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**Voices from the Academy: A Response to President Donald Trump's Anti-DEI Policies**

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**VOICES FROM THE ACADEMY:  
A RESPONSE TO PRESIDENT DONALD TRUMP'S ANTI-DEI POLICIES**

Our research underscores the importance of improving, not eliminating, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) programs. While DEI initiatives are well-intended, they sometimes lead to unintended consequences such as backlash, stigma, and perceptions of unfairness. So, rather than eliminating DEI efforts, organizations should focus on improving them by expanding inclusive hiring practices, establishing clear accountability measures, integrating DEI into workplace strategy and culture, and implementing a comprehensive evaluation system. Strengthening these programs ensures they effectively promote fairness, reduce bias, and create truly inclusive environments—ultimately benefiting employees, businesses, and society. In short: *mend it, don't end it.*

Herman Aguinis

*Avram Tucker Distinguished Scholar and Professor of Management  
The George Washington University*

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Aggrieved manhood is back with a vengeance and flooding all fronts. Trump is but one distracting vessel, best starved of the attention he craves. Tune out the blitz to focus on the fact that the agenda he serves spells death. Behind cries to 'end DEI' and 'drill baby drill' is a fragile ego-in-common willing to kill us all for another hit of supremacy. Not even straight white cis men can survive the coming wreckage of earth and soul. May all who seek to shed ego for the joy of sustaining life join hands. Let's face it: DEI as we knew it was made for a dying world. We can mourn this *and* (re)make it better, together.

Karen Lee Ashcraft

*Professor of Communication  
University of Colorado, Boulder*

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The systematic opposition and backlash against DEI are daunting. We will not accept the simplistic framing of DEI as going too far. We know that DEI calls out and counters widespread systemic discrimination, racism and sexism. In these difficult times, we need cool heads, warm hearts and strong hopes that we can organize in solidarity, keeping our eyes on the ball of justice. No anticipatory self-disciplining to discard DEI, but taking the words of feminist Kathy Ferguson and continue to develop radically different ways of knowing that trouble power relations, imagine better worlds and work to achieve them.

