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ON BEHALF OF IIDA

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Senior Vice President, International Interior Design Association

The International Interior Design Association (IIDA) is the Commercial Interior Design Association with global reach. We support design professionals, industry affiliates, educators, students, firms, and their clients through our network of 15,000+ members across 58 countries.

We advocate for advancement in education, design excellence, legislation, leadership, accreditation, and community outreach to increase the value and understanding of interior design as a profession that enhances business value and positively impacts the health and well-being of people’s lives every day.

For more information, please visit iida.org.

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Twitter/IIDAHQ

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Report Editor
Diversity in its fullest meaning (racial, gender, generational, cognitive, etc.) was the topic of the 2016 IIDA Industry Roundtable. It proved an especially rich and intriguing subject that’s germane to business, yet highly personal—one’s view of it being shaped by his or her life experiences and value system. Myriad studies conducted across all industry sectors have demonstrated that a diverse and inclusive workforce is a competitive advantage, a driver of innovation that’s good for creativity and for the bottom line. Diverse companies perform better financially, solve problems faster and more innovatively, and are more immune to the perils of groupthink.

The benefits of a pluralist staff have even been proven by mathematical modeling, notably in “The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies,” by Scott E. Page. In a February, 2016 New York Times interview, Page explained that his research showed “diverse groups of problem-solvers outperformed the groups of the best individuals at solving problems. The reason: The benefits of a pluralist staff have even been proven by mathematical modeling, notably in “The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies,” by Scott E. Page. In a February, 2016 New York Times interview, Page explained that his research showed “diverse groups of problem-solvers outperformed the groups of the best individuals at solving problems. The reason: And though interior design research conducted by the nonprofit Catalyst found that companies with more female board members outperform their male-dominated counterparts by 33% on return on equity, 42% on return on sales, and 66% on return on invested capital.

But despite awareness of diversity’s social and monetary value, many firms and organizations don’t do everything in their power to both engage and support it—particularly with respect to racial and ethnic diversity.

"The Center for Talent Innovation developed a “diversity dividend” showing that publicly traded organizations with a combination of diversity traits both inherent (racial, gender, etc.) and acquired (cultural fluency, generational savvy) were 70% more likely to capture a new market, and 45% more likely to improve market share.

"Research conducted by the nonprofit Catalyst found that companies with more female board members outperform their male-dominated counterparts by 33% on return on equity, 42% on return on sales, and 66% on return on invested capital.

I like people who think a bit differently than the other members of my team and who possess skills that I do not because I believe a good team is made up of complements, not copies, and I welcome the opportunity to learn something new from my team members.

I’ve been fortunate to work with people who think, act, believe, and work differently than I do, and it’s made me more open-minded and well-rounded.

As workplaces embrace diversity, they realize benefits that help improve their companies: more varied ideas, increased international opportunities, and new perspectives.

GABRIELLE BUL洛克, IIDA, FAIA, NOMA, LEED AP BD+C
Perkins+Will’s Director of Global Diversity, Gabrielle Bullock was a special guest and speaker at the 2016 Industry Roundtable. Bullock is the longtime head of the Los Angeles office and a leader of large-scale, complex, and program-intensive projects such as the Ronald Reagan UCLA Medical Center and the USC Zinna Neuroscience Institute. A lifelong advocate for pluralism in the design world, she believes the diversity of professions should reflect the society they serve in order to remain competitive and relevant, and she has more recently taken on oversight of Perkins+Will’s firmwide diversity initiative. She was also the second-ever black female graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design’s architecture program. A member of the National Organization of Minority Architects, Bullock has been inducted into the National Association of Women Business Owners’ Leadership and Legacy Hall of Fame.

By the Numbers

• In February, the Peterson Institute for International Economics and EY (formerly Ernst & Young) released a study correlating a zero to 30% increase in a company’s share of female leaders to a 15% rise in profitability.

• The Center for Talent Innovation developed a “diversity dividend” showing that publicly traded organizations with a combination of diversity traits both inherent (racial, gender, etc.) and acquired (cultural fluency, generational savvy) were 70% more likely to capture a new market, and 45% more likely to improve market share.

