

Behind the curtain: corporate DEI

Level: Intermediate (C1–C2)

Time: Approximately 90 minutes

Overview: This article discusses how DEI (diversity, equality and inclusion) work continues quietly in the corporate world despite the political backlash.

Business topics: Equality, diversity, inclusion initiatives, controversial DEI decisions

Business language: Useful vocabulary, business phrases, collocations

Activities: Key words, understanding the text, business language, discussion, DEI research / controversial decisions, email writing (optional)

Groups: Whole class, one-to-one, small groups

1. Warmer

- a. Ask students to discuss their opinions in small groups or pairs. After talking for a few minutes, get students to share their thoughts and ideas with the rest of the group. Write students' contributions of relevant target language on the board.

2. Key words

- a. Ask students to scan the article to find the key words. Then ask them to compare their answers in pairs or small groups before going over them.

Key:

- | | |
|------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. <i>backlash</i> | 8. <i>slash</i> |
| 2. <i>affirmative action</i> | 9. <i>recession</i> |
| 3. <i>mentorship</i> | 10. <i>demographic</i> |
| 4. <i>alter</i> | 11. <i>bold</i> |
| 5. <i>poll, polled</i> | 12. <i>retain, retaining</i> |
| 6. <i>initiative</i> | 13. <i>progressive</i> |
| 7. <i>unscathed</i> | 14. <i>in the pipeline</i> |

3. Understanding the article

- a. Ask students to skim the article first. Then, have them scan the article to locate the relevant paragraph for each statement and decide if each sentence is true or false. Have them correct the ones that are false in pairs.

Key:

1. *False. The decision was overturned, and companies have remained low-key since.*
2. *True*
3. *False. They are not altering their plans.*
4. *True*
5. *True*
6. *False. It is due to fears of a recession.*
7. *True*
8. *False. The figure for Disney is 28.5 per cent.*
9. *False. The comment was about Nike.*
10. *False. She is not changing her plans.*
11. *True*
12. *True*

4. Business language – idiomatic language and collocations

- a. Ask students to scan the article quickly to find the phrases.

Key:

1. *by the dozen*
2. *take your hat off to someone*
3. *stay the course*
4. *forward-looking*
5. *neck-and-neck*
6. *be jumping up and down*
7. *scream (it) from the rooftops*

- b. Ask students to work together to complete the activity. Ask them if they know any synonyms.

Key:

1. *panic (e.g., be in a frenzy)*
2. *action (sue / take to court)*
3. *programmes (modify, launch, manage)*
4. *backlash (remain unscathed)*
5. *budgets (cut funds)*
6. *workforce (increase diversity)*
7. *characters (star ... characters)*
8. *staff (hire/find personnel, talent)*
9. *colleges (universities)*

- c. Ask students to do this individually before comparing their answers. Ask early finishers to use more of the phrases in their own sentences.

Key (possible answers):

1. *We were consumed by panic as they continued to slash our department budget.*
2. *They are diversifying their workforce and screaming it from the rooftops.*
3. *They are recruiting new staff by the dozen.*
4. *They have threatened legal action for the way the film company has featured minority characters.*
5. *I would say these last two candidates are neck-and-neck in the job race.*
6. *I take my hat off to them for rolling out their first DEI programme ten years ago and staying the course.*

5. Discussion

- a. Put the students in pairs or small groups and ask them to discuss the questions. When students have covered all the questions, bring the whole class back together so that they can share their answers and any interesting information that arose from their discussions.

6. Wider business theme – controversial DEI decisions

- a. Elicit a controversial DEI decision from the class. If no examples arise, provide the example below:

In 2023, Disney released a live-action remake of The Little Mermaid. Black actress Halle Bailey played Ariel, the lead character. Ariel's six sisters were played by actors of different ethnicities. The film got 16 million views in its first five days of streaming, but it didn't look like it would be a success.

Give students some time to think of possible things to research. Have students discuss their ideas in pairs to help them brainstorm. Then, allow students

to research their chosen situation individually or in pairs and make notes about the answers to the questions.

- b. Regroup students so that they form groups where each student has researched a different DEI decision/company. Have them share their findings and discuss each situation by giving their opinion and agreeing or disagreeing about its success.

If time allows, ask students to share the most successful case from each group with the rest of the class.

Extension

Students can write an email about a DEI initiative they would like to see implemented. You could suggest the following structure:

1. the background to the DEI issue in the specific context
2. a summary of the suggested initiative with examples from a successful case
3. suggested action points or next steps