

Race *in the* Workplace

*Zoom in partnership with TIME for Learning invited **Shaun Harper**, one of the world's leading racial equity experts, to join Zoom's Chief Diversity Officer **Damien Hooper-Campbell** for a multi-part series focused on practical approaches to improving and advancing racial equity, diversity, and inclusion in organizations.*

For many leaders, tackling race in the workplace is challenging, and so they have historically chosen avoidance as their primary strategy. Many executives have little to no personal and professional experience talking about racism, and are afraid of being naïve, making mistakes that make them seem insensitive, or worse, racist.

But since the recent murders of many Black people, including George Floyd and Breonna Taylor, avoidance is no longer an option. The issues of police brutality in Black communities, structural and systemic racism, anti-Blackness, and white supremacy, as well as inaction on long-standing racial problems have come to the fore, and corporations have felt compelled to make internal and external statements stating that they are anti-racist and that Black lives matter.

However, these statements have to be more than just words in a moment of crisis. This can't be a moment, it must be a movement that leads to long-term, demonstrable progress on racial equity goals, and increased value on the lives and professional contributions of people of color in the workplace.

This document will summarize the key takeaways from each episode. To watch or learn more about the other episodes in the series, please visit time.com/raceintheworkplace.

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Essential Takeaways: Episode 8

Evaluating and Assessing Racial Equity in the Workplace

Many leaders erroneously believe their companies are equitable and inclusive. In this episode, Shaun Harper delves into how to analyze racial equity within an organization through quantitative data sources as well as qualitative methods—which when put together, help foster successful EDI (equity, diversity, and inclusion) goals.

12 Barriers to Effective EDI Assessments & Evaluations

1. **Executives commission a workplace racial climate assessment only after a racial episode** that has snowballed out of control. It works much better when leaders proactively look at the racial climate to get ahead of these issues.
2. **Only two broad diversity questions are posed on annual employee experience surveys:** 1) How included do you feel on your team? 2) How included do you feel in the company as a whole? These questions do very little to provide complex, nuanced insights into the realities of race in the workplace.
3. **The data collected from racial climate assessments is disregarded.** Workplace racial climate assessments can only help if leaders actually do something with the information.
4. **Data is reported in percentages,** which is sometimes done to deliberately mask inequities. The problem with percentages is that they can be misleading in showing the reality of diversity within a company. For example, you could say that Latinx employees make up 19% of your company, which sounds pretty good, but when you look at the raw data, you see that means there are actually only three Latinx employees.
5. **Data is not disaggregated by race, lumping all “minorities” together.** Again, this masks inequities and tells a story that is not altogether true. It also fails to pay attention to the intersectionality of race, gender, sexuality, and disability that employees of color may also bring with them to the organization.
6. **Data is not disaggregated by unit or team.** By not looking at the makeup of each team, you could be failing to see that employees of color are not evenly distributed throughout the company. For example, perhaps people of color are isolated in the diversity division.
7. **There are no data systems for measuring EDI.** Few companies have data systems that reliably track racial equity indicators and metrics—which means executives can’t do a year-over-year analysis. It is easy to pull up a financial report for any given year, but because there is very little investment into robust EDI reporting systems, it is virtually impossible to get a feel for the equity climate.
8. **The impact and learnings from diversity programs aren’t assessed.** Usually, only the number of events and the number of attendees at those events are tracked. There is not a focus on the takeaways of these programs, how they impacted the performance of employees afterward, and how they affected the company on a larger scale. You need to look to see if there was a reduction in things like implicit and explicit bias as well.
9. **Managers’ skills, attitudes, or behaviors around EDI are not assessed.** It is assumed that people will just naturally have what it takes to successfully promote EDI goals. That is not always—arguably rarely—the case.

10. **Emphasis is placed almost entirely on people and programs.** There is not enough attention given to assessing policies, cultures, processes, structures, systems, and conditions that allow EDI to thrive or fail. This does not allow for an actualization of EDI strategy.
11. **There is data hoarding.** Frequently, HR and top executives have access to the data but mid-level managers and even ERGs (employee resource groups) do not. There needs to be transparency in order to make effective changes.
12. **There are no data-informed EDI strategies for hiring, performance appraisals, or promotion conversations.** Most times, strategies are based on anecdotes but not necessarily EDI data.

What are Workplace Racial Climate Assessments?

