

Best Practices for Prioritizing Diversity and Inclusion Amidst the Pandemic and Beyond

Paradigm for Parity® Coalition
October 2020



2020 has challenged leaders worldwide to reckon with the barriers in society and in our workplaces that are limiting the ability and opportunity for women and people of color to advance.

Paradigm for Parity® coalition companies have long been on the forefront in working to create diverse and inclusive workplaces - with a focus on leveling the playing field for women of all races, cultures and backgrounds. In March 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic instantly transformed the workplace. The pandemic forced a majority of employees to work remotely and manage the demands of work and family from home. The result was company leadership had to quickly change long-held practices and adapt to the new normal.

Almost simultaneously, a second crisis emerged, shedding light on the systemic racism and inequality that has, for generations, held people of color from rising. Together, these crises demonstrated that companies must transform to meet their employees' needs and prioritize advancing diversity and inclusion (D&I). During these times, companies that have started the process of creating more equitable workplaces and flexible work schedules are better positioned for this new normal.

The more than 120 companies that have joined the Paradigm for Parity® coalition since the coalition launched in 2016 recognize that diversity improves performance and inclusion encourages belonging. Paradigm for Parity® coalition companies are motivated to create workplaces where all employees feel valued and appreciated and ensuring that all women and people of color can succeed and advance in the workplace.

To help leaders across the corporate world create diverse and inclusive workplaces, the Paradigm for Parity® coalition has compiled a set of best practices from top Human Resource and Diversity, Equity and Inclusion executives from several of our member companies.

Seven Best Practices to Promote Diversity and Inclusion in a Changing Workplace

1. Facilitate Open Dialogue and Courageous Conversations, Led by Company Leadership

Paradigm for Parity® companies are creating forums for employees to listen, share stories, learn and reflect on issues that impact them both personally and professionally. Whether it's company-wide virtual townhalls or small group discussions, these engagement opportunities are creating a safe space for vulnerable, courageous conversations for women and people of color to discuss the unique challenges they are facing and find support as they seek to advance in their careers. Moreover, these conversations are giving employees the opportunity to hear about the deeply personal experiences of people with different backgrounds to open the pathway for better understanding and career support.

Best Practices:

- Companies cite the importance of CEO and c-suite participation in these conversations to demonstrate the company's commitment to better understand the experiences of employees and foster an inclusive environment for women to thrive.
- Coalition companies note the importance of employee resource groups for helping build community and creating opportunities for discussions of shared experiences. Importantly, employee resource groups that have channels to leadership have effectively driven policies and changes within the company and give people a voice in a way they didn't have before.
- Deploy company leadership to engage in one-on-one conversations with employees at all levels to understand how they are coping in this moment and how the company can better support its workforce.

2. Support Women in Balancing Caregiving Duties with their Work

There is no question, this pandemic has created unique challenges for women who are struggling to meet the demands of work with caregiving needs. Our companies are making sure that their employees don't have to pick between work and family. A key step in the Paradigm for Parity® 5-Point Action Plan is for companies to prioritize performance over presence and allow people location and schedule flexibility to get their job done. This pandemic has demonstrated that many workers can effectively do their jobs remotely, and those who aren't able to work remotely may need to address caregiving needs prior to their return to work. Additionally, challenges remain as most schools are beginning the academic year virtually - forcing parents to balance both their children's education and their work responsibilities.

Best Practices:

- Accommodate non-traditional working hours to allow people to balance their unique caregiving duties with their work – and ensure it doesn't impact their career advancement.
- Empathize with employees who are balancing caregiving needs. For example, companies have embraced cameos from toddler "coworkers" or furry friends on virtual video calls.
- Organize meetings to ensure that women have active roles and are seen and heard by their colleagues.
- Expand access to paid sick days as well as paid family and medical leave. Whether it's for new parents, for parents who need to take time off to care for a child who is out of school or need to care for a sick loved one.
- Explore partnerships to provide emergency daycare and eldercare. For example, Paradigm for Parity® coalition companies have partnered with Care.com and Bright Horizons during the pandemic and beyond.

3. Review Hiring Practices

Paradigm for Parity® coalition companies are establishing equitable hiring practices, especially when it comes to increasing women and people of color in leadership ranks. During this time especially, our companies are placing a renewed focus on ensuring their recruiting efforts advance the organizations' goals of creating a diverse pipeline.

Best Practices:

- Engage historically Black colleges and universities as well as community colleges to recruit young people out of college for internships and entry-level positions.

