, and inclusion are even more important when people are distanced, I think, because it's arguably harder to include people from afar.

But in my opinion, PR and communications are a lot more progressive than many other industries. Therefore, people that head up communications departments internally tend to be more progressive and thoughtful. So, I think we're probably on the better side of it. But it definitely doesn't become as big of a priority, which is a shame because arguably it's just as important and it may be even more important at this time.”

-Jamie McLaughlin, CEO, JWM Talent

“Like many people around the world, those of us who work at academic institutions are outraged at the wrongful deaths of Black Americans, and all racially motivated violence and police brutality. This is a turning point. We must acknowledge that, as citizens of a nation and, in many cases, employees of universities with a history of racist policies and actions, we play a role in the systemic inequities that continue to harm our Black communities today. This is a troubling reality that demands action and a clear shift in the ways we operate and communicate.

We all know words are not enough. Now is the time to make real changes to eliminate obstacles and increase support for Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC). At the university level, this includes our students, faculty, staff, and alumni.

On June 6, I sent a message to my school’s students proposing 12 action items that we are refining with faculty input for fall implementation. This plan addresses key areas such as curricula, hiring practices, and financial support for BIPOC students, groups, and projects. In addition to discussions at the leadership level, we hosted two town halls this month with undergraduate and graduate students, faculty, and staff. The school’s communications team has been monitoring reactions to our messages and engagement strategy, and the public response has been overwhelmingly positive.

Most recently, we reached out to alumni because many have expressed concern and a desire to support our BIPOC students, especially the class of 2020, who will face a tough job market. We suggested a few ways they can help, including **financially supporting BIPOC student projects and groups; offering internships or remote micro-internships**, freelance work, or entry-level employment to students and graduates; **joining the school’s Diverse Alumni Mentor Network; establishing scholarships; and volunteering for activities such as speaking in a class or participating in informational interviews with students.**

As we all know, the worldwide movement to address systemic inequities and social injustices came to a head while we were already in the midst of a surreal global health crisis that continues to test all of us personally and professionally. In American universities, this also converged with two other stressors: the need to quickly learn how to deliver classes remotely, and the graduation of a class that suddenly faces an uncertain labor market in a turbulent world.”

-Juan-Carlos Molleda, Edwin L. Artzt Dean and. Professor, University of Oregon

“Just about the time we were beginning to get our arms around how to think about a changed world, tragedy, horrible and unacceptable actions unfolded across the country, creating another highly emotional and personally charged set of issues that require immediate action. We’re all grappling with the right role, voice and places to participate.”

-Chris Talley, Chief Communications Officer and SVP, Corporate Communications, USAA

“As we processed the death of George Floyd and began to talk about racial injustice in the days that followed, it quickly became clear that we needed to take a stand. On June 1, our CEO,

Antonio Neri, issued a memo to all team members, which was also shared externally, committing to speak up on inclusion and to advocate for equality - within and outside of HPE.

Of course, our instinct is to leap into action. I heard passionate pleas from team members who wanted us to quickly articulate bold, next steps. But what I also heard from some of our black team members is: "How can you fix what you don't understand? How can you help me when you haven't even taken the time to hear me?"

Even for companies that have been genuinely focused on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion efforts (DE&I), it was clear that we were entering a new chapter, and it had to start with listening. Our leadership team began meeting with black team members to hear their stories and experiences. I was so moved by the candor, courage and resolve. While we received some praise for our corporate culture and DE&I efforts, one of the recurring themes was that there are also more subtle issues that are causing pain and preventing progress.

Following our initial listening tour, we hosted an All Team Member Meeting to share what we heard and outline some of our near-term actions, including the launch a global HPE Inclusion and Diversity Council, which our CEO will chair; a new integrated Advocacy Program; enhanced leadership training; support for student scholars at historically black colleges and universities over the next five years; a grant from the HPE Foundation to the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund; and, a giving fund for our team members, in which HPE will match all contributions.

We also invited Lenora Billings-Harris, an author and Inclusion Innovator, to speak to all of our team members on the state of racism and what we can all do to make progress. Feedback from employees was remarkable, with 95% of team members expressing confidence in the actions HPE is taking to better drive diversity and unconditional inclusion. As one team member posted on our CEO's Facebook page, "It was probably one of the most thought-provoking meetings I've been to in my 33 years with the company."

Those are just some of the first steps we have taken so far on this journey. We know that we can and must do more and the time is now. I am both hopeful and optimistic that companies like HPE can be a force for change if we continue to be willing to share our vulnerabilities, set bold goals, and measure our progress."

-Jennifer Temple, Chief Communications Officer, Hewlett Packard Enterprise

"DE&I practices are becoming embedded in what we do. I think we have a long way to go as an organization before people would say it's a part of the fabric of how we run every day. During the pandemic, I'll be honest with you, that's not necessarily something that we directly focused on as an organization. We did focus on it from the perspective of healthcare disparities. The data strongly supports that many of the people most likely to be exposed to the virus are frontline workers, those who drive buses, those who pick up garbage, those who work at pharmacies, etc. And many of those individuals are people of color. So, as a healthcare system, we're very aware of how those numbers are tracking for us and then how many people of color

tested positive, how many have to be hospitalized, how many deaths occur, etc. We track all of that in the space of watching healthcare disparities. What that has translated to us in terms of action is we have begun to go out into the communities and do testing. Doing testing in communities where these vulnerable populations of people live has gone well for us. That's something we would normally do, and we've been very deliberate about doing it as a result of the pandemic.

Regarding the situation with George Floyd in Minneapolis, our CEO decided to take a stand against this brutality. He's getting incredible feedback from the workforce, and we've also decided to bundle it and send it out externally. Even in the middle of a pandemic, he is willing to take a stand on this and I applaud him for being willing to do that. That's another thing that we've done in the pandemic in the space of DEI, and also in the space of just what's flat out right to do."

-Chuck Wallington, Executive Vice President and Chief Marketing & Communications Officer, Cone Health

"DE&I never took a back seat. D&I was a priority for us that kicked off in 2018, and it is now taking even more of a lead. It is about how we as a company approach the world. We are focused on being an empathetic organization at all times.

We are also focused on an environment that feel safe to discuss and learn more. Not one that already knows what to do."

-Danielle Ward, Understood.org

"I think D&I has increased at our company given the recent times and also because some of our D&I programs were already operated remotely since we have employees across the U.S. We would gather via video conferences for our D&I program meetings."

-Senior Communications Executive in the Pharmaceutical Industry