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Workbook – Tackling Diversity and Inclusion in the workplace

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1. How to use this workbook

Thank you very much for taking the time to read this workbook!

This workbook contains a selection of areas to develop yourself, based upon my own tips. These are based upon a curated version of older articles which people have found useful. For your benefit, I have put these together in one easy-to-access document for you to reference as you go through your own development journey.

This workbook particularly focuses on how to make the workplace a more diverse and inclusive place. This is based upon my own experience working in this space, and in particular what actually works.

At the end of each section, I have added a short worksheet. Here you can add some reflections and thoughts on the article you have read. If you prefer to type these out, you may also use the word version of the worksheet which is downloaded separately.

I hope you find this workbook useful. Feel free to pass this on to anyone you think might benefit from it. If you don't mind, I'd be really grateful if you could pass them to my website to subscribe themselves so that they can also benefit from my articles:

<https://tahmidchowdhury.co.uk/subscribe/>

If you have any questions, comments or feedback, get in touch with me at tahmid@chowdhury.co.uk, or drop me a line via LinkedIn at <https://www.linkedin.com/in/tahmidchowdhury1/>.

2. Tips to create an inclusive workplace culture

An inclusive culture is where **all** people can feel comfortable to discuss issues outside of the work context should they choose to. In my department, I previously worked with Staff Networks and HR to come up with a set of 'top tips' to help foster an inclusive workplace culture, here are some of the highlights:

1. Set out a team code of conduct which demonstrates a common level of respect for all individuals, no matter their background.
2. Role model positive behaviour and openness to discussions about backgrounds – it makes conversations much easier if leaders and managers are open about their own background before asking about it from their employees; moreover, it can help disarm the more threatening elements of questions ('where are *you* from?')
3. Create safe spaces to discuss backgrounds and open up the conversations. For example, some teams hold lunch'n'learns where individuals can talk about their backgrounds in an open, curious and non-judgemental manner.
4. Create an environment where employees with disabilities and long term health conditions feel able to come forward and discuss their disability, and any reasonable adjustments that they might need. Avoid making assumptions about their condition and ask them to explain how they experience it and what support, or reasonable adjustments they need.
5. Ensure that conversations and social activities are inclusive as far as reasonably possible. E.g. holding 'breakfasts' as well as the usual pub gathering to capture parents. Ensure you include everyone as much as possible in work related discussions and avoid 'water-cooler' decision making.
6. Create clear mechanisms to deal with discrimination, and/or Bullying and Harassment within your team. Ensure that such mechanisms are used properly and aren't simply viewed as a 'tick-box' exercise. This can be through effective use of countersigning mechanisms or an anonymous 'agony aunt' style point of contact to raise issues within the team.
7. Where appropriate, be naturally curious about other people's backgrounds and take an interest in what other people do outside of work. This does not mean going out and

putting people on the spot about race, disability or sexuality – e.g. many LGBT+ may feel uncomfortable being asked about their background and personal circumstances. Ensure that any questions are respectful and done in a positive spirit, respecting your colleague’s response.

8. If you are not sure on how to refer to someone, **ask them how they would like to be referred to**. There are many ways individuals can identify themselves, and it is worth remembering that ‘BAME’, ‘LGBT+’, ‘disabled’ etc. is a very wide umbrella – with many not being fond of the term ‘BAME’ or ‘LGBT+’: often people may prefer to be referred to as ‘Black’, ‘Queer’ ‘Asian’, ‘neurodiverse’ etc. As there is no size fits all, the best way to do this is to ask, though ensure you do so in a sensitive manner without putting employees on the spot.
9. Ensure you are following the basics of line management: scheduling regular one-to-one conversations, Performance Development Meetings and allotting sufficient time where possible. Ensure you are being fair and consistent in the amount of time and attention you give to your different staff – whilst this sounds obvious, in a study, research demonstrated **only 20% of women BAME respondents below senior management stated they received help from their line managers**. In stark contrast, 75% of white women stated their continued growth was due to having a supervisor, champion, mentor or coach.
10. Encourage team members to become Reverse Mentors, and for your seniors to sign up to be reverse mentored. If you feel comfortable to do so, gently remind your seniors to fulfil any objectives they have relating to Diversity and Inclusion or wellbeing.
11. Sign up to your organisation’s staff networks (sometimes referred to as Employee Resource Groups). Join as many network’s as you’d like, even if you do not come from the characteristic of the group in question! It is important that the networks gain a wide membership to ensure their reach is across the organisation so don’t feel afraid to join! If you don’t have a staff network, why not create one?

Reflections

What do I like about this article?

Is there anything I disagree with?

Has this article prompted any new ideas you have not had before?

Are there any actions I want to take as a result of reading this article?

Are there any challenges you foresee when using this information? If so, how might you overcome them?

Anything else?

3. Creating a holistic Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

The tricky part of Diversity and Inclusion is figuring out how to start. After all, the subject is quite a thorny one, and everyone will have their own opinions on what is 'right' or 'wrong'. This fear of doing something accidentally wrong, or previous experiences of being burnt when trying to broach the topic often leads senior leaders to avoid the subject as much as possible.

