

## Panel Summaries, Truth & Transformation 2020

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### Opening Keynote: Pamela Newkirk

In her keynote, Newkirk explored why diversity, equity, and inclusion outcomes have remained largely stagnant even as firms that work on diversity programming now comprise an eight billion-dollar industry. Through her book [\*Diversity, Inc.\*](#) she shared, “I discovered some of the reasons why many are still pondering and gesturing, rather than meaningfully increasing racial diversity.” Newkirk believes that a number of major factors impede progress in the field.

The first challenge is **racial custom**, “ideas about racial hierarchy stamped in the nation’s DNA, curricula, and what we think of as ‘fine art,’ the dominant narratives that define our culture.” She reflected, “along with these disparities is racial illiteracy and historical amnesia that undermines a true understanding of the underlying causes of systemic inequality.” The second factor is that “we live in a rigorously segregated society.”

“People in the academy, Hollywood, and corporate America, like those in every other influential field, often hire people from their **small social and professional networks**. These networks often exclude people of color, for example at colleges and universities where faculty search committees generally have wide latitude to reach out to anyone they deem suitable or desirable to join the faculty. “Hiring, then, is a subjective process and candidate finalists typically mirror the networks of those leading the search. Searches often result in hiring friends and former colleagues or people whose background, scholarly interests, and sensibilities mirror those of the committee members. The candidates then tend to reflect the overwhelmingly white composition of the faculty.”

Another underlying reason that D&I efforts fail is that **ineffective diversity practices** ask women and people of color to conform to white male-dominant spaces, and mandated trainings often have a negative impact on those they are intended to help. “Within a year of mandatory training, the number of Black women in management at an organization drops by an average of 9.2 percent,” Newkirk shared. And while the positive effects of diversity trainings last at best for a day or two, organizations continue to spend billions each year on this programming.

And finally, **leadership** is key to achieve an equitable workplace. “My research shows that achieving [authentic diversity at the workplace] primarily requires committed leadership and attention. Instead, many institutional leaders have farmed the problem out to consultants or chief diversity officers, who are often marginalized in the workplace.”

Newkirk points to the Coca-Cola company as an example of a company that devoted real resources and time to diversifying its workforce in 2000 “with a system of transparent metrics and accountability.” She went on to outline the process undertaken by Coca-Cola: “They began

with an **audit of employees across race**, gender and job categories, which allowed them to see where people were clustered or underrepresented along race and gender lines. The company then required managers to account for decisions before they were finalized. So, before any hiring decision was made, they looked at the candidate pool and the outreach that was done before salaries were finalized – they'd look at the patterns of bias along racial and gender lines with vigilance and accountability, Coca-Cola was able to avert instances of bias in real time and by the end of five years, the company had managed to hire and promote a far greater number of African Americans and women, while ensuring greater equity. But tellingly, a recent Russell Renner rental survey of fortune 500 diversity professionals found that only 35 percent of them even have access to company metrics and most said they lacked the support and resources to effectively do their jobs.”

Newkirk closed by underscoring the importance of creative leadership and intention in ensuring that any process to bring about equity bears fruit.

Key takeaways:

1. Ensure authentic leadership commitment to a process of change. Hold leadership accountable to this change.
2. Collect data to understand which groups are underrepresented at your firm and why.
3. Interrogate processes such as hiring to understand where social networks are constraining your firm’s ability to hire and retain diverse talent.

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### Stories from the Field: The Way Forward in Corporate Diversity

Laura Marquez of Google shared that she thinks of Google as “both leaders and learners” when it comes to racial equity. She shared, “Since 2014, we’ve published our diversity annual report, and we’ve led the tech industry in being transparent about our progress and the need to build more pathways to tap for underrepresented groups.” She underscored the importance of company leadership **looking at diversity data together**, and shared the example of “a Google employee who created a new tool, which reduces gender bias in job announcements, and in the process increased women's applications by 11 percent last year.” Beyond technological innovations for stronger data analysis, she highlighted the importance of an inclusive culture, where “the person behind each data point” feels comfortable embodying the fullness of their identity in the workplace. Marquez underlined how important it is for each employee in a workplace to start from her own identity as she starts to take on diversity, equity, and inclusion work, **to make sure that others who look like her can see themselves in the workplace and have space to grow.**

Tamika Curry Smith started by referencing Damian Hooper-Campbell's frame of the "poetry and plumbing" of racial equity work. The "plumbing" refers to establishing a system where people of color can thrive, ensuring that policies and practices are in place to support employees of color.