Yvonne Benschop

*Professor of Strategic Human Resource Management  
Radboud Universiteit*

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5 The recent executive orders targeting Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) signed by the  
6 president have the potential to reverse decades of progress in fostering inclusion and promoting a  
7 just society. While these orders claim to restore meritocracy, DEI scholars and practitioners  
8 recognize the underlying implications. This shift could lead to increased inequality,  
9 discrimination, and a lack of equity. Meritocracy, as it is often idealized, does not exist in many  
10 organizations. Well-designed and effectively implemented DEI strategies are essential for  
11 addressing systemic inequalities and biases.  
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14 Furthermore, there is significant concern regarding research with a DEI component, such as  
15 studies on health disparities across all communities. It is imperative that we continue to strive for  
16 equity. ¡Adelante!  
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18 Donna Maria Blancero  
19 *Bentley University*  
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24 Before you react to Trump’s first week back in office attacks on DEI, take time to understand the  
25 long-game his coalition of Libertarians and White Christian Nationalists are playing. First, its  
26 questionable if the U.S. was even set up as a democracy for it has structural barriers to ensure  
27 minority rule – which this past week has become more visible – read - Levitsky and Ziblatt’s  
28 “Tyranny of the Minority” and their earlier “How Democracies Die.” Also read Stanley “How  
29 Fascism Works.” But even before these scholars read – Mayer’s “Dark Money” to understand  
30 the Libertarian plan and how they are buying a pro-business revolution to make capitalism safe  
31 from democracy. Also read – MacLean’s “Democracy in Chains.” For how this plays out in  
32 higher education, read – Wilson and Kamola’s “Free Speech and Koch Money.” To understand  
33 the long game of how Libertarians captured SCOTUS and overturned Roe v. Wade and enacted  
34 the dark money of Citizens United, the podcast “We Don’t Talk About Leonard” is excellent.  
35 The Libertarians are highly unpopular and aligned with the boots on the ground of the White  
36 Christian Nationalists who want to turn the U.S into a theocracy – this webinar helps one under  
37 the New Apostolic Reformation<sup>1</sup>. Hochchild’s “Stolen Pride” tells us how Trump has tapped  
38 into the shame of WCNs and used it for his benefit. If you want to be successful, you have to  
39 understand and counter long-game and the structural flaws in American democracy.  
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44 Cliff Cheng  
45 *Bard Center for the Study of Hate*  
46 *Bard College*  
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51 In critical moments, those in power often seek to impose their worldviews, driven by personal  
52 experiences or a desire to maintain privilege, which can exploit economically vulnerable  
53 individuals. Social media and generative AI further threaten those committed to dignity and  
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56 <sup>1</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K4lrmoaL3Kw>  
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3 social justice. Despite the challenging years ahead, I remain hopeful. Resistance to fairness and  
4 social justice is a longstanding struggle. Alarming proclamations from the US government and  
5 corporations have raised concerns among advocates for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI),  
6 but I believe this anti-DEI sentiment will ultimately falter. Historically, social justice efforts are  
7 embedded in frameworks like the UN, which promotes "peace, dignity, and equality on a healthy  
8 planet." Inspiring figures in the DEI realm include Amartya Sen and Martha Nussbaum,  
9 alongside less familiar names like economist Martin Wolf and the late Professor Hans Rosling.  
10 Their insights on examining the past and envisioning the future with evidence remain invaluable  
11 in guiding our path forward.  
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15 Nelarine Cornelius  
16 *Professor of Organisation Studies*  
17 *Queen Mary University of London*  
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22 President Trump's anti-DEI Executive Orders undermine rigorous research, evidence-based  
23 leadership practice, and our capacity to create fair workplaces and communities. Thriving  
24 organizations depend on diverse perspectives, yet these orders suppress inquiry into how to  
25 design systems that foster inclusion, fairness, and collective wisdom. Progress in management  
26 science and leadership practice depends on understanding how diverse experiences drive  
27 innovation, resilience, and performance. Silencing this work weakens our ability to build  
28 institutions that serve all people and limits the meritocracy the EOs claim to pursue. Scholars and  
29 practitioners must push back. We must continue to advance the knowledge that builds stronger  
30 organizations and a fairer society.  
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34 Martin N. Davidson  
35 *Johnson and Higgins Professor of Business Administration*  
36 *University of Virginia*  
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41 Opponents of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) policies and programs interpret them as  
42 encouraging a system of race-based or other-based discrimination rather than "merit." DEI and  
43 merit are not mutually exclusive. DEI benefits everyone. As Rev. Jesse Jackson used to say, "...  
44 a rising tide lifts ALL ships." The political backlash against (DEI) policies and practices requires  
45 a forceful response from all of us who value such programs. So, like Michelle Obama says, "it's  
46 time to DO SOMETHING!" Be creative, protest, wage legal battles, march, etc. Don't just sit on  
47 the sidelines and wait. Be proactive instead of reactive.  
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50 David L. Ford, Jr.  
51 *University of Texas at Dallas*  
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3 We urge the President, all politicians, organizational leaders, and all people to read the science  
4 and scholarship that support DEI practices. The ultimate goal of DEI practices (like the *stated*  
5 *goal* of President Trump) is to create a meritocracy – one in which wealth, nepotism, and bias do  
