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NO NONSENSE ADVICE

21

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION AT WORK

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PROLOGUE:

Diversity and Inclusion has become a 'buzz word' these days: and this booklet is not an attempt to pay lip service to it.

At the very heart of the two words, Diversity and Inclusion (D&I), is an appeal to humanity above all else: and the general acceptance that all human beings have a right to dignity and respect: and also, to equal opportunity. It is critical that Diversity and Inclusion are not considered a 'politically correct' term, but a fundamental belief within the organisation: and that we genuinely work towards it.

No society is without bias or deeply rooted cultural norms. However, as an organisation, it is critical to ensure that whilst being respectful towards national cultures, the organisation decides for itself what values and ethics it believes in: and regardless of the national culture, be open to the suggestion that everyone who works within its folds needs to be considered as one: rather than being discriminated against based on any individual characteristic.

This quick read is designed to offer some basic advice to any organisation keen to adopt Diversity and Inclusion as a core pillar of its organisational culture.

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Chapter 1
So, what exactly is
DIVERSITY?

Diversity is a rather large topic of conversation: but at its core is the acceptance that each of us is not only uniquely different in many ways: but also, similar in many ways. Broadly speaking, Diversity and Inclusion hinge on not being discriminatory based on anything that makes us different from another: in terms of our gender, sexual preference, race, religion, political leanings, etc. Diversity is not only accepting that we are different: but also accepting that we have a RIGHT to be different. Accepting that we have the RIGHT to be different also means that we have a RESPONSIBILITY to give that same right to everyone else: and not hold it against those who demand to be treated with the same dignity and respect we expect of others.

I. The equation of gender

A Facebook meme I came across reads: "I wonder why I am the only one without clothes at this gender reveal party"; a group of people silently (some not so silently) brought their palms to smack on to their faces: a common misunderstanding, or misrepresentation that one's anatomy defines what one's gender is when in reality, the two are related but do not define or decide one another. As an organization, it is important that at our core we understand what diversity is in gender. This will allow us to better understand our employees. As complex as this topic is, let's try and break it down into the most comprehensible format. Simply put, gender can be broken down to four very basic elements: sex, identity, expression and attraction. . Sex refers to a person's anatomy or the biological sex of a person, often defined by what reproductive organs they possess. Gender identity is the gender with which one most identifies: this is essentially to do with a person's thoughts and emotions. The expression would, therefore, refer to the way a person chooses to appear outwardly to society (for example, how they dress, etc). We will talk about attraction in the next section. The important thing to understand when it comes to diversity in gender is that no human is explicitly in one field. We all stand on a constantly changing marker within a spectrum. Often the mistake society, and companies make is assuming that one's biological sex must determine one's gender identity and expression. This is not the case.

II. The equation of sexual preference

Let's now talk about the element of attraction and the diversity in it. Attraction in gender refers to one's sexual preference or the kind of person that you are essentially attracted to. Traditional society undermined and criminalized sexual preferences that were outside of attraction to the opposite sex. Today, however, after much debate and research, western scientists have started to accept, formally, that there is more than one type of sexual attraction, and therefore, preference. While there are several different types of sexual preferences, the very basics that you should be aware of outside of the norm are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT). Any organization would consist of a mixed bag of people from any of these preferences. Hence, we must not discriminate based on a person's sexual preferences.

III. The equation of ethnicity, race, religion, and culture

The world is made up of thousands of identities; and given the way of the world, a lot of people will choose to belong to a particular race, ethnicity, religion, or culture. This is natural; it is what humans do. However, the questions and the issues arise when companies begin to discriminate against their employees based on these identities. As an organization, it is important to ensure that, from the point of your hiring policy, you do not discriminate based on a person's identity. Studies have shown that having a diverse work environment will mostly have a positive effect on a company.

