

5 advantages of a diverse workplace no one is talking about

Jim Morris

It's easy to focus on the more obvious advantages of a diverse workplace: cutting costs, for example, or the pride that comes from showcasing diversity as one of your organization's strengths. But there are many not-so-obvious advantages as well, which are rooted in the emotional transformation that occurs when individuals participate in diversity initiatives, take part in awareness exercises and fully embrace diversity and inclusion within their organization. The advantages listed below will only become more important as millennials and Gen-Z increasingly move into leadership positions and look to work for companies that prioritize diversity and inclusion.

1. Employees learn to use their head and their heart

Many people experience an unexpected side effect when they embrace the chance to become aware of their unconscious bias: their interpersonal relationships improve. By engaging in conversations around diversity, we tap into an emotional vulnerability that carries over into familial and romantic relationships as well. Becoming aware of what you don't know can be an emotionally freeing experience, both at work and at home. One participant reported: "As a husband and father, it allowed me to better 'listen to understand' and lean-in to my vulnerability as a means of strength".

2. Employee engagement

Thanks to embracing diversity initiatives, one CEO says his organization "truly learned how to fully engage each individual," while another business leader says a diverse workplace gives them the opportunity to "work with others from different organizations, and get to know colleagues in richer, deeper ways." Diverse workplaces necessitate profound and sometimes difficult conversations between employees who are given opportunities to be aware of unconscious biases and actively listen to others. Deep engagement between employees leads to improved job satisfaction and deeper engagement with the company.

3. Increased innovation

Creativity and innovation rely on having an open mind and the ability to approach an issue from different perspectives. Therefore, a workplace that encourages diversity – not just of race, gender and culture – but also of thought, will inevitably foster more innovation. The connection between diversity and innovation has been proven. Rockwell Automation is one organization that understood that to continue providing innovative solutions to meet customer needs, it had to attract, engage and leverage a wider range of talent, which is why it began looking to improve diversity and inclusion efforts. As a result, the

Jim Morris is Chief Consulting Officer at WMFDP, Portland, Oregon, USA.

company was able to substantially increase women in leadership roles, and involve male employees in playing a key role in redefining the culture.

Business leader Grant M. Yoshihara explains: “Diversity is not just based on what someone looks or sounds like, but what someone has experienced. These elements manifest themselves as diversity of thought. [Awareness exercises] opened doors for ongoing conversations that capture the richness that diversity of thought offers”.

4. More clearly defining the organization’s business goals and values

Having a diverse workplace helps an organization better define its values and overall role in the community. Business leaders who have integrated and prioritized diversity within their organizations find that diversity helps them to “better define and direct organizational values,” and that “having a sound inclusion and diversity foundation has sparked

discussions among leaders that are helping shape current and future actionable plans.” Diversity in the workplace creates organizations that are adaptable and resilient. With nearly two-thirds of millennials interested in an organization’s corporate social responsibility, having a strong sense of values is becoming increasingly necessary.

5. Thriving in a global, multicultural business environment

A diverse workforce means people can bring their whole self to work and are therefore able to more deeply connect with others. We often hear leaders say that diversity initiatives make a huge difference in the way they approach and engage with others, and that being part of a diverse workplace means employees are more comfortable meeting and interacting with people from all over the world. In today’s global business environment, the ability to connect with people from a variety of backgrounds and cultures is a huge advantage.

When an organization embraces diversity and inclusion as an integral part of the fabric of the company, incredible cultural transformations take place. People feel a greater sense of belonging, they feel more valued and respected by their team, and they are able to perform their job functions better. A diverse workplace isn’t just good for people; it’s good for business as well, and it is crucial for creating a thriving company culture.

About the authors

Jim Morris has 30 years of experience working and leading in purpose-driven consulting organizations. He is the Chief Consulting Officer at WMFDP, a consulting firm which provides organizations and business leaders with the skills they need to establish inclusive work cultures. There, he directs and supports a team of consultants and facilitators as they deliver one-of-a-kind world-class services to WMFDP clients around the globe. Jim Morris can be contacted at: lauren.roberts@smithpublicity.com