

Insight report

The link between diversity, equity,
inclusion and safety



November 2024

Lloyd's Register Foundation

Foreword

The connection between Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DE&I) and business performance has been studied for many years. The evidence is conclusive; a wide range of benefits emerge when employers take action to foster inclusion, address local and systemic inequities, and diversify the workforce – from senior leadership to the shop floor. These include improvements in morale, talent acquisition and retention, productivity, innovation, and more. DE&I in action involves strategies, initiatives, programs, policies and practices designed to include people of various backgrounds (particularly those who have been historically and systemically excluded or oppressed). Such actions ensure that these people finally have the support needed to perform to the fullest of their abilities.



John Dony
Former Vice President of
Workplace Strategy, National
Safety Council

Existing research has focused on exploring the value of DE&I as a concept but there is another very important but largely unrecognised area that could benefit from an effective DE&I strategy. **Safety & health performance** (covering both physical and mental health) can be considered a fundamental outcome from a strong DE&I strategy but has seen little formal analysis in academic, policy or thought leadership literature. This Insight Report looks to address this, discussing DE&I in a workplace safety context with reference to individual characteristics.

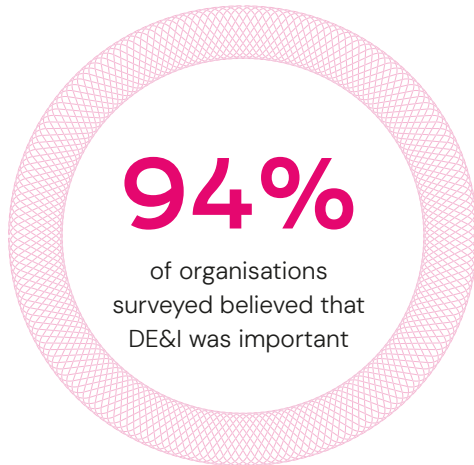
The state of safety and health related to DE&I and the lack of sufficient research in this area is particularly troubling, given what we can see from both workplace injury and fatality data, and anecdotal evidence. In the US, Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data clearly indicate that workers of colour suffer disproportionate rates of injury, illness, and death on the job. In addition, National Safety Council (NSC) survey data show strong connections between ‘feeling safe’ (being able to bring one’s whole self to work) and ‘being safe’ (not suffering from adverse safety and health outcomes).

In other words – safety and health outcomes appear to be inequitable. Anecdotally, this can easily be demonstrated at the lowest level of the hierarchy of controls; for example, when Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) does not fit one’s body because it is designed for a 5’10”, 180 pound male. And, although ill-fitting PPE can itself be life-threatening, a **DE&I-informed approach** is not only needed when considering hi-vis vests and safety glasses, it must be understood at all layers of Environmental, Health & Safety (EHS) management – or its benefits will never be fully realised.

But this scale of change isn’t easy. The recent politicisation of DE&I has created a polarised perspective on these activities. Many safety and health professionals hold near and dear the value of keeping everyone safe, but a lack of nuanced understanding around DE&I (particularly the concept of ‘equity’) has created a set of false assumptions within many organisations.

Across the course of the many conversations that informed this report, it has become clear that the mantras of ‘colourblindness’ or ‘equal opportunity’ held by some organisations and EHS professionals fail to take into account systemic factors, internal biases, and historic inequities – like socioeconomic conditions that lead to lower access to medical care, housing, safe communities, financial opportunities and so on.

The differences between ‘equity’ and ‘equality’ must be better understood. Equality means that each individual or group is given the same resources or opportunities (for instance, the same PPE is available for all workers). Equity, on the other hand, recognises that people or groups have different needs to achieve the same outcome – for example, not just access to PPE, but access to PPE that *fits*.



Workplaces that address equity rather than just equality find ways to remove systematic/structural biases and barriers, allocating the right resources and opportunities to overcome the circumstances that create unequal outcomes. This same principle extends across all aspects of safety and health management – from communication and training to hazard identification and risk management.

The lack of knowledge on the overlap of DE&I and safety is startling. It paints a picture of organisations and safety & health professionals sometimes at odds with their core values and the thinking they readily apply to other areas of risk management and hazard control. For example, while **94% of organisations** surveyed for this Insight Report responded that they believed that DE&I was important, **a quarter of them** reported no understanding of the linkages between DE&I and safety.