IV. The equation of political affiliations and other considerations

Sadly, in most organizations, the reasons for discrimination make a rather long list. The few topics discussed above are standard and quite common. What needs to be understood is that despite all these differences, each person is a human being and at the very least, we must afford each individual the right to have their own beliefs, ideas, thoughts and ways of expressing themselves. Furthermore, as an organization, it is vital to understand the diversity within the body of employees; in fact, you should work towards ensuring that your workforce is diverse and truly inclusive. It is important to respect the fact that people are different, they think differently, feel differently, look different and express themselves differently, and that, that is ok.

Chapter 2

Why does it really matter at the workplace?

Diversity in the workplace is a popular topic for debate and discussion among employers, hiring managers and recruitment officials. What is important to note from a business point of view is that Diversity and Inclusion is not only the right thing to stand for; it is also a means by which your company and its employees can reap tangible benefits.

What exactly is diversity at the workplace? Quite simply: hiring a wide range of diverse individuals regardless of gender, race, ethnicity, age, sexuality, etc. However, diversity for the sake of ticking a box is not the answer, and it should not be confused with equality. While equality aims at equal opportunities and prevention of discrimination, diversity is concerned with appreciating the differences that exist between individuals and ensuring that each of these varying characteristics and attributes are given value. According to research, the five top workplace diversity stats 'related to different benefits of diversity in the workplace' are as follows:

1. Companies that have more diverse management teams have 19% higher revenue.
2. Inclusive companies are 1.7 times more likely to be innovation leaders in their market.
3. When diverse teams made a business decision, they outperformed individual decision-makers up to 87% of the time when it came to making business decisions.
4. Sixty-seven per cent of job seekers said a diverse workforce is important when considering job offers.
5. Racially and ethnically, diverse companies outperform industry norms by 35%.

INDIVIDUAL

I. Being able to be yourself and accepted

We, as human beings, have an intrinsic need to be accepted and to belong. This is a psychological need which is deeply rooted in each one of us. We function best in an environment in which we feel accepted and have a sense of belonging. Although we know this as individuals, unfortunately, we forget that other people around us too, have the same need, and hence, we're rather quick to judge, criticize and ridicule those who are different from us, creating bad vibes and a detrimental effect on work relationships. Dissension very often leads to 'ganging up', 'bad-mouthing' and unhealthy office politics. In an environment in which we feel constantly rejected or ostracized, it would be virtually impossible to function at our best or achieve our true potential. Hence, quite apart from the injustice towards the individual, your institution would also be losing out big time: You would not only have a dysfunctional employee on your hands but also a department oozing with negative energy.

On the contrary, an employee who is treated with dignity, accepted for who they are, even if they are in the minority, would find it a refreshing change; and as a result, be more confident and willing to go the extra mile. Being grateful for being treated right, when being treated right should be a given, although a paradox in itself, is the bleak reality; and hence, it is these make or break moments which lead to exceptional employees and lasting loyalty.

II. You have access to equal opportunity as an individual

Every human being has the right to be 'treated without discrimination, especially on the grounds of one's sex, race, or age'. It is unfortunate, however, that more often than not, individuals are deprived of opportunities simply because they happen to be different. One's religion, race, social standing, school, or sexual preference should not be a determining factor. Honestly speaking, think about it.

How frustrating would it be to have to watch someone far less competent being promoted or given a training opportunity bypassing you simply because you are of a different faith or you choose a partner of your preference in your personal space? How absurd is that when it has absolutely no relevance to your work environment.

Also, ever heard of the woman who got a promotion and was asked: "Did you sleep with the boss?" Does the scenario sound familiar? To take it a step further: No, it was not a man who popped the question.

The concept that harassment and discrimination stem from the opposite dimension does not read true. Clearly, access to equal opportunity is not that simple a topic. It is not something you can pass laws on and enforce, although rules and regulations would help. There must be proper training where people's mindset is addressed and there is true conviction. People must be made aware that it is not just the individual but society as a whole that will benefit and progress.

