



‘Putting the Human Back in Human Resources’: Flourishing and Belonging in American Corporations, A 2024 Survey of HR Managers

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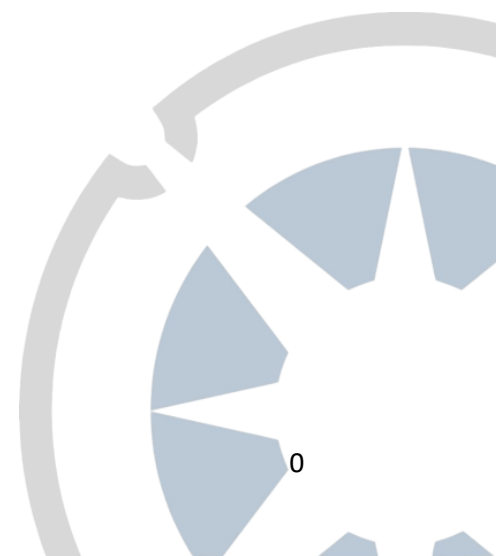
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Ryan S. Olson^{1,2}

Addressing differences is among our greatest global challenges. According to our 2024 survey of 305 U.S. HR managers, 64% of all respondents think diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is very/extremely important to their companies’ success, but 45% think that DEI programs “promote a political ideology, cause division in the organization, and are not focused on delivering better individual and organizational outcomes.” Of those with DEI programs deemed at least somewhat effective, nearly half think they are divisive. Our early tests of alternatives show that HR managers believe the concepts of “virtue,” “mutual benefit,” “human flourishing,” and “connection” could propel their companies’ efforts with diversity.

1. INTRODUCTION: CORPORATE DEI IN THE U.S. ECONOMY

Among our greatest global challenges is reconciling our differences. Populations can hive off in identity groups in large societies. The U.S. population has even begun to sort itself geographically by voting preferences. But places that require people with differences to live in proximity demand an ethic that allows people to get along. Employment is one such environment of proximity. Furthermore, since the 1960s when the U.S. government began tracking census information about the race, ethnicity, and gender of workers, interest has grown in increasing the representation of specific racial and ethnic groups in U.S. corporations through management initiatives (Kelly & Dobbin, 1998). Corporations increased investments in diversity and inclusion initiatives after the public response to the murder of George Floyd in May 2020 (Taylor, 2022). Among these increases was a significant uptick in DEI personnel, programs, and reports (Levi & Fried, 2024; J. Wang, 2024), which had already been underway (Pieterse et al., 2016). This eventually led to a public backlash against DEI (Foss & Klein, 2023), perhaps being a factor that prompted several major corporations to publicly step back from their DEI programs (Burnett & Aguinis, 2024) and many organizations to contest the backlash (Derry et al., 2024; Follmer et al., 2024; Hernandez, 2023). In 2024, many financial media outlets have wondered—and others doubted—whether “DEI is dead.”

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The liminal space in which corporations and associations now operate reflects the dearth of constructive alternatives. The Society for Human Resource Management, for example, recently dropped *equity* from *DEI* (Ruggs & Holmes IV, 2024). Nonetheless, SHRM's website still guides its members to implement DEI for "disadvantaged groups" with the following elements: executive commitment; vision, mission, and strategy; recruitment and talent sourcing; employee retention; training and development; onboarding; communication; marketing, advertising, and branding; leveraging employee diversity; strategic alliances and partnerships; corporate social responsibility functions; customer or member experience; supplier and vendor diversity; and measurement and accountability (*Guide to Developing a Strategic Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Plan*, 2024). DEI practices that researchers have categorized as aiming at nondiscrimination and at resources have come under heavy fire and are generally shown not to be effective (Dobbin & Kalev, 2022; Edmans et al., 2023; Jagdeep et al., 2024), so Cox and Nguyen (2024) have recommended focusing on accountability practices, noting that most companies do not do this (Williams & Dolkas, 2022).

