



MARLIN HAWK

Redefining CHRO Diversity:

Should HR Leadership Reflect
the Workforce It Serves?



Executive Summary

In today's corporate landscape, the Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) plays a pivotal role in shaping organisational culture, promoting diversity, and fostering inclusion. However, a stark and disconcerting reality exists; executive human resources officers often lack the diversity that should be reflective of our increasingly global and multicultural society. As organisations strive to embrace inclusivity and foster equitable work environments, researching and understanding the role and impact of diversity in CHRO positions becomes increasingly important. The CHRO, as a senior executive responsible for managing an organisations' human capital, holds the key to shaping workplace culture, driving talent acquisition and retention, and implementing effective diversity and inclusion strategies.

Through our research of 200 US and UK businesses, we seek to shed light on the sizeable underrepresentation of ethnically diverse individuals in CHRO positions, identifying the root causes and consequences of this disparity. We examine these topics together with ethnically diverse CHROs and HR advisors that we interviewed. Furthermore, this paper underscores the critical importance of addressing this issue, both from an ethical standpoint and for the sustained success and resilience of organisations in

an ever-evolving global marketplace. The lack of diversity in the CHRO seat is not only a question of social justice but also a matter of strategic necessity, as organisations must harness the full spectrum of human talent to thrive and innovate in the 21st century.

As the imperative for corporations to address diversity and inclusion issues in and outside the workplace gathered momentum, the role of Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) emerged. Whether a company's CDO comes from the HR function itself, or is hired externally, an important question remains: does having an ethnically diverse peer – or direct report - to the CHRO suffice? Through our research we look at reporting lines, responsibilities and the relationship between the CDO and CHRO as a means for driving change and progress.

By delving into the dynamics of diversity within the CHRO seat, we hope to unravel the potential benefits, challenges, and best practices associated with promoting diverse leadership in human resources. This paper sheds light on the significance of representation while offering valuable insights for organisations seeking to navigate the complexities of a globalised workforce and uncover the full potential of their human capital.

Methodology

Marlin Hawk analysed the perceived diversity profiles of CHROs and Chief People Officers (CPOs) at 200 organisations to understand who the decision makers are in this critical leadership position, architecting and driving the people agenda. This research paper references proprietary data, analysing the FTSE 100 and Fortune 100 HR executives employed by – and in some cases on the board of – these institutions. The data comprises of gender and ethnic diversity statistics of CHROs from both American and UK businesses across industries. Additionally, we interviewed leading HR professionals in the USA and UK, both those currently holding CHRO seats and those who have left those positions and now in advisory roles through consulting activities.

Marlin Hawk analysed the perceived diversity profiles of CHROs and Chief People Officers at 200 organisations to understand who the decision makers are in this critical role.



Representation in HR Leadership: Why is it Important?

Representation in the CHRO seat – and across the C-Suite of any organisation - enables diverse colleagues across all levels to visualise progression within an organisation, and allows for diversity of thought, experience, and background to influence executive decision making. With Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion (DEI) being at the forefront of business decisions, a diverse leader at the executive level - provided with both support and runway - is a signal that the organisation takes these issues seriously. The CHRO seat can change the cultural maturity, employee morale, talent retention and overall performance of an organisation. McKinsey research supports that greater representation within corporate leadership is inextricably linked to outperformance with its 2020 paper, *Diversity Wins*, concluding that the “likelihood of outperformance continues to be higher for diversity in ethnicity than for gender”.

Chief Human Resources Officer at Corebridge Financial, **Alan Smith**, shares his views on why representation is a critical lever for change.

“The importance of representation cannot be overstated. It gives people an **aspirational goal** that they can actually see and strive for. Whether it’s going on a company website and seeing a black person in the leadership team, or seeing a black family in the White House, it **gives permission** to underrepresented - often disenfranchised - people that they too can hope they will get there. That is the **visible sign** of representation and the power that it has.”

Alan Smith is the Chief Human Resources Officer at Corebridge Financial

A diverse executive in the role of the CHRO can have a profound impact on employees within an organisation, especially through ways in which other members of the executive committee interact with, partner, and support them as a leader. Seeing that representation and connection, and witnessing diverse voices being heard with a seat at the table can make a huge impact.

Former Chief People Officer at TIME, **Sue Suh**, speaks on the visibility of the CHRO role, and why inclusivity in senior leadership matters.

“Someone said to me a long time ago, ‘the higher you get in an organisation, the more comfortable you have to be with people talking about you.’ Firstly, they will watch you as the person they may identify with in order to **see how you’re leading** and showing up in that moment. Then, they will watch the rest of the leadership team to **see how they are treating you**. If both of those things are done well, it can really open up space for everyone else because **inclusivity is alive**. While being a person of colour in a role is important for representation and progression, it is the ecosystem in which that person sits which is critical. No matter where you sit in an organisation, to be seen and valued for who you are is really, really powerful. For you as the individual but also for those watching you.”