- Train managers on best practices for minimizing bias in the hiring process.
- Work with hiring teams to incorporate blind resume reviews and panels composed of individuals from diverse backgrounds.
- Don't be content with diverse hiring at entry and mid-level positions. Ensure equity goals play a role in promotions across all levels.

4. Seek Out Diverse Suppliers and Partners

Paradigm for Parity® coalition companies acknowledge the importance of reflecting their diversity and inclusion values with the businesses that they partner with.

Best Practices:

- Prioritize investing and incubating businesses that are owned by people of color.
- As companies vet suppliers, consider reviewing how they represent people of color in corporate advertising to ensure it aligns with the company's values.
- Consider donating to organizations that support communities of color or to causes advancing racial justice.

5. Provide Employees Diversity and Inclusion Resources and Trainings

Even in a remote work environment, Paradigm for Parity® coalition companies are pivoting to engage employees in diversity and inclusion training and are providing ongoing resources.

Best Practices:

- Turn regular D&I summits and training sessions into virtual events and webinars focusing on different topics within D&I. For example, coalition companies have found programs focusing on anti-racism efforts, the history of structural racism, unconscious bias, and addressing microaggressions to promote important conversations among employees and build awareness and empathy.
- Provide managers weekly "Inclusion Tips" to support employees and help them cope and thrive in the remote work environment.
- Create a D&I hub with resources for employees covering a wide range of topics including how to get involved in racial justice activities in their community, how to have conversations about race with children, and resources to learn more including podcasts, articles and books.

6. Facilitate Professional Development and Relationship Building for Women and People of Color

Paradigm for Parity® coalition companies are providing mentorship and sponsorship opportunities for employees. And they recognize that in the virtual environment it is even more important to create opportunities for women and people of color to advance in their careers and get the support they need, when casual communications and in-person interactions are limited.

Best Practices:

- Create opportunities for visibility for women and people of color with corporate executives, beyond large Zoom meetings. For example, companies find that small group sessions with

women and senior leaders create sightlines into projects and accomplishments as well as create channels to share ideas and ask questions.

- Continue skill-building opportunities through virtual professional development opportunities and peer to peer sharing.
- Facilitate regular opportunities for employees to network in a social setting, seeking to replicate water cooler conversations. For example, coalition companies are establishing virtual opportunities to connect employees with shared interests - including yoga, recipe sharing, and conversations about different topics including movies and music.

7. Establish Regular Company-Wide Internal Communications

Paradigm for Parity® coalition companies have found that the key to keeping employees connected to the company is having strong two-way internal communications. Without an effective internal communications system in place, some employees will be kept in the dark, in particular those who are not in leadership or who do not have close personal relationships with executives.

Best Practices:

- Launch an intranet site for leaders to communicate directly with employees.
- Provide a regular cadence of employee communications - whether it's a video or weekly newsletter that includes company updates and highlights employee accomplishments.
- Provide toolkits for managers to guide them in managing and supporting employees remotely. Companies have found that incorporating protocols that help managers assess teammates' health and wellbeing can be helpful in identifying any problems and the development of a collaborative process to address challenges.

Key Takeaways

The data is clear, having diverse teams is good for a business's bottom line. At a time when business operations have been upended, it is critical to continue to prioritize diversity and inclusion. Companies cannot afford to go backward on the progress they've made.

The Paradigm for Parity® coalition is pleased to partner with more than 120 companies to help them close the gender gap in corporate leadership - and level the playing field for women of all races, cultures and backgrounds in the workplace.

Participating Companies

The best practices outlined in this white paper were cultivated from a series of conversations with Diversity, Equity and Inclusion executives as well as Human Resource executives from coalition companies, including: APCO, Diageo, Eversource, Ingredion, KeyBank, NFP, Sodexo and Sempra Energy. The coalition thanks our member companies for providing candid, insightful feedback for prioritizing diversity and inclusion, especially during these challenging times.

About Paradigm for Parity®

Launched in 2016, the [Paradigm for Parity](#)® movement is a coalition of business leaders dedicated to addressing the corporate leadership gender gap. The coalition is made up of CEOs, senior executives, founders, board members, and business academics who are committed to achieving a new norm in the corporate world: one in which women and men have equal power, status, and opportunity. The coalition has developed a 5-Point Action Plan comprised of synergistic steps that, when implemented together, catalyze change and enable substantial progress towards gender parity. The ultimate goal is to achieve full gender parity in corporate leadership by 2030, with a near-term goal of women holding at least 30% of senior roles.