• Research conducted by the nonprofit Catalyst found that companies with more female board members outperform their male-dominated counterparts by 33% on return on equity, 42% on return on sales, and 66% on return on invested capital.

There is absolutely a gender imbalance at the very top: only 25% of firm leaders are female.

Jenner Ter Horst, Haworth

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These are urgent matters that we don’t always treat as such. But the health and well-being of our profession depends upon committed, tenacious, and unfailing efforts to create a diverse and inclusive workforce. Passivity is not an option.

IIDA is making strides toward a corrective. In the galvanizing and idealistic spirit of the weekend, the event culminated with the groundbreaking formation of the IIDA Diversity Council—the design industry’s first such body.

Chaired by Milliken’s Stacy Walker and with an inaugural membership comprised of the 29 roundtable participants (a mix of manufacturer and design representatives), the council’s first act was creating a diversity intention statement for the profession (see page 29). Among other benchmarks, the council will fund diversity research, promote diversity resources, and develop a curriculum that encourages students of diverse backgrounds to pursue design careers. All such initiatives are intended to support designers, firms, and manufacturers in their own vital efforts to improve diversity in their ranks.
LEAST DIVERSE PROFESSIONS:
1. Law/legal practice
2. Veterinary medicine
3. Aviation/pilots
4. Chiropractors
5. Architecture
6. EMT and paramedics
7. Congress and Senate

THE CONSTRUCTION INDUSTRY WAS THE THIRD-LOWEST SCORER IN A FORBES STUDY ON DIVERSITY.

Sister-profession architecture is similarly homogeneous (and its racial makeup better documented). Per 2015 data collected by the Bureau of Labor Statistics, architects are:

- 77% White
- 7.6% Asian
- 5.8% Black
- 5.7% Hispanic
- 25.7% Women

(To put that figure in perspective, the least racially diverse profession—law—is 81% white.)

And designers of all genres—the Labor Department doesn’t distinguish—are:

- 40% White
- 6.9% Asian
- 3.5% Black
- 6.9% Hispanic
- 8.2% Women

Comments from roundtable participants—minority and otherwise—testified to this imbalance:

- At my first post-collegiate place of employment, I was one of only two African-American A&D professionals. I have seen few people of color in my 20-plus years in the profession.
- My workplace has only one LGBT employee, and the sole ethnicity is white, Anglo-Saxon American.
- The design firms I’ve worked for have not been ethnically or gender diverse at all. They have been male-dominated and largely white.
- I was the only guy in my interior design program at university.

OVER-REPRESENTATION BY GROUPS IN THE FIELD OF:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community/social service organizations</th>
<th>African-Americans</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Software engineering</td>
<td>Asians</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>Hispanics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human resources</td>
<td>Women</td>
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According to a 2015 study conducted by Interior Design magazine.

Gabrielle Bullock introduced herself to the roundtable as representing the “0.3% of African-American licensed women architects in the U.S.; there are 347 total.” She continued, “We just passed the 2,000 mark of African-American licensed architects.”

Do the math: that means only 17% of black architects are female—a minority within a minority.
Roundtable participants were given a questionnaire to fill out in advance of the event to gauge their opinions about and experiences with workplace diversity. One question posed was:

**WE ARE NOT AS DIVERSE AS WE THINK WE ARE**

What accounts for this disparity between reality and perception, between hard fact and subjective impression? Perhaps attendees’ experiences are not reflective of the industry norm. Perhaps it’s denial. Or is it something more complicated and nuanced? The weekend’s discussion teased out numerous contributing factors.

**DESIGN IS CONSIDERED ONE OF THE LEAST DIVERSE PROFESSIONS. DO YOU AGREE?**

Interestingly, responses indicated that many design industry insiders do not consider the field lacking in diversity. A sampling of comments:

- This has not been my experience within my organization or team.
- I do not agree. I feel the design profession is very diverse.
- I disagree with this statement. I would like to see the data backing this up.
- With limited sampling, I would have to disagree: My workforce is comprised of multiple generations, races, and religions.
- I disagree. The design industry has employed some of the most diverse people in terms of character, ethnicity, race, color, and gender... more so than other industries.