In light of the fact that diversity is broadly accepted by the American public (Horowitz, 2019; Putnam & Garrett, 2020; Minkin, 2023), companies have come under increasing pressure to eliminate their DEI positions and cancel their DEI programs, yet to uphold similar ideals of fairness, equality, and the like. However, alternatives such as merit, excellence, and intelligence (MEI) draw scorn from detractors; DEI policies and practices are deeply embedded in corporations; diversity in management and board roles continues to be relatively low (Larcker & Tayan, 2020); and Gen Z and millennials are demanding DEI (Ferraro et al., 2023; Milkman, 2017) which puts pressure on recruiters (Rider, 2024). A non-polarizing but effective alternative, among other reforms (Fisch & Schwartz, 2024), could be useful (Nwabufo, 2024; Q. Roberson et al., 2024; M. L. Wang et al., 2024), especially one that is morally engaged (Sandel, 2010).

To explore an evolved framework for DEI, we sought to understand the current beliefs and practices of HR managers in a diverse set of U.S. corporations. The Flourishing and Belonging Human Resources Management Survey began with at least three basic assumptions: (1) people share a common humanity, regardless of their physical characteristics (West, 2017); (2) identity includes more characteristics than only race but also abilities, religion, viewpoints, and the like (Allen, 2023); and (3) a thriving life includes justice, to be sure, which is typically the focus of diversity initiatives, but it also includes prosperity, sustainability, goodness, beauty, and truth (Allen, 2023; Smith, 2015; Yates, 2015).

In such a framework, human flourishing, virtue, and equitable self-interest would feature prominently (Flynn, 2008; Kristjánsson et al., 2017), reaching down to a substructure of what it means to be human by recognizing basic qualities that all share and which therefore may transcend differences (Hunter, 2024).³ So far from character and related terms being merely superfluous, resources from virtue ethics, especially a neo-Aristotelian concept of collective *phronesis*, could offer a way forward for addressing diversity in business enterprises and management education. Apprehending the likeness between Aristotle's historical context of the

³ These are synthesized in Parham and Olson (2024) and Olson (2024).

polis and the business corporation (Kristjánsson, 2022a) could offer opportunities to reinvest labor with purpose, as Hannah Arendt posited: “[L]ife together in the form of the *polis* seemed to assure that the most futile of human activities, action and speech, and the least tangible and most ephemeral of man-made ‘products,’ the deeds and stories which are their outcome, would become imperishable” (Arendt et al., 2018, p. 197).

The present paper summarizes a preliminary analysis. A full report will examine the appeal of traditional DEI terms, in addition to the new terms and principles related to human flourishing, virtue, and character. Additionally, we will analyze the favorability of concepts for clusters of survey respondents, including those who indicated that they have DEI responsibilities, those who were strongly against DEI, those who worked for public companies, those from different racial and ethnic backgrounds, those with cultural differences, and so on. We will also analyze the outcomes that the managers surveyed prioritized for DEI, and their beliefs about merit and DEI’s effectiveness.

1. THE SURVEY

From April 1-12, 2024, we surveyed 305 human resource managers.⁴ Respondents completed an internet survey with a mean interview time of about 20 minutes to answer 33 items, a few of which had multiple parts. Respondents were 47% male, 53% female; 26% under age 35, 74% age 35 and older. A quarter of the sample were at the C-level (CAO, CDO, CIO, etc), 7% at the VP/SVP level, 30% director/senior director, and 36% manager/senior manager, with 2% in the role of lead/leader. Of the companies represented, 81% were private and 19% public. As to region, 20% were in the Northeast, 21% the Midwest, 21% the West, and 38% were in the South. Corporate sizes ranged from under 250 employees (52%), 250-500 employees (28%), and 500 employees or more (21%). Of the HR managers in the sample, 75% worked for corporations with DEI policies and 21% of the companies did not have DEI policies (4% did not know). The race/ethnicity of respondents and industries represented appear in nearby tables.

Table 1

Race / Ethnicity	
Hispanic	14%
White, non-Hispanic	70%
African American, non-Hispanic	12%
Asian, non-Hispanic	2%
All Other, non-Hispanic	2%

⁴ The survey was fielded by Heart and Mind Strategies of Reston, Virginia.

