

Workplace

Diversity and inclusion not interchangeable

By Rebekah Hinds

The terms "diversity and inclusion" are used together so often, it is easy to think the two concepts are one and the same. However, this is simply not true. Diversity and inclusion are interconnected not interchangeable.

It's possible for a workforce to be diverse, but not inclusive, likewise, there are many workforces that are inclusive, but not diverse.

What is diversity?

Often when people hear the term "workplace diversity", they envision a group of employees with various ethnicities, working in the same company. Though that's not entirely wrong, it is a one-dimensional idea of diversity and diminishes what advocates have been championing over the years. Diversity is defined as acknowledging, understanding, accepting, and valuing differences among people with respect to age, class, race, ethnicity, gender, disabilities, etc. (Esty et al. 1995).

In a "nutshell" diversity is about representation and refers to the variety of different perspectives present in a team. Think of it this way, a company seeking to be more diverse hires a disabled or differently abled person to be a part of their workforce but does not include this person in any decision-making meetings. With the new hire, the company can be seen as a "diversified company", but the perspective of the new hire is never heard. This is a missed opportunity for true representation.

What is inclusion?

In a review by Harvard, Edmondson explains that "inclusion happens when people of different backgrounds feel that their voice matters and are included in the important meetings. It's possible for people to be at important meetings, even to be speaking up, and still



Diversity and inclusion are interconnected but not interchangeable. (Internet image)

do not feel that people like they belong there. Inclusion means this is a place where I can thrive; I feel that I am truly a member of the community." Ergo, while diversity is about representation, inclusion is about how well the contributions, presence, and perspectives of different groups of people are valued and integrated into an environment. Given the example above, if the company welcomes the new hire's perspective and includes them in the decision-making, they transition from being only diverse to diverse and inclusive.

How can they work together?

Diversity and Inclusion in the workforce refers to a company that intentionally employs a diverse group of employees and works to foster a culture that includes, recognizes, accepts, supports, and nurtures all employees fairly and equally. One of a company's greatest assets is its aggregate of employees, so diversity and inclusion cannot be a moral advance towards workplace culture or a superficial representation of different races, policies, programmes, or headcounts. Fundamentally, we all live on this earth, however we all walk different paths. Fundamentally, our experiences are influenced by our individual paths

shaping the way we view problem-solving and the world. Each perspective garnered is a potential essential asset to future problem solving but only if each person is given a platform to express their perspective.

Initially, many organisations may have categorised diversity and inclusion programmes as another checklist item and proceeded to hire one or two token employees to meet diversity and inclusion requirements. However, through research the benefits of these programmes have provided more insight into the positive contributions they can provide to the company.

Diversity and Inclusion programmes when implemented with continuous care, can benefit organisations at all levels. According to several research studies the benefits of diversity and inclusion working together include but aren't limited to the following.

Increased productivity

A diverse and inclusive workplace often allows for more ideas and processes. A diverse and inclusive team can inspire and challenge your employees to think and perform their tasks in a new or 'fresh' way. This diversity of talent means a broader range of skills among



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employees, as well as a diversity of experiences and perspectives which increases the potential for increased productivity.

New perspectives and innovation

Often, a team with similar backgrounds will have similar experiences, opinions, and thought processes. In fact, studies show that diverse teams tend to outperform teams consisting of the best problem-solvers by offering unique input. Hiring people from diverse backgrounds brings a variety of new perspectives to the table. Sharing individual experiences benefits decision-making and problem solving, leading to more creative and productive teams. Openness to diversity widens access to the best talent.

Enhanced reputation

Companies with a reputation for diversity and inclusion often attract a wider pool of job applicants and customers. This correlates to the law of attraction if customers and potential job seekers see representatives of your company that look like them, they feel included.

Diversity and Inclusion go hand in hand to complement each other, I would even go as far as to say they are quite ineffective without each other's presence. Promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace is essential for creating a positive work environment where employees feel valued, respected, and supported. By working together diversity and inclusion can lead to greater innovation, creativity, and productivity, while also helping businesses attract and retain top talent. Together they can contribute to a culture of positive growth for a company both internally and externally.

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