"WE HAVE DIVERSITY OF SKILLS. As our organizations become more multidisciplinary, our teams are increasingly diverse with respect to expertise. "Post-disciplinary" was the term Edwin Beltran used to describe NBBJ's integration of neuroscientists, behaviorists, a healthcare futurist, and a former hospital CEO into the firm's design teams. These specialists, he explained, "have become translators, helping us work with clients in a more productive manner. It's really improved the quality of our work."

"WE HAVE DIVERSITY OF AGE. Design firms and manufacturers are consumed and preoccupied by management issues stemming from another facet of diversity: demographic. Discussions of the microgenerational divide and the resultant culture clash of working styles stoked heated debate and flared emotions—much more so than any of the weekend's conversations about race."
My view of diversity. That is a telling qualifier, and one most Roundtable participants used to frame their opinions about the subject. And, as Durst pointed out, far more people prefaced their comments with the phrase “I feel” than with “I think.” Diversity is a highly personal topic that we inevitably view through the lens of our own value system, background, and life experiences. Accordingly, everyone interprets the word a bit differently. “Our definitions of diversity are all over the map—as they should be,” said Bullock.

[ Diversity is] a workplace or team comprised of different perspectives, strengths, experience levels, and philosophies.

Marlene M. Liriano, IA Interior Architects

Diversity exists when a group’s members vary in race, age, background, gender, sexual orientation, and perspective.

Julio Boga, IA Interior Architects

Inclusive and tolerant.

Shauna Stahleth, Luhf Branded Environments

Having no boundaries or limits based on gender, race, sexuality, education, social class, or beliefs.

Krystal Lucero, Edwards+Mulhausen Interior Design

Diversity needs to be understood on broad terms. We cannot just think of it as race or religion. It includes sexual preference, gender identity, ethnic customs, generation, even personalities (introvert versus extrovert, for instance).

Daniel J. Tuohy, Tuohy Furniture Company

Simply to have a wide variety.

Kristin Tompkins, Humanscale

Having a wide variety of people, clients, resources, talent, project types, opinions, and styles make a diverse whole. Some organizations have a bent on diversity toward people, others toward skills.

Brett Sheweny, AECOM

A truly diverse work environment, and one that thrives through innovation and creative energy, requires building a team around diversity of professional background and expertise; cultural experiences, educational backgrounds, personal interest, thinking styles, etc.

Edwin Beltran, NBBJ
The aforementioned diversity traits fall into two camps: inherent—those we were born with (gender, race)—and acquired, referring to characteristics like work style and worldview that are shaped by our life experience. Studies reveal that organizations are at their best, operating at maximum creativity and critical thinking, when they have both types of diversity in their ranks. One or the other is not good enough.

Complicating our pursuit of a varied staff makeup, inherent attributes can be difficult to discern accurately during a traditional interview. It may be obvious to determine a job candidate’s race or gender, but figuring out what type of thinker they are will involve a protracted interview process.

Many participants divulged that they’ve at times felt marginalized over the course of their design careers. “We all know what it’s like to be the ‘only’ in a room: designer, female, black, disabled, etc.,” said moderator Cheryl Durst. “Part of diversity,” she added, “is telling our stories, sharing our full selves.” Here are some that were particularly affecting, and that changed many attendees’ perspectives on the urgency of striving for racial equity:

Herman Miller’s Jeffrey Gay on founding Sepia, a casual networking event for black designers: “There was a group of us in D.C.; we used to see each other around and at meetings, and do the ‘black nod.’ One day we were like, ‘Wouldn’t it be nice to meet up?’ So we created an informal group for black designers—interior designers, architects, and manufacturers. The size went from 20 to 35 to 75. Then brokers wanted to come, people from the periphery of the industry. Last time, we even had students. It was nice. You don’t realize the impact of just being there together.”

Gabrielle Bullock on why she went into the field: “Designers have a powerful impact on the environment, and I want more people who look like me to have a say in that. Growing up, I had seen what architecture does to our communities; they suck. I wanted to change how my people live.”

