

Race

Update Your DE&I Playbook

by Joan C. Williams and James D. White

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Summary. Addressing structural racism requires changing the structures that reinforce racism. In this article, we meld White's approach with Williams's to propose a new four-component DE&I model to do just that.

White Americans are finally starting to understand that racism is structural. The problem is not just a matter of a few bad apples, and it certainly won't be solved by a few good conversations. To dismantle structural racism in our organizations, we must change our cultures.

But how?, companies wonder. They have a Chief Diversity Office. They've done bias trainings. They have employee resource groups (ERGs). They celebrate Black History month. Why are their efforts not working?

CDOs, bias training, and ERGs do not address subtle and persistent forms of bias. Four decades of studies show that white men have to prove themselves less than any other demographic group; their successes are noticed more and their mistakes noticed less. How does this play out? Here's one example: At the request of a company woke enough to care, one of us—Williams—did an audit of performance evaluations and found that mistakes were mentioned in 43% of the reviews of employees of color but in only 26% of the reviews of white men. And that's just the beginning. Three decades of studies show that white men are also more likely than others to get away with personality quirks and interpersonal issues. Take anger: 56.1% of white male lawyers feel free to express anger when it's justified, but only 39.6% of women lawyers of color do. Being seen as an “angry Black man”—or an angry woman of any race—typically is not a good career move. No wonder the percentage of CEOs who are white men has fallen only 4% in over a decade, from 93.4% in 2005 to 89.4% in 2017. And nearly 70% of senior leadership (VP, Senior VP, and C-Suite) positions are held by white men, suggesting that little will change at the top.

For all the time and treasure spent on diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) by U.S. companies, the failure to deal with structural racism has predictable results. Google reportedly spent \$114 million on DE&I in 2014, but this year reported that African-Americans make up only 3.7% of its workforce, and 2.6% of leadership roles.

One of us, James D. White, is an African-American former CEO who led a turnaround at Jamba Juice that wove diversity into the fabric of his company. In his seven years at Jamba Juice, he tripled the diversity of the top three levels, and increased the diversity of the top two levels from 20% to 50%. Over that same period the company's market cap soared 500%—performance that we argue resulted from James's

efforts to create a true meritocracy that holds every group to the same standards. When the whole workforce can bring its talents to the table, results are better than when only some people can.

White's co-author, Joan C. Williams, is a white researcher who has documented how subtle forms of racial and gender bias are transmitted through companies' culture and systems, and how evidence-based "bias interrupters" can change those systems and routines. In one experiment at University of Kansas, social psychologist Monica Biernat gave subjects Williams's open-sourced 2 ½ page "Identifying and Interrupting Bias in Performance Evaluations" worksheet. Just doing that—nothing more—sharply increased the bonuses of Black men and women and white women. Bias interrupters use the very same tools companies use to solve any problem they care about: evidence, metrics, and goals. Their absence in the DE&I context speaks volumes.

Addressing structural racism requires changing the structures that reinforce racism. In this article, we meld White's approach with Williams's to propose a new four-component DE&I model to do just that.

- 1. Make sure the DE&I leader has the authority to make systemic change**

For years, the standard DE&I playbook has been to hire a chief diversity officer (CDO) with a budget for consultants and enrichment programs. But you can't build capacity if the problem is not with the diverse talent but with the culture that determines their future. And hiring a consultant to give bias training is fine, but doing anything *once* cannot change a corporate culture that reinforces itself day after day.

Sweeping overhauls require support from the top that only a CEO can deliver. When White became CEO of Jamba Juice, he went structural in ways most CDOs could never accomplish. When he was hired, all 10 members of the Board of Directors were white men. White

championed two new board members, both women, one African-American. White firmly believes that the board's new range of voices changed the way the company thought about its people and its business. Though White would have led the same way with a less diverse board, he might not have been *supported* in the same way—which may well have limited his ability to undertake the broad structural changes he accomplished.

DE&I initiatives either need to be led by the CEO, or companies need to empower their CDO with substantial authority. Better yet—the CEO may also serve as CDO; Nielsen's David Kenny is one example of this approach. The CDO has to have the power to make the kinds of systemic changes we describe below.

2. Change the way glamour work is assigned

Glamour work positions employees for promotions. Crucially, middle-level managers are typically the people who control who gets these high-profile assignments; that's why white men so often get channeled to the top despite the best efforts of the CDO. When White took over at Jamba Juice, management was 80% white men; by the end of his first year, half of the managers were women and people of color. He pulled off that feat by changing the way career-enhancing work was assigned.