Sue Suh is the former Chief People Officer at TIME

The Systemic Archetype of the CHRO: The Historic Mechanics

Before looking at today's HR leadership, we must examine both the evolution of the CHRO role and the profile of the person sitting in that role. Traditionally, CHROs being predominantly white men can be attributed to a complex interplay of historical, social, and economic factors. In addition, the CHRO role in its early years was commonly very closely intertwined with legal and compliance functions, as to ensure that human resources policies and practices aligned with legal requirements and ethical standards.

We spoke to ethnically diverse CHROs around the reasons as to why they think there is a lack of ethnic diversity within the CHRO seat across both sides of the Atlantic. The historic gender allocation in the HR seat repeatedly came up. Here are some key factors that contributed to this phenomenon:

- **Historical Gender and Racial Biases:** Leadership roles across most industries remain dominated by the archetype of the white male – and, historically, the CHRO seat is no different. Due to a complex set of dynamics played out over time, we now face deeply ingrained, societal, gender and racial biases in the workplace.
- **Ingrained Corporate Culture and Systems:** Many corporations have had deeply entrenched patriarchal and racially biased cultures, which made it difficult for women and people of colour to break through the glass ceiling. These cultures favoured individuals who conformed to traditional leadership norms, which often excluded diverse candidates. Corporate systems have been created for a dominant archetype in the workforce favouring those people above others and perpetuating systemic biases over time.
- **Labour Union Origins:** The labour movement in the United States, for example, historically had its roots in industries that were dominated by white male workers. This labour movement played a crucial role in shaping workplace dynamics, including the development of HR functions. As these labour unions were often led by white men, it influenced the early composition of HR leadership.

- **Implicit Bias in Hiring:** Implicit biases in hiring practices have also played a role. Decision-makers unconsciously favoured candidates who resembled the existing leadership, perpetuating the lack of diversity in executive roles.

Chief Executive Officer at Caerus Executive - and the only black male to hold the position of CPO at a FTSE 100 company, ever – **Frank Douglas**, shared his views on the importance of challenging this archetype.

“The important question is, do you believe in the myth of meritocracy? Do you believe that the overriding archetype of leader we have in business today is the best one? Any organisation challenging the archetype of what a leader looks like should be viewed positively. The power of representation is that it **disrupts the myth of meritocracy** and paves the way for many leader archetypes, instead of just one.”

Frank Douglas is the Chief Executive Officer at Caerus Executive

8%

of CHROs from FTSE 100 companies are (perceived to be) ethnically diverse



Diversity Amongst Today's CHROs: Why is There Still a Lack?

In recent years, the role of the CHRO has undergone a profound transformation, evolving from a predominantly administrative and compliance-oriented function into a strategic, forward-looking leadership position with people and culture at the heart of the agenda. This shift can be attributed to the increasing recognition of human capital as a critical driver of organisational success, followed by increased labour laws, employee rights and the recognition of mental health and wellbeing in the workplace.

Today's CHRO is no longer confined to managing traditional HR tasks but, instead, is actively involved in shaping corporate strategy, fostering a culture of innovation and diversity, and ensuring that the workforce is equipped with the skills needed to navigate the changing business landscape. In addition, the CHROs expanded remit can encompass talent acquisition and development, succession planning, employee well-being, diversity, and inclusion initiatives, and even workforce analytics to inform data-driven decision-making. This evolution reflects that an organisation's most valuable asset is its people, and the CHRO is now at the forefront of harnessing that asset to drive growth, competitiveness, and culture.

Looking surface level at the CHRO seat today, one might believe it to be one of the more diverse C-Suite positions with over 60% of FTSE 100 and Fortune 100 organisations having a woman at the forefront of the people function

and, in some cases, the only woman on the executive committee. However, when we dig deeper, we discover a few key factors that point to the major lack in ethnic diversity in the seat, in their direct access to board, and in the HR function more generally.

- Lack of diversity beyond gender: The gender allocation within executive teams is broadly a systemic issue, as women have historically been positioned into "softer" leadership positions such as HR which require a broad skillset including empathy, excellent communication, and deep listening. Such leadership seats do not have P&L ownership or require STEM-rooted education which has historically been seen as the domain of white men. When looking at ethnic diversity in the CHRO seat, only 23% of CHROs at Fortune 100 companies come from an ethnically diverse background, and this falls to 8% when looking at the FTSE 100 companies, with none from Black, African, or Caribbean origin. Due to historic talent pipelines, it has been much easier for organisations to allocate the CHRO role to a Caucasian woman as their tenure and experience is already present within the function. But as we are in an age where DEI is at the core of most organisation's values, culture, and external marketing, shouldn't the CHRO and HR function represent the people it's designed to serve and protect?