Shauna Stallworth of Luhf Branded Environments on her entry into design: “I was raised in Cincinnati and went to a progressive high school, a real melting pot. I’d been successful all my life. Then I went to a university where I was the only black person in the school of architecture. Confidence was not enough. I was paralyzed; I felt isolated and scared. There is so much more to being successful at university that I was not aware of. It’s not just about being skilled and smart; you need to feel safe and nurtured. All the white male professors treated me like, ‘What can you possibly bring to the discipline of architecture?’ I was crushed. Gensler had been in my life plan. I washed out, as they say—even though I had a great support system! Then I enrolled in Howard. There was an intangible ‘other’ than just being able to do the work. It was about being comforted, feeling as though the people around me in the studio were going to be the best and brightest. They all looked like me; we were all moving forward as a group. Had you told me at 17 that that was important, I would have said, ‘Please, I am used to everyone. I’ll slide on in and make it work.’ But that was not the case.”
Those who inhabit the schools, offices, hospitals, and hotels we design are typically much more representative of the general populace. As a service-minded profession, we need to be as pluralistic as the communities we serve.

"Without diversity, design will lack the necessary input to develop products, environments, and tools for our ever-changing multicultural future," noted Formica’s Scott Dannenfelser.

"Diversity improves critical thinking. By disrupting conformity, racial and ethnic diversity prompts people to scrutinize facts, think more deeply, and develop their own opinions." Sheen S. Levine and David Stark, “Diversity Makes You Brighter,” The New York Times

The users of the spaces we design are not the only ones becoming more diverse, so are the people who hire us. “Our clients don’t look like they did 20 years ago,” said Bullock. “So if we go into an interview and we are all white men and our client is not, then we won’t get the project.”

Many of our target industries are themselves models of multiculturalism. The hotel and catering sector ranks as the most ethnically diverse workforce, followed closely by the healthcare industry. Per Forbes, the top most racially diverse industries are:

- Hospitality
- Healthcare
- Transport and communications
- Public administration

Most diverse vis-à-vis proportion of female employment:

- Healthcare
- Hospitality
- Education
- Business/financial services

Making a concerted effort to increase diversity is imperative to the survival of our organizations and, potentially, the profession itself—certainly for the quality and innovation of the work we do.

As a global company doing work all over the world, we are not doing our job if we are not culturally aware.

Gabrielle Bullock
Building diversity is also vital for another reason: recruitment. The talent pipeline—the next generation of professionals—more closely mirrors the U.S. populace. The future of interior design will be much more colorful: Of the 10,000 students enrolled in NASID-accredited interior design and interior architecture programs, minority percentages have in every case doubled over the last 15 years (though there’s still much room for improvement):

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Asian</th>
<th>Hispanic</th>
<th>Black</th>
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<tr>
<td>11%</td>
<td>6%</td>
<td>3%</td>
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And a recent survey of AIA associate members—the not-yet-licensed architects who represent the years (though there’s still much room for improvement): interior design and interior architecture programs, minority percentages have in every case doubled over the last 15 years (though there’s still much room for improvement):

<table>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>6%</td>
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<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>8%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Asian</td>
<td>10-11%</td>
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These figures, too, are at least double the current percentages. That’s great progress—but also no excuse to become complacent. As Bullock noted, “These guys are not yet licensed, if we take our eyes off the ball, we’ll revert back.” Industry leaders must ensure those impressionable neophytes don’t “wash out,” as 32% of the profession did during the recent recession. We can’t afford another talent drain.

One-third of the 21,000 students enrolled in the CIDA-certified interiors programs will be graduating this year, meaning some 7,000 building designers will be looking for jobs. Will they be put off by the existing lack of inherent diversity traits they discover in the field? “You want to see people like you,” says Krystal Lucero of Edwards-Mulhausen Interior Design. “I’ve been a designer for 10 years, but it was only four years ago that I finally became an IDA Member—I wasn’t sure it was for me. Then I attended an event and saw Cheryl’s face. It made me smile.” Firms that don’t represent diversity will have a hard time recruiting and retaining minority talent. If we don’t collectively and collectively pursue measures to make all ethnicities feel that there’s a place for them, there’s a strong chance of attrition.

Inspirational role models and mentors representative of minority groups also need to be more visible. “There’s a lack of (minority) role models within the industry,” observed Dannerfelder. “Young professionals and students of diverse backgrounds need to identify with others who are similar to encourage them to seek a career in the field.”

