Diversity and Inclusion at Brookings: What Does the Research Tell Us? Inclusion and Diversity Committee¹ August 2018

In 2016, the Brookings Institution elevated inclusion and diversity to a strategic priority with a particular emphasis on our scholar ranks and management. There is a strong case that we should pursue increased diversity of the Institution's workforce, as well as a more inclusive workplace, because it is simply the right and fair thing to do. As an organization whose central purpose is bringing quality research to bear on public policy questions, however, we should not ignore the wealth of social scientific work on the consequences of diversity and inclusion in the workplace to justify this elevated institutional focus. If we are to ask our audiences to use our research to make informed decisions, we should be prepared to hold ourselves to a similar standard.

This document reviews a range of relevant literature with the goal of informing ongoing conversations, decision-making, and goal setting around these issues at Brookings. It considers both the diversity and inclusion sides of the ledger—as we must as we make changes not only to our recruiting strategies but also to our broader policies and practices. There are benefits to having a diverse workforce, but we cannot capture them if we do not also ensure that the talented individuals we hire have the opportunity to make meaningful contributions. Inclusion and diversity efforts also reinforce each other. An inclusive workplace culture makes Brookings an attractive destination for the kinds of job candidates that enhance the diversity of our ranks.

Recruiting and supporting a diverse workforce matters at all levels of, and across all job functions within, the Institution. But to the extent that we are focusing on *identity diversity*, data on the composition of our workforce makes clear we are falling especially short in terms of our scholar population. Definitions of identity diversity generally rely on six primary categories—race, gender, age, ethnicity, physical qualities,

¹ This document was drafted under the auspices of Brookings's Inclusion and Diversity Committee as an internal resource meant to inform institutional discussions about diversity and inclusion. We hope other organizations confronting similar issues find it useful.

and sexual orientation—but can include others, such as educational background and socioeconomic status, that may also be relevant to the particular challenges Brookings faces.²

The research on the effects of identity diversity in the workplace is voluminous. One major review of relevant literature identified approximately 250 relationships between different kinds of identity diversity and various attitudes, behaviors, and performance metrics that have been studied by researchers in a range of fields.³ To be clear, much of this work suggests that diversity comes with tradeoffs. For example, several studies found evidence that more diverse teams of employees are less cooperative with one another, but also tend to make better decisions and, depending on the type of diversity, may generate higher revenues.⁴ Other work has argued that more diverse groups are less likely to trust each other's decisions; that distrust, however, may introduce a healthy amount of skepticism into deliberations.⁵

In a wide range of contexts, if individuals are willing to accept these tradeoffs, there is evidence that suggests better outcomes may result. One analysis of academic publishing indicated that less diverse author teams see their work published in lower impact journals and are cited less often.⁶ In the for-profit world, some studies—though by no means all—have found identity diversity to be associated with outcomes like higher sales, profits, revenue, and market share.⁷ Other work has suggested that encouraging more identity diversity spurs innovation in firms.⁸

How might this work? One line of research proposes that identity diversity has a direct effect on decisionmaking processes by introducing new perspectives.⁹ According to one study, when groups include members whose demographic differences are apparent from physical appearance alone, participants are

² This definition is drawn from Page 2017, p. 136. "Identity diversity" is not the only term used in the literature to describe this or related concepts. Loyd et al. (2013) use "social category diversity" to describe the criteria individuals use to classify salient differences between themselves and others. Some researchers also drawn a distinction between "surface-level" and "deep-level" identity diversity (Phillips, Northcraft, and Neale 2006). Jackberg and Jacki 2011. Three of diversity included as "identity diversity" include mea(otherisity of the second s

³ Jackson and Joshi 2011. Types of diversity included as "identity diversity" include race/ethnicity, gender, age, nationality, and cultural values.

⁴ Loyd et al. 2013; Ellison and Mullin 2014.

⁵ Levine et al. 2014.

⁶ Freeman and Huang 2015.

⁷ Hoogendoorn et al. 2013; Herring 2017; Hunt, Layton, and Prince 2015. For one competing view arguing for more limited effects, see Stojmenovska, Bol, and Leopold 2017. For a review of the competing views, see Mannix and Neale 2005.

