


Dismantling Bias Conference Series

Lean DEI: Applying a Proven Transformative Approach to “Sticky” DEI Problems

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Lean DEI: Applying a Proven Transformative Approach to “Sticky” DEI Problems

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“Lean DEI” is an emerging approach to diversity, equity, and inclusion that identifies inequity as a form of corporate waste (non-value-added activity) by applying principles of Lean Production Systems to “sticky” DEI problems. Toyota used what American manufacturers labeled “Lean” production principles to transform the company from a flailing organization following the desolation of WWII into the global powerhouse and largest, most profitable automobile manufacturer that it is today.

Other industries have adopted Lean approaches as well, including banking, education, government, and healthcare. Lean approaches include, fundamentally, centering the customer (or the looking at systems’ outcomes from the perspective of those affected or disadvantaged by them), measuring disparate outcomes within the system, e.g., variation in graduation rates by race, ethnicity, or gender, capturing those disparities on a value stream map, devising cross-functional, diverse teams to identify and test corrective actions, and engaging affected groups directly to assess the effectiveness of proposed solutions.

Key to this approach are 1) learning how to define problems, 2) visualizing a viable future state, 3) weighing impact against effort, and 4) routinely checking current state against desired state as changes are implemented. The ultimate goal is Zero Racial/Ethnic Inequity, which indicates a long-term commitment to measurement, problem-solving, assessment, and continuous improvement in diversity, equity, and inclusion.