Racial climate assessments provide useful insights into the realities of race within a company. They are executed usually over the course of a week with nonstop, monoracial focus groups [examples: white women; white men; non-gender conforming; multi-racial; with white women, white men, non-gender conforming employees, multi-racial groups, Latinx, etc.]. By breaking into same-race groups, it allows you to arrive at a common, shared experience and therefore get a complete picture by racial group. The data collected is then analyzed and a report is given with findings and recommendations on how to do better at realizing EDI goals.

Case Study

During a focus group with Black women at one organization, stories emerged about other employees touching their hair without consent. The findings of the focus groups were presented to the entire company. When presenting the findings, Shaun Harper asked white people to raise their hand and then to keep it up if they ever had another colleague run their hand through their hair without permission. All hands went down. Then, Harper asked Black women to raise their hands and posed the same question. Many hands remained raised—effectively proving that these incidents are not a cultural norm within the company but were very much a racial experience.

These findings should help executives to see their workplace climate as it really is. Good leaders SHOULD want to know if:

- Black women employees are routinely violated by having their hair touched.
- Black employees are routinely called the N-word.
- Asian American, Pacific Islander, indigenous, and multiracial employees feel erased, invisible, and unimportant in the workplace because their racial experiences do not fall into the black/white binary.
- The women's ERG is an invalidating space for women of color.
- Pride month activities are great for white queer employees and allies, but culturally marginalizing for queer employees of color. Going forward, be intentional so that employees of color are included in the next Pride.
- Climate-driven departure (where employees of color leave the company because it is so racist) is the most powerful determinant of attrition.
- White managers feel ill-equipped to lead on race and solve racial problems.
- White managers feel afraid to talk about race.
- White managers feel unsupported by executives who have pronounced that EDI is important but have not provided proper training.
- White managers feel like they're doing great on EDI, but employees of color do not agree.
- Some white leaders don't care about EDI, especially in low-accountability environments.

12 Ways to Assess and Promote EDI in the Workplace

1. **Do a climate assessment of your workplace.** Make sure it specifically focuses on the racial climate in your company.
2. **Make strategic use of the data and recommendations.** If you don't "listen" to the data and do something with it, you can't improve EDI within your company.
3. **Produce an annual report, including quantitative and qualitative data.** Just like you do for corporate giving and financial reporting, you should produce one for EDI. It should include a census and mapping of where employees of color are found within your company. Make sure this report is shared with others for transparency.
4. **Go beyond the 3-5 the common metrics that are typically used for assessing EDI:** The number of people of color are in the company, the roles they are in, how long they stay at the company, the number of diversity programs, and the number of attendees of these diversity programs. Don't abandon these metrics, but you must also look into other metrics that give the complete story of race in the workplace.
5. **Racialize things like pay equity.** Lots of organizations are doing pay equity analyses. However, make sure you don't just look at gender (it's important) but also racialize the analysis to look for racial inequities in pay.
6. **Engage in qualitative and narrative data collection approaches.** Invite colleagues to provide anonymous stories and examples of their encounters with racism in the workplace. Use these stories not only for professional development exercises but treat them as data that can be coded and analyzed to see trends within the company. Make sure to use exit interview data as well.
7. **Create data dashboards that permit trend analyses.** Get statistical portraits of staffing and turnover trends around EDI.
8. **Present data in both percentages and raw numbers.** To present only in percentages can be deceptive, and a way of masking inequity.
9. **Rely on data in meetings about EDI.** If in all your meetings, you only talk about the racial climate by way of anecdotes, feelings and beliefs and don't pay attention to data, your EDI strategy will fail.
10. **Hire a data analyst in the Chief Diversity Officer unit.** This person would be a very important partner to the CDO and would assume responsibility for data collection and reporting.
11. **Offer data tours to managers and upskill them in data interpretation and data use.** At the very least, managers and leaders should be trained on how to read, interpret, and use data reports from the CDO unit as part of their professional learning program.
12. **Seek out success, not always problems and inequities.** A lot of times, evaluation and assessment seems to be one-sided, always looking for gaps and inequities in teams. However, if you have a unit that is successful in their EDI strategy and goals, you should think about how to replicate it and scale it throughout the company.

Let's not stop now. Check out more info and takeaways from additional episodes of the Race in the Workplace series, in partnership with Zoom and TIME for Learning at time.com/raceintheworkplace.