

THE EDGE ADVISORY GROUP - Response to question posed by AHRMA Participant;

An analysis of racism:

Interpersonal - This is a form of racism or discrimination that is between two people. The most commonly accepted or understood form of discrimination. Examples may include racial slurs, prejudice or exclusionary behaviors, microaggressions, etc. In extreme cases this may include race or gender-based violence hate crimes etc.

Institutional - When racism or discrimination is enacted through policy, practice, or procedure. Historical examples would include redlining/racial housing covenants (a racist housing policy enacted under the New Deal that lasted from the 30s to 60s) and how it prevents people of color from owning appreciating assets, getting loans to purchase homes, or living in certain neighborhoods. The current impact as a result of that practice is an increasing wealth gap between white families and families of color.

Similar examples can be found in education, healthcare, incarceration rates.

Systemic - When two or more overlapping institutions create a disparate racial outcome. Continuing with the housing example, redlining prevented ownership and the ability to live in certain neighborhoods. Even after segregation ended and people of color were permitted to attend historically white schools or higher education institutions a barrier still exists. Schools are funded by property taxes. Areas with higher value thus have schools with more funding and tend to have better student outcomes, placement rates, and more access to gifted, accelerated, and specialized programming. Due to policy that discriminated based on race, communities of color had less access to quality education. The result of this in the United States is the growing achievement gap in public schools across the US.

The difference between DEI and Anti-racist efforts. DEI is focused on a series of diversity characteristics and often will drift away from the conversation about race or only deal with racial issues on a surface level/interpersonal level. The justification becomes; as long as am "not racist" everything is okay.

An anti-racist effort understands that racism has been a part of the fabric of the United States since inception. It also understands that if we are not intentional about dismantling racist systems or removing barriers created by racist policy, we will continue to get the same outcomes. It realizes that when we disaggregate data across all major categories of success that black and brown folks tend to be at the bottom and asks how can I intentionally remove barriers that are in place inside and outside of my organization. If you think about systemic racism as an escalator it may be the best analogy. If I am not intentional about moving in the opposite direction I will still land at the same destination/outcome. In other words being "not racist" will still allow disproportionate outcomes and systemic racism to persist. We will just have a few more people of color on staff and be sure that we don't say anything that would hurt their feelings. Being anti-racist says that we will not tolerate racism of any form and actively work to remove barriers inside and outside of our community that continue to create disparate outcomes.

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A Closer Look: Systematic Racism vs. Systemic Racism

Systematic according to Merriam-Webster, means “relating to or consisting of a system.” An alternate definition is “methodical in procedure or plan.” You could imagine, for example, a systematic approach to editing a manuscript, or a systematic approach to preparing a house for sale. Systematic implies a thorough series of steps that you follow.

Systemic means “of, relating to, or common to a system.” That sounds a lot like the definition of systematic. But in the context of racism, the appropriate sub-definition is “fundamental to a predominant social, economic, or political practice.” Where systematic applies to an approach, systemic applies to the system itself. Systemic is *not* related to a series of steps. It is a quality inherent in the system, not necessarily on purpose, but more “that’s just the way it works.”

Hiring Example:

Systematic Racism

- Hiring managers explicitly reject resumes that appear to have “[black-sounding](#)” or Hispanic names. (I don’t mean to be racist myself, but if you read the passage on this in *Freakonomics*, you know that racist recruiters could pick out certain unique-sounding names and reject them.)
- Recruiters reject resumes from historically black colleges and universities.
- Recruiters do phone screening and reject people they believe “sound black.”
- Black or Hispanic people get shorter interviews and never get called back for hiring.

Systemic Racism

- An AI-system trained on past hires screens resumes. The AI system inherits the bias in past hiring, and is therefore less likely to recommend resumes from minority candidates.
- All the HR staff are white, and as a result, are more likely to hire people they feel comfortable with — that is, people like themselves.
- Recruiters do phone screening and hire people who they feel are most articulate, not recognizing that they are perpetuating their own prejudices in hiring based on their evaluation of the way others speak.
- All the pictures on the company’s Web site are pictures of white people, sending a clear message to any applicants that the company does not have any black or minority employees.
- The company develops hiring relationships with universities that its senior managers graduated from, universities where the students are far more likely to be white.
- Screening includes a credit report, which generates bias against less affluent candidates from lower-income families.
- Because all of the staff at the company are white, they are likely to receive internal referrals from those they know or have been friends with, a group that is overwhelmingly white.

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This system would certainly result in discrimination against minorities, even if none of the policies are explicitly racist. The hiring managers and executives would likely say, "We are obviously not racists, it just turns out that we tend to see and hire white candidates, even though we hire candidates based on merit." But regardless of whether the staff are explicitly racist, they have created a racist *system*. Systematic racism is a set of practices that discriminate on the basis of race. Systemic racism is a system that has racism inherent in how it operates.

Systematic racism is relatively easy to fix, if you care to try. *Systemic* racism requires a deeper level of thinking. It demands including a racially diverse set of decision makers, because a diverse set of people can more easily identify racism in the systems that include racism within it, whether that racism is intentional or not.