- Economic inequality amongst ethnic minorities: Ethnic minorities may face financial barriers to enter the HR profession. Access to quality education is a fundamental economic barrier. Individuals from different backgrounds may have limited access to undergraduate or graduate school opportunities or face financial constraints inhibiting them from pursuing advanced degrees in fields relevant to human resources. Without a strong educational foundation, it can be difficult to compete for CHRO positions. Separately, gaining experience through internships is essential for career development. However, many internships, especially in HR, are unpaid or low-paid. This can deter individuals who cannot afford to work without adequate compensation from pursuing HR careers. In the professional world, many organisations offer professional development opportunities, such as executive coaching and leadership training, to prepare individuals for executive roles. These programs can be expensive or may not be equally accessible to all employees, further hindering diversity in executive leadership.

To address these economic barriers and promote diversity in the CHRO seat, organisations need to first understand why representation is so important within their business and why diverse leadership is overall crucial. It's vital to understand the distinction between being a person of colour valued in an organisation and being a person of colour brought into an organisation expected to fix a problem around DEI.

Chief Human Resources Officer at Corebridge Financial, **Alan Smith**, expands on his views on representation and how companies need to be looking at diverse hiring.

“When it comes to moving forward on representation, we need to **shift away from looking at the ‘fit’ and instead focus on the ‘gap’**. We are all inherently biased and when we are not conscious of that bias, most people lean towards finding someone who fits, invariably meaning someone who is like us. This is what most people truly mean when they say cultural fit. When you focus on the gap, on what is lacking and what needs to transform, that is when you **hire diverse talent.**”

Alan Smith is the Chief Human Resources Officer at Corebridge Financial





The Trickle-Down Effect: Change Must Start at the Top

If leadership does not recognise there exists an issue with diversity, it proves impossible to enact a real, meaningful shift. DEI initiatives must begin at the highest levels of an organisation to foster genuine and lasting change. When leaders at the top prioritise these principles, they set a clear example for the entire organisation, signaling the importance of DEI within the company's culture and values. Top-down commitment ensures that resources, policies, and practices are aligned with DEI goals, creating a more equitable and inclusive workplace for all employees. The diversity mission needs to be carried out from those most senior leaders. And diverse leadership in that seat is crucial.

David Biu, EMEA Head of Executive Recruiting at Google, shares his thoughts about the importance of hiring for diversity at the very top an organisation.

“For any organisation the biggest driver for change is to ensure there is diversity in the HR function, particularly at the leadership level. It is only by having a truly diverse team that the HR function can go beyond its current thinking and show a commitment to a **culture of DEI that is proactive, rather than reactive**. By having people from different genders, ethnicities, backgrounds, and with different lived experience, you create a

collective diversity of empathy, and that kind of culture drives real change.”

David Biu is the EMEA Head of Executive Recruiting at Google

Sue Suh, former Chief People Officer at TIME, expands upon why having diverse leaders executing the diversity agenda creates an ideal blueprint for change.

“Ethnic diversity in the CHRO seat is part of the same overall question of ethnic diversity across the C-Suite. As a person of colour, it can go two ways when choosing the CHRO seat: from my own lived experience, I was extremely lucky to have extraordinarily supportive colleagues in the C-Suite and in our owners, which gave me the agency and **ownership to really be myself** and be there for the people in our business. The opposite situation is when a business leans on their CHRO, who is a person of colour, to be the fixer of everything by themselves with no support. **No one person can fix everything**, and it becomes very difficult to lead and drive from that place.”

Sue Suh is the former Chief People Officer at TIME

The Chief Diversity Officer: The Rise of the Role, Reporting Lines, and their Impact

In the wake of the murder of George Floyd in May 2020, society's expectations from companies around racial justice became even more prominent. Employees demanded for corporations to actively play a part in the fight for social justice by pushing for equitable opportunities for employees of underrepresented groups.

As a direct result, many Fortune 500 companies hastened to create new teams and positions focused on DEI, many hiring a Chief Diversity Officer (CDO) to further these initiatives. According to McKinsey's November 2020 study, *'Unlocking the potential of chief diversity officers'*, roles related to DEI have nearly quadrupled in the past five years in the United States. The rate of new CDO hires in 2021 was nearly triple the rate of hires in the previous 16 months. Among Fortune 500 companies, 53% now have a CDO or equivalent role and more than 60% have since May 2020 appointed their first-ever diversity leader, McKinsey research proves.

What makes a good CDO and what is their impact?