And even amongst the organisations that have made these connections, the report suggests that implementation of safety programs informed by DE&I principles are in their infancy and largely not strategic, validated, or influenced by experts.

In some cases, it is a problem of awareness, in other cases, a problem of implementation. We intend to tackle both in this report.

To do so, NSC, in partnership with (and funded by) Lloyds Register Foundation, has sought to address this critical challenge, by embarking on a **first-of-its-kind examination of the state of DE&I and safety**.

This report considers ‘DE&I’ as a framework, which we acknowledge can seem monolithic; disguising the ways in which its component parts differ and relate to one another and in turn, to safety. A framework in this context should not be interpreted as something to be managed, sorted and delegated, but rather a value that **everyone** subscribes to. We will provide an overview of the landscape and conversation to help readers understand how (...if at all) organisations connect the dots between DE&I-informed risk assessments and the actions they must take to address them.

We are optimistic this report will encourage others to take up this next level of analysis.

The report is based upon an extensive review of the (worryingly scant) literature on this topic, along with interviews and surveys with HR, operations, safety and health, and other stakeholders. It also involved a stakeholder workshop and year-long engagement with a group of safety and cross-disciplinary practitioners.

Today, we believe that to truly keep people safe, we must more holistically understand the conditions and challenges that affect people in all of their incredible and infinite variation. People for whom one size does not fit all; people who will be put at risk if safety and health professionals and business leaders fail to understand what makes them “them,” not just as individuals, but as populations shaped by – and too often failed by – the systems within which they work and live.

We hope that you will engage with this work in the way it was intended – utilising existing data and your expertise to draw deeper and more direct connections between DE&I and safety and health.

Foreword

In support of its mission to engineer a safer world, Lloyd's Register Foundation (The Foundation) publishes 'insight' and 'foresight' reports that explore safety in critical sectors. They are designed to improve safety by supporting policy and industry decision making, research and societal debate.



Ruth Bournemouth
Chief Executive, Lloyd's Register Foundation

This latest insight report explores the safety considerations of the diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) frameworks that organisations across the world use to promote fair treatment and full participation for all, particularly groups who have historically been underrepresented or subject to discrimination on the basis of identity or disability'.*

Most of the existing research about DE&I focusses on its value/impact on conventional indicators of business performance including morale; talent acquisition/retention; productivity; and innovation. There has been little academic analysis of its impact on health and safety (both physical and psychological). We found this concerning, given that better health and safety is a fundamental outcome of implementing a strong DE&I strategy.

With this in mind, we examined the links between DE&I and safety, seeking to answer five questions:

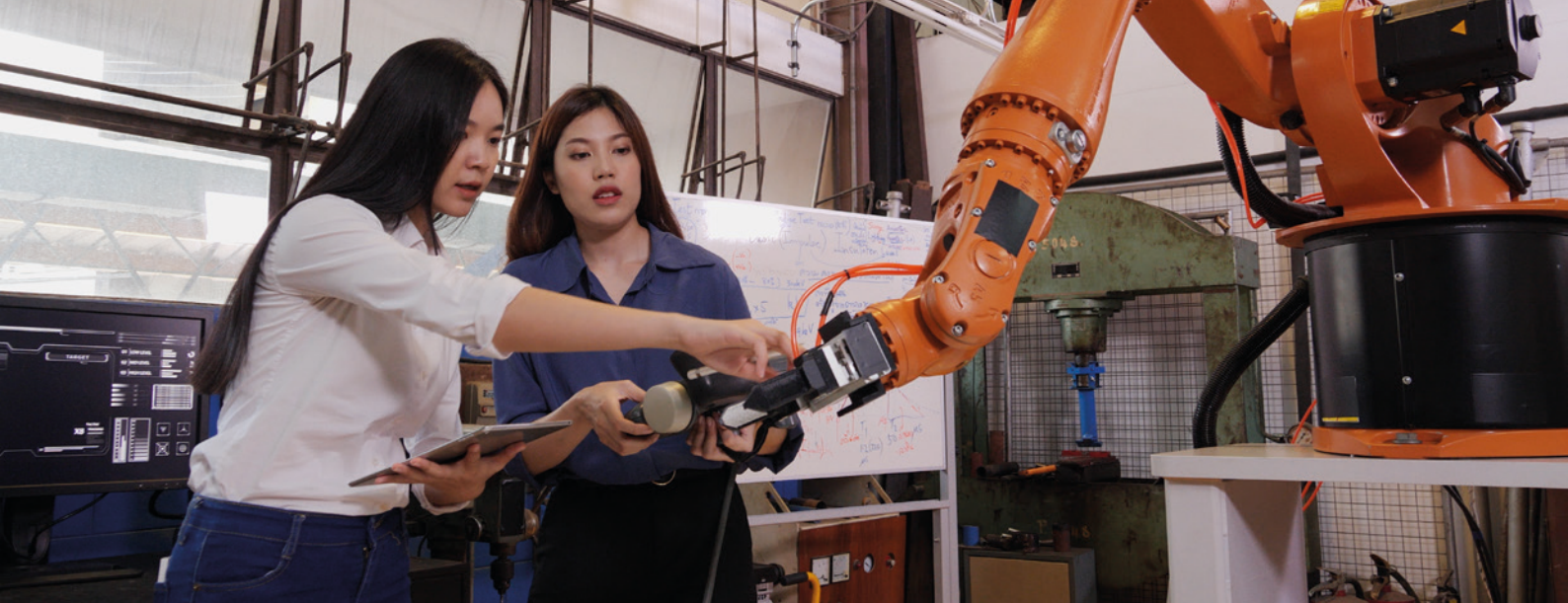
- What is the current landscape of policies and practices in DE&I?
- How do the core topics within DE&I align with safety? What are the inter-relationships, synergies, and barriers among them?
- What aspects of DE&I and safety are well-established? Where are there gaps?
- How could (or does) a focus on DE&I improve safety outcomes?
- What strategies and tactics hold the most promise for creating and implementing a successful DE&I-informed safety approach?

