To improve diversity and inclusion, organizations must understand unconscious bias and take data driven approaches to eliminate it. But it isn't easy to define and quantify something so intangible — and it's even harder to translate insights into action and change. To help, we've compiled our top tips to help you move the needle on diversity.

1. Lead with data.

Needless to say, data driven diversity initiatives are more successful. Data helps you precisely understand diversity problems, devise targeted initiatives to eliminate them, and observe progress over time. Data is crucial to convince skeptics, and make diversity an organization-wide commitment.

There are many different kinds of diversity data you can gather. The most obvious include the **representation of demographics in the hiring pipeline and organization**. In these cases, of course, it is important to consider the departments, positions, and levels of these candidates and employees, and for candidates, whether they were given an offer and whether they accepted.

Data around career trajectories (both internal and external) provides a deeper, connected level of analysis. Examining demographic variation in ratings and career outcomes, such as hires and promotions, is crucial, and tenure, level, and age information provide additional nuance.

Data concerning career trajectories often contains an open-text component as well. This text is a window onto the emotions, perspectives, and rationale behind career decisions. In other words, the text can reveal the true drivers of diversity issues: the attitudes and perceptions of others that can prevent employees from reaching their full potential.

Employee surveys also offer a powerful way to understand diversity — they reveal issues, specific to diversity and otherwise, that are important to demographic groups. They shed light on obstacles faced by minorities, differences of treatment, and demographic variation in expectations and priorities.

2. Embrace transparency.

A commitment to transparency is critical to improve diversity-related issues and processes. As difficult as it can be, it is necessary to face the status quo of affairs in order to develop effective positive change strategies. Transparency should be a driving force behind every analysis and interpretation, as well as diversity initiatives and improvements. Transparency should also be emphasized in organizational processes, such as hiring and promotions, as it helps level the playing field.

3. Start small.

While it's tempting to try to change the entire organization at once, it's best to begin with one department, location, etc. This makes it easier to obtain buy-in, and experiment to find what works.

Starting small also applies to the nature of the changes and initiatives implemented. Rather than requiring major process-based changes, start with one small change and see what happens. Small changes — to the wording of a performance review or hiring process — can make a significant difference. Continually iterate and experiment until you've found a solution that delivers the results desired and is feasible for your organization long term.

4. Address the entire employee lifecycle.

Diversity efforts are often concentrated on the hiring pipeline, but it's crucial not to neglect the equally important period following offer acceptance. After all, diverse employees will invariably decide to leave organizations for which creating and fostering an inclusive culture is an afterthought. Diversity issues can impact every aspect of an employee's career at an organization, and initiatives and support systems should be designed accordingly. While it is advisable to "start small" with one part of the employee lifecycle, you should eventually address it all — to truly commit to organizational diversity.

5. Establish clear, measurable goals with deadlines.

As a sure-fire way of making progress, establish clear, measurable diversity goals with deadlines. Even better: hold yourself accountable and make these goals known within the company, and/or to the public. The more transparency around the purpose, expectations, definition of success, and timeline, the better. Despite conventional knowledge, this approach can be applied beyond traditional diversity metrics to previously nebulous unconscious biases (see our website for more information).

Clear, measurable goals with deadlines should also be applied to performance management, where they can increase transparency around employee expectations. This transparency encourages performance-based evaluations as opposed to more subjective evaluations.

6. Begin with competencies, not an individual, in mind.

There's another relatively simple way to start removing unconscious bias from evaluations: prior to the evaluation, come up with a concrete list of role-based competencies. (There is the possibility that these competencies will themselves be biased, so it is important to examine them and try to correct for this). When we begin by considering the skills and attributes necessary for a given role and evaluate an employee or candidate accordingly, we are less likely to fall into the habit of selecting and praising people like us, or like others we have seen in the role. We are also more likely to consider the breadth of relevant competencies for a given segment, correcting for trends like the less frequent evaluation of women on leadership. This competency-based approach is also important because it fosters transparency — in terms of evaluations, and by extension, career paths at the organization.

7. Remember: it's a process.

Cultural change doesn't happen overnight. We all harbor unconscious bias, and eliminating it is not trivial. There aren't easy fixes, and even when we experience successes, the journey's not over. Every step taken for diversity should be part of a continuous process of improvement, iteration, and experimentation, and every decision should be considered through the lens of sustainability — how can we make this endure? How can we foster lasting change?

At Kanjoya we recommend a 24/7 employee feedback channel as part of this commitment to continuous improvement. Employees can keep you appraised as situations arise, and you can respond in real time. It's also a good practice to ask employees how they feel about diversity in surveys, and to allow them to respond in their own words. This demonstrates the importance you attribute to diversity, offers a pulse on diversity in the organization, and identifies important issues that may have slipped through the cracks.

8. Kanjoya can help.

Let's start a conversation. Contact us to learn how we can help improve diversity at your organization.