Book Summary: DEI Undone

The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

By Dr. Sabreena Ghaffar-Siddiqui and Dr. Ardavan Eizadirad (2026). Prepared for HR managers and directors.

DEI Undone is written by Dr. Sabreena Ghaffar-Siddiqui, a sociologist who advised governments, colleges, corporations and non-profits on national equity frameworks before becoming one of the field's sharpest critics, and Dr. Ardavan Eizadirad, Associate Professor in the Faculty of Education at Wilfrid Laurier University. For HR leaders, the book is less a rejection of diversity work than a challenge to the way most organisations currently practise it.

The central argument

The authors trace DEI from its origins in the civil rights, women's rights and disability rights movements, through the era of hashtag activism, and into its absorption by corporate and institutional structures. That absorption, they argue, hollowed the work out: justice was reduced to branding, tokenism and optics, a pattern they call woke capitalism. Their core charge is that many organisations adopted the vocabulary of equity while leaving the distribution of power, pay and decision-making authority untouched.

A substantial section examines what the authors describe as the Palestine exception, their contention that institutional commitments to voice and belonging were suspended when employee speech became politically inconvenient. Readers will reasonably differ on that specific case. The transferable lesson for HR is structural rather than political: an inclusion policy is only as credible as its application in the situation an organisation finds least comfortable, and inconsistency there is what employees remember.

Why this matters to your organisation

The book lands at a moment when DEI budgets are contracting and workforce trust in these programmes is under strain. Where stated values and daily experience diverge, the cost surfaces in engagement scores, voluntary turnover, grievance volume and reputational exposure. A programme that cannot demonstrate a measurable change in outcomes is, in the authors' terms, performance rather than practice.

Moving towards DEI + Justice

The book's constructive proposal is DEI + Justice, organised around decolonisation, accountability, redistribution of power and community-rooted transformation. Practical adjustments an HR function can make include:

- Measure outcomes, not activity. Replace training completion rates and headcount ratios with pay equity gaps, promotion rates, retention by group and grievance resolution data.
- Move decision rights, not only visibility. Give employee networks a budget, seats on hiring and promotion panels, and a route into strategic decisions.
- Compensate the labour. Recognise employee resource group leadership and equity work in job descriptions, workload allocation and pay.

- Tie accountability to senior objectives. Equity outcomes belong in executive performance reviews, not only in the HR workplan.
- Set policies on speech, dissent and difficult topics in advance, then apply them uniformly rather than case by case under pressure.
- Extend the lens beyond staffing to procurement, supplier selection, community investment and partnerships.
- Report honestly, including targets missed, so that credibility rests on evidence rather than messaging.

A note for readers

DEI Undone is a polemic, and several of its political framings are contested. Read as a diagnostic instrument, it poses one question worth putting to any equity programme: if our DEI function disappeared tomorrow, what measurable change in power, pay or opportunity would disappear with it?

References

Ghaffar-Siddiqui, S. and Eizadirad, A. (2026). DEI Undone: The Rise, Fall, and Rebirth of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. ISBN 9798253453773.

Official book website, including a free extract from Chapter 1: https://deiundone.com

ResearchGate record for the title: https://www.researchgate.net/publication/402786622

Author interview, Academic Aunties podcast: https://open.spotify.com/episode/60GpWxGvNVxvbwNQBtAMg5

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