His approach was to appoint Action Learning Teams (ALTs) to accomplish key business goals, including opening new distribution channels in airports and moving into global markets. ALTs are cross-functional teams of 15 to 20 people, with breakout groups of between five and eight people who are laser-focused on solving well-defined problems. ALTs were given release time from their regular jobs, and a 90-day deadline. The theory behind action learning is that the people on the ground know best what's working well, and how to fix what's not. You just need to choose the right talent with the right mix of skills to solve a specific, well-defined business challenge. White purposely chose previously overlooked employees for this glamour work, which meant that the teams were far more diverse than the

company's workforce as a whole. By reconceiving the mechanism for assigning glamour work, White created a pipeline that increased diversity at the top.

3. Change the incentives and enhance the capacity of middle management

At every organization White has helped lead, he's found that middle managers are the key to changing the culture. Effective policies *enable* inclusion, but middle-level managers hold the key to delivering it.

At Jamba Juice, he instituted a new incentive system. In this new system, up to 20% of store managers' compensation was determined by engagement, climate, and organizational health scores. White used a variant of the Gallup Q¹² survey; another useful tool is Williams's Workplace Experience Survey, a 10-minute survey that pinpoints every basic pattern of racial and gender bias, where it is playing out, and its impact on outcome measures like belonging and intent to stay.

Addressing structural racism requires managers who understand the specific ways bias commonly privileges one group, so they can understand the reasoning behind the new policies, procedures, and incentives. Accomplishing this will require bias training that does more than just explore the cognitive bases of bias without providing concrete strategies for interrupting it. Williams's Individual Bias Interrupters workshop does this by explaining how bias plays out on the ground, and giving managers time to brainstorm ways they personally would feel comfortable interrupting it. But that's just one example: Facebook's inclusion trainings also give people a chance to brainstorm ways to interrupt bias. Facebook also deeply integrates bias awareness into multiple trainings. Again, go structural: what's needed is not just one training; all of a company's trainings—from onboarding to leadership programming—should seamlessly build in continuing education on how bias enters into company culture, at many evidence-based, meet-you-where-you're-at touch points.

4. Debias HR systems

Williams's research documents in detail how business systems transmit both racial and gender bias. In a national survey of lawyers, her team found that people of color and white women reported they lacked a fair shot at getting hired, receiving fair performance evaluations, getting mentorship and networking opportunities, receiving high-quality assignments, and getting paid and promoted fairly—all at much higher levels than white men. In industry after industry, Williams's team has documented that other groups' experience diverges from white men's. Women of color experience the largest difference, with men of color and white women typically in between. The differences are often dramatic. Only a third of white male engineers reported they had to prove themselves more than their colleagues did, compared to two-thirds of women and people of color. Women lawyers of color report that they get equal access to high-quality assignments at a level 28 percentage points lower than white men. In another study, only about a quarter of white male architects reported bias in compensation; two-thirds of Black women did.

Debiasing HR systems starts by appointing an action learning team that includes the CEO or another executive sponsor, the CDO, the head of HR, some outstanding and receptive managers, a data analyst and others who receive release time, a mandate, and a deadline to debias existing HR systems. The most straightforward approach is to adapt Williams's open-sourced toolkits, which use evidence to identify key metrics and establish baselines to measure progress—again, the tools we use to address any challenge we are truly committed to solving. Going structural yields real results: when one insurance company developed objective criteria and rated all applicants using the same rubric, it ended up offering jobs to 46% more minority candidates.

In most organizations, CDOs don't control any of the relevant HR systems, much less all of them, and eliminating bias in just one system means that bias will remain everywhere else, silently but effectively powering the invisible escalator for white men while leaving everyone else stuck toiling up the stairs. To address structural

racism effectively, the CDO—whether that’s the CEO or not—needs the authority to change both formal and informal systems, instituting changes that typically will help both people of color of both sexes and women of all races.

Joan C. Williams is a Distinguished Professor of Law, Hastings Foundation Chair, and Founding Director of the Center for WorkLife Law at the University of California, Hastings Law. An expert in the field of social inequality, Williams is the author of 12 books including *White Working Class: Overcoming Class Cluelessness in America* (2016) and *Bias Interrupted: Creating Inclusion For Real and For Good* (forthcoming 2021). She is widely known for “bias interrupters” — an evidence-based, metrics driven approach to eradicating implicit bias in the workplace, and the website www.biasinterrupters.org with open-sourced toolkits for organizations and individuals has been accessed 225,000 times in countries around the world.

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James D. White is the former chairman, president and CEO of Jamba Juice. White has also held leadership positions at Safeway Stores, the Gillette Company, Nestle-Purina, and Coca-Cola. White also sits on several corporate boards, including those of Medallia, Panera Bread, and Simply Good Food