Pull quote (Tamika): *What are you doing to make sure leadership is educated on issues of equity, and creating an inclusive culture?*

She discussed the importance of **accountability and measurement** in establishing equitable systems, and underscored the three major pathways to creating a diverse workplace culture: hiring, promotion, and retention/turnover. "You really should understand where your organization is, where each leader is, in each of those areas. You can then tie progress in those areas to accountability: in how leaders are assessed, how they're measured, and how they're rewarded."

The "poetry" is unlocked when employees are able to show up to work just as they are, and bring their whole selves to work. "Belonging is critically important, because I think for many years what organizations have expected people to do is to fit in. And when we fit in, what we're doing is constantly trying to assess what we need to say or do, how we need to show up to survive and then organization. Instead, we want people to show up as who they are, and **that's really what belonging is: to have a culture where difference is normalized, appreciated, and valued.**" She discussed leveraging difference: appreciating the value that new ideas and identities bring into the workplace.

Mike Dillon discussed the two systems that any corporate leader has control over: what happens inside the "four walls" of one's firm and what happens outside in society as a whole. "Corporations can make a big difference these days around what's happening in society. Speaking up for your values and speaking out on current events is crucial; your people want to hear it, and you carry a lot with the brand name you have."

He also stated how important it was for him as the Chief Diversity Officer at PwC to report directly to the CEO, so that he knew that diversity programming was being taken seriously. Dillon discussed the importance of **auditing processes such as succession planning** to understand what criteria are taken into consideration as leaders hire their replacements. "And what was good about this [process of looking at the data together] is this brought it all into the sunshine. And I say this a lot about D&I: **unless it's in the sunshine, things aren't going to change.**"

On challenges around enacting his vision for racial equity at his company, Dillon underscored the importance of level-setting using data to avoid spending too much time on the "individual antidote" each member of leadership may have to affecting diversity. Instead, he suggested it is more impactful to say, "let's look at the data, let's understand it together, and let's make that difference together. So I think that sharing of data, putting it into the hands of people that can make change, is extremely important and has been a big hurdle for D&I efforts in corporate America."

Smith shared that one of the main challenges remains that “organizations view D&I as an HR thing, and as having a narrow scope. As a result, it does not get the same level of accountability of resources, and of investments as other areas.” If organizations viewed D&I as the business imperative it is, “the way that they mobilize would be very different. They would look at this as a true end-to-end business initiative, not an HR one, and they would properly resource D&I teams in terms of headcount and budget.” To firms that point to already growing revenues as evidence that their policies seem to be working, Smith poses the following question: “How much better could you have done, who could you have operated, and what better results could you have had or as you move forward? **Because the data is not in dispute around D&I in terms of driving business results. Shareholders value customer satisfaction, profitability, better engagement for employees, less turnover, lower legal costs, etc.**” Smith suggested that firms reframe D&I programming from being an add-on to being a crucial core business initiative.

Marquez discussed the importance of having potentially difficult conversations about diversity data that may not reflect the progress a firm wants. “It’s not always an easy discussion to have,” she reflected, and underscored that transparency is key even when the numbers aren’t what we want them to be.

“This is a long-term journey of change,” Dillon closed, “and data transparency is key to maintain accountability.

Key takeaways:

1. Understand the system within which your firm operates, and recognize your own role as a leader in creating that system.
2. Understand from those who have been historically marginalized what it would require for them to feel a sense of belonging.
3. Collect disaggregated data, and look through it together to understand trends as a leadership team. Do not shy away from conversations about the places where progress is not happening.
4. Tie leadership performance to progress in creating diversity and inclusion.