⁸ Gao and Zhang 2017.

⁹ Much of the literature discussed in the next several paragraphs is also summarized in Phillips 2014.

less likely to assume that others know the same things they do. As a result, they are more likely to share the information they have with their teammates.¹⁰ In another experiment, when a black group member presented a dissenting opinion to her white teammates, it was considered more novel than when the same information was presented by a white participant to an all-white team.¹¹ At a research organization like Brookings, building environments where all available information is heard and taken seriously is especially important.

Beyond introducing new perspectives, identity diversity may also change how people behave in groups.¹² In one study, adding a new, socially dissimilar participant made a group more likely to get the right answer on a task because the original members are more apt to change their minds.¹³ A different analysis—of simulated jury deliberations—found that, in racially diverse panels, white participants use more novel facts and make fewer inaccurate statements than they do in racially homogeneous situations.¹⁴ Ensuring that groups are more diverse, then, may make people work harder at coming to a decision because they assume that not everyone else on the team agrees with them. At an increasingly team-based Brookings, where research work takes place across programs and collaboration occurs between research and business units, taking advantage of these team-level benefits of diversity will be particularly important.

Importantly, the positive effects of identity diversity can also be indirect. Our race, gender, and other identities profoundly shape our perspectives on issues. Male and female economists, for example, view certain economic outcomes and policies differently.¹⁵ Researchers refer to these differences in what people know and how they reason from that information as *cognitive diversity*. Studies suggest it is especially important for efforts that require complex thinking,¹⁶ including those for which no single person has the knowledge or tools to complete the task alone and for which it is difficult to separate the assignment into simpler, routine components.

¹⁰ Phillips, Northcraft, and Neale 2006.

¹¹ Antonio et al. 2004.

¹² For a review of some of this literature, see Bayer and Rouse 2016.

¹³ Phillips, Liljenquist, and Neale 2009.

¹⁴ Sommers 2006.

¹⁵ May, McGarvey, and Whaples 2014.

¹⁶ Sommers 2006.

Much of what we do here at Brookings falls squarely into this category. A range of studies have indicated that bringing a cognitively diverse set of individuals to bear on these kinds of tasks can produce better outcomes, including predictions that are more correct, solutions that are more creative, and decisions that are better informed.¹⁷ One study, for example, found an association between racial heterogeneity and increased productivity in industries that focus on creative decisionmaking and problem-solving.¹⁸ In other work, there is evidence suggesting that female representation in top management improves performance in firms that prioritize innovation.¹⁹ A more diverse Brookings, then, has the potential to produce more original thinking.

This discussion of the value of cognitive diversity should not suggest that it is a replacement for identity diversity.²⁰ Rather, the latter is an important source of the former. An identity diverse Brookings will also be a more cognitively diverse one. A range of evidence indicates that that cognitive diversity can enhance our ability to produce high-quality research. The potential of a more identity diverse workforce to improve the work we do, then, is both direct and indirect.

Beyond improving the quality of our output, a more diverse workforce can also enhance the reach of that output. To "enhance our influence and relevance"—another one of our strategic priorities—we must consider how we are viewed by those who consume the work we do. The demographic composition of our staff affects the kinds of issues we identify as important enough to place on our research agendas, and an inclusive environment is key to guaranteeing that these perspectives are incorporated into the choices we make. We see evidence of this dynamic, for example, in research on state legislatures, where black and female representatives are more likely to introduce bills dealing with issues of particular importance to women and racial minorities.²¹ Investing in a diverse scholar population, then, is likely to produce research that a wider audience will find relevant. A diverse and changing audience may also to be more likely to trust our work if it is produced by a more diverse workforce; experimental evidence suggests that African-Americans ascribe more legitimacy to institutions with more black representation.²² Work done at

¹⁷ Page 2017; Higgs, Plewnia, and Ploch 2005.

¹⁸ Sparber 2009.

¹⁹ Dezso and Ross 2012.

²⁰ For a discussion of the dangers of cognitive diversity as a replacement for identity diversity, see Williams 2017.