Table 2

Industries Currently or Previously Represented		
Agriculture	2	1%
Automotive	8	3%
Construction	46	15%
Real estate	13	4%
Consumer goods and services	7	2%
Energy	6	2%
Financial services / Banking	17	6%
Food and beverages	18	6%
Healthcare / Pharmaceutical	37	12%
Insurance	4	1%
Legal / Law	4	1%
Manufacturing	21	7%
Marketing	1	0%
Oil / Energy / Chemical / Utilities	4	1%
Professional services	22	7%
Retail	29	10%
Technology	12	4%
Transportation and logistics	19	6%
Travel / Hospitality	18	6%
None of the above	58	19%
<i>*Percentages do not total 100%.</i>		

Opinions and attitudes were assessed with five-point Likert scales, but a question about attitude toward the concept of DEI forced respondents to choose between two statements and allowed them to indicate whether they “completely” or “somewhat” agreed with them. Some questions were only asked of respondents who indicated that their companies currently have DEI policies or programs. Survey topics related to diversity and inclusion asked about the current state of DEI in their industry and in their company, their attitude toward DEI generally and in their company, the outcomes their organization aims to achieve through DEI, their company’s current DEI efforts, their interest in outside solutions or resources, the challenges of DEI, tests of various DEI terms and concepts and their perceived importance, and proposed shifts in DEI approaches and programs.

3.0 PREVIEW OF FINDINGS

3.1 THE CURRENT STATE OF DEI

We presented two statements to participants and forced them to choose one of the statements and the strength of their agreement. The statements were as follows.

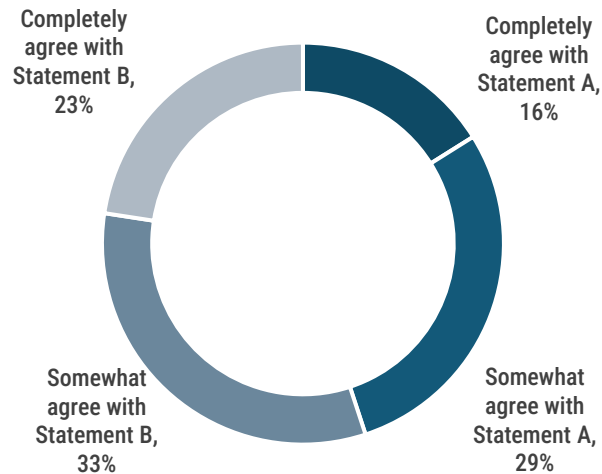
Statement A – Some people say they want to improve opportunity for all people at their organization. They value diverse opinions and do not want to intentionally exclude others. But they believe some DEI efforts have gone too far to promote a political ideology, causing division in the organization, and are not focused on delivering better individual and organizational outcomes.

Statement B – Some people say improving opportunity for all people requires intentional effort to include people based upon their race, ethnicity, gender, and other factors. They see real company and societal improvement through these efforts. They believe more organizations need to embrace DEI programs because they truly help people.

The results were as follows.

Table 3

Opinion about DEI	
Completely agree with Statement A	16%
Somewhat agree with Statement A	29%
Somewhat agree with Statement B	33%
Completely agree with Statement B	23%



In total, 45% agreed with Statement A, which is critical of DEI; 55% agreed with Statement B, which is supportive of DEI. More than 6 in 10 (61.4%) only “somewhat” agreed with the statement they chose. Despite this reluctance about DEI, nearly two in three respondents said DEI is “very” or “extremely” important to the success of their company.

Table 4

Importance of DEI policy for Company Success	
Not at all important	5%
Not very important	8%
Somewhat important	24%
Very important	41%
Extremely important	23%

3.2 GOALS FOR DEI

We asked respondents to identify their primary outcomes for DEI from among 10 options. The results are below.

Significant differences were observed between African American managers and white managers on Employee Engagement and Improved Organizational Performance.