BUSINESS

I. Diversity as a means of having a wider pool of ideas

So, what does it mean to have the 'best' in? How do we define 'the best'? Are all eligible candidates considered or are some penalized and left on the shelf? Think about it. How can we harness a wider pool of ideas? – LOGIC! You eliminate some, right?

One of the techniques you can use to increase the diversity of candidate pools is to 'de-identify' resumés so that the data such as name and gender are not visible so that you consider the candidate based purely on the individual's suitability to perform the expected tasks. Nothing else should matter, right? It shouldn't, bearing in mind that diversity enables individuals of varied talents to come together and work towards a common goal using different sets of skills; and if the best were to be harnessed, leaving some out is definitely not the answer. Another aspect to consider is that people bring with them life experiences which contribute towards their work. The more diverse these experiences are, wider the range of perspectives you would have within your pool of ideas, resulting in a much richer output.

Diversity is having people/employees from all walks of life in one place and in this book, we explore this in the workplace. This diversity or difference can range from location, ethnicity and religion, gender and gender identity, caste and class, disability and even personality. Our general understanding and acceptance are that people who are different will have different experiences in their lives, hence quite different thoughts, and points of view. If given the opportunity to be open and feel safe to share these thoughts with no ridicule, no judgment, and no silencing by the people of power, these thoughts would be the start of ideas. These ideas nurtured in this inclusive environment will be the creative change and disruption that can become innovations of this world. I refer to people of power! This refers to the power dynamics in any relationship: parents and children, managers, and team members, religious or community leaders and villagers[a5], teachers and students. These are all stakeholders in Diversity and Inclusion.

Maureen Wild, business etiquette and workplace ethics seminar leader, hit the nail on the head in saying: "When employees respect each other and get along in the workplace, it's amazing how productivity increases, morale increases and employees are more courteous to customers."

II. Diversity as a way of promoting humanity

How would one define 'humanity'? The word stems from the Latin word 'Humanitas' which means 'human nature and kindness'. The problem lies in that we choose to ignore the true quality of humanity: kindness, understanding, compassion, generosity, etc., and behave most cruelly and unacceptably towards those who are different from us when, in fact, diversity promotes humanity.

Living with diversity helps us accept our uniqueness and encourages us to be less afraid of our differences and sharing them. We then learn to accept and even celebrate these differences, together with others. The byproduct of this evolution brings inclusion which can also be described as having gratitude, showing more kindness, being supportive, encouraging, willing to share, etc.

This, is the true essence of humanity and it should be promoted right from the outset: at home, in schools and communities, to be recognized, continued and nurtured in the workplace, for when we stop being kind, compassionate, grateful and understanding towards each other, we lose an intrinsic part of our humanity

III. Inclusivity as a means of promoting better workplace practices

Reevaluate your company. How diverse is your Executive Team? The answer to that question will speak volumes for your organizational culture. Foster a culture within which every voice is not just heard but welcome and respected: Respect is KEY! People need to feel connected and valued for who they are rather than for whom you want them to be. Ever heard of a workforce communications platform? You might want to introduce one. There is a link at the end of this book for ideas. Through this platform, you will be able to provide your workforce with a 'personalized employee experience that is inclusive and allows all voices to be heard.'

What about language? Are we accepting or tolerant? Do we pass judgment or undermine people's potential based on the language they speak? Be honest! Don't we miss out often on fantastic talent simply because they do not speak a 'foreign' language? Isn't it a better idea to foster a multilingual culture where everyone tries to learn a language the others speak? One of the practices you might adopt is to incorporate this into your recruitment process so that you try to hire people who are fluent in more than one language.

Teamwork and collaboration are aspects that inclusion brings, like sharing, appreciating and accepting are all part of inclusion. Why then do not we see enough of this in our workplaces? Does competition kill inclusion? Or is it a matter of lack of consistency and patience which might seem difficult to cultivate and maintain? Inclusivity can be difficult to sustain if we individualise competition so much that we are blinded by the goal and strive to achieve it at any cost. Like everything else in life, the trick is 'balance'.

