



JOBS

[ECONOMY](#) | [WORLD ECONOMY](#) | [US ECONOMY](#) | [THE FED](#) | [CENTRAL BANKS](#) | [JOBS](#)

Diversity can be helped through 'cultural competency': Experts



355 SHARES

108 COMMENTS [Join the Discussion](#)

Jalena Keane-Lee, special to CNBC.com
Sunday, 23 Aug 2015 | 9:00 AM ET



Getty Images

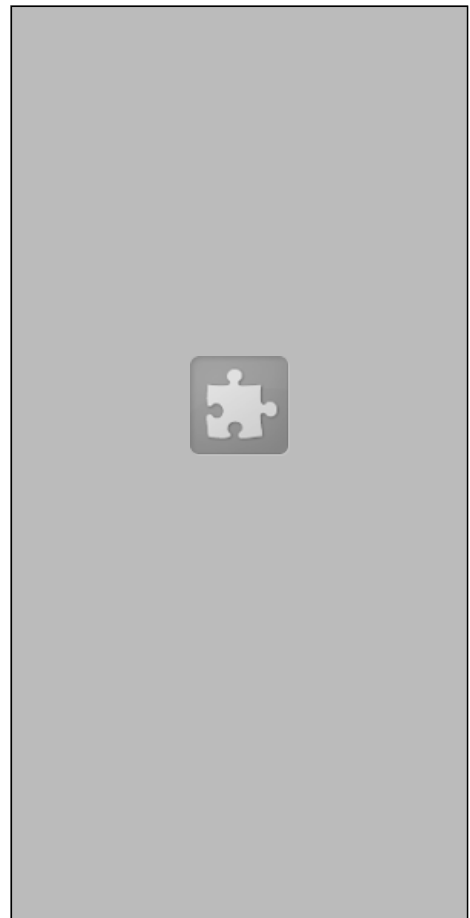
Hundreds of job seekers lined up to meet potential employers at the Diversity Job Fair in New York City in April.

The technology sector is in the midst of a raging debate about whether its leaders have done enough to ensure a diverse workforce.

Yet those efforts are falling **well short of the mark**, leading some experts to argue that companies are faltering because they lack deep understanding of their workforces, as well as the populations they serve.

Earlier this month, the Congressional Black Caucus's (CBC) Diversity Task Force met with Silicon Valley tech leaders to push for more African-American representation in the field.

The meeting was part of a sustained effort to boost the representation of blacks, Hispanics and women among technology workers. It's become a hot topic that has put industry leaders like **Google** and **Apple**



by Taboola

[Cramer: Never fooled again! Signs of a real bottom](#)

on the defensive even as the sector sits on record profit of **nearly \$135 billion collectively**.

To be sure, the conversation hinges largely on how diversity is defined. Organizations like Working Partnerships USA point out that tech's **"invisible workforce"**—the plethora of nonskilled support jobs outside of engineering and coding—is in fact balanced, but mostly underpaid.

However, at least a few observers argue that some workplaces are growing in diversity, yet don't fully appreciate their workers' abilities, or their target markets. Along those lines, experts say both companies and diversity advocates might be misapplying the lessons of diversity.

[Read More > The toys that could help close Silicon Valley's gender gap](#)

"We define cultural competence as the ability to interact effectively across difference," said Sara Taylor, founder and president of deepSEE Consulting, a diversity and cultural competency consulting firm.

"It's not just about diversity; it's about what we do to utilize it," she said. "It's like having a giant treasure chest—do you know how to unlock it? You need competence to unlock it."

Not just a 'nice, moral' thing

The debate has grown in importance as demographic trends make diversity something that all businesses have to negotiate. Recent Bureau of Labor Statistics data showed that people of color make up a third of the workforce, a figure that is likely to grow.

Ensuring a workforce that is more representative of demographic realities is a problem that defies easy explanations and solutions. Still, evidence suggests that in instances where diversity exists, the outcomes aren't what some might expect.

[Read More > Silicon Valley 'needs guidance' to boost diversity: Entrepreneur](#)

In a 2003 study, Switzerland's IMD Business School professor Joseph DiStefano **explored the impact of cultural diversity** on business performance, and found that teams with conventionally defined diversity were often less productive than groups with shared backgrounds and values.

DiStefano noted that differences in culture, leadership style, personality and gender can pose challenges to high performance. The findings suggested that cultural competency—demonstrating deep knowledge of and appreciation for a population or demographic—is key to ensuring that diversity translates into the best results.

"This isn't just a nice moral thing; this is what we should be doing to make us more effective," said Charles Zelle, Minnesota commissioner of transportation, who went through deepSEE's cultural competency training.