Table 5

Outcomes for DEI		
	N	%
Diverse Workforce	206	68%
Employee Engagement and Satisfaction	197	65%
Inclusive Culture	191	63%
Reduced Bias and Discrimination	180	59%
Equitable Policies and Practices	170	56%
Enhanced Talent Acquisition and Retention	154	51%
Improved Organizational Performance	143	47%
Social Responsibility and Impact	139	46%
Innovation and Creativity	129	42%
Positive Brand Reputation	122	40%
<i>*Percentages do not total 100.</i>		

This may indicate a difference in the importance placed on DEI for “creating an environment where everyone feels heard, respected, and supported” and the extent to which DEI may “lead to better decision-making, problem-solving, and overall organizational performance.”⁵ The only significant difference regarding outcome selection that we found between Hispanic and African American managers was on Positive Brand Reputation, with African American managers

⁵ Employee Engagement: $t(54.676)=-2.272, p=0.027$; Improved Organizational Performance: $t(49.999)=-2.614, p=0.006$.

selecting this to indicate the belief that DEI enhances the company’s “reputation and attractiveness to customers, investors, and partners.”⁶ C-level and VP-level respondents identified Innovation and Creativity as an outcome for DEI more than those at the director, manager, and leader levels, indicating that they believe “diverse perspectives and ideas” may “lead to greater innovation and creativity.”⁷ Managers with HR responsibilities in public companies selected Employee Engagement at a higher level that was statistically significant, while managers in private companies selected Enhanced Talent Acquisition and Retention.⁸ For DEI outcomes, the greatest number of statistically significant differences we found among subgroups were between those who currently have diversity and inclusion responsibilities and those who do not. In our sample, 132 did not have D&I responsibilities; 173 did have D&I responsibilities. The means are provided below.⁹

Table 6

Outcomes for DEI: Means of Respondents with D&I Responsibilities			
	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
Diverse Workforce	0.78***	0.415	0.032
Inclusive Culture	0.72***	0.452	0.034
Equitable Policies and Practices	0.65***	0.477	0.036
Reduced Bias and Discrimination	0.45***	0.46	0.035
Employee Engagement and Satisfaction	0.73***	0.443	0.034
Innovation and Creativity	0.52***	0.501	0.038
Improved Organizational Performance	0.53*	0.501	0.038
Positive Brand Reputation	0.45*	0.499	0.038
Social Responsibility and Impact	0.55***	0.498	0.038
<i>*p<0.05, ***p<0.001</i>			

We also asked those whose companies have DEI policies (75%) to indicate the top three priority applications of DEI.

⁶ Positive Brand Reputation: $t(72.15)=-2.663, p=0.005$

⁷ Innovation and Creativity for C-/VP-level: $t(187.193)=-2.998, p=0.003$. See also Wright et al. (2022).

⁸ Public company managers, Employee Engagement and Satisfaction: $t(91.39)=-2.066, p=0.042$; Private company managers, Enhanced Talent Acquisition and Retention: $t(84.895)=1.994, p=0.049$.

⁹ Respondents were asked to select as many items as applied to them. Variables for each were 0 or 1, with 1 indicating that the item was selected.

Table 7

Frequencies of DEI Applications Selected in Top 3	
Workplace culture and climate	126
Recruitment and hiring practices	99
Training and education	87
Performance management and promotion practices	67
Policies and procedures	65
Leadership commitment and accountability	58
Community engagement and partnerships	37
Employee resource groups	35
Meeting legal and regulatory obligations / Mitigating Risk	35
Data collection and analysis	25
Supplier diversity	20
Succession planning	11

Statistically significant differences of means were found for Succession Planning in public versus private companies (0.15 versus 0.02) and Employee Resource Groups among white versus Hispanic managers (0.18 and 0.06 respectively).

3.3 DEI CONCEPTS

We asked all respondents to indicate their reaction to 23 terms, thinking of them within the context of DEI. Responses were measured on a five-point Likert-type scale, with 1 indicating “strongly negative,” 3 indicating “neutral,” and 5 “strongly positive.”

We were especially interested in how terms typically associated with DEI like social justice (al-Gharbi, 2024),¹⁰ diversity (Q. M. Roberson, 2006), and equity compared here to respondents’ preferences for terms from the discourse of character formation, including virtue and human flourishing.