With the exponential rise of the CDO, what types of executives are qualified for these roles and what is the extent of their impact once they're hired? [Harvard Business Review](#) reports a qualified candidate for a CDO position does not need technical HR experience. Rather, seeking candidates with diverse professional backgrounds and a proven track record to effectively influence change, devise strategic plans, and achieve tangible outcomes is most important.

Chief Executive Officer at Caerus Executive, **Frank Douglas**, shares his thoughts on what makes a credible candidate for the Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer role.

"For many organisations, hiring for the Chief Diversity & Inclusion Officer has been focused predominantly on lived experience and secondarily on skillset. Deep empathy and understanding of the history and challenges faced by underrepresented employees is critical to the role but it is not more important than having the capabilities to affect change and be successful in the role. A key competency of any CDIO is **excellent project management skills**. This should be at the **very top of any role description** and assessed alongside a person's diversity and unique lived experience."

Within their organisation, CDOs can enhance the impact of DEI by cultivating an inclusive work environment, ensuring equal access to opportunities and benefits, establishing enterprise-wide trainings to reduce unconscious bias and support employees of underrepresented communities. Externally, there are a multitude of ways a CDO can drive the diversity agenda: companies can contribute to bettering their community by engaging in corporate social responsibility initiatives; intentionally integrating DE&I goals into their operational and investment procedures; and incorporating equity considerations as a fundamental part of their core business strategies.

However, all these internal and external goals would not be possible without the close partnership of other members of the senior leadership team to build up the DEI agenda, specifically board-level access and support. So that begs the question, does the reporting line of the CDO matter?

Who should the CDO report into?

There have been myriad points of view shared by CHROs and executives' industry wide on the reporting relationships of this relatively new role and its integration with HR. If an organisation wants to link DEI with the talent agenda, then the CDO is appropriately sitting with HR. With a focus on both DEI and talent within the same remit, this ensures talent development programs are executed from a diverse lens.

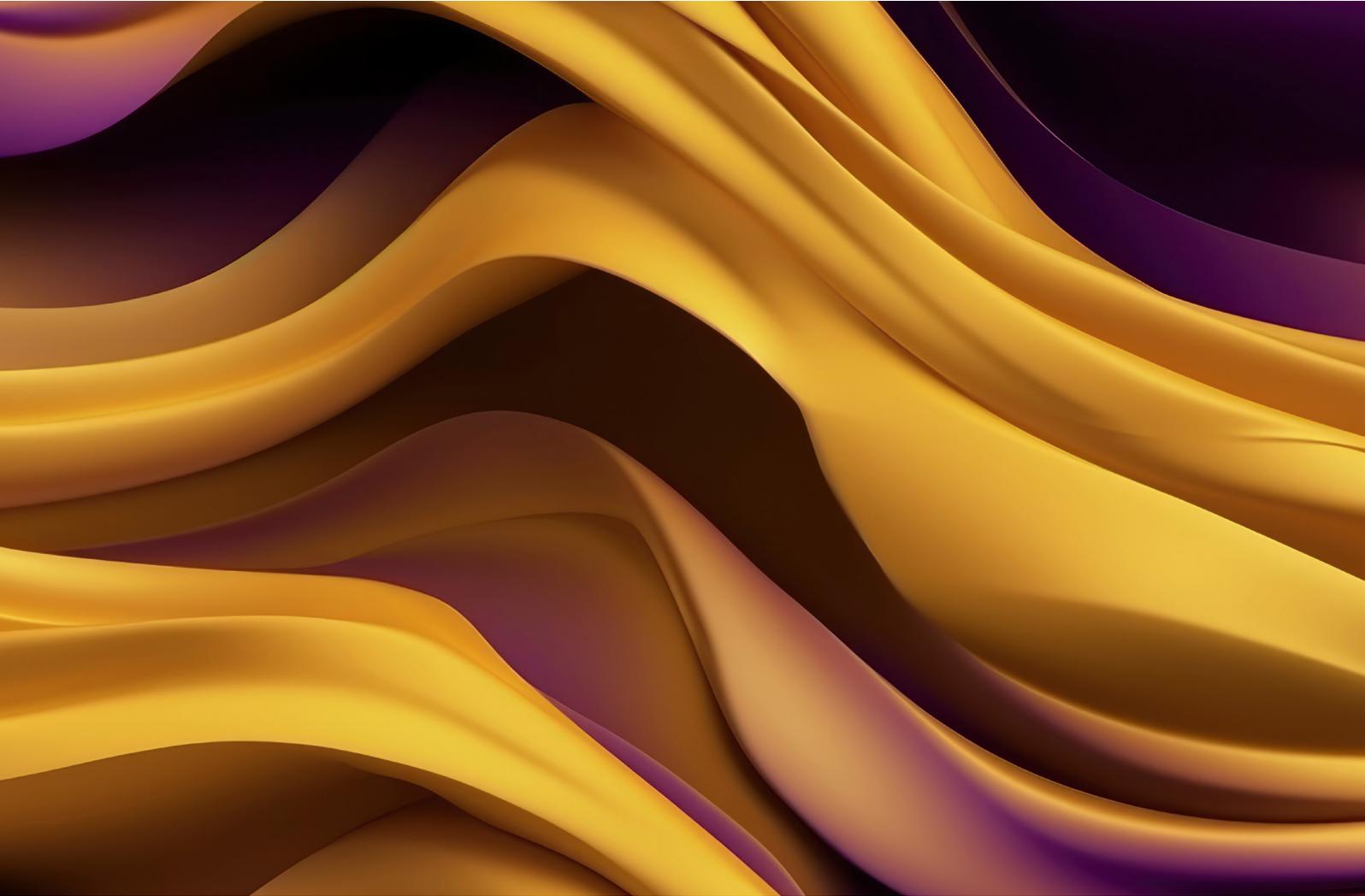
Interestingly, the majority of ethnically diverse CHROs Marlin Hawk spoke with argued that the CDO's reporting line becomes relatively obsolete if they don't have that close partnership with all leadership across all levels of the organisation and across all functions. Everyone needs to be an advocate of DEI at some level for DEI maturity and transformation to happen. Moreover, the dynamic between the CHRO and CDO - and their overall relationship - is crucial. With both executives being the gateway to the organisation's culture and having people at the heart of their position, some ethnically diverse leaders see the CDO position as a steppingstone to the CHRO seat.

