

## **Final Question**

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How should companies in the US manufacturing sector adapt their hourly worker labor practices to the regulatory and cultural shifts under the new US administration?

## **Introduction**

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With the start of a new U.S. administration, the manufacturing landscape has experienced significant regulatory and cultural shifts that are both rapid and unpredictable. U.S. manufacturing companies—particularly those with large hourly workforces—are now navigating an increasingly complex environment shaped by heightened immigration enforcement, evolving attitudes toward DE&I, and uncertain labor regulations. In such circumstances, the ability to adjust without making premature decisions is crucial in maintaining compliance, employee trust, and operational efficiency.

## **Key Challenges and Strategies for Adaptation**

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### **Communication**

In a turbulent regulatory environment, the goal is not to preempt every policy shift but rather to foster a resilient workforce capable of adapting quickly. Speculating about future regulation can lead to confusion or missteps. Instead, manufacturers are focusing on building strong communication practices and a workplace culture that can weather uncertainty without losing trust. Organizations should:

- *Develop rapid-response plans:* Build protocols for cascading important updates across levels of the organization, starting with HR and people managers, who should receive advance context and talking points. Ensure communication is not only timely but anticipatory where possible, helping workers feel prepared rather than blindsided.
- *Scenario Planning:* Anticipate various policy outcomes and prepare communication strategies in advance.
- *Empower frontline leaders:* Supervisors will bear the brunt of employees' questions and anxieties, and they will benefit from practical guidance on the regulatory landscape to address employee concerns and facilitate open dialogue.
- *Reassess DE&I Messaging:* Ensure diversity and inclusion goals emphasize fairness, inclusive culture, and access to opportunities without moving away from language involving quotas or labels and divisive language.

### **Immigration Enforcement**

Federal immigration enforcement is intensifying. Compliance in this space must be embedded across sites and teams, as each error can result in hefty fines and run the risk of public notoriety. Best practices include:

- *Conduct proactive audits:* Internal frequent reviews of I-9 documentations to proactively identify and address errors before government inspection, also known as a “digital raid”.
- *Standardizing processes:* Implementing consistent I-9 storage, destruction, and verification procedures across all locations.

- *Train staff:* Educate front-line managers and front-desk staff to ensure employees know how to respond to worksite visits or raids and understand legal boundaries.
- *Using E-Verify:* Enroll in E-Verify, especially for companies with federal contracts or high-risk exposure.

### **OSHA & Workplace Safety**

Although OSHA may signal a more collaborative approach under the new administration, safety obligations have not changed—and the reputational stakes remain high. Workplace safety should not be treated as a checklist item but as a strategic investment in organizational culture and employee trust. It is one of the few areas where companies can demonstrate visible, values-driven leadership without wading into political territory. Key steps can include:

- *Sustaining Compliance Efforts:* Avoid the temptation to scale back too soon, and reduce safety protocols prematurely. A decrease in enforcement does not mean a decrease in liability or risk. Companies must continue to uphold OSHA standards rigorously—not just to remain compliant but to reinforce a culture of care and shared responsibility.
- *Conducting site audits:* Perform regular site-level audits and refreshed training programs to ensure compliance.
- *Promoting Visible Leadership:* Demonstrating commitment to safety can turn compliance into a trust-building tool rather than a reactive obligation.

### **Case Studies**

While specific cases from large manufacturing firms are hard to come by, employer decisions from other industries can demonstrate valuable lessons. For example:

- **Target's** decision to roll back DE&I initiatives has led to reputational challenges and internal tension.
- **Apple** has chosen to maintain its DE&I commitments, stating that such efforts are central to its values and business strategy. Apple's board opposed a proposal to scale back DE&I programs, arguing that doing so would limit the company's ability to meet stakeholder expectations and navigate future talent demands.

These contrasting examples reinforce a critical point: before making broad changes, organizations should analyze their own stakeholder landscape—including employees, customers, investors, and community partners—to determine what approaches will preserve trust, support long-term goals, and reflect their unique operating environment.

### **Conclusion**

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For manufacturing companies, adapting to regulatory and cultural shifts will require a balanced approach that avoids premature decisions while maintaining compliance and employee trust. While there is no one-size-fits-all strategy, companies can build resilient workplaces by implementing clear internal communication practices, in-depth compliance training for both managers and front-line employees, and emphasizing worker well-being. Change and uncertainty are inevitable, but organizations with a workforce prepared for disruption will be better equipped to navigate the years ahead.

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## Upcoming CAHRS Events of Interest

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**April 24:** [CAHRS Virtual Working Group - U.S. Immigration Challenges in the New Administration.](#)

**April 29:** [Virtual Working Group - Navigating The Evolving DEI Landscape](#)