Table 8

Responses to Concepts (Percentages)						
	Strongly negative	Somewhat negative	Neutral	Somewhat positive	Strongly positive	Concept Score
Social Justice	8.9	10.2	19	29.5	32.5	42.9
Diversity	2.3	5.9	11.5	30.2	50.2	72.2
Equity¹¹	4.8	1.9	18.8	29.9	44.8	67.6

¹⁰ We don’t here mean to pit *social justice* as Aristotle conceived of it (Kristjánsson, 2022b) against the character discourse. The survey used the term to capture its more popular undertones (Arthur et al., 2021).

¹¹ Equity was presented to a split sample. The split sampling was random, and the original analysis provided a slightly higher score for equity (68.3). But because reception of the term could be based on

A concept score was calculated by subtracting the sum of the two negative selections from the two positive selections. Of three concepts typically associated with DEI, equity had the highest concept score and the lowest percentage of neutral responses. This may indicate that respondents believe that they have enough knowledge of the concept to decide whether they are positive or negatively disposed toward it, and clearly they responded positively.

Of three terms from the character discourse, virtue has the highest concept score as it relates to DEI, as well as the highest percentage of neutral responses, which may at least indicate a lack of familiarity with the term and openness to the concept.

Table 9

Responses to Concepts (Percentages)						
	Strongly negative	Somewhat negative	Neutral	Somewhat positive	Strongly positive	Concept Score
Human Flourishing	3	5.6	24.9	32.1	34.4	57.9
Equitable Self-interest	4.3	13.4	28.5	31.5	22.3	36.1
Virtue	1.6	3.3	29.5	34.8	30.8	60.7

Of these six concepts, the one that evoked the most positive response was *diversity*, followed closely by *equity*, and the least positive was *equitable self-interest*, the latter of which also had the second-highest percentage of neutral responses (28.5).¹² This may indicate that, within U.S. corporate settings, the concept of equity could be re-signified to include an Aristotelian concept of civic friendship (Allen, 2006; Parham & Olson, 2024), within a new framework.

Several of the other concepts we tested are tabulated below.

Table 10

Responses to Concepts (Percentages)						
	Strongly negative	Somewhat negative	Neutral	Somewhat positive	Strongly positive	Concept Score
Trust	0.3	1.3	12.8	30.2	55.4	84
Equality¹³	2.2	2.5	7.1	36	52.2	83.5
Belonging	0.7	2.3	14.8	39.7	42.6	79.3
Connection	0.7	2.3	15.1	39.7	42.3	79

race/ethnicity, we took a more cautious approach of determining valid percentages by weighting each response based on the race/ethnicity of the participants who were presented the equity item as compared to the total sample proportion from each racial category, and then multiplying each percentage by 2, which resulted in a slightly lower score (67.6 vs. 68.3).

¹² The concept of *self-interest* garnered a concept score of 14.4, with a neutral percentage of 27.2. Self-interest of the *equitable* type evoked more positive responses in our sample.

¹³ Equality was presented to a split sample. Valid percentages were calculated in the same way as for equity (see above).

Fairness	1.0	3.3	13.1	33.1	49.5	78.3
Personal Resilience¹⁴	0.6	3.2	26.2	31.4	36.8	64.4
Ally	1.0	6.9	24.3	34.1	33.8	60
Identity	2.0	6.2	23.9	39	28.9	59.7
Underserved Communities	8.9	15.1	24.9	28.2	23	27.2
Underrepresented Communities	6.9	17	27.2	27.5	21.3	24.9

Belonging is clearly a term that is being employed in the DEI world, and with good reason: it is very positively received (Mellinger et al., 2024). Its reception very closely reflects that of *connection*, with nearly identical concept scores. As a result, we have combined these similar terms in our work. In the social capital literature, these could link to “bridging capital” between communities (Putnam, 2020), a point that we elaborate in our Flourishing + Belonging framework concept paper (Dobbin & Kalev, 2022; Putnam & Garrett, 2020).

