

Building Successful Teams Through Diversity and Inclusion



What comes to mind when you think about diversity at workplace? Most people might think of having a perfect 1:1 male to female ratio or having a certain percentage of minority employees. But a diverse workplace means employing as many different kinds of people as possible, including them, and helping them maximize their skills. It is all about building engaged, innovative, and high-performing teams as well as advancing company culture so that every employee feels valued, respected, and safe to be their authentic self.

Employees thrive in an organization where they feel they belong, their ideas are valued, and they're treated fairly. However, a one-size-fits-all approach does not work in this case. So, we invited leaders from top GCCs to the 6th edition of ANSR Leadership Forum (ALF) and share ideas and best practices that helped them build successful D&I initiatives in their companies. Here are the key takeaways from the discussion:

Two sides of the same coin

"If diversity is the goal, inclusion is the way of reaching that goal" – Shreya Bhagwanth, Asia Total Rewards and Services Leader, 3M

Even though diversity and inclusion are two very different things, they are often discussed together as a single thing, and it is safe to say diversity without inclusion is meaningless. While most companies focus on creating diverse teams, many have not yet figured out how to make the environment inclusive. They attempt to create a diverse workforce but stop just at that. If organizations want to make 'diversity' work for them, they need to create an atmosphere in which all people feel valued, respected and have access to the same opportunities. D&I efforts start bearing fruits

once people from diverse backgrounds in a workforce collaborate and work together as a team. Organizations must do away with any biases – conscious or unconscious – against underrepresented groups, which means providing equal growth opportunities to make key decisions or climb up the corporate ladder. “Inclusion at 3M is about the environment, where people feel safe to be themselves and welcome to express their ideas authentically,” says Shreya.

Engines of growth and innovation

“Inclusive cultures are far more innovative than the ones that are not” – Shreya Bhagwanth

Organizations in the post pandemic world stand on a precipice and they need to become quick, agile, resilient, and far better at innovation. To that end, they need to make a tectonic shift from the traditional structure, that of departments, business divisions, and silos, to a new model of fast-moving, diverse, and inclusive teams. An inclusive workforce can rapidly uncover new, innovative ways of growth and transformation. D&I is imperative to the success of a modern organization and, in fact, the driver of their innovative capacity. “A culture of innovation driven by inclusion is key to our purpose as an organization,” says Shreya.

A core business function

“D&I should not be an HR function, but a business function”– Vaidyanathan Seshan, VP – International Technology & Head of India Tech Hub at lululemon

While several companies consider D&I efforts to be “the right thing to do,” leaders don't often give them a high level of support. In fact, lack of leadership buy-in is one of the major reasons why D&I programs fail. D&I must become part of leadership strategy for a company to thrive in the future. To get leaders on board with the D&I program, it's important to be able to show them the projected ROI of the program. While becoming an employer of choice is one key result organizations identify through their diversity processes, leaders would also expect to know how D&I will help the company to grow and be profitable. lululemon is one organization that has D&I ingrained in its DNA and looks at it as a core business function. 60% of its board members, 72% of the C-Suite and 70% of the global workforce are women, people of color, and LGBTQ. “This has been fueling the growth for us,” says Seshan.

Mitigating biases

“Use technology to build a more diverse and inclusive workforce without biases” – AJ Rodrigues, Head of IT Delivery and the Delta Tech Hub

Organizations looking to create a more diverse and inclusive workplace should be aware of the impact of biases – conscious and unconscious. Such biases, also

referred to as explicit and implicit stereotyping, have a clear negative impact on formal employment decision-making processes and an employee's work life and growth. Bias adversely influences talent attraction, hiring, promotion, training, performance appraisal, compensation, and even termination. [Research has found](#) that applicants with White-sounding names receive 50% more callbacks for interviews than their counterparts with Black-sounding names. Artificial Intelligence (AI) has the potential to mitigate biases and provide more equitable access to the job market. AI not only speeds up the hiring process, but helps reduce unconscious bias by concealing applicants' names as well as gender and racial references in resumes.

Delta has been successfully using AI in the recruitment process to screen resumes and identify the right candidates from a large pool of applicants. "When we do that, 4 out of 5 candidates move to the interview stage and we've been able to roll out offers more quickly," says AJ Rodrigues. "AI helped us overcome the initial fear that diversity comes at the expense of speed and quality," he adds.