Participants unanimously touted minority outreach and education as pivotal to solving the issue of racial inequity:

**The number of times I’ve had an 8th grader ask me, ‘What does an architect do?’ is staggering and unacceptable.**

Chris A. Ciftis, Griffin Interactive Design Inc.

**We need to look further into the future, to the next generation—at younger students who may not understand what the practice of interior design entails, and don’t consider it to be an attainable or lucrative profession. Many get discouraged by ‘barriers to entry both perceived and actual,’ said Stallworth. Gay elaborated. “There is a lack of awareness [among minorities] that design is a viable career for them due to lack of knowledge and exposure in their personal experience.” Reduced funding for arts education in public schools has further squeezed minorities’ exposure to creative fields. “Change needs to happen at the early childhood education level, to allow kids of all backgrounds exposure to the possibilities of careers in these professions,” asserted Busch. “We also have an obligation to show school-aged children the number of opportunities available to them within the profession,” said Stallworth. “Not everyone is going to be the firm principal.” She argued for more internships, mentorships, camps, scholarships, and in-school activities—‘touchable outlets,’ as she called them—at the high school level are needed to enable students to build literacy and awareness about the industry.**

**One step in the right direction: IIDA is working with the National Association of Elementary School Guidance Counselors to communicate the profession involves and what types of students (and skill sets) might be predisposed to enjoying or having success in the field. The goal is to leave counselors better equipped, and with the proper vocabulary, to talk about careers in design. “So when a student says, ‘I like this,’ the guidance counselor knows to ask, ‘Have you thought about design or architecture?’” explained Durst.**

**Designers becoming more involved in schools in disadvantaged communities will go a long way to introducing them to the profession. Educating families, though, is just as important as educating students. “It starts at home with something being an ‘approved’ profession,” said Lucero. “Most parents in black communities still encourage their kids to become a teacher, doctor, or lawyer. Having a degree in interior design is still not well known, so a career does not seem legitimate.” Bullock agreed. “When I was 12, I told my mom I was going to be an architect. Her reply was, ‘I don’t know how you came up with that!’”**
DIVERSITY DOESN’T COME NATURALLY

Diversity will always take effort. It may be the state of the world, but it is not the default mode of most industries or offices. There are numerous reasons for this. First, as OFS Brands’ Doug Shapiro pointed out, “a profession is by definition kind of the opposite of diversity. When you select something you love doing daily, that selection itself says a lot about you. Inside every profession, you tend to see similar people.” Recruiting practices typically reinforce that notion: We hire for fit and for culture, which often means prioritizing other values over diversity for diversity’s sake.

“Companies tend to lean toward like-minded people rather than push for different perspectives,” said Mohawk Group’s Jackie Dettmar. “Company cultures can also stifle diversity by not understanding how to listen to and engage different personality types. Then you get an office monoculture versus a culture that embraces many voices and viewpoints.”

In addition, noted Gensler’s James (Jim) Williamson, design is a risk-adverse industry: “Our fees and compensation versus the scale of specification of goods and materials—does not allow us to take risks with new ideas and design solutions,” he explained. “The client not only must buy into the new idea, but also assume the risk associated with implementing it and living with it long term. This goes against the grain of diverse thinking.”
THE ROLE GEOGRAPHY PLAYS

For manufacturers, location often works against diversity, too. Many are headquartered in semirural areas that are not exactly hotbeds of multiculturalism: Western Michigan; East Greenville, Pennsylvania; Muscotine, Iowa. “The regional cultural surroundings and ethnicity makes it hard to find candidates [in the local talent pool] to fill a mold or requirement,” said NELSON’s Scott Hierlinger.

It’s also tough to recruit outsiders from more urban areas. “We can’t get anyone to move here,” was a common refrain. Luring new hires to the nearest big city—sometimes an hour’s commute away—is one option. But, noted one participant, “The company gets mad when employees don’t want to live where the factory is. It comes down to company ego and organizational arrogance.”

Simply traveling to a small town for an interview—let alone relocating there—can be a scary prospect for minorities. “I can tell you, as a black man, it was terrifying to visit Jasper, Indiana!” affirmed Gay. “In terms of recruiting, a lot of companies are missing the other part of the picture: your family. They don’t want to move to these places. When we’re talking about inclusion, we have to think about not only the company, but also the community—and invest in making the community more welcoming and inclusive.”