We identified several subgroups and analyzed their responses to these concepts. Because we are interested in which concepts could appeal to people regardless of their view of DEI, we identified the 49 respondents, or 16%, who completely agreed with Statement A as presented above, and the 69 respondents, or 23%, who completely agreed with Statement B above. These are the groups most critical and most supportive of DEI. Which terms appeal to the DEI critics *and* the DEI boosters? Those concepts with a mean of 4.0 or greater for both DEI critics and boosters include belonging (3.98 for critics, not statistically significant), equality, access (3.8 for critics), and wellbeing; and means between 3.5 and 4.0 with statistical significance: human flourishing (4.22, 3.53), diversity (4.7, 3.61: a central concept (De Meuse & Hostager, 2001; Person et al., 2015)), ally (4.39, 3.57), and fairness (4.52, 3.96).¹⁵

For the character movement looking for ways to bring character into contact with societal needs, these scores could indicate concepts that would appeal to HR managers in U.S. corporations and perhaps beyond.

From our Flourishing + Belonging framework concept paper, we also developed six human flourishing principles that we tested with the sample, separately from the single terms we discussed above. These principles were tested in a section in which we asked respondents to

¹⁴ Personal resilience was presented to a randomized split sample. Valid percentages were calculated by multiplying each percentage by 2.

¹⁵ Human flourishing: $t(57.687)=2.165, p=0.035$; Diversity: $t(55.493)=3.384, p<0.001$; Fairness: $t(57.334)=2.14, p=0.037$. Related to a common view of DEI critics, we also attempted to identify a group in the sample for whom merit seems to be an important factor. A merit index was calculated by determining the mean of six items that responded to the question, “What are the challenges or reasons for a company not having a DEI policy?” with respondents instructed to select all that applied. A Cronbach’s reliability test was performed with $\alpha=0.676$, so we have not pursued this index further. Being a DEI critic was negatively correlated at the 0.01 level with equitable self-interest, identity, human flourishing, diversity, fairness, inclusion, underrepresented communities, culture, ally, underserved communities, equity, and social justice, and at the 0.05 level with belonging, wellbeing, access, and connection.

imagine different ways to achieve the outcomes they desire from DEI. The first iteration of these corporate principles was as follows.

Q500.a. Connection + Belonging: Essentially, this is about building relationships rooted in respect and empathy within your business. It's about ensuring everyone feels their unique background and contributions are acknowledged. When team members feel understood, valued and part of a collective, collaboration flourishes and business thrives.

Q500.b. Human Flourishing: This champions a workplace that nurtures well-being, and promotes happiness, health, and fulfilling growth. Leaders set the example and cultivate a culture that honors integrity, personal development, and strong connections both in and outside work. Empowered employees excel, propelling the organization's success.

Q500.c. Organizational Resilience through Diversity: Resilience in an organization is driven by diversity. Valuing different perspectives equips businesses to better handle technological shifts, economic variability, and global market pressures. Diversity should be leveraged not for consensus, but as a strategic tool to forge the best solutions. This approach fosters agility, innovation, and long-term viability.

Q500.d. The Cultural Pillars of Wellbeing: These stand for justice—fair and orderly operations; truth—honesty and trust in communications; goodness—ethical actions and decisions; beauty—encouraging creativity and appreciation; prosperity—financial growth and opportunities; and sustainability—ensuring the enduring health of the business. These are essential for a culture that supports personal satisfaction and drives organizational success.

Q500.e. Personal Resilience via Anchored Self: People are more than their visible characteristics or affiliations. Encouraging employees to develop self-understanding and a strong sense of personal values fosters resilience, enabling them to navigate challenges, engage with diverse perspectives, and contribute to a more inclusive and adaptable organization.

Q500.e. Culture of Mutual Benefit for Results: Organizations must shift from a culture of individual self-interest to one that values mutual benefit and shared success. By aligning personal goals with the collective good, employees can foster collaboration, trust, and effective problem-solving. This mindset leads to increased engagement to drive the organization's purpose and success.

To reiterate, each principle was distilled from an academic paper (Olson, 2024) and contained dense language we were testing but also used simplified terms for some concepts in which definitions rather than terms were prioritized. Using a five-item, Likert-type scale, responses indicate the importance of the principle for their own corporate aims. The results for all respondents follow.