²¹ Bratton and Haynie 1999.

²² Scherer and Curry 2010.

Brookings by Jennifer Bradley, moreover, suggests that demographically diverse employees may be particularly well-equipped to be flexible in reaching broad audiences, including global ones.²³

A diverse workforce has the potential to benefit Brookings's core mission of producing quality research that bears on public policy debates. If we are to reap those benefits, however, we cannot simply wait for them to materialize magically. We must, research indicates, be careful and purposeful in how we approach our efforts. A number of different studies have suggested that the benefits of diversity are greater for tasks involving the exploration of new opportunities and ideas, and most likely to be realized when the nature of the diversity is germane to the goal at hand.²⁴ In one study, for example, the positive effects of racial diversity on firm performance were concentrated among organizations pursuing growth strategies, where the flexibility and creatively associated with a more diverse workforce helped offset inefficiencies that can arise with growth.²⁵

This need for careful implementation extends to efforts like training and other learning opportunities, where analyses of various initiatives suggest all well-meaning offerings are not created equal. The literature on the efficacy of various training-based approaches is wide and presents a decidedly mixed picture.²⁶ In some cases, interventions that prime participants to be aware of stereotypes and biases can backfire and have a negative impact.²⁷ Initiatives like targeted recruitment and mentoring, meanwhile, have been more successful at producing greater gender and racial diversity among managers in some studies.²⁸

Similarly, the inclusion side of the ledger also requires thoughtful execution. In one study, for example, public employees intended to remain at their jobs longer when they perceived they were treated fairly and had equal access to opportunities—conditions that do not arise on their own, but rather require active cultivation and management.²⁹ Other work suggests that "building teams and groups in which demographic attributes do not overlap with functional roles" is key to employees' performance and well-

²³ Bradley 2015.

²⁴ Mannix and Neale 2005; Page 2017.

²⁵ Richard 2000.

²⁶ Kochan et al. 2003; Forscher, et al. 2017.

²⁷ Duguid and Thomas-Hunt 2015; Legault, Gutsell, and Inzlicht 2011.

²⁸ Dobbin and Kalev 2016.

²⁹ Chrobot-Mason and Aramovich 2013.

being.³⁰ To ensure an inclusive workplace, then, we must think beyond individual hiring decisions and consider carefully the composition of our teams, small and large.

Building a more diverse workforce, and a more inclusive workplace, are not just short-term goals, and our commitment to these goals does not operate in a vacuum. The broader environment matters. To the extent that there are tradeoffs to be navigated between negative and positive consequences of introducing diversity, one analysis found that the drawbacks are more likely to arise in occupations dominated by whites and men.³¹ When Norway introduced gender quotas for corporate governance, for example, evidence suggested it led to lower corporate profits,³² in part because there was not a sufficiently large pool of strong female candidates to fill the required slots.³³ If we are committed over the medium and long terms to building a more diverse staff at the scholar and management level, we must also do our part to feed that pipeline through efforts focused on our early career workforce.

As we review what the literature in a range of fields tells us about the value of diversity in the Brookings context, it is also worth considering the assumptions that underlie this task. As Columbia Business School's Katherine Phillips has written about the task of offering a justification for diversity and inclusion,

We should reflect on how seeking evidence of a business case for diversity reifies the status quo and legitimates the idea that some people belong and some people deserve to be included in organizations, while other people have to go above and beyond to prove their worth. The questions we ask about diversity have power. They have underlying assumptions that often go unspoken.³⁴

In offering this literature review to support our institutional focus on inclusion and diversity, we are beginning from the assumption that these goals should be justified in terms of what they mean for our ability to produce high-quality research that has an impact on the policymaking process. There is certainly value in offering social scientific evidence in support of our choices; indeed, it is what we ask others to do with our work every day. But this argument cannot and should not be the end of our institutional

³⁰ Guillaume et al. 2017, p. 295.

³¹ Joshi and Roh 2009.

³² Matsa and Miller 2013.

³³ Ahern and Dittmar 2012.

³⁴ Phillips 2017, p. 244.

conversation about how and why we should pursue a more diverse and inclusive workplace. It is only a starting point.

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