To do this we commissioned the National Safety Council (NSC) in the US to provide a comprehensive overview of everything that is currently known about how safety relates to DE&I.

We used NSC analysis to offer two practical outputs:

- Robust recommendations for organisations wanting to improve their safety and DE&I practice, recognising that a truly inclusive approach to understanding the links between safety and DE&I should consider all aspects of diversity, including those relating to sex; gender; sexual orientation; ethnicity; disability; religion, and socioeconomic background. These recommendations pave the way to tangible actions for leaders that remove structural barriers to diverse, equitable and inclusive workplaces. With these, and first-hand accounts of the effects of those barriers, leaders have both the understanding and tools they need to create lasting change.
- The first model for DE&I-informed safety that any organisation can use to determine its level of maturity in this area, offering an accurate starting point for benchmarking and continuous improvement.

As John Dony describes in his foreword, we believe this is the first report to focus on the symbiotic relationship between these inherently connected areas of business performance. We hope it will lead to greater engagement in this important topic, and improved safety for all.



How is DE&I defined?



**Equality is giving everyone a shoe.
Equity is giving everyone a shoe that fits**

[Attributed to Dr Naheed Dosani]

Definitions of 'diversity', 'equity' and 'inclusion' that together form DE&I vary, as does opinion about which of the three is most important. This variation is fitting, since DE&I – however defined – is about eschewing a sense of 'standard' and recognising that 'one size does not fit all'.

DE&I can be described in two ways – as an organisational framework and as an organisational value – and even that causes debate... Some prefer to see it as a framework providing a DE&I foundation for everything that happens with the organisation while others prefer to see it as a value, something which creates an environment where everyone from the leaders to the newest employee can be open to where DE&I takes them – even if it's uncomfortable – and build psychological safety by doing so.

Both views agree on one thing: DE&I is about creating a subtle change in mindset from the notion of "standard" being "normal" and anything outside of that is "different." It is a move – for example – from "some people need something different from the norm and that's fine" to "everyone needs PPE that fits."



Key findings and recommendations

The extensive research undertaken to produce this report has generated a significant number of findings, challenges, and takeaways for those interested in improving the link between DE&I and safety in their organisations. All of these are available in the full version of this report, which can be found on the [NSC website](#).

These outputs broadly fall into three main themes:

The interconnections between DE&I and safety are clear but current levels of integration fall way below what is actually possible.

Organisations recognise the value of the link between the two but they struggle with effective implementation. This is not helped when approaches differ between industries, geographies and types of organisational design, and when the range of understanding about how DE&I and safety are linked is so diverse.