6 not outweigh the job skills and capabilities of applicants and employees. Effective DEI  
7 initiatives, like cuts in sidewalk curbs and captions on zoom calls, are designed to benefit  
8 everyone and they can. Nobody has to lose. We must ensure that the future of the American  
9 workforce is vibrant, healthy, and competitive; DEI practices help, not hurt, that objective.  
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12 Mikki Hebl and Eden King  
13 *Martha and Henry Malcolm Lovett Professor of Psychological Sciences*  
14 *Lynnette S. Autrey Professor of Psychological Sciences*  
15 *Rice University*  
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21 Great strides have been made in the past century with regards to equal right and anti-  
22 discrimination. The efforts and pains to reach these advances seem to be wiped away as Trump  
23 prepares for another four years of social ravage. While these are dark times for humanity, I hope  
24 we learn from these terrible mistakes as we examine its outcomes and show the absolute need for  
25 legislation and inclusive practices. The setback the world will face with Trumps anti DEI-  
26 rhetoric is scary, will aggravate inequality and will normalize hate towards certain communities.  
27 We can only hope this will be a short-lived episode in history.  
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30 Sophie Hennekam  
31 *Professor in Organizational Behavior*  
32 *Audencia Business School*  
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37 The flurry of Republican-led anti-DEI laws and Trump’s anti-DEI executive orders represent a  
38 monumental abuse of power, exertion of prejudicial attitudes, and threat to our democracy.  
39 Republican leaders’ attempts to take the United States back to an era where discrimination,  
40 exclusion, and opportunity hoarding for specific groups were legal should cause massive  
41 coalition-building efforts among national and grassroots civil rights organizations to use every  
42 tool and resource to beat back all these attempts vigorously. Conducting high-quality DEI  
43 research is monumentally important, and scholars should not abandon their work. However, this  
44 moment of DEI resistance is a testament that DEI research is never enough to rid our society of  
45 powerful, oppressive forces. To meet this moment, we need brave activists to engage in civil  
46 disobedience to turn the tide back towards freedom and justice.  
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49 Oscar Holmes IV, Ph.D., SHRM-SCP  
50 *Associate Professor of Management*  
51 *Rutgers School of Business-Camden*  
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3 Meritocracy Requires Diversity. Innate human talent is distributed equally among all identity  
4 groups. To think differently is to embrace fascist values. Assuming equality of talent across all  
5 human groups means that meritocracy requires diversity. When historically advantaged groups  
6 receive more than their share of organizational resources and rewards, results are unlikely to be  
7 meritocratic and the integrity of the distribution process becomes questionable. Only when  
8 organizations distribute resources and rewards to both advantaged and marginalized groups can  
9 decision-makers demonstrate their ability to embrace excellence regardless of how talent is  
10 embodied. Therefore, diversity strengthens meritocracy by rewarding the top of every human  
11 talent pool.  
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14 Alison M. Konrad  
15 *Ivey Business School, Western University*  
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20 Pursuant to federal and state laws, Executive Orders 14173 & J21 “suppress free speech,  
21 threaten lawsuits” and withhold funding for organizations with DEI initiatives. Actions to  
22 dismantle DEI misappropriate creative destruction principles<sup>2</sup>, creating false economic and  
23 innovation narratives pronouncing DEI as inefficient and obsolete in employment and education.  
24 While DEI and merit are undefined in the EOs, the U.S. laws codifying the democratic principles  
25 of equal opportunity, justice, and anti-discrimination on the basis of race, ethnicity, sex, religion,  
26 disability, age are not Without intervention, organizations will not legitimize the societal and  
27 economic value of employing and fully engaging a diverse workforce.  
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31 Ellen Ernst Kossek  
32 *Visiting Scholar, Queen Mary University of London*  
33 *Basil S. Turner University Distinguished Professor of Management Emerita,*  
34 *Purdue University*  
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39 Trump’s anti-DEI executive orders exemplify the broader responsabilisation of inequality—  
40 shifting systemic failures onto individuals while dismantling institutional mechanisms of justice.  
41 My research on EDI leadership, alt-right movements, and gendered organisations demonstrates  
42 that such attacks embolden exclusionary practices and legitimise *strategic ignorance* as an  
43 unearned privilege—allowing dominant groups to deny discrimination while deepening systemic  
44 inequities. These orders erode workplace protections, delegitimise inclusion efforts, and silence  
45 critical scholarship. As DEI scholars and practitioners, we must counter this erosion through  
46 empirical evidence, institutional advocacy, and transnational solidarity. DEI is not an ideology—  
47 it is a foundation for equitable economies and sustainable democracies.  
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50 Mustafa Özbilgin  
51 *Professor of Organisational Behaviour*  
52 *Brunel University of London*  
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55 <sup>2</sup> Schumpeter, J.A. (1950). The Process of Creative Destruction. In: *Capitalism, Socialism and*  
56 *Democracy*, 3rd Edition, London: Allen and Unwin.  
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Donald Trump has expressed opposition to DEI initiatives, framing them in ways that some perceive as disadvantageous to White men. This perspective sometimes leads to criticism of individuals from diverse backgrounds who advocate for different policies. At a DEI Division plenary session at the AOM Meeting in 2023, I warned that our ongoing challenge was to establish and maintain our legitimacy as a field externally. At the time, it was already under attack; now, it's worse. We do good and needed research as DEI scholars, and we need to keep doing it. And we should not let our field, and our vulnerable colleagues, be victims of Trump-induced DEI hysteria and remain silent.

