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## A Culture of Inclusion and Diversity

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Inclusion and diversity in the workplace have become a top priority for many organizations hoping to create working environments that bring together employees' different backgrounds and experiences while also helping them contribute to their fullest potential. Strategically focused efforts around inclusion and diversity promote innovation, enhanced opportunities, better access to top talent and ultimately improved performance. Simply put, inclusion and diversity drives employee engagement as well as productivity. In fact, organizations with higher racial and ethnic diversity are 35 percent more likely to produce above average financial returns beyond their national industry medians, and organizations with higher gender diversity are 15 percent more likely to do the same.



### What does it mean to be inclusive and diverse?

Diversity is characterized as different or divergent, and in the workplace, everyone brings their uniqueness to the table. Inclusion, on the other hand, is characterized by acceptance or belonging, meaning everyone's uniqueness is welcomed and leveraged in a manner that fosters greater creativity,

problem-solving, engagement and performance in pursuit of a common goal or purpose. Many organizations have already realized and understood that inclusion and diversity are critical to the successful fulfillment of any mission or strategy, which means fostering an inclusive environment so employees can achieve professional success and best serve the clients and goals of the organization. Such an environment creates a workplace where people thrive in both their similarities to each other and their unique differences, which means that people can authentically be themselves at work.

## What factors influence inclusion and diversity?

Many people associate inclusion and diversity with commonly known factors such as gender, race or ethnicity. However, there are multiple factors influencing inclusion and diversity.



As you can see, there’s much more to an individual’s identity than their cultural background or gender. Consider some of these factors that can greatly influence someone’s identity and why they are important in regards to contribution in the workplace:

- **Thinking Styles** – Diversity of thought can play a significant role in realizing the full potential of employees, where different perspectives and unique ways of thinking are encouraged, thus building new levels of creativity and productivity. Diversity of thought discourages end-goal consensus and group think, and instead fosters creative tension that results in new and better ideas.
- **Abilities** – Differently abled employees contribute to a large portion of the talent pool that may be marginalized from the workforce depending on biases toward their potential ability to contribute to an organization.
- **Communication** – Challenges in the workplace regarding communication are typical, especially in cross-culturally diverse organizations. This may include speaking language, body language and overall self-expression. Sensitivity to different communication

attributes, as well as developing good listening skills, can create a more inclusive environment for employees to freely express their ideas.

- **Work Role** – Some employees may be less likely to express their ideas in the workplace depending on their work role or job title. For example, an employee may disagree with a manager about a project strategy, yet may be less likely to express such disagreement because their work role is subservient to the manager. In addition, work roles may cause unconscious bias when employees seek ideas and input on new and upcoming projects, such as if a manager seeks input from another manager or executive, rather than someone in an entry level staff or administrative role.

## How can we improve our efforts?

So how can organizations work to improve with their culture around inclusion and diversity? The following are some practical considerations that can greatly enhance your efforts.

- **Address unconscious bias** – More organizations are encouraging their employees to address unconscious bias and assumptions. Since people have an inclination to categorize what is around them, this can lead to favoring people that are more like us, which can lead to making decisions based on assumptions rather than facts. Building awareness is key, but education and training resources are also important tools to recognize and address unconscious bias.
- **Offer proper training and education** – In the same vein, as we address unconscious bias, overall diversity training can address other important areas, such as leadership behaviors, conflict resolution and interacting with different communication styles. The right training for employees can also reduce any attitudes of defensiveness, particularly in relation to unconscious bias.
- **Personalize the workplace** – People tend to perform at a higher level when they are able to work in a way that takes advantage of their strengths. When organizations give employees more choices about how they work, rather than administer a one-size-fits-all structure, they perform better. More organizations are increasing flexible work options available for employees, including part-time and remote work. Blending and incorporating different workstyles and needs empowers employees to contribute their best performance.

- **Encourage diversity within teams** – Strive for a more diverse cross-section of talent within organizational teams, which can increase collaboration and creativity efforts. Different experiences and perspectives can develop more innovative contributions and inspire thinking in different ways. Encourage every person on the team to contribute so that all perspectives are considered.
- **Develop the right evaluation methods** – Any efforts to improve inclusion and diversity in the workplace should be properly and regularly evaluated to determine success rate. Specific measurement tools can be used to directly assess the impact of such efforts, including employee surveys, reports on workforce demographics and evaluation of talent acquisition metrics.

The benefits to inclusion and diversity can hardly be overstated, as they make for a more productive and successful workplace, as well as the best talent to join an organization. By seeking value from the experiences of others, as well as incorporating their unique attributes in the workplace, organizations can work to enhance their culture around inclusion and diversity that allows employees to thrive, clients to feel understood and the overall organization to grow and perform well.

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