Further, diversity in your workplace also means that your company earns a good reputation, which will lend you many benefits including retaining and hiring talent and reducing employee turnover. While embracing diverse viewpoints is the way to go, creating an inclusive environment in which everyone feels 'relevant and a part of a shared mission' is what will stick in the long run.

Chapter 3

What can we do as a company?

The company can create an appropriate environment where employee behaviour is influenced. The most impactful and sustainable way to do this would be through raising their awareness and consciousness to influence their thinking. This way the behaviour change you will see will be more sustainable and authentic. To ensure there is consistency in the longer term, having operating procedures will be the medium-term strategy which will guide specific actions, in certain situations, in a consistent manner. These operating procedures, or even guidelines, will achieve optimum results and impact in a company. The evolution of this D&I [a6] culture can continue when you share the internal knowledge and practices with external parties like suppliers, customers and community to strengthen and enable this behaviour more widely.

I. Truly believing in inclusivity: rather than merely paying lip service to it
Thinking and behaving inclusively is a mindset, and way of thinking linked to values and behaviour... you could even say it's a way of life which is where culture comes in.

The personal experiences we have in life form biases which get registered and stored in our minds over time, which then become stereotypes. These biases and stereotyping, we usually based on physical or tangible attributes of a person, like:

University students from Jaffna are ...

All long-haired men are...

Light-skinned women are all ...

All kids from foreign international schools are ...

Muslims are all ...

You form these opinions based on your personal experiences with people with these attributes or others (including media) providing you with these opinions. The first step towards being more inclusive is being aware of our biases and being sensitive enough to know when we discriminate intentionally or unintentionally.

Once you have raised the individual consciousness, creating an environment that permits employees to behave against these biases, and being accepted for their changed behaviour are key. Being able to discuss these biases and unpack them and be able to try other ways of thinking and acting is what will form a culture.

II. Having robust policy frameworks

Frameworks are useful to make available in a company not only when raising awareness but also when focusing attention towards solutions and change; when employees are looking for a better or improved way to act and behave, this will guide them. It is critical that these policies are easily accessible and easy to understand frameworks, that would guide employees on what to do next, or how to act when faced with a situation that they are unsure how to deal with. This also ensures that employees don't come up with many different ways to solve a problem or act when the company has already strategized the best ways for everyone to react to different situations. While pondering upon these situations is part of learning and growth, some guidance on actions that will impact the company's overall culture will support D&I when implementing at a company level, instead of expecting every employee to reinvent the wheel when an ideal way/solution already exists.

One critical aspect of a company framework needs to be capturing data and being able to measure diversity as inclusion initiatives take shape. This is a tough one when this type of personal information is protected and considered private; rightly so as history shows this information to be the means of discrimination.

Here again, the culture of the company and trust in the company and management will be the main reasons employees will be willing to disclose this information. So, I would say, being able to get these diversity stats for your company will also be an indicator whether you are on the right track.

The most critical touchpoints that policy will be most impactful are worth discussing. Recruitment will be the single most important point to add to diversity. Do note that if the engagement and retention strategy don't follow, it will be a leaking bucket. In other words, recruitment would have put in the effort to hire diversity, but the company will not see the results for several reasons:

- 1) The stats won't show as attrition will not hold the diversity in the company.
- 2) The actual benefits come through business impact and the bottom line which is a byproduct of collaboration and innovation for which you need to be able to retain your diverse staff and get their best work out.

EQUALITY VS EQUITY

This is worth a quick review as when we create policy we tend to aim for equality, i.e., everyone gets the same access and benefits. Equity will enable better and provide improved productivity with optimization. The challenge is understanding our audience better so that the customizations you offer in policy will actually serve the purpose instead of a tick in the box offering a benefit or service.

