Inclusion@Work™

Creating the Conditions for Employee Inclusion

Defining Diversity & Inclusion at Work

The modern workplace depends on successfully unifying the efforts of a wide array of individually motivated workers to achieve collective goals. At the basic level this is partially accomplished by defining work responsibilities; creating physical & technical infrastructure to accommodate needed collaboration; and providing a clear plan to meet a motivating group goal. By investing in these aspects of employee experience, organizations help bridge the distance between individuals so that they can successfully coordinate their efforts in their common interest. Without some capacity to accommodate and leverage the diversity presented by even a relatively homogenous group of individuals, the modern organization would be devoid of any utility whatsoever. Put another way, organizational efforts that focus on an appropriate strategy to accommodate differences between employees are nothing new, and in fact is a vital part of any organization's ability to develop and improve.

Diversity at Work: A Strategic Approach

Organizational **diversity** refers to the scope of biographical differences represented in an organization's workforce. Although a wide range of personal differences may factor into an organization's diversity strategy, areas of personal difference that many companies focus on are race/ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, and religion. The reason these forms of personal difference serve as focal points for an organization's **Diversity Strategy** is that they are historically and contemporarily related to set of underlying social and political conditions that disadvantage those who fall outside of existing norms.

Organisational diversity then is the reality of the biographical differences between members of an organisation's workforce. A **Diversity Strategy** determines how well the organization establishes a context wherein people across the entire of breadth of human differences within the organization can thrive at work. One component of this is ensuring that employees have the necessary support to be fully engaged in their work. Measuring how effective the organization has been in inspiring employees to feel a greater degree of a commitment, and willingness to act on organization's behalf serves as an excellent way to get a gauge on how employees in general are reacting to their experiences within the workplace. An approach so effective we built an entire company around it.

The most important component of a strategy aimed at managing the fact of human diversity, however, involves addressing the specific of challenges experienced by individuals who fall outside of the demographic norms that predominate within the organization. Challenges that often manifest in day to day working experience, and that produce the unspoken sense that those outside of the predominant group are not fully legitimate members of the organization— that their differences are being seen as a vulnerability, rather than an opportunity.

Inclusion at Work

If the outcome of failed diversity strategy is that members of key groups feel they are excluded and held apart from their counterparts in the predominating group, the clearest

indicator of a successfully implemented diversity strategy is the degree that everyone, and especially members of minority groups, feel drawn in and encouraged to participate by the social dynamics within the organization. **Inclusion** is the extent to which employees feel that they can be meaningfully involved in work that is valued by the organization, are allowed the necessary information and resources for accomplishing that work, as well as the ability to influence the decision making process. Experiencing inclusion is the outcome of a work environment and social context that is designed to empower and establish trust with employees.

Critically, the experience of employee inclusion is not the outcome of the individual choosing to try and push themselves into an unwelcoming circumstance, or to try to solve their problems individually. Rather, Inclusion is the result of an intentional collective effort on the part of the everyone in the workplace to ensure that everyone is provided the opportunity to share in the mutual respect and responsibility that accompanies working together as equal members of the same organization. By removing the barriers to a workplace that is both socially and materially open to all workers, employees are able to fully appreciate how they are able to effectively function *because* of the diversity of experiences and identities they each bring to their work.

Engaging Inclusion: Measuring for Effectiveness

Interventions focused on Inclusion centre around developing a productive social context that allows the variety of backgrounds and experiences each employee brings to support common goals and interests. Alternatively, interventions focused on Employee Engagement centre around how experiences within the workplaces influence one's commitment to the organization and their willingness to engage in discretionary effort on behalf of the workplace. Both are important ways of understanding how day to day experiences within the workplace influences workers' ability to do their very best work. Where engagement focuses on the employee's relationship to directly to their work, inclusion focuses on the structure of relationships between employees that either enable or hamper performance. Each is an important component of improving the effectiveness of an organisation's human capital.

