

What Are the Stages of a DE&I Maturity Model?



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In previous years, commitment was all that was required for an organization to be considered a leader in Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DE&I). It was seen almost as an act of courage. This then shifted to measuring 'effort', and specifically what actions an organization was taking to drive change. Now, the focus is firmly where it should be: on impact.

This move from commitment into action into impact are the stages each organization must go through in measuring its DE&I maturity. It doesn't matter where you start. What matters is that you make a start in the first place and keep up the rhythm of transformation.

A DE&I maturity model is a barometer for organizations, a framework that measures an organization's progress in achieving equity. This could be focused on a binary view of gender or on [intersectional gender equity](#), which also considers race/ethnicity, gender identity, working with a disability, LGBTQ+, nationality and age.

When organizations make a conscious decision to progress their DE&I maturity, some will naturally be further along their journey than others. This will be due to external factors such as industry, geography, public policies and regulations, reporting requirements in the countries where they operate, local culture and more.

For example, an organization operating in a country where gender pay gap reporting is mandated will be able to assemble an action plan on pay equity sooner than in an organization collecting this data from scratch. For this reason, there may be nuances for global organizations – different offices and divisions may be at different stages of their DE&I journey depending on where they operate.

Though starting points vary, every organization must pass through the same three stages to achieve DE&I maturity: demonstrating commitment, showcasing progress and celebrating success.

1. Demonstrating commitment

Every organization's DE&I journey should start with laying out the purpose of that journey: why is it important? What does this mean to the organization? It also starts with buy-in at the highest level. Senior leadership must be committed to the journey before it even begins.



There is movement, and times have changed. Women are speaking out more, men are supporting us more than ever, and I think that's all going to lead to positive changes. Freedom and progress can go away immediately.

You always have to know it is in a tenuous position and keep moving forward. We need every generation to be activists, and nowadays everyone is an influencer so you never know where the inspiration is going to come from. And if progress slows down again, well that will be another challenge we have to overcome."

Billie Jean King, EDGE Certified Foundation Ambassador

The next step is to get the lay of the land. It is important to have an accurate view of where the journey is truly starting from, because all the progress will be measured against this baseline.

What data does the organization already have available? What data isn't available but can easily be collected? If there is data that cannot be collected, you can always start with an anonymised employee survey: how do employees across the diversity spectrum identify themselves and what are their experiences in the workplace? Where do the opinions of different groups align and where they diverge?

At this stage, it is useful to assess whether your organization has any actions or practices already in place around DE&I and whether you have made any public commitment to the topic, for example by signing the [Women's Empowerment Principles](#). Also, are you ranked as part of any ESG (Environmental, Social and Governance) benchmarking indices such as the [Bloomberg Gender-Equality Index](#) (GEI) or [Equileap](#)?

Lastly, commitment must come with transparency and accountability. [Independent, third-party certification](#) will keep the organization honest and ensure the journey toward DE&I maturity is rigorously measured. This will also allow the organization to communicate their progress and impact clearly and confidently – both internally and externally.

2. Showing progress

With a commitment firmly in place, organizations should now be taking action – working to improve DE&I and demonstrating [the first signs of positive impact](#).

The first stage of DE&I maturity:

- **Secure the commitment for gender balance and for DE&I more broadly**
- **Check the availability of data and existing policies and practices around gender – the binary definition and for any other aspects of diversity – and assess what public commitments you have already made**
- **Get independent validation of this starting point, no matter how far along your organization is**

To showcase visibly and credibly your [DE&I progress](#), internally and externally, a baseline must already be in place. Without third-party validation at the start of your DE&I maturity journey, you cannot effectively measure how far you have progressed. However, with it in place you can move to this next stage of maturity by auditing the impact of your actions against this baseline.

This stage is not about having completed everything you set out to do. DE&I maturity takes time to achieve, and even then, the journey will never truly be over – there is always progress to be made. What is expected is that there has been a shift, a forward movement, and that there are clear examples of actions that have been taken with initial data to show impact.

3. Celebrating success

Commitment has been made; progress has been showcased. The third stage of DE&I maturity happens when your organization can demonstrate success – when you have delivered on your action plan and made a significant and positive impact on your organization.

To achieve DE&I maturity, you must be able to demonstrate impact with both qualitative and quantitative indicators. Without this, you cannot credibly celebrate your success. It's not enough to tell your employee, investors, board members, customers, etc. that you have achieved workplace diversity, equity and inclusion. [Evidence is everything](#): you must be able to prove your success.

For this reason, independent, third-party validation is crucial. You deserve to celebrate how far your organization has come.

A word of caution: DE&I maturity can, once achieved, also be lost if the positive results and impact are not sustainable over time. To maintain this level of maturity, your organization must be committed to maintaining the success they have achieved through continual measurement and analysis.

EDGE Assess

Organizations certified at the EDGE Assess level of EDGE Certification have demonstrated that they are at this first stage of maturity. They have started their journey in a systematic, structured way using EDGE Empower. They hold themselves transparent and accountable and they make public their commitment to four DE&I pillars:

- Representation
- Pay equity
- Effectiveness of policies and practices to ensure equitable career flows
- Inclusiveness of the culture

They may have chosen to make this commitment not only for gender, but for the broader diversity spectrum by adding an EDGEplus to their EDGE Certification level.

Through third-party validation, organizations at the EDGE Assess level have also committed to implementing an action plan. Two years after they start the journey and obtain their EDGE Certification, wherever that starting point was, these organizations will be ready to measure their progress by undergoing the EDGE re-Certification process.

EDGE Move

Organizations certified at the EDGE Move level of EDGE Certification are at the second stage of maturity. They have taken steps to make a positive impact on representation, pay equity, the effectiveness of policies and practices to ensure equitable career flows and inclusiveness of the culture. And they can visibly and credibly show their internal and external stakeholders progress on their DE&I action plan with a robust audit.

The second stage of DE&I maturity:

- Demonstrate that actions have been taken to address imbalances
- Audit progress against baseline data
- Get independent validation of your progress to date

They may have chosen to make this commitment not only for gender, but for the broader diversity spectrum by adding an EDGEplus to their EDGE Certification level.

An EDGE Move Certification remains valid for two years, after which re-certification occurs.

EDGE Lead

Organizations certified at the EDGE Lead level of EDGE Certification have met every single standard across representation, pay equity, effective policies and practices and inclusiveness of the culture. They have achieved gender balance and have chosen to analyze intersectional issues relating to gender equity and other aspects of diversity through EDGEplus.

They have demonstrated their robust commitment to the S in ESG and are leading the way for DE&I.

An EDGE Lead Certification remains valid for two years, after which re-certification occurs.

Start your DE&I maturity journey

[EDGE Empower](#) is a comprehensive, software-based DE&I solution that will guide you through your journey and support you to become eligible for EDGE Certification at the EDGE Assess, EDGE Move or EDGE Lead level, with or without EDGEplus.

The third stage of DE&I maturity:

- Demonstrate that your organization has achieved its goals
- Get third-party validation of your success
- Maintain your commitment to DE&I