A very basic example we bump into all the time in companies is medical insurance. Most companies offer a hospitalization annual value, outdoor for doctor consultations and maybe life insurance. Usually, medical insurance is offered to your family defined as spouse and children. We all get offered this same benefit whether we have families or not. This would be equality.

In comparison, why not have a standard premium cost incurred per employee but the employee can select what they use this insurance towards. A single person might prefer to use more towards outdoor and less towards a life insurance policy, or maybe spectacles and less towards hospitalization, etc. If you don't have a family let the single person use the rest of that premium towards their parent's insurance instead, etc. some flexibility that fits that individual's requirements instead of assuming all employees are the same. This is what defines equity; a solution that is relevant to a cohort or individual so it can serve the requirement, which will enable and empower.

III. Empowering employees to speak up

Since this chapter is all about acting and behaving which is backed by the right mindset, the company does need to create a safe workplace with appropriate prompts that encourage employees to share their opinions and thinking. More importantly, once this space is created, listen to what an employee is thinking and learning, also to their suggestions. This also validates that the company does want new ideas and is willing to listen and evolve with their employees. This also creates the environment where employees will feel like they can be themselves and are accepted for who they are, which creates a safe space to try new things, explore difficult areas and review unexplored problems.

This is the beginning of new things: innovation.

Culture is also about the collective and not merely the rule book that the company follows. Hence, employee representation and buy-in from the collective are important when creating these rules or frameworks, which starts by employees speaking up and the company listening.

IV. Taking action when you see blatant violations

“Culture is what happens in a company when the bosses are not watching”. To sustain this culture of inclusion, everyone must be empowered to be the custodian of these values and norms and feel responsible for them. How would you know as management? And how would you deal with it in a company environment?

This starts with the frameworks of policies being clear enough and not ambiguous. It also means that the guidelines are for ALL including management and the bosses. Like every other aspect of culture, if you compromise, precedence will set in where the rules will apply to some only and the those in power are exempted. This is the easiest way to break a culture. Transparency is critical with inclusive cultures as we are talking about values and there could be some different interpretations as we are going into a more personal and emotional aspect of people. Hence, getting comfortable with some of these “messy” situations and openly dealing with them and giving it time and focus is very important. It’s these difficult emotional situations and circumstances that make up culture and behaviour.

How these situations are addressed and resolved, endorsed by managers of the company, is what gets defined as good culture or poor culture. Wrong decisions could be made as after all we are human. Taking responsibility and dealing with issues; these too are part of policy and management and inclusion.

V. Training on sensitivity

This would be mostly on raising awareness across the whole company. Creating a safe learning environment within these sessions at all levels is critical to empower the culture of D&I and get it started on the right track. Training is a one-time thing. How do you keep this thinking as a priority, which will be evolving since we all have daily experiences as well which will change points of view and biases? Offering employees focus groups, and internal subgroups to continue to discuss, get support and create employee engagement plans will be how you keep it alive. Linking these champions with experts, internally and externally, ensuring there are business sponsors and support from senior management will make this authentic and evolving culture towards inclusion. This is how you create and sustain a culture of inclusion. Employee-led conversations are very, very critical. Making this a priority and handing over the reins to employees to suggest and action new ideas within a framework bring it alive for all.

Senior management and all people manager learning, and training are essential to make sure this message and these values reach all employees and become a way of life within teams, not just in front of the senior team. This has to be linked to performance and other incentive linked performance training and never as just a “nice to do”. This has to become the foundation, so this becomes as important as performance evaluations and increments.

This brings us to a key topic. Parity in performance, pay, and promotions. What do I mean by this?

Do you believe there is bias when these decisions are made by managers about their teams? If so, how do you detect and correct it, and even avoid it?

