

SUPPORTING A DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE CULTURE - THE FIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF BEING HUMAN - #4

Diversity isn't just the *right* thing to do, diverse Boards perform better too. One recent study found that diverse companies produce 19% more revenue. Diversity of thought leads to innovation and competitive advantage - that translates to the bottom line.

We have also seen the rise in governance and regulatory requirements (e.g. gender pay gap reporting) contributing to diversity and inclusion being a topic high on board agendas. All good news, awareness is rising! But how has this awareness contributed to progress and change? Are we truly being more inclusive or are we spending our time analysing the data instead of applying it to make changes, however big or small? Have we lost sight of why having a diverse and inclusive culture, apart from being the right thing, raises competitive advantage?

What practically can organisations do to improve diversity of thought today? Below are six things you can do now to take Diversity and Inclusion forward in your company.

Rethink Meetings. Managers spend, on average, 23 hours per week in meetings. They are a necessary part of work and we need to make sure they're set up to allow different voices to be heard, to get the most from them. Whether board, project or team meetings, those who chair the meeting need to be empowered to effectively manage the timing of the meeting to ensure everyone has a chance to contribute and ensure that information is gathered from different perspectives leading to a better outcome.

Those who are attending the meeting can tell the chair in advance that they have something to contribute, or signal in the meeting that they have a point to make. Agreed ways people can share their thoughts enables the chair to facilitate discussion and manage time appropriately. If someone builds on your point or is seen to 'take your idea' this is good, your point got heard!

Gain perspective. Encourage leaders to find time to get a different perspective from their 'usual' way of working. This might be through mentoring. Two way mentoring, bringing senior and junior members of the organisation together, is a great way to build perspective. Spend time with different people, get into their minds and see things from their point of view: NLP (Neuro Linguistic programming) has a great technique to facilitate this. Leaders can take what they learn from exercises like this into their decision making.

Provide perspective within your organisation by bringing external speakers in, get curious, ask questions and listen.

Don't have a static Diversity and Inclusion steering committee. This implies that only the committee has a responsibility to create and support inclusive practices. Instead, have a committee that supports/encourages others by inspiring the company. Galvanise the organisation to deliver against the vision by setting out clear parameters of what is included and what is not, and encourage champions to

run gatherings, meetings, put ideas into practice and offer advice. Don't be an approval committee, be an enabler for the whole organisation.

Make it everyone's responsibility. Don't leave it all to the recruitment/talent team to bring a diverse shortlist or identify a different pipeline of candidates. Partner with this team. Go to meetups, network at conferences, speak on panels and engage with diverse talent directly. Social media makes it easy to connect with diverse talent all over the world. Even if connections can't be cultivated in person, we can learn an enormous amount from each other online.

Diversify how you deliver your message. When communicating, be diverse. Cover all the different channels, for example in person, email, calls, podcasts, Slack, Whatsapp, text, etc. There are three generations of people in our workforce who have different preferred styles of communication. Remember too, within that pool there are a wide variety of personal preferences. Delivering your message across as many channel as possible to get your message out.

Start your focus on inclusion from day one. How does your induction work? Does it make newcomers feel welcome or do they need to fight for themselves after the Monday morning health and safety briefing? Include information about how you cultivate inclusion in your process, from when they sign their contract, before their first day. Otherwise your talent who comes with a different perspective won't feel welcome and won't stay.

The most important thing to remember is that diversity isn't just about numbers. True diversity only flourishes when you focus on inclusion and provide an environment where everyone can speak up and share their views. That's how real innovation happens.