

Game on Mole!

If you've ever visited a Chuck E. Cheese or strolled through an arcade you may have stopped to observe, listen and smile at the familiar sights and sounds of swinging mallets, popping moles and repeated laughter. Whac-a-Mole is a high-energy, competitive game of skill – specifically eye-hand coordination. As each plastic mole quickly and randomly pops up, the contestant's job is to force the mole to retreat back into its mole hole.

I have enjoyed playing this game many times with family and friends. Now as you know when we do this work, we live it all the time – everywhere. So, after a recent walk through the arcade, a diversity connection came to mind. It is this... we start the year believing we will make “huge progress this year” and then at the end of the year wonder what we have accomplished. In fact, it seems the year has been consumed with chasing after activities and situations that continued to pop up throughout the year taking us from the strategic, proactive work we set out to do. To a large extent, we are weary and frustrated by expending our time, energy, resources... and our own personal passion playing Whac-a-Mole.

Here's an example: Cheryl (fictitious name) was attracted to a certain Fortune 100 organization by the excitement and challenge of leading their diversity & inclusion initiative and taking it to the next level. Two years later, she leads the diversity & inclusion efforts for a competitor. Cheryl switched companies because she felt frustrated and burned out. She said she was tired of performing reactive, random tactics of hit and miss – she was done whacking at diversity & inclusion moles.

Many of us have experienced this on different levels as we have done the work of diversity inside large and small organizations. Just like in the actual game, we find ourselves reacting to “crises” situations as each one pops to the surface. This is not to say that each situation is not important – but soon the “important” and “urgent” consume our time and energy. This constant whacking away at the important and urgent daily crises keeps us in a spin cycle with little to no time for strategic planning or building a sustainable process.

If Cheryl doesn't set out to fundamentally change things, the same “moles” will present themselves and the game will be re-enacted – diversity & inclusion Whac-a-Mole will continue.

So... how do we get out of the spin cycle and avoid performing reactive, random tactics of hit and miss?

If you are feeling that you are the player in the arcade, here is a process to help you win at **Diversity & Inclusion Whac-a-Mole**:

- 1) Acknowledge that this is the “game” you find yourself playing most of the time. Assess the consequences or impact to you and the organization.
- 2) Identify the reasons why you are caught up in the “game.”
- 3) Name the specific “moles” that you expend time, energy and resources trying to force back into their “mole holes.”
- 4) Decide what you would rather do instead, considering what the organization needs you and hired you to do.
- 5) Propose a strategic framework and a new way forward.
- 6) Choose to make decisions and invest your time in activities which are linked and aligned with your strategy.



Step 1: Acknowledge that this is the “game” you find yourself playing and assess the consequences or impact to you and the organization.

This is the first step in any process. Admitting it to yourself may not be that difficult – you are seeing and feeling the results. It may be harder to quantify and communicate the consequences and impact. Clearly, we must leave room for those unforeseen or unplanned situations... life is full of them. If however, you find that you are spending most of your time whacking away at them, the impact is clear... diversity & inclusion as a strategic, business-relevant process is not gaining traction. And therefore, the company is missing this important strategic business lever.

Step 2: Identify the reasons why you are caught up in the “game.”

Why are you playing Whac-a-Mole? Is it by default or design? Did someone design this approach for you? Did you design it for yourself? Often times when an organization is just beginning a diversity initiative, leaders may not know what the position of Diversity Officer should focus on... so for them, handling all kinds of “diversity-related” situations that pop up is perfectly acceptable. One problem among several with this theory is that many activities or organizational situations can look diversity-related... and yes, you may want and need to be in the communication loop about them... but they might not be your primary focus and can be better handled by someone else. If you have defaulted to playing this game for far too long, it may be that you haven’t designed, communicated and “sold” a more strategic, comprehensive, business-relevant approach.

Step 3: Name the specific “moles” that you expend time, energy and resources trying to force back into their “mole holes.”

This step is a simple one... identify and name the “moles” and purposefully and strategically commit to eliminating them – or at least putting them in check. The moles can include: lack of diversity & inclusion competencies on the part of leaders and managers; lack of organizational commitment; lack of budget and resources; lack of an infrastructure built to sustain the process; on-going harassment and EEO investigations... to name a few.

Step 4: Decide what you would rather do instead, considering what the organization needs you and hired you to do.

You know that your time and the resources of the company can be better spent... so, what is your vision? What do you need to do to help move the business forward? When you review the organization’s strategic direction, mission and key objectives, what role does diversity & inclusion have in the company’s success? How can diversity & inclusion help make the organization more competitive from a workforce, workplace and marketplace perspective? Is there a business case? What is it and is it compelling for your organization?

Step 5: Propose a strategic framework and a new way forward.

Creating your strategic framework including key performance objectives, tactics and action steps is the key to keeping the diversity & inclusion process focused and on track. Your strategic framework and plan is the organization’s approved roadmap for utilizing the D & I process as a strategic business lever and you as a business partner. Your plan should include the support mechanisms needed to sustain the effort and the budget required. An infrastructure should include some, if not all, of the following: chartered diversity councils; employee resource groups (ERGs); Action Teams; and a knowledgeable and skilled diversity department. These entities should be linked and aligned to the strategic framework and to each other. Measurable result targets should be included and your job description and personal performance plan aligned accordingly.

Step 6: Choose to make decisions and invest your time in activities which are linked and aligned with your strategy.

This last step may be the hardest. It follows the adage... plan your work and work your plan. Behaviors, however, are hard to change – yours and the behaviors of others, who for whatever reason, want to keep you whacking away at each and every mole that pops up. This step is also hard because it takes business knowledge and political savvy to discern which activities are moles in disguise and which ones are worthy of adding to your plan. Always assess and calculate the political risk as well as the organizational opportunities when deciding.

Game on, Mole – The Secret to Winning Diversity & Inclusion Whac-a-Mole

Whacking plastic moles for fun is one thing. However, constantly whacking moles professionally is a good indicator that you are acting *reactively* and *tactically* and the game is playing you. Winning at D & I Whac-a-Mole requires that you become *proactive* and *strategic* by creating and executing a business-relevant diversity & inclusion strategy that identifies and prioritizes your tactics and allows you to avoid – or at least manage – moles.

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