VI. Coaching for Leaders

My advice is to approach it as a discussion and review through moderation and other consultative approaches. There would be unconscious bias training aspects to annual year-end review sessions and refreshers. [a11] Will this give you confidence that a lifetime of bias will be adjusted in each manager's behaviour? How about a review of all the performance ratings, like you do moderation for the company/depts? Do a cut by gender and see what the curves tell you? Bell curves are meant to be a normal curve. Do these gender curves match that? Have an open discussion around what the dept managers think when they see these curves. This is also a form of awareness when you review pay and promotion as a collective so that there is no finger-pointing but realising together about bias and allowing them to correct it during moderation as part of the process.

Wellbeing is intricately linked to D&I, as the feeling of belonging and acceptance is the foundation of emotional and mental wellbeing. The role, managers must play in creating the right culture and environment in their teams, which in turn, creates the company culture. Hence, having great policies and frameworks for D&I means nothing unless your managers buy into it and see the value for them and their teams.

Making senior managers mentors and business sponsors would be the outcomes you should strive for after any specific training related to D&I. Their visibility in the company endorsing and backing these initiatives will be the best way to sustain an authentic D&I culture. Reverse mentoring: giving senior leadership an opportunity to engage with the diversity groups and have informal conversations will make a difference in breaking barriers and bias.

VII. Sanctifying freedom of speech: but also, being mindful of hate speech

People have their own thoughts which we cannot stop. The D&I work and activities that we are referring to in the company is all about influencing these thoughts towards inclusion and tolerance with a bigger outcome of collaboration and innovation.

Hate speech comes from a bad experience or ignorance. Awareness will help raise knowledge which is one way of tackling ignorance. In the case of bad life experiences, talking about them without being judged is possibly a place to start to break down these barriers and move towards healing the pain and bad experiences. It might get worse before it gets better, but you do have to be brave enough to want to create that space for open dialogue if we are to get to a better place in the future.

Chapter 4

What can we do as individuals?

No matter what we do as a company, ultimately, if we genuinely want a culture of Diversity and Inclusion, we: each one of us within an organisation needs to embrace it. We need to honestly believe that individuals have a right to their identity: and that we should not discriminate against anyone who we believe is 'different' to us. Being able to honestly accept each other's differences, and be willing to find common grounds to work together and allow individual differences not to interfere in a professional relationship is at the very heart of our duty and responsibility towards being a good employee - and also, a good human being.

Once again, it is important to understand that this does NOT mean that you need to surrender YOUR individuality or YOUR belief system in any way: rather, be willing to truly accept others for who THEY are.

I. Be willing to have a dialogue - rather than being rooted in bias and dogma

We ALL have our biases - and our beliefs - and our ways of thinking. Nothing wrong with that. Just be mindful that there will be others who hold polar opposite views to us. Be willing to have a DIALOG rather than an argument. A conversation rather than a fight. Be willing to listen and not only talk...

Being able to 'agree to disagree' but not castigate those who share a different view as 'wrong' is important. You need to be able to understand that what YOU see as RIGHT may not be seen in the same light by others: and rather than having to AGREE with that perspective, you must be willing to have a dialogue around it: seeking to UNDERSTAND rather than to convince.

It is CRITICAL that you understand; that there CAN BE two 'rights' - not only what you perceive to be right. Challenging this perception cannot automatically classify the challenger as 'wrong'.

Rather than seeing things as 'right and wrong' try and see them as 'different': which allows an open conversation. The moment you castigate things out as 'wrong', there is no more conversation to be had...

II. Having more empathy

At the epicentre of inclusivity is empathy.

Be willing to understand another perspective. Another point of view. Another angle. Another attitude. Another belief. Try and see it from THEIR perspective: to be able to understand where 'they are coming from'.

Having empathy, once again, is NOT about agreeing. Having empathy is about being able to relate to and appreciate the perspective - not about agreeing...

