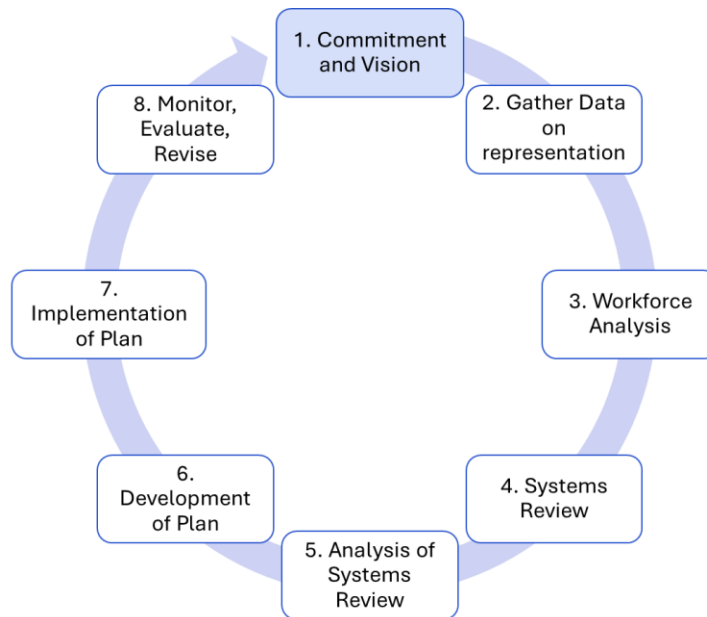




Employment and Human Resources Toolkit

Tool 4: HR Cycle - Commitment and Vision



Often the future direction and vision of an organization is led by leadership and senior management.

There may be situations where an organization attempts to change to protect or improve their public image, minimize financial settlements, or are directed by an external decision-maker due to staff, client or external stakeholder complaints or grievances. Unfortunately, leaders and management driven by these elements are not likely to bring about meaningful or lasting cultural change because the desire for culture change has not been internalized

There may also be situations that drive organizational change based on the “business case” for diversity and inclusion. The business case rationale for diversity and inclusion, simply stated, is that recruiting, hiring, promoting, and retaining historically marginalized groups allows organizations to tap into diverse knowledge and expertise which benefits the organization’s overall productivity and performance. However, after more than two decades of the “business case”, many organizations have increased some representation but have not become any more inclusive. In some cases, increased representation has resulted in increased internal conflicts and tensions which in turn



results in marginalized groups leaving the organization. As well, marginalized groups continue to be under-represented in most senior leadership positions.

The business case has been critiqued – simply increasing the representation of marginalized groups does not result in measurable organizational benefits because it has not been internalized organizationally. However, if key conditions are included in the “business case” rationale then there may be measurable organizational benefits. These conditions include building trust and safety, actively working against discrimination, embracing a wide range of styles and voices, and making cultural differences a learning resource. These elements are more than simply “inclusion” because they involve reconfiguring power relations, changing the status quo and internalizing the culture of diversity and inclusion. It means that those that have been marginalized have the power to set the agenda and influence decisions, feel valued and recognized for their work and can have further opportunities to advance.¹

The question arises: how do we move organizational commitment beyond performative and reactive to public opinion, specifically if the leadership is not reflective of marginalized groups? The conditions must be right for meaningful commitment to occur.

To foster the necessary conditions, first, the leadership must be ready for honest and authentic discussions about who is leading the organization and who is missing. Although some leaders may have some knowledge of why marginalized groups are under-represented, many do not have the necessary deep understanding of how to bring about organizational culture change on these issues.

Deeper insight can occur through intersectional anti-oppression and anti-racism training. This type of training differs from diversity and inclusion training. The former addresses historical and systemic power structures with the recognition that some have greatly benefited in society for merely being born a particular colour, ethnicity, religion, gender, abilities, etc.

Intersectional anti-oppression and anti-racism training emphasize that the root causes of under-representation, under-employment, or unemployment of marginalized communities are based on colonialism, racism, sexism, ableism, etc. and that any solutions, including removing barriers, must start with addressing these root causes. Diversity and Inclusion training emphasizes that the issues of under-representation will be addressed by removing barriers for marginalized communities - this is important but misses the point on the root causes for the marginalization.

¹ Source: “Getting Serious About Diversity: Enough Already with the Business Case” by Robin J. Ely and David A. Thomas, Harvard Business Review Magazine, November-December, 2020
<https://hbr.org/2020/11/getting-serious-about-diversity-enough-already-with-the-business-case>



It needs to be emphasized that meaningful and impactful intersectional anti-oppression and anti-racism training is ongoing. Training once – whether half a day or a week – will not have long lasting effects unless there are regular ongoing trainings that build on previous training. Anti-oppression and anti-racism trainers call this kind of learning a lifelong journey where there is no final destination because our understanding of what is or is not oppressive or discriminatory today may be very different from our understanding in the future.

As well, for intersectional anti-oppression and anti-racism training to be meaningful and impactful on the learners, there should be a level of discomfort. In organizations that consider themselves progressive or specialize in work assisting marginalized communities, there may be an even greater amount of discomfort. In transformative education, the most significant learning comes from and after this discomfort.

As a cautionary note, intersectional anti-oppression and anti-racism training that results in discomfort could result in resistance to change. Individuals may refuse to acknowledge the role the organization may have played in perpetuating oppression regardless of whether the oppression is unintentional and contrary to the beliefs and values of individual leaders, managers, and staff in the organization.

Once the leadership has an understanding and commitment to intersectional anti-oppression and anti-racism concepts, then management and staff need to also be educated on these topics with specific anti-oppression and anti-racism discussions and training. It is important for leadership to first be grounded on these principles so that they can be role models for anti-oppression and anti-racism by building trust and safety among staff, actively working against discrimination, embracing a wide range of styles and voices, and making cultural differences a learning resource.

Questions to ask:

- What are the commitments to anti-oppression, anti-racism, intersectionality, and DEI?
- How are these commitments made?
- What resources are allocated to these commitments?
- Is there meaningful buy-in from leadership, management, staff, and other stakeholders?
- What is the communication strategy around the commitment?