The ability to integrate DE&I and safety effectively in practice is being held back by a lack of data and resources.

This is usually due to barriers at the organisational level that impede progress on aligning DE&I with safety practices in the workplace.

Best practices are starting to emerge that can improve both integration and implementation.

There is an increasing recognition that the integration of DE&I and safety has to start in the boardroom, and that successful DE&I-aligned safety policies depend considerably on successful engagement with stakeholders and their inclusion in the process.

Our findings have enabled us to develop ten recommendations for organisations that want to improve the links between DE&I and safety but need guidance on what steps to take:

1. Create a safe and inclusive environment

A psychologically safe and trusting workforce is a starting point for honest and open engagement.

2. Inform safety initiatives with workers' feedback

Numerous mechanisms and channels must be used to ensure diverse worker feedback underpins any DE&I and safety policies and initiatives.

3. Back up communication with action

Transparent and open communication is critical but it fails without visible action and a positive feedback loop.

4. Integrate DE&I and safety into the organisation's code of conduct

DE&I-informed safety must serve as a tenet of daily business decision-making to foster accountability.

5. Address DE&I and safety as a full-spectrum exercise

Everyone, from leadership to middle management, to workers, must have a meaningful role in enabling the DE&I and safety link, and they must "walk the talk."

6. Enhance cross-functional collaboration

Collaboration between key stakeholders such as HR, ESG, and safety is critical for integration and data purposes.

7. Adapt DE&I and safety goals to changing trends

Regulatory, societal, and workforce trends require regular policy, program, and initiative review to stay relevant and impactful.

6. Set DE&I targets in C-suite remuneration and goals

ESG-related goals are becoming more common in CEO compensation and should be built upon with thoughtful DE&I-related goals.

9. Apply a DE&I-or equity-informed 'lens' to safety policies, programs, and initiatives

Rather than starting new programs to integrate and implement DE&I principles in safety, organisations should embed these principles into existing safety and health activities such as data collection; risk assessment and hazard identification; proactive observations; incident investigations; serious injury, illness and fatality (SIIF) precursors and human organisational performance.

We believe that the NSC research demonstrates both the potential to, and the criticality of, embedding DE&I into 'everyday safety' across the spectrum of safety and health management system activities, wherever they may fall on the hierarchy of controls. From PPE to Engineering risk mitigation, opportunities exist to apply a DE&I-informed approach.

10. Recognise the importance of each component of DE&I

Engage with the constituent parts of DE&I, not simply the entire concept as a monolithic idea. Each element is unique, requires specific action to enable, and must continue to evolve over time. Too often diversity, equity, and inclusion are bundled together in ways that can restrict an organisation's ability to address any one particular challenge.