- Visit people in their homes - get to know them better.
- Take the time to appreciate their cultural and religious traditions and contexts.
- Widen your pool of 'friends' to include those who are not like you.
- Travel - especially to countries whose cultures are in stark contrast to yours (this will help you understand that 'good' and 'bad' people exist EVERYWHERE).
- Read up on empathy.
- Listen to conversations/debates about widely different things - so that you can become more open to the suggestion of 'having a conversation'.

III. Reporting violations: and standing up

Inside an organisation, we often SEE many injustices taking place. A foul and rather rude comment towards a girl/woman, a derogatory remark against an ethnicity, a racial slur: and we have two simple choices: we can speak up - or we can ignore.

IF you want your organisation to be inclusive and embrace diversity, such instances need to be addressed: and YOU are its first line of defence.

- TALK to the perpetrator: and explain WHY it is wrong to make that remark - that slur.
 - Encourage dialogue between different groups.
- REPORT repeated violations - even if it means ostracism from your 'group'.
 - Seek HR help to resolve tensions.

Being a champion of diversity is a CHOICE - and often - a rather CONSCIOUS choice one needs to make.

IV. Being considerate and balanced - and not being a 'counterproductive' zealot

There is a difference between being a 'liberal' and being a 'zealot': and one of the biggest issues is the fact that liberals are not liberal of others who are not liberal.

Remember: you 'coming down hard' on something you don't believe in is often counterproductive in the long term towards an inclusive culture - because, it often means that you will create the very opposite of a truly inclusive culture. Certainly, there are absolute non-negotiable areas: such as sexual harassment - which you need to have zero tolerance on. But, having a different point of view on aspects like religion, gender, sexual orientation: and not being able to talk about it - or have a debate on it creates polarization that is counterproductive to inclusivity.

So, be inclusive: even of those who hold counter views: and this is the fundamental principle that needs to be followed IF you truly want to be part of inclusivity as a whole.

Some interesting Links and Further Reading

Understanding the terms Sex, Gender, Sexuality etc :

<https://www.genderbread.org>

- Nike Equality Policy: <https://purpose.nike.com/standing-up-for-equality/>

-An example of a 'gender' debate: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=A-jU5ahtc6hU>

- Women's value: beyond the business case for Diversity and Inclusion -

[https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736\(19\)30165-5/fulltext](https://www.thelancet.com/journals/lancet/article/PIIS0140-6736(19)30165-5/fulltext)

- Research on when Gender diversity makes firms more productive - <https://hbr.org/amp/2019/02/research-when-gender-diversity-makes-firms-more-productive>

- Diversity and Inclusion, the tactics that really work - <https://hbr.org/amp/2020/05/diversity-and-inclusion-efforts-that-really-work>

- Unilever's Policy to ensure Diversity and Inclusion in their workspaces -

<https://www.unilever.com/sustainable-living/enhancing-livelihoods/opportunities-for-women/advancing-diversity-and-inclusion/>

- Some frameworks to add - <https://diversity.google/annual-report/>

- Employee well being linked to diversity - <https://cultureplusconsulting.com/2018/08/17/how-does-employee-well-being-link-to-diversity-and-inclusion/>

- Diversity at LSEG - <https://www.lseg.com/about-london-stock-exchange-group/corporate-sustainability/women-finance-charter>

- Diversity at Mercer - <https://www.mercer.com/content/dam/mercer/attachments/global/gl-2018-diversity-in-wellness-mercer.PDF>

- Top five workplace diversity statistics - <https://medium.com/hr-blog-resources/top-5-workplace-diversity-statistics-2f4ba1d03a2e>

- Example of workforce communications platform - <https://socialchorus.com/blog/content-planner-collaborate-create-and-predict-with-a-birds-eye-view/>

EPILOGUE

Workplace diversity is an organisation's ability, not only to understand and accept, but to value the differences that exist amongst its employees. From race, gender, age, religion to personalities, education levels, etc. Nothing is excluded.