The CDO's accountability is important, not the reporting line. Above all, the CDO really must be lockstep with the CHRO if they want to be moving towards where they need to be. To reinforce this, CHRO **Dantaya Williams** from RTX explains there are ways to ensure exposure and access to the CEO for CDOs especially if they do not report directly into the CEO. She describes her close partnership with RTX's CDO and the visibility the RTX CDO gets with company leadership and the RTX Board of Directors, *"Our CDO regularly presents to the board of directors and the RTX senior leadership team. Together with the CEO, we co-chair the RTX DE&I advisory council which includes leaders from across RTX who are committed to driving measurable and meaningful progress toward our DE&I aspirations."*

In other organisations, there are times when the CDO and CEO reporting structure can be an optic rather than a way to impact change. As the CHRO is responsible for the people hired, developed, and retained, it increases how

intentional DEI can be, and gives the CDO a strong peer regarding all things people related. When reporting into the CEO, the CDO strategy must be crystal clear, as well as their influence to be real and for their access to the CEO, budget, and resources to be as valued as everyone else on the C-Suite. However, as we have seen in recent news, this is not the case with all businesses.

The placement of the CDO within the organisational structure can carry significance in terms of perception, but it holds less weight compared to the extent of empowerment given to the individual in the role to collaborate with and influence stakeholders within the business for driving progress. In their 2020 article, *Do You Know Why Your Company Needs a Chief Diversity Officer?*, Harvard Business Report reports "the CDO should report directly to the CEO or to the head of HR with a dotted line to the CEO. Either way, a close partnership with HR, legal, and corporate communications, with full access to and support from the entire C-Suite, will be critical" to their impact and overall success.



What happens when DEI is not integrated across an organisation?

While the CDO position has seen a significant rise in both prevalence and recognition over the past three years, there often remains substantial ambiguity around the role's authority and seniority within an organisation. Precisely this lack of clarity around purpose and power has recently led to many CDO departures from their position.

In 2023 alone, a selection of high-profile organisations have withdrawn the CDO seat at the executive table or eliminated the role altogether, with many arguing that nothing has changed culturally in organisations since 2020. [*The Financial Times*](#) reported several diversity leaders at [Disney](#), [Netflix](#), [Warner Bros Discovery](#) and the [Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences](#) either resigned or were let go in the last 12 months alone. When the film academy's Executive Vice President of Impact and Inclusion, Jeanell English, [addressed her recent departure on her Instagram](#), she touches on the challenges of the CDO role, citing, "Despite my successes, this work has

not been easy. These paths are often lonely, uphill battles. Leaders in these positions need support, love, and advocacy while they are in the roles, not only when their departures make headlines."

Making DEI the sole responsibility of one senior executive allows the opportunity for that person to be easily scapegoated should anything go wrong. To avoid that, it is imperative organisations set DEI at the core of their talent agenda, allocating appropriate resources, providing executive support, and fully investing in DEI initiatives and programming. DEI initiatives became inextricably linked to talent in 2020 with the implementation of sponsorship programs, employee resource groups, and enterprise-wide training programs aimed to reduce unconscious bias and increase inclusive leadership. That's when we saw real change with companies making public commitments regarding comprehensive DEI metrics and actions, [McKinsey reports](#).