Gary N. Powell  
*Professor Emeritus of Management*  
*University of Connecticut*  
*Former Chair of the Women in Management Division (now Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Division) of the Academy of Management*

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Attacks against DEI are attacks against democracy's core principles of pluralism, respect for difference, and tolerance. The brutish masculinity with which DEI is being dismantled, erased and belittled engenders violence to everyone – even those responsible for its execution. This violence is enacted by a fragile masculinity which prizes aggression, individualism, greed, misogyny, racism and transphobia. Resistance to this fragile assault is imperative and calls every institution that upholds democratic values to action, especially Universities. Political action for acceptance, care and a shared humanity is a priority. Protecting those who are attacked most directly is immediately essential.

Alison Pullen  
*Professor of Gender, Work and Organization*  
*Macquarie University*

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These are perilous times for all who advance diversity, equity, inclusion and justice. Among the most vulnerable are thought leaders and practitioners who do not center, validate and uplift the dominance of cisgender, heterosexual, white, Christian, U.S. born men. Scholars, institutional leaders and grassroots activists have always put their livelihood on the line by documenting and advocating against bias and inequity. But the latest wave of legislative violence aims for this work - and those who lead it or endorse it – to be publicly persecuted, censored, and banished. Labeling DEI as “radical,” “wasteful” and “shameful discrimination” places undue and excessive risk upon all who seek to learn about differences and level the playing field for the betterment of society. Rescinding these hard fought, evidence-based, emancipatory programs and policies will remove workforce protections for everyone impacted by the U.S. economy. If they are not