When we value, we show respect to the individuals and this leads to better collaboration and in turn creates a supportive and respectful working environment, that will breed and encourage an innovative and creative workforce.

Research shows that organisations that create diverse and inclusive work environments are more adaptable, creative, and naturally attract high performers and likeminded individuals.

The challenge here and one that is often overlooked is the involvement of the senior-most within the organization. While they are supportive and open doors for this kind of thinking to set in, the lack of commitment and involvement is often the missing piece to an organization's culture really setting the standards.

Leadership needs to champion this and not just pass the baton down the line. This is as important as the approach to increasing revenue or decreasing cost within the organization.

Whether we like it or not, corporate organizations today are in a position to influence positively or negatively in several areas. That is the power they hold. The decision they make will set the tone for centuries to come. These decisions impact both the business and society in general. It is therefore imperative that the leadership of organizations fully understand the responsibility they have towards creating the right culture not just within their own organisation but one that will impact societies in general. Every new generation views DE&I differently as they experience life in general.

So strategize, implement and review periodically, include ALL decision-makers and leadership and always ensure you are on track. Include ALL, leave no one behind!

It is YOUR responsibility not just towards your organisation, but towards your family, society and humanity!

ABOUT THE AUTHORS



BANI CHANDRASENA

Bani's present role focusses on one of the primary strategic initiatives for the London Stock Exchange Group in Sri Lanka today; Future proofing our talent as well as pipeline through ensuring that we create and sustain an inclusive and holistic culture. With the pandemic that has engulfed the world at this time, her role in introducing wellbeing as part of the culture, leading the way with leadership taking an intentional role, is pivotal to the sustainability of future corporates. Her experience and exposure leading the human resources function at LSEG, as well as a range of organisations across multiple industries has positioned her to lead this program here in Sri Lanka.



VIDUSHA NATHAVITHARANA

Vidusha is currently the Destiny Architect at High5 Consultancy and Training and also the organization's founder member. His areas of expertise lies with strategy facilitation, HR strategy development and Leadership Training. He has conducted assignments in 15 countries regionally and consulted for the World Bank, the UN as well as some of the top corporates in Sri Lanka and the Region. He is also a member of the board of directors for Chrysalis, a social enterprise working to empower women and youth by fostering inclusive growth in Sri Lanka and elsewhere.



ANTON THAYALAN

Anton is a multi-faceted professional who has had over two decades of hands on experience in process improvement, change management and strategic management. As the former AVP at HSBC DPL Anton won accolades for his superlative work there: and won the prestigious HSBC Group Service – Global Talent Management Member two years in a row. Anton currently works as a consultant focusing on efficiency and productivity improvement and process optimization for local and regional Clients.



RUWANTHI WIJESINGHE

Ruwanthi Wijesinghe, an educator in English for over three decades, at both secondary and tertiary levels, has her roots in the corporate/development sectors. Her tenures with Wesptac Banking Corporation (Australia), United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the International Water Management Institute (IWMI) gained her international exposure while her quality of work earned her awards of excellence. She is a graduate of the University of Peradeniya with an honours degree in Sociology.



BHAGYA WICKRAMAGE

Bhagya started her career in process improvement and then moved towards HR related consulting and soft skills training. Her varied interests in music, fashion and travel has offered her the ability to draw on these varied interests when drawing inspiration for her training. Bhagya is also actively involved in event management: and manages 'Nadagama': a musical odyssey that is fast becoming critically acclaimed for its originality and repertoire of music. Bhagya has a Bachelors in Psychology and is currently reading for her Masters.



TATUM DE SOUZA

Tatum started her career in the banking sector, working both Locally and Internationally, culminating as a Corporate Relationship Manager. Her 18 year career includes exposure in the areas of Sales and Marketing, Content Creation, Creative Writing, HR, Event Management & Social Media Management, covering industries such as Hospitality, Telco, Recruitment and Education.