Looking Forward: How Can HR Leaders Drive Diversity?

The need for organisations to enhance diversity within the CHRO role is an opportunity for growth, innovation, and a more inclusive workplace. Diverse CHROs bring fresh perspectives and promote a culture of equity, attracting top talent and fueling employee engagement and creativity. By embracing diversity at this level of leadership, organisations set themselves on a path towards enduring success and a brighter, more equitable future. It's a journey filled with potential and promise, one that can lead to both organisational prosperity and a more inclusive society.

Alan Smith, CHRO at Corebridge Financial, shares the pivotal role HR leaders play in driving positive change by actively promoting and enhancing Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion within their organisation.

“Addressing a topic as broad and complex as improving Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Belonging within an organisation, or industry, requires **having a plan with tangible steps** that make a change. In my experience, those steps can be distilled as follows: i) measure representation at every level to understand where you are today; ii) continually upskill and educate your people so current events transcend time and build momentum behind action; iii) set up a DEI committee to create accountability for your action plan; iv) keep track of initiatives and programs and report on progress to the business; v) develop partnerships that feed your talent pipeline and invest in internships and scholarships that create opportunities for underrepresented people. I have seen **real results from this type of commitment** to DEI that has gone beyond the organisation positively impacting suppliers and partners. I believe having this kind of influence is **where the magic happens.**”

Alan Smith is the Chief Human Resources Officer at Corebridge



There are many ways in which leaders and organisations can promote diversity within their organisation and develop an inclusive culture that permeates throughout the business, and beyond. From our broad research on these topics, we have distilled a high level six-point plan for any organisation looking to effectively drive DEI efforts:

1. CREATING TRANSPARENCY: KNOWING EXACTLY WHERE YOU ARE TODAY

Data transparency around DEI is a crucial tool for HR departments seeking to improve DEI within their organisations. When HR leaders collect, analyze, and share relevant data related to DEI, it fosters accountability and awareness. Transparent data allows organisations to identify disparities, set measurable goals, and track progress. It also promotes informed decision-making and helps HR leaders implement targeted strategies to address areas that need improvement.

Sharing DEI data more publicly and openly demonstrates a commitment to transparency and inclusivity, enhancing that trust between employees and their employer. Showing the good, the bad and the ugly and being transparent around diversity figures allows people to want to become part of the change, and shows the world that organisations are taking accountability and action.

2. RAISING AWARENESS: TALK ABOUT CURRENT ISSUES AND EVENTS

After the events of 2020, we saw a huge rise in establishing enterprise-wide training programs aimed to reduce unconscious bias and increase inclusive leadership. Provide equal access to training, mentorship, and career development opportunities for all employees. Create programs that target underrepresented groups and help them advance in their careers. Creating employee resource groups to raise awareness on issues and talk about concerns around inequities can also help.

3. RETHINKING REWARDS: THINK THROUGH RELEVANT BENEFITS FOR A DIVERSE WORKFORCE

Incorporate DEI principles into a total rewards strategy – this can help attract, retain, and engage a diverse workforce ultimately contributing to a more inclusive and equitable workplace culture. It's important to regularly assess and adjust a total rewards program to align with changing organisational and societal expectations regarding DEI. Reviewing and expanding benefits packages to make them more inclusive is one way. This may include offering diverse family and childcare benefits, access to mental health resources, and support for employees with disabilities. These benefits should be accessible and tailored to meet the unique needs of a diverse workforce.

4. HIRING FOR DIVERSITY: BUILD YOUR PIPELINE OVER THE LONGER-TERM

A proactive recruitment strategy is vital when it comes to external hiring. It's not enough to simply identify diverse talent. This means increasing rigor around the recruitment process to ensure that diverse talent pipelines are authentic and not just a tick on the box exercise.

Organisations must ensure the recruitment process is accessible to all applicants, including those applicants who are neurodiverse providing the necessary accommodations. When advertising the role, ensure job descriptions and marketing materials are crafted using inclusive language. Require a candidate slate to include people with diverse backgrounds, genders, ethnicities before advancing to the interview stage.

During the application process, organisations can anonymise candidate CVs to remove any implicit biases; for example, removing candidates' school history from CVs eliminates bias towards certain types of institutions, particularly those whose student body is historically majority white and male. To create equity during the interview process, use standardised questions so each candidate is evaluated on their responses to the same questions. Assembling an interview team with diverse perspectives is necessary to have better and more diverse outcomes during the interview process.

