

From Intention to Reality

Creating Diversity and Inclusion in Insurance

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Everyone benefits when an insurance company or any company for that matter, has a diverse, inclusive workforce, ranging from employees and executives to partners, clients, and individual policyholders. In this context, diversity means individuals are recognised, respected, and valued for the different perspectives they bring. Likewise, inclusion means individuals are given equal opportunity to contribute to business success, regardless of their background.

Every industry regardless of its ethnic and demographic profile or its history of change management has both an obligation to tackle unconscious bias and the ability to make a difference. By recognizing the potential for unconscious bias and intervening appropriately to remove bias from operations and processes, change

managers can drive change that will influence the actions of their peers and competitors. This, in turn, will ultimately yield a larger systemic change.

So, before you conclude that your company advocates diversity and inclusion, try answering these questions:

- Do your leaders understand the business value of a diverse workforce?
- Do you have the right data to help you understand the diversity in your organisation?
- Is there a clear vision to help you to attract and retain the best talent?
- Are your current initiatives making a difference?

MANAGING UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

Unconscious biases or stereotypes that we hold unknowingly, often keep our company and industry from achieving success. Unconscious biases based on age, gender and sexual orientation are the most common examples, but they are not the only areas of concern. For example, hiring decisions might be influenced by perceptions of educational background, favouring

a candidate who is a graduate of an 'elite' university over a similarly qualified and skilled applicant who graduated from a state school. This too is unconscious bias, and it may take several conversations for your executives to understand that a diverse set of educational backgrounds contributes to a diverse and more productive workforce.

Banishing unconscious biases and truly embracing diversity requires action. A company cannot simply declare their commitment without making any substantial changes to their hiring practices, community outreach, or workplace culture. Diversity initiatives need not start with a bang, especially when you are still exploring what works and what doesn't. Instead, begin by examining internal processes. Then, think about how you can break down your goals into actionable steps to improve these internal processes.

For starters, companies that purposefully address unconscious bias, are likely to hire a more diverse and representative workforce and to partner with diverse suppliers and customers. Many executives are ready and willing to commit to



diversity and inclusion and make them core elements of company strategy, planning and culture. However, HR leaders will have to initiate the ‘uncomfortable conversations’ that help teams identify and understand the various unconscious biases that they may be holding onto, despite their best intentions.

IN MAKING DIVERSITY A REALITY

- **Making the case**

Leaders can set the tone by articulating the competitive benefits of a diverse workforce, factoring it in their key decisions and ensuring that management at all levels of the organisation understand and promote diversity objectives.

- **Mitigating unconscious bias**

Unconscious biases can't be tackled by statements of intent alone. So, it is important to make people at all levels of the organisation more aware of such biases and develop ways to mitigate them. This includes tracking whether hiring and promotion are equal and, if not, identifying what biases may be at play.

- **Talent watching**

Experience shows that a good way to achieve fairer identification of people with leadership potential is to appoint a dedicated ‘talent



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watcher’ from within the executive team. This talent watcher should possess sufficient influence to ensure that the people being watched have access to appropriate assignments and that barriers to progression are removed. The talent watcher should also take the lead into investigating why a high-potential employee might choose to leave the organisation and to address the underlying issues.

- **Embedding diversity in your brand**

The brightest and best candidates will actively seek out organisations that have a strong reputation for diversity and inclusion. It's therefore important to promote role models and ensure that diversity and inclusion are at the core of the employer brand.

- **Practising inclusive leadership**

Inclusive leadership means working at attracting a more diverse workforce. For example, one company realized they had a lack of young people in their organization, so, they came up with innovative ways to ensure that young voices were being heard.

- **Promoting insurance careers for everyone**

It is vital to communicate to any intended audience that insurance companies, like many other companies, are open to all jobseekers. The point is, having experience in the industry or the relevant qualifications and certifications may help some

people to land the position of their dreams. Nevertheless, there are so many more talents and skills that are needed to broaden the insurance market and meet the changing needs of customers. Companies should aim to educate young people on how meaningful and successful an insurance career can be, and emphasize that the insurance industry is one of the few economic segments where, regardless of your background or degree, you will find a role.

None of these actions can make diversity a reality on its own. However, a concerted effort to bring diversity into the forefront of management thinking and actively tackling barriers will surely ensure one thing. It will shift diversity strategies from high level statements of intent to policies that can make a real difference, not just to the workforce, but to the company's ability to succeed in a fast- changing marketplace.



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