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**Keynote: Ruth Simmons**

*“No matter how painful or disturbing, we cannot make progress if we do not understand the nature and extent of the problem we face. The stories now being told about racism in our country need to be told, and they need to be heard.”*

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**Bridging Private Sector and Nonprofits/Philanthropy in the Diversity and Inclusion Sector**

The third panel of the day focused on opportunities for cross-sector partnership when it comes to taking on diversity, equity, and inclusion outcomes. Michelle Wonsley Ford spoke to the tendency to think of racial equity work as “topical” or important “for this moment,” and reminded us that this work is crucial at all times, not just during the pandemic or after a summer when individuals and firms came together to say “Black Lives Matter.”

Theodore Van Der Loo articulated the importance of centering Black voices in one’s company. “Initially, what we had to do as a company was to listen. To listen with empathy to what the Black community had to tell us.” Although 65% of Brazil’s population is Black, Van Der Loo highlighted that top leadership at corporate firms tends to be majority white. On challenges in the D&I journey, Van Der Loo shared, “for me the biggest challenge is to get other CEOs engaged into this because it has to come from the top. Leadership really [defines] the trend of what will happen in the future.”

Lori Villarosa discussed the central role of **determining where power lies in organizations**, and how it has to be shifted to effect a more diverse workplace. “So many of the failures [in the D&I space] get framed as failures of those who are doing the trainings. **But so many of those who trash diversity programs aren’t taking responsibility for their own need to learn and change.**”

Nia Evans of the Boston Ujima Project highlighted the “**collaborative and cooperative**” community effort required to lead anti-racism work: She opened, “I try not to move as a single charismatic leader but to recognize that we’re **moving within an ecosystem**, we’re part of a movement, and so there are a lot of people in addition to us doing great work.”

She focused on the importance of philanthropies establishing **good business standards around equity**: “our investment criteria uses good business standards, meaning businesses cannot receive investment from us, unless they meet these standards: they include businesses being owned at least 50% by people of color, at least 60% of employees being people of color, workplace policies center the safety and success of queer and trans women of color...and they commit to the sanctuary business pledge to protect immigrant workers.” In addition, the Ujima Fund allocates the highest returns to working class investors, so that the fund is redistributive in nature.

Moderator Megan Ming Francis asked what it will take for things to be different this time: “In what ways does the private sector or nonprofit sector need to change to be more in step with Black and Latinx-led social movements?”

Villarosa underscored the importance of ensuring that the frame used by the private sector to understand its racial equity work in this moment is “the one that is most relevant to Black and brown and Indigenous communities who are living the issues.” Firms refocusing their efforts around racial equity without acknowledging the vision and needs of communities of color, especially at this moment in history, will yield little impact.

Evans spoke to the role of the individual process of reckoning required to engage in meaningful racial equity work and suggested, “at the national level, we need to do that collectively. Let’s look again, sober-eyed, at how we got here, and let’s not be so reactionary and defensive.” The second key to the path to equity, she reflected, is “really grappling with our history, understanding it took us centuries to get here...it shouldn’t take a century to undo it, but we need to arrive at a common understanding that we need to make substantive long-term investments of various kinds in communities that have been neglected for centuries.”

Key takeaways:

1. Frame your racial equity work in terms of the vision that is articulated by BIPOC communities living the issues every day.
2. Understand and grapple with the history that got us here.
3. Use racial equity as a good business standard that guides where your firm invests.

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## The Good, The Bad, and The Ugly in Inclusion and Diversity

*Crystal Williams: What does DEI mean to you?*

Aria Florant: “We must determine whether the goal is to bring more women and people of color into the system as it is, or to transform the system as we bring more people of color into it. My vision is the latter.”

Kimberlyn Leary: **“Much of our work on D&I has been akin to the emergency room (reactive & site-specific) whereas what we need is strong primary care that is preemptive and proactive.”**

Tara Spann: Our vision for equity should be where all staff are “working in safe spaces where we can be our best selves.”

*Crystal Williams: Where have we seen successes, and what challenges remain?*

Kimberlyn Leary: Employees are looking at measures of DEI more and more as they think about where they want to work. Companies have started to spend an incredible amount of money on diversity efforts. We are seeing a threefold increase in job listings for diversity officers. “Some 47% of the Fortune 500 companies have a Chief Diversity Officer, and most of those have been promoted to those roles in the last three years.”

