

Briefing Bite

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**BOSTON WOMEN'S
WORKFORCE COUNCIL**



Getting Serious About Diversity: Enough Already With the Business Case

Featuring Robin Ely

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OVERVIEW

Professor Robin Ely dismissed common myths about diversity and its benefits in business and shared her research on DEI efforts made by organizations of all sizes. Her overall conclusion is that **there is proof of correlation, but not causation** when it comes to efforts to diversify and positive impact an organization's bottom line.

What the research does show, however, is that organizations that do the hard work to diversify and treat cultural differences as a resource for learning are better able to achieve their goals. Fostering this growth can lead to many benefits down the line such as high retention and employee satisfaction.



OVERVIEW CONT.

Interestingly, many of the common interventions used by organizations today such as mentoring programs, implicit bias training, and flexibility opportunities, while well-intentioned, often actually lead to **less** equity in the workplace.

Overall, Professor Ely found that the best way to bring about diversity is to change the company culture, which is no easy task. Organizational cultures are steeped in deeply embedded (untested) assumptions about the nature of work and talent. It requires a change in “hearts and minds” and **must start at the top**. Cultural changes only happen when the CEO and other senior executives are **willing to understand their own behaviors** that might be encouraging the status quo, even as they talk about diversity.





TAKING ACTION

In what she called the “nuts and bolts of culture change”, Professor Ely pointed to four action items:

1. Develop an aspirational vision and rationale for the company and communicate it often
2. Do the diagnosis (i.e. who is hired, promotion opportunities, and turnover)
3. Convene a guiding coalition of credible, influential, powerful people to spearhead the change
4. Hold these same people accountable; recognize and reward change

SUMMARY

In summary, leaders must not only invest in employee development and foster a growth mindset in the culture of the organization, but also invest in their **own** development and foster a growth mindset in **themselves**.

Furthermore, they must be transparent about the change they intend to make and how they will accomplish it.