

Diversity and Inclusion as you transition out of Pandemic Mode

The imminent change

In 2020 in the UK your organisation had to 'pivot', literally overnight, due to the Covid-19 pandemic. Now, you are planning how to rapidly re-organise once again as we, hopefully, come out of the pandemic. Organisations, our own clients included, are seeking to create a blended working environment comprising a mix of *work at home* and *work at work*, in response to staff preferences, to reduce costs and perhaps also due to remaining concerns about Covid transmission. They are also adapting to changing customer needs and wants and again some 'blend' is anticipated e.g. in retail a markedly different mix of online and bricks & mortar.

Prompt, effective changes are required again in processes and solutions, rather than simply reverting to pre-pandemic practices. To be successful, these changes are reliant on both diversity and inclusion:

- Diversity underpins innovation and creativity; diverse people increase your chances of finding innovative and creative solutions
- Inclusion is mission critical; diversity without inclusion is simply a recipe for conflict

Furthermore:

- Inclusion underpins engagement; you cannot be engaged if you are not included. The more included you are, the more engaged you can be. More engaged people come up with more and better solutions

There are of course a lot of other very important reasons to be delivering on diversity and inclusion, however the purpose of this article is to focus only on Covid related drivers.

The Challenge

- You can't do much about the diversity of your staff in the very short term.
- Inclusion doesn't happen by default, and requires even more effort in this environment; with rapid change in working practices and more remote working, exclusion is the default.

(Some) Solutions

Here are some areas we are helping our clients to develop as they come out of pandemic mode:

- Communicate the increased importance of D&I to your people, and show you recognise the risk of their increased vulnerability (exclusion)

- Seek their input about how you can be more diverse and inclusive; their combined knowledge far exceeds yours
- Look harder for how the individuals in your existing teams are actually different. Once you start looking, you will find lots of differences. Which can you leverage more? Which would help the individual to be more fulfilled in your organisation?
- Find temporary ways to plug gaps, for example, short term hiring of people with specific skills, knowledge or experience, seconding people across teams, looking outside to see what others are doing. What can your customers/consumers teach your teams? What can your teams do to educate your customers?
- Look closer at your plans for improving diversity going forward. For example, improve recruitment processes to increase access to diverse talent, find ways to improve *Inclusive Leadership*
- Understand and address every individual's needs. For example, those working remotely longer term may
 - have personal challenges e.g. carer responsibilities
 - have technology needs/anxieties
 - feel isolated
 - experience more stress and anxiety

The more employees feel 'psychologically safe', the more creative they will be (ability to bring their whole, diverse, selves to their work)
- Adjust training plans to optimise remote/blended delivery
- Devise/review processes for fairness and equality in areas such as reallocation of roles, redundancy planning, creation/mobilisation of special teams, etc
- Identify and address pandemic-induced unconscious bias effects e.g. halo effect; those who come across well on Zoom or Teams are not necessarily 'the best', and vice versa.

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