Crystal Williams: *Let’s double down on the shift to hiring Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs), the radical rapid growth in the field. **In my experience in higher ed, it has resulted in lots of people coming into senior Diversity Officer roles that have not actually understood [the work] to be***

**about change management, and have not actually undertaken large institutional culture shift initiatives in their professional lives.**

Tara Spann: "I've seen many different descriptions of the responsibilities of a Chief Diversity Officer. We have to be prepared for the fact that, like most change management efforts, a good number of them fail because they have not been well defined. The goal isn't clear, and people have not been brought along either incentivized or mandated to be a part of those."

Crystal Williams: *When I was a new CDO, so much of what I was doing was "Crystal-contingent." I was not building structures that could easily unnecessarily persist, once I pivoted out of that organization.*

Kimberlyn Leary: Having expectations about the time tenure that this will take is key, and having key expectations about the budgeting and investment that will be required. Senior leaders need to be willing to share power with the CDO, and they should work together to "manage up" to the board.

Tara Spann: **Change occurs when white people become the advocates for DEI, and own the metrics, the plans, and the execution of creating a more inclusive culture.**

*Pull quote (Tara Spann): While I wish I could say there's an end to this work, where we could focus more on transformation and innovation, I truly believe we'll be facing the headwinds for a while.*

(49:28)

Key takeaways:

1. Build a shared vision of what the role of a Chief Diversity Officer is. Ensure that leadership is fully bought into this vision.
  2. Understand the time and resources required for a Chief Diversity Officer to achieve her goals.
  3. Creatively strategize on how the CDO and CEO can collaborate to hold their board accountable.
  4. Ensure that Black employees have cover and sponsorship in the organization, to be able to share ideas and take risks.
  5. Work toward inclusive procurement and investment.
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## Closing Keynote: Glenn Singleton

Pull quote (Khalil): *“How do you quantify in a way that is scientific, numbers and that kind of thing, what people feel when they are being marginalized? Just because you can’t measure it doesn’t mean it isn’t real. What we measure itself is influenced by power and politics.”*

Singleton took the audience on a journey to understand the steps required to engage in courageous conversations about race, including starting from a personal place and moving to a more systemic view.

Singleton started by highlighting some of the questions that arose for him during his time working in education.

- Why is it that the Black children sit at the back of the class?
- Why is it that their teachers are the ones with less experience?
- Why is there less enthusiasm about the curriculum they are learning?
- Why is it that no one believes that they are going to go on to college?
- How does the top graduate school in the world not have any teachers who look like me?

As he started to ask himself these questions, he also noticed that folks in professional and policy spaces often shied away from grappling with them. It was this line of inquiry that led him to consider the role of courage in transformation.

Pull quote (Glenn): *Absent courage, there is no transformation.*

Singleton underscored **the importance of starting any DEI effort by understanding what a world in which one’s vision is successful looks like**. started by asking a question about vision: “What’s getting in the way of D & I being successful – and what does it look like when it is successful?” Nike’s [“Dream Crazy”](#) ad provides one such vision for what kind of future is possible when race, gender, ability, sexuality, and other axes of oppression do not limit what any person can dream and do. The video ends with the words, “Having your dream called crazy is not an insult; it’s a compliment.” With his work on this ad, Singleton provides an example for the attitude D&I initiatives should adopt when dreaming about what is possible. Based on his experience in advertising, Singleton noted **the importance of advertising and media in bringing issues of racial equity to the fore**: “If we change what’s going on in advertising, then in fact, we can transform the ways we see these issues of race in society and how we address racial equity.”

In describing what a courageous conversation about race entails, Singleton reminded listeners, *“We can’t actually repair something that we can’t talk about.”* **He cautioned against moving from diagnosing the problem to recommending technical solutions**, a tendency many have in formal spaces such as the workplace. Instead he suggested, “We must **bring our whole selves to the**



**conversation, allow for the discomfort, and share what's true.** We need to recognize that we inherited this challenge, and it's going to be here tomorrow."