Table 11

Importance of Principles (Percentages)					
	Not at all important	Not very important	Somewhat important	Very important	Extremely important
Connection + Belonging	1	3	19	38	39
Human Flourishing	2	3	23	39	33
Organizational Resilience through Diversity	3	6	27	40	24
Cultural Pillars of Wellbeing	2	3	24	41	30
Personal Resilience via Anchored Self	2	6	28	39	25
Culture of Mutual Benefit for Results	2	4	26	40	29

Based on the percentages selecting very and extremely important, Connection + Belonging was the most popular principle with 77%, followed by Human Flourishing (72%), and then Cultural Pillars of Wellbeing (71%). African American managers rated Personal Resilience via Anchored Self higher on average than did white managers, with a mean of 4.22 compared to 3.66. HR managers in public companies said that Organizational Resilience through Diversity was of greater importance than did HR managers from private companies, with means of 4.02 and 3.68, respectively.¹⁶ Table 13 in the Appendix presents means (4.0 and greater highlighted) for various groups, including respondents who expressed a strong opinion about merit and who strongly agreed with Statement A above.

HR managers in our sample who had D&I responsibilities rated several of the principles as more important than those who did not have those responsibilities.

Table 12

Importance of Principles (Means)		
	D&I Responsibility	No D&I Responsibility
Connection + Belonging	4.23	3.94
Human Flourishing	4.12**	3.8**
Organizational Resilience through Diversity	3.91**	3.53**
Cultural Pillars of Wellbeing	4.05**	3.77**
Personal Resilience via Anchored Self	3.89	3.61
Culture of Mutual Benefit	4.03**	3.74**
**p<0.01		

¹⁶ Personal Resilience via Anchored Self: $t(60.616)=-3.928, p<.001$; Organizational Resilience through Diversity: $t(104.582)=-2.733, p=.007$.

To approximate the conceptual background of a Flourishing + Belonging framework, we created an index that included ten items: belonging, equitable self-interest, human flourishing, virtue, and the six principles listed above. The four terms were measured with a five-point scale (strongly negative to strongly positive) and the six principles were measured on a five-point scale (not at all important to extremely important).¹⁷ A multiple regression was run to predict support for the Flourishing + Belonging framework from interest in external help, perceived importance of DEI for company success, the number of corporate goals relevant to DEI, and attitude toward 10 DEI reforms. This resulted in a significant model, $F(4,300)=137.487, p<.001, R^2=.804$. The individual predictors were examined further and indicated that interest in external help ($t=3.772, p<.001$), perceived importance of DEI ($t=3.208, p=.001$), the number of corporate goals relevant to DEI ($t=2.979, p=.003$), and DEI reforms ($t=9.89, p<.001$) were significant.

Those DEI reforms included ideas such as bringing in the full social and cultural background of employees, operating with an understanding of diversity that emphasizes perspectives, enculturating collaboration and generosity, working toward bridging communities,¹⁸ implementing a full understanding of flourishing including character and community, making meaningful connections, and recognizing individuals holistically.

By design, the principles and evolved concepts in the survey reflect a background understanding of collective *phronesis*. While many frame their arguments for diversity in justice or fairness or personal ethical terms, and rightly so, these are not always operationally salient. From the character discourse, the concept of collective *phronesis*, however, could offer both an intrinsically good approach and a practically useful one. Important studies have shown the importance of mentoring for increasing management diversity (Dobbin & Kalev, 2022), which can resemble aspects of Aristotelian character friendship (Kristjánsson, 2022a).

More to the point, four components of ‘collective managerial *phronesis*’ within an accumulation argument (Kristjánsson, 2022a) could well be aided by thoughtful uses of diversity, a concept not unfamiliar in ancient Greek *poleis*, at least in inter-political networks (Ma, 2024). (1) The *constitutive function* of moral sensitivity to the ethical responses required by particular situations can be executed by *phronetic* managers with wisdom culled from virtuous action practiced in various walks of life called forth from diverse socioeconomic, racial, educational, religious, and ideational backgrounds. This is especially reflected in the Connection + Belonging and Organizational Resilience principles. (2) The *integrative function* becomes essential when meaningful differences are brought to bear on the analysis of ethical salience, especially when virtues may conflict and need to be ‘blended’ or ‘synchronised’. The deliberation of this blending can itself present formative opportunities. The Culture of Mutual Benefit principle especially reflects the integrative function. (3) Integration requires a broader understanding of organizational

¹⁷ For the 10 items, alpha = 0.869.

