

## Dismantling Bias Conference Series

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# The Benefits and Perils of Diversity Initiatives: The Relationship Between the CEO and CDO

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## **Abstract**

In response to racial injustice, many organizations are now hiring Chief Diversity Officers to create more diverse and inclusive workplaces. These mass hiring's particularly increased after the murder of George Floyd (an article by the Washington Post cited a Glassdoor report that Diversity and Inclusion postings increased by 50% in the weeks following the incident). Many organizations are now starting to understand the importance of diversity and inclusion within their organizations and how it is a business imperative. However, there are many factors that influence the effectiveness of the Chief Diversity Officer role, including the relationship and support of the CEO. The Chief Diversity Officer should be placed strategically within an organization to be most effective, in that the CDO should report directly to the CEO of an organization. CDOs must also play a strategic role within an organization and offer guidance to organizations in terms of policy, crisis management, and meeting diversity and inclusion goals. The CDO's overall goal should be to tie diversity strategy with the overall organizational strategy. CDOs should not just be leading diversity trainings and should not be the only person influencing diversity within an organization. Finally, for a CDO to be most effective requires a financial support in the form of a budget to lead initiatives as well as support a team of diversity and inclusion practitioners within larger organizations.

These are just some of the factors needed for a Chief Diversity Officer to be set up for success within an organization based off existing literature. CEOs must also play a role in supporting diversity and inclusion initiatives within an organization as they hold the most influential power. From the things they say and the actions they take, one can make a huge difference on how an organization perceives diversity. It is important to study how the roles function independently to

influence diversity management as well as how the roles can work together to have a better chance at maximizing the effectiveness of diversity management within an organization.

We will review the existing literature and discuss the role of the CEO and CDO separately in terms of how they influence diversity initiatives, and then discuss how the relationship between the roles is vital in influencing diversity-themed change within an organization. Neither role can bring about this change on their own, especially in large organizations. Based on this literature review as well as looking at diversity and inclusion information in a variety of organizations within the Fortune 500 companies, we will highlight trends and practices in hopes to guide further research questions. As more organizations begin to understand the value of diversity as well as its connection to increasing better business outcomes, it is important to understand how leadership and change management can play a role in bringing about a more inclusive workforces and create environments where employees are able to bring their authentic and whole selves to work.