The Need

The client is a US-based global services industry association. Its member associations represent a wide range of business sectors that serve the industry. The association had launched a landmark, high-profile initiative to address discrimination in the industry. Characterised by significant employee diversity and serving a wide range of other industries, the client was driven by a sense of opportunity to make a difference in building DEI both within the industry and in the wider society.

Solution: AI-based DEI study

To ensure maximum impact, the client wanted to ground the initiative in data-based research. So they partnered with Culturelytics to conduct **a first-of-its-kind global study of current perceptions and experience of DEI among employees across the industry**. The study was conducted in three phases:

- **Focus group discussions:** First, focus group discussions (FGDs) with association leadership representing different sectors – to build common understanding and ownership of the project, surface key themes, and shape an industry-wide employee survey. Insights from the FGDs were used to create a **four-dimension framework** for assessing the state of DEI in the industry: Ownership (personal understanding and action); Accountability and Power of Influence (leadership, engagement, tracking); Sustaining change (impact); and Delivering change (priorities and practice). The framework was designed to enhance clarity about DEI challenges and help sharpen plans for addressing them.

- **Chatbot survey:** We then designed and deployed a short 12-question survey, conducted by our friendly chatbot, Kaiwa, to maximise responses across the association's membership network. Responses were received from industry professionals in 380 organisations across 15 industry sectors.

- **Results:** Survey responses were analysed using our proprietary AI-powered analytics platform. Results were sliced along key demographic categories critical to the initiative, including: ethnicity, gender, industry sector, country location, and job grade. Study findings, insights and directional recommendations were presented to the client in a customised, interactive, and visually intuitive dashboard that helps leaders understand, discuss and act on the study results.

Selected key insights

- **Demographic findings: Ethnicity**: Respondents who identified as part of minority ethnic groups were significantly fewer and rated all dimensions of their DEI experience significantly lower than for those identifying as White, indicating that it could be difficult to have the minority representation in leadership needed to effect change. **Gender**: Majority female representation across the industry contrasts with a high level of dissatisfaction on DEI compared to the much smaller population of male counterparts. Their higher Ownership scores indicate they could be an engine of change on DEI but will require more support from employers. **Employment**: Employed professionals were more dissatisfied with DEI in the industry compared to the self-employed, suggesting that increasing personal agency and ownership of role at all levels holds potential for improving the experience of DEI.

- **Dimension findings**: Higher scores across all groups for the dimensions of **Accountability** and **Ownership** would appear to reflect improved awareness of the relevance and nuances of DEI as a result of heightened societal dialogue around racism and other forms of discrimination. By contrast, the dimension of **Delivering change** received the lowest scores, indicating that some DEI policies and structures are applying in principle but not practice. New approaches may be required to achieve transformational change.

Client outcome

Insights derived from the study on current experience and challenges have provided the client with a data-based foundation for their DEI initiative, helping them to build a high-impact strategy for improving DEI across the industry. Guidelines, training, and toolkits will be developed to support members' efforts to combat discrimination and build inclusion in their workplaces.