¹⁸ A Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to evaluate the relationship between “bridging communities” and the Flourishing + Belonging framework index. There was a significant positive relationship between bridging and FBFI, $r(304)=.487, p<.001$.

purpose within a social context—a flourishing life, a flourishing corporation, and related aims—that is served by the *'blueprint function'* of collective *phronesis*. The Culture of Wellbeing and Human Flourishing principles reflect the importance of this collective ethical identity. (4) Finally, the *'emotional regulative function'* aligns the collective emotions with the morally salient aspects of a situation. *Trust* may be the most influential emotion, which is perhaps a reason that it was well regarded in our sample of HR managers—with a concept score of 84, the highest in our results.

3.4 SURVEY FOLLOW UP

To improve our understanding of HR managers and test revisions to the principles based on our analysis of the survey, we conducted a 90-minute focus group on a proprietary platform. During the session, 35 HR managers answered 43 questions, some of which were created based on their real-time input using generative artificial intelligence (Gen AI). The focus group yielded more than 100 pages of feedback. One participant commented that the principles “put the ‘human’ back in human resources.” Two co-creation sessions of two hours each tested solutions and deepened feedback further, leading to revisions of the principles and related materials.

4.0 CONCLUSION

These results are important because they could offer direction for evolved diversity and inclusion initiatives where necessary. Urgency for a constructive response arises not only from the effect of the culture wars on corporations and workplaces but also the accelerating use of Gen AI and autonomous or agentic AI (Pollio & Riemma, 2024), perhaps at an historic inflection point. The Flourishing + Belonging framework, with its emphasis on human flourishing, virtue, equitable self-interest, and collective *phronesis*, could inform a way forward conceptually, strategically, programmatically, and morally: conceptually because it draws on a new discourse; strategically because it appears to transcend polarized views over difference; programmatically because HR managers in the sample envisioned improvements that could be made cross-functionally in their responsibilities; and morally because they can be linked to collective *phronesis*, the purpose of which is not merely to achieve ‘favourable collaborative outcomes’ but ‘the ethical betterment of the agents involved’: *eupraxia* and *eudaimonia*.¹⁹

¹⁹ HR managers in the sample were asked to project the impact on their top three selected DEI applications that the principles and practices they reviewed in the survey could be imagined to produce. The mean was 4.46 on a 5-point scale, i.e. between “somewhat positive” impact and “very positive” impact. For quotations, see Kristjánsson (2022a, p. 52). We could also add the betterment and flourishing agency of the corporation in which the framework is deployed.

APPENDIX

Table 13

Importance of Principles: Means across Differences							
		Connect + Belong	Hum Flourish	Org Resilience	Cult Pillars	Pers Resil	Mut Bene
Total		4.10	3.98	3.74	3.93	3.77	3.90
U.S. Region	Northeast	4.11	3.98	3.77	3.98	3.64	3.79
	Midwest	4.27	3.97	3.75	3.91	3.83	3.92
	South	4.1	3.97	3.8	3.97	3.85	4.07
	West	3.92	4	3.6	3.83	3.68	3.7
Gender	Male	4.08	3.93	3.79	3.82	3.76	3.92
	Female	4.12	4.02	3.7	4.02	3.78	3.89
Race/Ethnicity	Hispanic	4.16	3.86	3.79	4.19	4	4.02
	White, non-Hisp	4.03	3.94	3.66	3.82	3.66	3.8
	African American	4.38	4.27	4.22	4.32	4.22	4.35
	Asian	4	4.6	4	4.2	3.6	3.4
	All Other	4.43	3.86	3.29	3.43	3.43	4.29
DEI Opinion	Strong A	3.82	3.47	3.04	3.61	3.39	3.63
Merit Opinion	Merit 5	3.3	3.2	2.5	3.2	2.9	3.6

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