5. NURTURING THE COMMUNITY: CONTRIBUTE TO UPSKILLING YOUNG TALENT

Engage the community to provide programmes especially for young people in education or entering the workforce. Corporations going into local communities to engage the youth, providing opportunities for internships and mentorships, have seen great results in upskilling young people teaching the employable skills needed to eventually join the organisation and increase diversity. Examples of local organisations include the [10,000 Black Interns Foundation](#), [Girls Who Code](#), and the [National Academy Foundation](#).

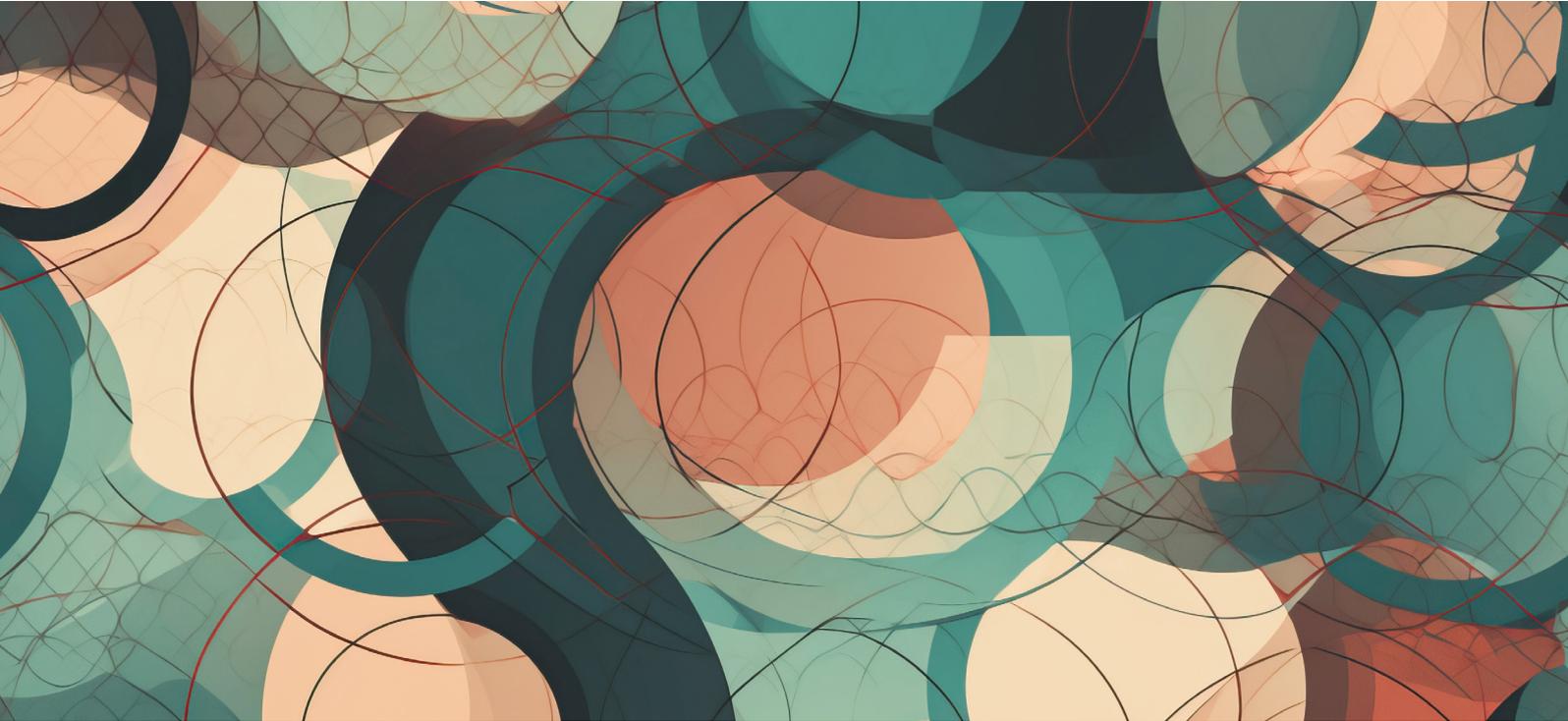
Dantaya Williams, CHRO at RTX, highlights the importance of those formative years and access to education. *"I'm in my role today because I received a scholarship that opened the door to a career in HR. If it wasn't for that scholarship, I likely wouldn't be the CHRO of RTX."* Williams shares that RTX partners with several external organizations to provide underrepresented young people access to education, mentorships and training that they wouldn't have access to if it wasn't for these programs and RTX's investment.

6. DEVELOPING PARTNERSHIPS: BROADEN YOUR TALENT NETWORK

Corporate organisational partnerships can significantly enhance DEI initiatives by bringing together diverse perspectives, resources, and expertise. Collaborative efforts allow companies to tap into a broader talent pool, share best practices, and leverage each other's networks, thereby fostering a more inclusive work environment and expanding the impact of DEI initiatives beyond the boundaries of a single organisation. Additionally, such partnerships demonstrate a commitment to DEI in the broader community, which can positively influence public perception and attract diverse talent and customers.