"A common theme when I talk with my group of business leaders is

[El-Erian: Stocks have a lot lower to go from here](#)

[Cramer: Buy buy buy these into the nasty decline](#)

[McDonald's brings back a flop](#)

['God-trader' Andy Hall's fund loses \\$500M](#)

[Dow futures down as Wall Street preps for meltdown](#)

[Cramer: Worst mistake you can make in a selloff](#)

[Cramer: The huge surge reversal—get ready for more](#)

[Stocks will 'get ugly' this year: Technician](#)

[Market correction not over yet: Bob Doll](#)

FROM THE WEB

Sponsored Links by Taboola

[How project managers can measure a cloud project's success](#)

IBM

[Watch 7 Up's Ultimate DJ Contest w/ Tiësto](#)

Vevo

[A Method Used By Most To Pay Down Credit Card Debt At A Furious Pace](#)

NextAdvisor

[Ever Looked Yourself Up? This New Site Reveals All](#)

Instant Checkmate Subscription

MOST POPULAR: TECH



[Cramer: If this doesn't close up, we're in trouble](#)



[Transgender porn quickly growing in popularity](#)



[Apple loses key music streaming executive](#)

that without doing this we'd be out of business," Zelle said. "It's about how we treat people—clients, the public and employees. It's essential to the business and mission."

Even advocates of a diverse workforce acknowledged that the solution wasn't as easy as it seems to some. "If everyone agrees that a diverse workplace is more productive why haven't we seen it implemented? I think people intellectually understand it, but it's difficult on the emotional level," said Center for American Progress fellow Sam Fulwood.

"If you told a CEO that a new type of machinery would make their business more productive they would buy it immediately," Fulwood said. "Diversity provides the same increase in productivity but causes a disruption. People need to be willing to manage the disruption that comes with managing change."



4. Ashley Madison parent company CEO is stepping down

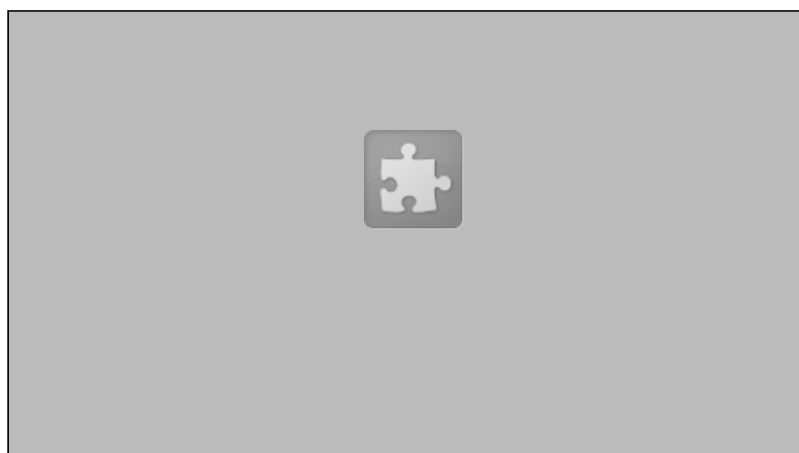


5. This could be tech's next big problem

1 Tip of a flat belly :

superfatburningfats.com

Cut down a bit of your belly every day by using this 1 weird old tip.



Another barrier in learning cultural competency is that most people self-assess their understanding as much higher than it actually is.

"There are a lot of myths around this work, the biggest two being that identity equals competence, that you have to be a woman or person of color to be culturally competent," said deepSEE's Taylor. "The other is that exposure somehow equals competency. We don't expect exposure to become competency for anything else. I can hold a violin for hours but that won't teach me how to play it."

The implications of the diversity debate are clear to most business executives, who polls show **broadly agree with the idea** that a balanced and inclusive workforce is important to innovation. For many experts and industry leaders, the nagging question is how to make it a reality.

"The nation is undergoing demographic change—the most informed and progressive businesses on diversity will be tapping into a changing democracy and they will be the most profitable, the others will be lapped," said American Progress' Fulwood.

RELATED SECURITIES

Symbol	Price	Change	%Change
--------	-------	--------	---------

GOOGL	658.03 ▼	-9.93	-1.49%
AAPL	112.835 ▼	-0.085	-0.08%

MORE FROM CNBC

by Taboola

- [Cramer: Never fooled again! Signs of a real bottom](#)
- [El-Erian: Stocks have a lot lower to go from here](#)
- [Cramer: Buy buy buy these into the nasty decline](#)
- [McDonald's brings back a flop](#)
- ['God-trader' Andy Hall's fund loses \\$500M](#)
- [Dow futures down as Wall Street preps for meltdown](#)

FROM THE WEB

Sponsored Links by Taboola

[Where is the Internet of Things being invented? Not in Silicon Valley](#)
IBM

[A Method Used By Most To Pay Down Credit Card Debt At A Furious Pace](#)
NextAdvisor

[Warren Buffett Just Gave Americans a Big Warning](#)
The Motley Fool

[College Student Finds Market Trend; Increases Net Worth By Millions](#)
Money Morning Report Subscription

[5 Easy Ways to Use Up Leftover Paint](#)
PaintCare.org

[Ever Looked Yourself Up? This New Site Reveals All](#)
Instant Checkmate Subscription

<p>Per Mile Car Insurance metromile.com/Free-Quote Drive Less than 200 Miles Per Week? Save \$500+ with Per Mile Insurance!</p>	<p>1 Rule of a flat stomach: redirectyourcarbs.com Cut down a bit of stomach fat every day by using this 1 weird old tip.</p>
--	--

SHOW COMMENTS

Data is a real-time snapshot *Data is delayed at least 15 minutes
Global Business and Financial News, Stock Quotes, and Market Data and Analysis

© 2015 CNBC LLC. All Rights Reserved.

Data also provided by