That is something OFS Brands is doing in Huntingburg, Indiana, population 6,057. “It’s hard for us to attract enough talent with big exposure to the ‘outside world,’” said Shapiro. “Huntingburg is never going to be a metropolis. So we are building things to attract culture. We started a co-working space and a coffee shop, and are converting a major street into a pedestrian area.”

When managers do entice star hires, it might not be for the long haul. “I may get the star for three years before they move on,” said Dettmar. “But I will try to get as much as I can from them for three years. We also work hard to create a culture and atmosphere in the design studio that makes people want to stay. Working with people you love will keep you somewhere a lot longer.”

Many leaders explained that in lieu of being able to achieve racial and ethnic diversity, they are focusing on maximizing other types of diversity. “Chatfield, a town of 2,500 in rural Minnesota, has as little diversity as you’re going to see,” said Tuohy Furniture Company’s Daniel Tuohy. “So we take advantage of what other diversities we do have—age, religion, gender, sexual preference.”

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The industry is well-intentioned, but has work to do. Though our organizations do tend to exhibit a variety of acquired diversity traits—work style, personality, expertise, etc.—it falls short in terms of inherent traits like race, ethnicity, and gender. So how do we effect change and achieve adequate progress? The formation of the IIDA Diversity Council is a big step forward. But there are actions we can take on an organizational level to slowly turn the wheel.

1. Initiate Discussions About Race

In her provocative and engaging TED talk, financier/philanthropist Mellody Hobson made a compelling case for business leaders to be “color brave”—emboldened and enlightened to address the sensitive issue of racial diversity (or lack thereof). “Smart companies deal with [race] head on,” she asserted. “The subject matter can be hard, awkward, and uncomfortable. We should learn to be comfortable being uncomfortable.” She deemed the prevalent policy of color blindness “damaging,” undermining diversity efforts by inhibiting us from discussing or even acknowledging race. Said Stallworth, “Race enters every equation. If we are uncomfortable talking about it, we’ll never get to a solution.”

“I ENCOURAGE YOU TO HAVE THOSE BOLD AND BRAVE DISCUSSIONS BECAUSE THEY ARE THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM.”
Gabrielle Bullock, Perkins+Will

2. Define Diversity for Your Organization

As evidenced by the weekend’s discussion, every individual has his or her own definition of diversity, inclusion, and engagement. Thus, it’s vital that firms establish their own definition, and communicate their vision so staffers can be on the same page and work toward a common goal.

3. Create and Enforce a Diversity Agenda

Based on attendees’ “homework” responses, companies diverged when it came to having a concrete diversity plan or policy in place. Some do, some don’t; those that do don’t necessarily follow through with them. “The worst thing is to have a policy that sits in a drawer and doesn’t impact the corporate culture,” lamented Bullock.

This is a lost opportunity in more ways than one. Firms and manufacturers find that clients often inquire about diversity practices and factor it in when choosing which designer to hire and what furniture to specify. “Lots of clients are driven by metrics that measure our ability to provide what they’d call diversity,” explained one designer. George Bandy Jr. of Interface likes to exploit this as a springboard to a deeper, more nuanced discussion about diversity. “I always use the ‘box check’ to get a meeting, so I can then step outside the box and explain our history and story, and get clients to start thinking about the box differently. It’s an opportunity to have a conversation that’s much more significant. It sets the expectation higher—and gets you the return business.”

Inclusion, acceptance, and engagement are three words that we can rally behind. And let’s not make it difficult.
Shauna Stallworth, Luhf Branded Environments

“I ENCOURAGE YOU TO HAVE THOSE BOLD AND BRAVE DISCUSSIONS BECAUSE THEY ARE THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM.”
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Diversity is the mix; inclusion is what you do with the mix. It’s the difference between just asking someone to the party versus asking them to dance. Gabrielle Bullock, Perkins+Will

4. MAKE THE PIE BIGGER

Only a handful of designers and manufacturers mentioned that they actively seek out diverse candidates when recruiting, and very few made it a top priority. One: because they don’t necessarily view a lack of workplace diversity as a big problem, and two: because they did feel an urgent need to recruit and hire “great talent” that is “a cultural fit.” Explained Dina Griffin of Interactive Design, Inc., who is African-American and the president of her company. “You’d think it would be the easiest thing in the world for our firm to be diverse, but it’s not. As a small firm, I can’t hire just for the sake of diversity.”