Thinking strategically (and creatively) around what kinds of partnerships organisations need to employ to help diversify the pools of talent available.

For example, McKinsey, through their Affinity Program, helps develop programmes tailored towards high potential employees of colour to help improve their L&D and retain them in the organisation. In the insurance space, partnerships with organisations like the [International Association of Black Actuaries](#) and [Organization of Latino Actuaries](#) can help support and improve the representation of Black actuaries in the profession.



Looking Forward: What Does Success Look Like for a CHRO?

Building the Future Pipeline

Building a talent pipeline is essential for the success of a Chief Human Resources Officer because it ensures a sustainable pool of skilled and diverse talent that can drive an organisation's growth and innovation. A robust talent pipeline allows the CHRO to proactively address talent needs, fill leadership gaps, and respond swiftly to changing workforce dynamics. This strategic approach secures the organisation's future leadership enabling the CHRO to play a pivotal role in shaping a diverse and dynamic workforce, aligning talent strategies with the company's overall goals and long-term success.

Dantaya Williams at RTX touches on why it is so vital to develop this pipeline during her tenure within the CHRO role.

“I have to be intentional in building the pipeline and continue to nurture my CHRO role. I believe it's my responsibility to lead the organization in evolving the HR function, achieving our DE&I aspirations and accelerating talent development. I need to influence my peers and leaders across the company to change the ways we have traditionally thought about the successful talent profile.”

Dantaya Williams is the Chief Human Resources Officer at RTX

Sue Suh, former Chief People Officer at TIME, speaks on the importance of representation for the leadership of tomorrow.

“Having more ethnic diversity across the entire C-Suite is paramount and having people of colour in the Chief Human Resources Officer seat or the Chief Diversity Officer seat is, directionally, very important. I believe we are at a tipping point in the marketplace where the CHRO role is seen as a true strategic leader in the organisation - a person who sees, plans, leads and advises on a breadth of topics - and that role should be seen as a pipeline role for a CEO position. This moves the needle from seeing these seats filled by people from diverse backgrounds today, towards seeing where they can go tomorrow.”

Sue Suh is the former Chief People Officer at TIME

Eliminating Systemic Biases

Eliminating systemic biases against historically underrepresented communities is not only a moral imperative but also a strategic imperative for a successful CHRO. By fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion within the organisation, the CHRO has the unique opportunity to create a more just and inclusive workplace driving innovation, enhancing talent retention, and strengthening the company's competitive advantage in an increasingly diverse global market.

Chief People Officer at a luxury Hospitality and Leisure company, shares why eliminating these systemic biases allows for all employees to work on an even playing field.

"I think the success would be consistent to anyone in the role, regardless of race or gender. Success is to make sure that the performance of the organisation is optimal, where every individual is able to **perform at their very best, without any systemic biases** against them. That there is a sense of belonging as well as a high-performance culture that attracts the very best within that industry and entertains the very best. Those are all huge achievements. I certainly believe that is what my remit is within the organisation."

Advising the Next Generation of HR Leaders

The future generation of CHROs has a crucial role to play in shaping inclusive workplaces. To achieve this, they must prioritise DEI initiatives as integral components of their and overall business strategies. They need to advocate for

diverse hiring practices, promote inclusive leadership, and foster a culture of belonging where every employee's voice is valued.

By championing diversity and inclusion, future CHROs can create environments where all employees thrive and contribute to a more equitable and productive workforce.

Frank Douglas shares his advice on career management for anyone in the HR function looking to be a leader of tomorrow.

"Part of the issue of diversity in the CHRO seat is to do with career management as much as it is to do with lack of representation. To become a CHRO - like any C-Suite functional leader - you need to have **experience across the full spectrum of the function** and a willingness to move between them and gain the necessary capabilities. That said, there are two anchors within the function that set people off on a pathway for future leadership: total rewards and talent management. Any ethnically diverse HR professional early in their career should be gaining experience in these two areas if they want to eventually get to the top. Equally, organisations serious about creating a more diverse HR function must ensure they are **creating these opportunities.**"

Frank Douglas is the Chief Executive Officer at Caerus Executive

Interviewees

We would like to thank all of those who contributed to the content of this article, some of whom have graciously consented to be listed below:

Alan Smith, Executive Vice President and Chief Human Resources Officer, Corebridge Financial

Dantaya Williams, Chief Human Resources Officer, RTX

Frank Douglas, Chief Executive Officer, Caerus Executive

Sue Suh, Former Chief People Officer, TIME



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