Pull quote (Glenn): *Non-closure shouldn't stop us in our tracks because the problem is so big.*

Singleton suggested that organizations encourage staff to start with a focus on the personal, local, and immediate: "Start by discussing the impact of race in the lives of each and every person. **We need to realize that racial impact is always present for each of us, regardless of our race.**" He discussed the power of each member of an organization creating a "racial autobiography" of sorts: "How does my race impact me? How is race coming through me and what is my own racial experience?" To understand what belonging requires at a given workplace, Singleton suggests, "Ask the people who don't feel a sense of belonging what it is they need to bring their whole selves to work."

He then moved to **the importance of creating a systemic equity transformation framework for one's organization**, "moving away from 'random acts of equity' to a systemic approach to racial equity within your organization." This process starts by introducing courageous conversations within the organization. The next step is to build knowledge and skill for racial equity in one's organization through competency-building activities, and support members of leadership to grow their will and capacity to transform. Singleton posits that this is the progression required for companies to engage meaningfully to create equitable environments. Merely pledging to change (as Singleton notes we saw frequently over the summer after the killing of George Floyd) does more harm than good when not accompanied by these conversations to create will and capacity to transform.

When do we know that such an effort is successful? "My litmus test for when racial equity & inclusion work is successful is when **people of color actually start to benefit from it. If this is only about creating 'better leadership' among those in power right now, we are just reifying the system with greater skills and capacity, to stay racially stratified.**"

Key takeaways:

- Create space for conversations about how race impacts each of us in the workplace.
- Ask those who have historically felt marginalized what it would take for them to feel belonging.
- Form an actionable framework to move toward a shared vision for equity.

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### **Opening Remarks (worksheet / animation with set of questions)**

Professor Khalil Muhammad opened the day by giving an overview of what the IARA Project does, and the questions that the Truth & Transformation conference seeks to answer.

- How do companies achieve equity, sector by sector?
- How do companies hold themselves accountable to their racial equity goals? How do stakeholders inside and outside of companies hold the companies accountable to their own goals?

He defines “truth” as **taking stock of how your organization came to be**, and then working to address that past insofar as it has created harm in communities. He underscored the importance of companies **being honest about their past** in order to move forward, noting that given the prevailing race, gender, power dynamics in the U.S., it would be difficult to become a truly diverse and equitable place to work unless a firm was very intentional about it.

Muhammad noted that some companies seem only to be interested in passing a symbolic litmus test: “how do we look?” For example, although we know from the field that hiring a diversity officer is a fairly weak adaptation (a bare minimum first step unless accompanied by policy changes) when it comes to effecting racial equity within an organization, this is where many firms stop. He later reminded us: “Simply adding more Black and brown people to an organization does not make it a racially equitable place to work.” Additionally, one-time implicit bias trainings have short-term, one-off results, if any.

Pull quote: *“Companies must interrogate the blind spots on their part that created a business model that might be doing harm or neglecting part of the communities that it aims to serve.”*

In order to be truly accountable to their employees and beneficiaries, companies must have robust internal and external accountability mechanisms in place. Many companies don’t self-report data about their own stated diversity goals. If companies take this seriously, they should have a robust set of metrics they track on parameters around racial equity and inclusion.

- As an example for this type of framework, we can consider environmental building codes that promote sustainable building practices. What would it look like if firms had an accreditation process to place companies on a spectrum, from bronze to platinum, with regard to their performance around racial equity metrics? The IARA Project hopes to develop such a framework, for companies to be assessed against their goals around racial equity and inclusion.
  - For example, merely hiring a diversity officer would lead to a bronze certification.
  - Having a clear system on how to report micro- and macro-aggressions would yield a silver certification.
  - Being a truly anti-racist organization would mean a platinum certification: **“The way we do business in the world matches our stated values about the kind of nation we want to be part of.”**

Through surveying a wide array of DEI/antiracist programs currently in use, IARA assesses the gaps between what these programs seek and expect to accomplish. How do they measure

success? Are their results reproducible? How do these programs shape or transform, if at all, institutional culture?

- How do organizations themselves determine their progression or success in creating change?
- What mechanisms keep companies accountable to their stakeholders (internal and external) around their stated racial equity and inclusion goals?
- What mechanisms keep companies accountable to the communities they aim to serve?

Pull quote: *"Diversity and solidarity statements are much easier to write than to follow."*