15.1 The Case for Inclusion in the Workplace

Who is accountable for creating an equitable and inclusive workplace? Is it one person? It might be the person volunteering to lead an employee resource group, a human resource professional, or maybe it's an employee who just cares a whole lot about diversity, equity, and inclusion.

The reality is that it's often only one or two people in an organization who are accountable for this. But the truth is that everyone should be responsible for fostering inclusion. If you fall into any of the categories above, and want to encourage a more inclusive workplace, this tool and these tips are for you!

Defining the Business and Human Imperatives of Workplace Inclusion

There are numerous studies and research that shows that workplaces that represent the full spectrum of diversity experience many benefits:

- Higher employee engagement

- More creativity and innovation

- A better ability to respond to local and global markets

- A stronger financial bottom line

These workplaces all have something in common: not only are they diverse, but they also focus on equity and inclusion. Let's take a moment to define these words.

Diversity

Diversity is really about differences. This includes the things that are usually associated with diversity such as disability, skin colour, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. It also goes deeper than that to include religious affiliation, socioeconomic status, learning styles and diversity of thought and experience.

Equality vs. Equity

The commonly held assumption is that everyone benefits from the same supports - equal treatment. Equity is when everyone gets what they need, and those things may be different.

Inclusion

An environment where people feel valued, respected, and supported for their distinct skills, experiences, and perspectives. Inclusive organizations not only recognize differences, they also:

- Recognize that some people and groups may face barriers to inclusion, so they work to remove those barriers (equity); and

- Celebrate those differences, acknowledging that with diversity of experience, thought, and background comes creativity and innovation.

How to Influence Others and Gain "Buy-In" for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Initiatives

So, you have been tasked with leading the EDI work in your organization. The big question on your mind might be this: where do I start? Gaining buy in and getting others on board is an important area to focus on at the very beginning. Consider these questions first:

- Who are the key stakeholders (ie: all employees – and those experiencing marginalization in the workplace, employee resource groups, executives, managers)?

- Who are the "influencers" in your organization (these are the people who other employees and leaders listen to and follow their lead)?

Nudge Theory

You can't force someone to believe something. In fact, research has shown that when EDI initiatives and training are mandated, they can backfire – people become more entrenched in their existing beliefs. This means that your ability to influence people will be vital.

You want to "nudge" people to consider new ideas and to be curious about different people and cultures. Nudge Theory is the science behind how to gently persuade people to do things differently.

Connecting equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) to your organization's goals

Some people care about EDI because they know that it's about people - the human case is obvious to them. They are already on board the EDI bus!

Others may not have a clear understanding as to why EDI is important at work. They may think that this is "just an HR thing" and while it might be nice to have, there is other "real work" to focus on. For these people you need to be strategic about how you craft your message and present your business case for EDI.

Here are four tips for building a business case for EDI specific to your organization:

1. **Share research that illustrates the financial impact of EDI in the workplace.** Ensure that the research is related to your industry so that your audience can see how it could work in your organization. There is a lot out there! If you have any employee engagement data or stats about employee turnover by demographic (Don't have any? That's OK – you can gather that later!), include this when making your pitch to senior leadership.

2. **Connect EDI to your organization's strategic goals.** Are you a small company that wants to sell more widgets? Draw a straight line between increased sales and a more engaged, innovative, and creative sales team. Want to bring in more guests to your restaurant? Hire more diverse employees who represent and reflect your community and advertise in new places and in new ways that reflect your commitment to EDI.

3. **Tell them what's in it for them.** Sometimes we need to know what's in it for us. Because learning new things and changing how we work can be uncomfortable – and sometimes scary – letting people know how EDI will benefit them personally, can help to remove fear.

4. **Craft an "elevator pitch."** Get really clear on what you are doing, why you are doing it, and how it will benefit your organization. Practice it, ask for feedback, and refine it. If you speak with confidence, passion, and excitement others will begin to get on board that bus!

People don't always want to talk about EDI and there are many reasons for that. It's not usually that they don't care, it's often because of these things:

- Fear of the unknown and being wrong

- Not wanting to be uncomfortable

- Not wanting to say or do the wrong thing or hurt someone's feelings

- Not having the right terminology

- Not having the tools such as "rules of engagement"

These are all elements of psychological safety or a lack of it. Fear drives a feeling that we aren't safe to share a different perspective, make mistakes, or challenge the status quo. You can reduce this and build trust by modeling the behaviours that you are encouraging as part of EDI work:

- Be authentic and vulnerable (you don't have to have the answers)

- Lean into hard conversations (the hard conversations where we are most uncomfortable can be the ones where we learn the most)

- Encourage and share different perspectives (be curious and seek different viewpoints)

- Invite people into the conversation (call people in, don't call people out)

Source:

[1] *Businessballs. (2020, September 3). What is Nudge Theory? Retrieved from:*
https://www.businessballs.com/improving-workplace-performance/nudge-theory

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