Interventions capable of measuring and addressing both have the unique opportunity to not only address any prior gaps in an organisation's diversity strategy, but also provide buy-in to employees who feel diversity initiatives are likely have little bearing on their personal work experience. A joint approach allows the opportunity to meet each employee where they are at in their own experiences of the workplace and then speak to the issues that they are personally experiencing. The result being a system for organizational development that both ensures employees are fully engaged with their work, and fully bought in to engaging with their co-workers in a productive manner. One that returns diversity strategy back to its central role in creating a valuable workplace for all parties.

Indicators for the Inclusion@Work Instrument

- **Inclusion within the Workplace**: *The extent to which employees feel that they can be meaningfully involved in work that is valued by the organization, are allowed the necessary information and resources for accomplishing that work, as well as the ability to influence the decision making process*

- **Commitment to the Organization***: The degree to which employees identify with the organization and its value, feel pride in their being a part of the organisation, and remain firmly attached to the organization*

- **Willingness to Extend Themselves:** *The likelihood that employees affirmatively decide to go the extra mile, to exert additional energy, to be more innovative and to expand their roles in an all-out effort to help the organisation to be more successful and to achieve its goal.*

Drivers of Inclusion@Work

Where indicators provide information about the state of inclusion and engagement within the organization, **Drivers** are the factors that are the likely causes of those results. They represent both the challenges that employees are facing regarding feeling fully included in the organization, as well as the opportunities to create meaningful improvements. If indicators are there to indicate *what* is happening vis-à-vis the effectiveness of the current diversity strategy, the drivers are there to answer *why and how* those results likely came to be.

In the context of these surveys being used as part of diversity initiatives they address: 1) whether employees experience unfair treatment at work due to their differences from the predominant group, 2) the extent that individuals are confident that there are reliable internal systems of accountability that can be used in the case something goes wrong while on the job, 3) whether the organization has a known history of treating employees in a fair and consistent manner, and 4) whether employees feel confident that they can safely express themselves and be heard when they do so.

If employees are treated in a discriminatory fashion at work, lack confidence in the mechanisms in place for addressing issues they may have within the workplace, receive consistently unfair treatment, and do not feel safe to speak up; the chances of developing an inclusive work place are quite low. Alternatively, an employer where people are unlikely to experience discrimination based on their background, where there are well known systems in place that reliably address conflicts at work, where there is an established history of the organization making decisions in a fair way, and where people feel confident in sharing their perspectives without fear of reprisal or reprimand.

New Drivers for the Inclusion@Work Instrument

- **Experience of Equitable Treatment in the Workplace-** Whether or not employees report having experienced discriminatory treatment within the organization on account of a specific background.

- **Confidence in Redress -** How confident your employees feel that there are systems in place to make sure they are protected and respected while workplace conflicts resolved.

- **Workplace Fairness –** The extent to which workplace is consistently experienced as a fair place. Full participation relies on a universal trust that the organization strives for fairness.

- **Mutual Support-** The degree to which employees feel encouraged to participate with the organization as a fully-fledged team member. This depends on feeling safe to express oneself and encouraged to participate.

Equitable Treatment

Being treated as a respected and fully accepted member of the organization is first, and most clearly seen in whether one is being treated in a discriminatory fashion. Ultimately, for projects that focus on Inclusion, worries about a failure to provide a workplace that is free of differential treatment based on demographic background, serve as the primary motivator to begin work. Not only does a failure to provide equitable treatment often correspond with the violation of legal and ethical standards, it saps the organizations ability to serve as an attractive place to work for the diverse pool of applicants that are the reality of modern talent management efforts.

Equitable treatment not only involves the lack of overt discriminatory treatment, it also entails the careful consideration of how procedural and customary structures within the organization may create differential barriers to employees whose background differs from the predominant group both organizationally and socially. For example, topics such as work life balance take on a different inflection, when compared against the reality that to this day women perform the bulk of the labour required by family obligations. As such, reports of equitable treatment serve as a diagnostic tool to see if the organization has gone through the process of reviewing and considering existing policies and working conditions to ensure that every employee, regardless of background, experiences a workplace that is open and accepting.

