Moving From Diversity to Inclusion

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Do you know what you need to create an action plan for shifting from diversity management to inclusion?

As a start, a common definition of "diversity" and "inclusion" is needed. Diversity means all the ways we differ. Some of these differences we are born with and cannot change. Anything that makes us unique is part of this definition of diversity. Inclusion involves bringing together and harnessing these diverse forces and resources, in a way that is beneficial. Inclusion puts the concept and practice of diversity into action by creating an environment of involvement, respect, and connection—where the richness of ideas, backgrounds, and perspectives are harnessed to create business value. Organizations need both diversity and inclusion to be successful.

Many companies struggle and do not realize the full potential of a diverse and inclusive workforce. These organizations might still be focused on numbers and lack a complete understanding of the business imperative. While diversity in organizations is increasingly respected as a fundamental characteristic, neither acceptance nor appreciation have equated to inclusive workplaces where unique vantage points of diverse people are valued. Inclusion enhances an organization's ability to achieve better business results by engaging people from diverse backgrounds and perspectives through participatory decision-making.

An organization's journey to become inclusive begins with a critical but simple inquiry: ***what actions is my organization taking to foster an inclusive work culture where uniqueness of beliefs, backgrounds, talents, capabilities, and ways of living are welcomed and leveraged for learning and informing better business decisions?***

This inventory of actions must begin with a macro view of diversity considering workforce, supplier diversity, philanthropy, communications, etc. Organizational systems must be assessed to determine the degree to which equitable access is provided to all. Several key strategies will also need to be revisited and even reinvented to facilitate total alignment of organizational systems, processes, and structures to transform the culture. Where gaps and barriers are identified, it is important to understand how inclusion can address deficiencies and support effective decision-making and better business results in these areas. Findings from the inventory are the basis of an action plan.

• **Work from a well-documented plan of action complete with goals, objectives and lots of small manageable tasks to help realize change.** Achieving an inclusive work environment is a culture change initiative, but it does not require lots of large undertakings.

• **Incorporate diversity principles across business functions and units.** Diversity supports inclusion and should be practiced throughout all aspects of the organization, even in developing the plan for working toward a more inclusive culture. Inclusive practices must be integrated into product development, communications, training and education, career and professional development, recruitment and retention and overall leadership and management practices.

• **Create opportunities for cross-generational work teams and interactions.** Cross-functional teams comprised of men and women who are intergenerational and racially diverse stimulate new thinking, which leads to greater possibilities.

• **Invest in team building and leadership skills, as they are of increasing importance to benefit from diversity and to achieve inclusion.** Instilling the organization with competencies that foster successful teams and skills for leading diverse teams is a critical success factor.

• **"Mind the Middle."** innovative organizations find ways to "mind the middle" without sacrificing executive and entry levels. While some organizations show slow progress on the diversity journey due to the lack of support from its senior leadership, many organizations find middle management derails progress.

These action items will help your organization reap the benefits of a workplace inclusion strategy. Inclusion represents opportunity for growth, new knowledge, and global community. So, what is your organization doing to inspire next level thinking about shifting from diversity management to inclusion?