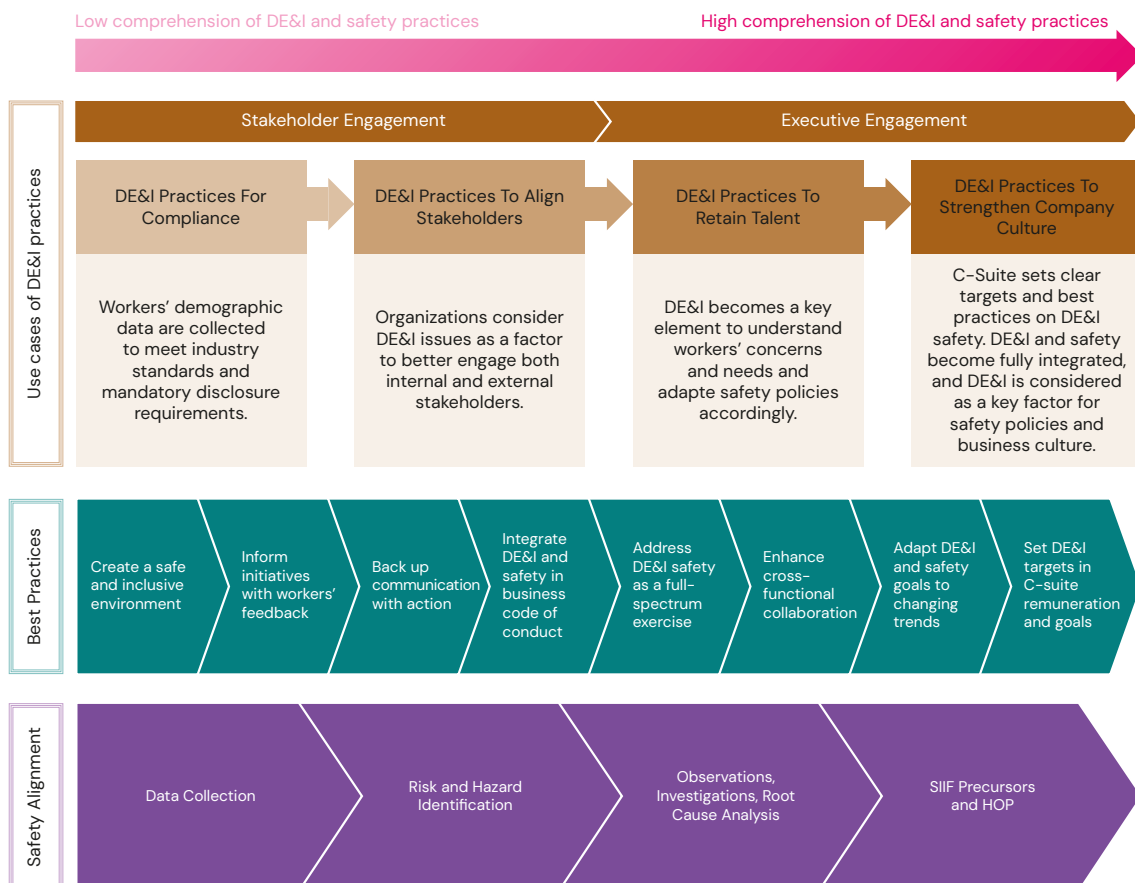




A brand new model for DE&I-Informed Safety

The combined findings from all the work to produce this report have indicated that organisations would benefit from a clear way to understand how well they are already integrating DE&I and safety and what they need to do to improve. To help them, NSC has created a new tool to do just that.

The 'DE&I-informed Safety Model' offers a framework and language to describe various levels of organisational maturity related to how well an organisation understands the link between these two areas; how engaged it is in integrating them successfully; how far they have got to date; and the best practices they should consider. As a result, it can be used to gauge where an organisation is on its journey towards DE&I-informed safety maturity.



A decorative graphic consisting of numerous thin, red, curved lines that originate from the top right and fan out towards the bottom right, creating a sense of movement and depth.

FOCUS

World Risk Poll: DE&I and workplace harm, violence, and harassment

Lloyd's Register Foundation's World Risk Poll is the first global study of perception and experiences of risk to people's safety. The findings of the 2021 poll were based on over 125,000 interviews in 121 countries and included questions on experiences of workplace harm (polled as any form of serious harm arising from respondent's work, open to personal interpretation of what harm means), as well as violence and harassment in the workplace. The data showed some important trends about the connection between DE&I and health and safety when split across different variables:

By Sex

Men were both more likely to have experienced workplace harm than women (17% vs 14%), and also know someone else who had experienced harm.

By income

Personal experience of harm decreases as personal income increases. However, the poorest 20% within their country, were less likely to say they know someone else who has experienced harm.

By education

Those with a lower level of education were more likely to have experienced harm personally, but less likely to know someone who had experienced harm.

- **Primary education** – 70% no experience
- **Secondary** – 73% no experience
- **Tertiary education** – 78% no experience

By migrant status

Foreign-born women reported a greater experience of violence and harassment in the workplace than their native-born counterparts (30% vs 22%), an effect that was not seen for men.

By experience of discrimination

The poll asks individuals if they have ever personally experienced discrimination due to a disability, their gender, nationality, racial or ethnic origin, or religion. Those who experienced discrimination were much more likely to have experienced or know someone who had experienced personal harm (28%) than those who had not experienced discrimination (12%).

Workplace violence and harassment

Whilst violence and harassment were not directly studied in the literature review for this report, findings from the World Risk Poll offer some insights about physical and psychological safety outcomes that are relevant in the context of DE&I.

- **21% of workers globally** have experienced some form of violence and harassment at work.
- **Men were slightly more likely to have experienced violence and harassment at work** (22% vs 20%) compared to women. Of those who reported an experience of violence and harassment, more than half experienced it more than once.
- Importantly, whilst psychological violence and harassment was the most experienced form for both men and women, **a third of women** who reported experiencing any violence and harassment reported a sexual element to this experience (33%). This drops to **one in six for men** (15%).