But Bullock pointed out that if we cast the net wider, we will attract better and more diverse talent simultaneously. “Have a pool of candidates that generally reflects the population,” she offered. “I’m not saying split the pie differently; just make it a bigger pie.” Added Stallworth, “We are creative. We dig, We look for every opportunity to create the best design. But we are not doing it when we look for people.”

For those who need more incentive to hire diverse versus “the best candidate,” consider what’s known as the paradox of meritocracy, a phenomenon that can cloud objectivity:

According to the Los Angeles Times, “At least one study has shown that the more meritocratic people try to be, the less meritocratic their hiring and promotion decisions actually are. In other words, people are more likely to give big raises to men and small raises to women if they’re told to base their decisions exclusively on meritocratic principles.”

5. BE INCLUSIVE

A key takeaway from the weekend’s discussion was the need to support diversity via inclusive practices. Hiring a diverse team is not enough. For diversity to succeed, all employees need to feel safe, comfortable, and encouraged by managers and colleagues alike. Leadership needs to know how to nurture inclusivity, and how to patrol for discrimination both active and passive. A generally tolerant, liberal attitude is not the same thing as deliberately going the extra mile to ensure workers of all stripes feel at home. “You can hire whoever you want, but if they don’t feel welcome, they’re gone,” said Gay. “Diversity can’t just be lip service, the feel-good poster on the wall. You have to go all the way.”

SOME READING


Diversity at Work: Creating an Inclusive and Supportive Work Environment
http://hrcouncil.ca/hr-toolkit/diversity-supportive-environment.cfm

http://www.theguardian.com/women-in-leadership/2014/may/14/create-more-inclusive-workplace-culture


6. GO BEYOND THE POSTER

Use marketing efforts to signal that you support and embrace diversity. One example: Primo Orpilla of O+A shared his new website design, which effectively illustrates his firm’s multiracial makeup. “Our leadership includes people who are half-Asian, African-American, gay, and [Filipino]; we are pretty diverse across the board. And so is the entire firm.” The website showcases everyone—from designers to the controller—alongside their responses to a humorous, but insightful Q&A where their biography would typically reside. “It’s not about pedigree or what college you went to. It’s about having the right people and celebrating the collective.”

7. LOOK FOR OPPORTUNITIES TO MOVE THE AGENDA FORWARD

Building a diverse workforce can be a vexing challenge, especially for companies not located in diverse communities, and often takes years. In the meantime, there’s still a lot of other things you can do to invest in future diversity. Take the long view. “Find other avenues for change,” suggested Stallworth. “Reach beyond what’s immediate and look forward to opportunities where you can make a change—even if it’s to invest in a coffee shop in your town. That’s where growth happens.”

“If we don’t keep moving forward, we’ll slip backwards. Never give up on progress.” Jackie Dettmar, Mohawk Group

8. ACT LOCAL

Support programs and initiatives in your community that serve underprivileged populations, in order to build awareness of what design is, and show that it’s in fact a viable career path. Become involved in public school STEM/STEAM initiatives through volunteer opportunities, or as a mentor or visiting critic.
Workplace diversity is a complex issue. Reaping its myriad (and well-researched) benefits requires curating a staff that’s varied on both levels: inherent and acquired. A perfectly calibrated mix of ethnicities, genders, worldviews, and work styles can be hard to achieve—and hard to manage, requiring inclusive measures, a “color brave” attitude, and sustained attentiveness. But the results are worth it: more (and more inspiring) ideas, more creative work, financial gains, and upholding social justice.

Collectively, the design industry is not yet as diverse as it could or should be, but intentionality and collaboration will get us there. It will involve working together to share best practices, to create a common message, and to show a unified front. We can be a leader in thought and in practice, creating an exportable model for other industries—just like we were for sustainability.

Interior designers and manufacturer representatives have to do the hard work, because it matters—to the profession and to the world.