Confidence in Redress

No system or set of policies can ever provide a complete guarantee that workers will experience a conflict free workplace. Just as every person has the capacity to affect one another within the workplace, so too does every member of your organization have the capacity to potentially disrupt or transgress workplace policies established to provide equitable employment. To that end, employees must have confidence in the HR team and its established procedures for addressing circumstances where an employee feels that they have been discriminated against or similarly experienced a transgression against their personal dignity.

Creating the circumstances that produce this confidence among workers involves a variety of elements. The first however, is having a clearly established and internally communicated system in place. If these processes for redress exist on paper, but do not serve as commonly understood process, they will ultimately fail in the task of emphasizing to workers that your organization take seriously matters of non-discrimination within the workplace.

In designing systems for addressing breaches of policies aimed at preventing discriminatory behaviour within the workplace, a balance must be struck. First, upon receiving communications from the effected employee, the HR team must promptly communicate that the issue has been heard and is being followed up on with urgency. From there, the response team should first check with available legal resources to ensure that there does not exist legislation that legally proscribes responses on the part of the organization. If the reported event falls outside of specific circumstances with legally mandated responses, the team should proceed to set up an opportunity to hear/receive in text the full description of the event from the employee. Careful

documentation of information received, including dates of collection and parties named is critical. If at all possible, confidential corroboration from third parties to the event should also be sought. Crucially, the accused party must also be given a chance to share their side of the story. If it is found that there was indeed an instance of discriminatory behaviour which falls outside of events covered within a legal framework, a facilitated conversation between the two involved parties should be arranged where the nature of transgression and the expected future behaviours from the transgressing party are clearly outlined. Creating, implementing, and internally marketing a process as outlined above, provides a context where all parties are given equal protection from the organization, and a pathway to forgiveness and growth can be established.

Foundational Fairness

A driving component of inclusion that cuts across all backgrounds is a workplace that is perceived to treat its employees fairly across the board. This means that employees feel that decisions central to their employment relationship with the organization, such as responsibilities associated with the role and hourly pay, are determined in a fair and consistent fashion. Establishing this consistency in turn creates the conditions for trust to be extended to the organization as a whole. Without trust, the avenue of viewing undesirable outcomes as the result of a discriminatory or exclusionary character within the organization becomes much more feasible.

In a similar fashion to engagement, supervisors play a central role in establishing the workplace as a foundationally fair environment. This stems from their direct involvement in many of the promotional, disciplinary, and other administrative decisions that workers will be subject to. Given that in many ways one's supervisor serves as the primary personification of the organization, their ability to create a sense of trust with their subordinates serves as a key factor in creating a sense of inclusion for their subordinates.

Mutual Support

Although policies and supervisors are key features of providing a sense of inclusion to all employees, an employee's immediate team or co-workers serve as another source of feeling included by the organization as a whole. In many ways, employees come to understand their standing within the broader organization, based on the treatment they receive from, and relative to, their colleagues. Feeling denigrated or disrespected by those one works with day-in and day-out can be a major barrier to feeling included in the group as a whole.

Beyond this aspect of appropriate treatment however, an employee's immediate co-workers also serve as a key resource for addressing issues one faces while at work. A helping hand, supportive words in a time of difficulty, and other such experiences serve as the basis for seeing oneself as a member of a team working toward a collective goal. Without this sense of camaraderie between colleagues, employees are left with a totally isolated way of viewing their relationship to the organization. Thus, it is critical for inclusion that employees experience both a lack of disrespectful treatment from their co-workers, and also a sense of trust and shared interest in achieving team goals. Without this experience, the prospect of feeling a fully included in the organization as a whole become a difficult one.