This report suggests how the data generated through our poll might lead to new actions to tackle violence and harassment in the workplace that are more effective because they are DE&I-informed.

Lloyd's Register Foundation (2022) World Risk Poll 2021: Safe at work? Global experiences of violence and harassment at work Available from <https://wrp.lrfoundation.org.uk>



FOCUS

Lloyd's Register Foundation grant case study: Improving health and safety for indigenous workers

In New Zealand, and similar to other indigenous groups, the indigenous population, the Māori, are at a higher risk of work-related injuries and fatalities than non-Māori. Data published in *Injury Prevention*, a peer-reviewed journal, showed that they are 55% more likely to be injured or killed at work than non-Māori workers,^v with an average of 17 deaths per year.^{vi}

These findings are important because over 370 million people worldwide are classified as indigenous and they are some of the most vulnerable workers in the world, often employed in precarious conditions undertaking extremely hazardous work.ⁱⁱⁱ

Like many indigenous peoples, the Māori's understanding of risk and how to manage it is based on a body of lived knowledge across multiple generations. This has spawned a cultural disposition for a cautious attitude that the Māori call *Kia Tūpato*. It is well understood both within and outside their community, to the extent that the New Zealand government has used it as the basis of promotional material to encourage people to become more cautious about certain risks, for example during the global pandemic.

In workplaces, *Kia Tūpato* is a casual phrase used by Māori and non-Māori alike, and informally adhered to by some staff. Yet despite there being an empathy towards *Kia Tūpato* from non-Māori workers, it has not been integrated into modern health and safety practices.

Between 2019 and 2021, IndigeSafe, an international provider of worker-centric indigenous health and safety research and practice, examined the potential of *Kia Tūpato* to improve the perception of risk by vulnerable workers in the modern workplace. While at work, staff actively applied the principles of *Kia Tūpato* to their daily risk register and their behaviours were observed.

The results showed improvements including a heightened awareness of risk, improved risk assessment, and a reemphasis of current practice or controls.

- **70% of workers** considered *Kia Tūpato* made more sense than conventional health and safety practices.
- **60% could talk more openly** about health and safety.
- The families of workers noticed workers were more **job satisfied, spoke positively about their work, and encouraged the use of Māori culture** in the household.

The *Kia Tūpato* case study has produced a draft practice model planned for completion in 2024.

“Progressing new practices derived from minority cultures that challenge convention, inevitably involves overcoming hegemony. A grant from the Lloyd's Register Foundation has been invaluable in avoiding obstacles like this, by supporting the development of concise training resources to promote the use of *Kia Tūpato* in health and safety practices.

Vance Walker, Founder of IndigeSafe, and a Foundation small-grant recipient.

Footnotes

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- Parkes, P (2021) *Priorities driving better work* Available from <https://www.nzism.org/webinars/priorities-to-drive-better-work-with-phil-parkes/>
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Acknowledgements

The National Safety Council and Lloyd's Register Foundation would like to gratefully acknowledge the individuals who provided interviews and feedback to contribute to this report:

Adele Abrams	Law Office of Adele L. Abrams P.C.
Jane Austin	Lloyd's Register
Christy Caputo	Consor Engineers
Dawn Childs	Pure DC
Philippe Lai Choo	Institution of Occupational Safety & Health Management
David Daniels	ID2 Solutions
Sue Ferns	Prospect
Mike Flynn	CDC
Colleen Gemmill	D.E. Gemmill
Janet Handwerk	University of Central Oklahoma
Mohammed Hassan	Kuwait Oil Company
Carl Heinlein	ACIG
Jennifer Lastra	360immersive
Amy May	Boeing
Mark McBride-Wright	EqualEngineers
Katie McLaughlin	ISN
Billie Jo Moyer	Sauder Woodworking
Alberto Munuera Moreno	AECOM
Travis Parsons	Laborers' Health and Safety Fund of North America
Dheera Phong-anat	Work Promotion Association
Wayne Pignolet	White Men as Full Diversity Partners
Dani Rigg	Nutrien
Emily Spearman	BP
Jessie Strickland	Lloyd's Register
Patti Swope	RTX
Jason Townsell	Paramount
Alex Tse	Hong Kong Occupational Safety and Health Association



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