“With focus and milestones, we will be the most inclusive and influential body of creative folks,” said Stallworth. “We will move things forward because we are the idea folks. We motivate, strengthen, enforce, initiate, and influence.” We have to use that influence to design a better world.

CONCLUSION:

TURNING A CONVERSATION ABOUT DIVERSITY INTO A MOVEMENT

Gabrielle Bullock, Perkins+Will

“After my appointment as Director of Global Diversity, I took a deep dive into the firm, visiting each office and having honest—and at times uncomfortable—discussions. I asked the staff what they thought about diversity and inclusion, and get unique perspectives. In some offices (the consensus) was race, in some it was gender, and in some it was generational.

The yearlong process gave me an idea of the challenges and how to address them uniquely. It was clear that we needed training. So I engaged a trainer to deliver a half-day workshop to the leadership in each office. Through that process the offices decided what their specific challenges were and created their own strategic plan.

They weren’t looking for diverse candidates, and to them it wasn’t important.

Since then, the Minnesota office has done things to attract talent, getting involved in NDiMA and schools and universities outside the area. They are not hiring diverse candidates yet, but they are investing in the future.

We made this an accountable program and assess progress according to our stated goals. The initiative is part of our culture and part of our evaluation process: We measure each office for social responsibility, sustainability, and design quality. We try to look at everything through a diversity lens. The board and the CEO get a progress report every year, and so does each office leader. It’s up to each office to communicate (the results) to the staff. Responsibility has to trickle down—I don’t want to be the voice.

I’ve been on a number of diversity task forces and committees in my 27 years, and until now it went nowhere. You need focus, a leader, funding, and a feeling of: If we don’t do this, something is wrong.”
IIDA DIVERSITY INTENTION STATEMENT

The International Interior Design Association (IIDA), in recognizing that diversity is the catalyst for innovation, thought leadership, cultural relevance, and creativity, hereby confirms its commitment to the implementation of a comprehensive Diversity Initiative on behalf of its Members and the profession of Interior Design. IIDA will be steadfast and resolute in the advancement of equity and inclusion in the professional practice of design and throughout all sectors of the design industry.

To that end, the Association will be a fundamental resource, providing diversity education, mentorship, outreach, and scholarship, toward the goal of a broader and more inclusive profession that better reflects the global society in which we all live and work and for whom we create exceptional interior environments. Diversity has always been a core value and foundational concept for the Association and its Members. Our intent with this initiative is to further prepare design professionals to work in an increasingly diverse and global society by promoting equity and justice for all individuals and to create opportunities for those traditionally underrepresented in the profession of Interior Design. To that end, we will actively work to eliminate barriers and obstacles created by institutional discrimination, long-standing habit, and an overall lack of awareness.

It is our goal to identify challenges in this profession and to discover, define, and deliver comprehensive education and solutions.

Some diversity-related challenges faced by the design profession include the lack of equitable access and awareness of career information and ultimately a decided misrepresentation in interior design by a diverse community that may include, but is not limited to, race, ethnicity, culture, religion, language, socioeconomic status, gender, sexual orientation, age, and physical abilities.

As an organization, IIDA will work toward:

- Actively recruiting and sustaining a diverse member body.
- Sustaining a diverse International Board of Directors and Headquarters Staff.
- Creating a formal Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Model Policy that can be adopted by IIDA Chapters, design firms, and industry-related organizations.
- Supporting and engaging an active Diversity Council comprised of all segments of the Commercial Interior Design profession.
- Integrating diversity-related knowledge, skills, and experiences throughout all efforts of the Association.
  - Identifying and addressing issues and needs of underserved populations.
  - Identifying and addressing global diversity issues and needs.
- Conducting comprehensive research about diversity in the design profession and in areas that have impact for a diverse population.

RESOURCES


http://www.entrepreneur.com/article/240550

https://hbr.org/2013/12/how-diversity-can-drive-innovation/7

Bouree Lam, “The Least Diverse Jobs in America,” The Atlantic, June 29, 2015

Marianne Cooper, “The False Promise of Meritocracy,” The Atlantic, December 1, 2015


“The Diversity & Inclusion: Unlocking Global Potential,” Forbes Insights