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3 reinstated, humankind will suffer the extraordinary cost of this ideological suppression and  
4 programmatic oppression.  
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7 Laura Morgan Roberts, Ph.D.  
8 *Associate Professor of Business Administration*  
9 *University of Virginia Darden School of Business*  
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13 The backlash against DEI initiatives in the U.S., rooted in ideological opposition, marks a  
14 troubling regression in public discourse. It not only disproportionately fixates on race/ethnicity  
15 and falsely frames equity as antithetical to merit but also seeks to dismantle programs without  
16 assessing their effectiveness. This anti-DEI rhetoric disregards decades of research  
17 demonstrating DEI's positive impact on innovation, performance, and competitiveness,  
18 undermining both meaningful progress and the integrity of organizational sciences by  
19 prioritizing politics over evidence. Accordingly, researchers and practitioners must reaffirm  
20 DEI's essential role in building inclusive, high-performing institutions that reflect the realities of  
21 an ever-changing workforce and society.  
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24  
25 Quinetta Roberson  
26 *John A. Hannah Professor of Organizational Behavior*  
27 *Michigan State University*  
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32 Everyday, malevolent leaders make disparaging remarks about DEI, and claim it means hiring  
33 those who are inferior. I believe these arguments are a subterfuge to conceal their racism, and  
34 some white males slander DEI to maintain dominance and control. Diversity benefits society,  
35 and diverse members have made many dramatic contributions. For example, Navajo codetalkers  
36 used their language to help marines communicate in WWII, and win the war. Martin Luther  
37 King, Rosa Parks, and others helped pass Civil Rights Laws. Famous LGBTQ persons ,  
38 Leonardo da Vinci, Alan Turing, Isaac Newton, changed our world, and people with disabilities  
39 like Stephen Hawking, Helen Keller, Franklin Roosevelt made a lasting impact on our lives. We  
40 need to counter slanderous comments about DEI with these contributions.  
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44 Diana L. Stone  
45 *Research Professor*  
46 *University of New Mexico*  
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50 The recent attacks on DEI by the U.S. administration are unsurprising, given that many DEI  
51 activists and most DEI academics, editors and journals remained silent on the genocide in Gaza  
52 carried out by the U.S.-backed Zionist regime of Israel. This silence reflects the haunting truth of  
53 the phrase: "Then they came for me, and there was no one left to speak for me." The way  
54 forward requires an honest acknowledgment and atonement for this silence, along with a  
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3 commitment to solidarity with all individuals and communities facing discrimination, violence,  
4 and persecution.  
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7 **Jawad Syed**

8 *Professor of Organisational Behaviour*

9 *Lahore University of Management Sciences*  
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13 The silver lining of Trump’s anti-DEI efforts is that now the best way to avoid legal risk is also  
14 the best way to make year-over-year progress towards DEI goals. Trump can’t prohibit  
15 companies from using evidence-based measures to pursue their business goals; our Bias  
16 Interrupters<sup>3</sup> do just that. In 22 experiments inside companies we’ve tested both our bias training  
17 and our tools to eliminate bias in hiring, access to opportunities, performance evaluations and  
18 meetings, and found sharp decreases in bias and increases in diversity. The key is to use metrics  
19 that measure whether and where bias is arising, along with evidence-based strategies that  
20 combine insights I/O and social psychology. All described in an on-going series of posts on my  
21 LinkedIn!  
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24  
25 **Joan C. Williams**

26 *Sullivan Professor of Law*

27 *University of California, College of Law, San Francisco*  
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32 To have sustainable success an organization must attract, develop and retain an effective  
33 workforce. At the same time, demographic shifts mean that our workforce has never been more  
34 diverse. Thus, leaders must decide how they reconcile these two facts. Will they create an  
35 environment that champions homogeneity to achieve a sense of comfort associated with the past  
36 or will they create environments that allow a diverse set of skills, experiences and perspectives to  
37 create new opportunities. Decades of research tell us that it is the latter choice which will make  
38 our future brighter than our past.  
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41 **Professor Ian O. Williamson**

42 *Paul Merage School of Business*

43 *University of California, Irvine*  
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49 Trump’s EOs represent the forceful backlash of ultra-conservative politics against the marriage  
50 of capital and progressive liberal politics embodied by DEI. They are a major political setback  
51 for subordinate groups, as they will likely erase many achievements of the last decades.  
52 Nonetheless, they could also constitute a political opportunity. On the one hand, they could  
53 become a catalyst for progressive forces to recompose against a common enemy. On the other  
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56 <sup>3</sup> <https://biasinterrupters.org/>  
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3 hand, they might reveal the contradiction between ultra-conservative politics and capital's need  
4 to acquire more easily exploitable labour, including women, migrants, workers in the global  
5 south... to valorize itself. The global intersectional labour class should take on the challenge and  
6 mobilize for a more radical transnational equality agenda, grounded in the political tradition of  
7 the emancipatory movements of the 1960s and 1970s.  
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10 Professor Patrizia Zanoni  
11 *School of Social Sciences*  
12 *Hasselt University, Belgium*  
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