



The Importance of Inclusivity in a Diverse Workplace

By

DARRAGH OOI

Director, Business and Society Practice, Brunswick Group

Inclusivity in the workplace is needed to unlock the benefits of diversity. An inclusive culture tends to have a high degree of trust and engagement among employees.

Creating and sustaining a diverse workforce is a necessity in this day and age, especially in multicultural Singapore. This may pose a challenge for organisations, but the bigger challenge actually lies in how a company can unlock the benefit of that diverse workforce once it is in place.

After all, what value is there in diversity if employees from social or cultural minorities are not engaged, adequately represented in discussions or made part of decision-making processes?

Inclusivity

A truly inclusive organisation finds itself to be more productive, creative and efficient because of the ideas and processes that come from a wider range of people with a broader world

view. A *Forbes* study found that companies at levels three and four of the Deloitte Talent Management Maturity Model (see diagram), which are labelled "inclusive" and "managed" talent companies, were nearly twice as likely to be change-ready and inclined to be the innovation leaders in their market.

In a recent article in the *Brunswick Review*, Jonathan McBride, Global Head of Inclusion & Diversity, BlackRock, said, "What we're trying to prove – and measure – at BlackRock is that when people feel included, they're more innovative, work harder, are better teammates, and stay with their company longer. They may even work for less money – which isn't the point, but illustrates just how much inclusion matters to them as individuals, and how it

Talent Management Maturity Model



Source: Bersin by Deloitte, 2015

could maximise the performance of your team. If I have a manager who's favouring three people over the other 10 in their group, I'm still paying all 13, but getting a disproportionate number of ideas from three. That's an inefficient way to run a business."

The goal is conceptually simple – to create a working environment in which everyone feels included and believes their opinion matters, leading to a more progressive, innovative organisation.

Making this goal a reality however, is deeply complex, highly nuanced and it is very difficult to know whether progress is being made. This is because it often involves cultural change within an organisation – not something that a new policy or a single initiative can address.

Trust

Arguably the most important factor at play here is trust in the organisation itself. Research has shown that a company in which employees have a higher degree of trust in the business and its management is more likely to have an inclusive culture.

Trust, unlike diversity, is difficult to quantify, which may be why companies prefer to focus on diversity with its training programmes and metrics, even though the benefits of these are often unproven and can be counterproductive.

There is no magic bullet for creating trust, but at the heart of it lies a strong programme for employee engagement that allows people to express themselves fully, reflects the variety of opinions and beliefs within the workforce and tells the story of the business in a way that everyone recognises and feels part of. Achieving this is about equipping leaders so they become better, more authentic communicators that ensure everyone understands the value they place in fostering inclusion at work.

As McBride puts it: "Our theory is, you need to get a number of key people on board for the culture to tip over. And then it becomes hard not to behave this way. Because who doesn't want to be included at work? If you believe the research, if you believe that diverse, inclusive teams are going to out-produce, why would you want to be on the second-best team?" ■