Unfortunately, simply avoiding the issue is not a viable solution – the Black Lives Matter movement demonstrates how critical it is for businesses to be able to have difficult conversations on these issues in a confident manner. Customers and Employees are expecting businesses to have genuine strategies to improve the situation in their own workplaces and for the wider public they serve.

This leads many organisations to develop their own Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. Naturally this is a difficult topic to avoid criticisms for tokenism, so how can organisations look at this in a holistic manner? Here are some areas to look at:

Recruitment

Organisations often start with a relatively homogenous workforce. Statistically they may find that they have an underrepresentation of women, ethnic minorities, disabled and LGBT+ staff. A natural starting point is looking at the talent coming through the doors. How many staff from diverse backgrounds are making it into interview? Are they even applying in the first place? Understanding the pipeline will help understand where the blockages are. It is then possible to take remedial measures.

For example, if there is a lack of BAME applicants applying, more outreach can be done to areas with a high BAME population. If you are then finding many are not making it to interview, look at your job adverts and see whether your requirements are genuinely open to people with different experiences or have been written in a way that has a certain type of person already in mind.

Inclusive Culture

You may have improved your recruitment practices, what happens then? Getting staff from different backgrounds through the door in of itself is not the solution – if your organisation does not make any shift to the culture or hold one that is inclusive, what you often find ensuing shortly after is some level of disharmony within the workplace.

Often where there is only one BAME or woman staff in the team with little efforts to integrate them, it can be very easy for these individuals to feel the odd one out. And whilst we would love to simply expect people to adapt to the people around others from whatever background, the reality is that we naturally gravitate to those who are similar to us.

So we need to build genuine efforts to make our workplaces inclusive, where it is open as possible for anyone from any background to come in and thrive. Culture takes time to change, and requires senior leaders to genuinely bring these conversations and hear people's stories to start the conversation.

Some smaller wins include making team socials more inclusive (e.g. having breakfasts as well as the usual pub visits to include more people); build staff networks within your organisation to allow groups to come together and share their experiences; make your working practices as flexible as possible in terms of working hours and being output focussed in performance management rather than hours spent at the desk.

Retention and Progression

One area to be wary of is diverse staff joining then quickly leaving the organisation. This can be very frustrating when a lot of effort has been put into bringing these people in. Without genuine inclusion, people will often feel excluded and will look to the door rather than staying in the organisation.

Similarly, what often happens in an organisation is women and staff from BAME backgrounds tend to get stuck at the bottom. Often there are issues relating to pigeon-holing and unconscious bias at play, where individuals are type-cast as unable to progress due to not having 'leadership traits' which are often built in the mould of its founders, rather than allowing different styles of leadership in.

Lack of opportunities is often cited as an issue, particularly for BAME staff. It would be a good idea to monitor how such staff are feeling about their prospects to get a good litmus test on how your D&I strategy is working.

Other areas to consider

Whilst not specifically on the subject of what should be *in* a D&I strategy, I did want to highlight a few more areas to consider:

Data

Data is absolutely paramount to understanding what is happening within our organisations. If you cannot understand why people are leaving within a year, it is vital you understand why. To successfully monitor a D&I strategy, you may need to overhaul your current HR systems with an ability to properly monitor application rates from different backgrounds. Exit interviews are also a vital way to understand why employees are leaving and an opportunity for genuinely honest feedback.

Engagement

Let's face it. We've all seen dozens of strategies pass through our inboxes. Most of them are simply glanced over and little due regard is paid to them after a week or two.

So getting staff genuinely engaged in what you are trying to do is really critical. Building your support structures within the organisation through volunteers that are enthusiastic to the cause is really vital. Also remember that much of this strategy will be delivered by managers across the organisation, so if you have done little to tell them what they need to do, the chances of it actually happening are pretty slim.

One final reflection is that there is no one-size-fits-all solution to a good Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. Each organisation will have its different strengths and challenges; some may find a high proportion of women and low proportion of BAME staff, others may find the reverse. So it is critical for firms to look at their own situation and build a realistic ambition of where they would like to further improve.

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4. What Small Businesses can do around Diversity and Inclusion

Small businesses may want to do more around diversity and inclusion, but not know how. Some of the issues relate to a lack of resources to tackle this issue, a lack of expertise in this area or their regional location where there is less diversity in general. On top of this, simply surviving during COVID has taken been one of the most difficult battles for many local businesses, meaning additional aspirations on this agenda can be tough to justify.

That being said, it is worth stating that many of the strong business reasons for D&I apply for small businesses as well. For example:

- Serving diverse customers is a way to diversify business revenues. Offering products and services for underserved communities can open up additional opportunities for a local business.
- customers have a growing societal conscience around Diversity and Inclusion. People may be put off taking services if they feel a business is not representative or is not taking action to support the agenda. This is particularly important for community-based businesses.
- By creating an inclusive culture, businesses making people feel more comfortable working there. Happy staff = productive staff (and less turnover).
- Attracting wider talent pools will help small organisations get the best talent available. This is particularly critical for small businesses in ethnically diverse areas who may not otherwise attract individuals from different backgrounds.

It's also not all doom and gloom for small businesses in being able to act in this area. After all, Small businesses are more nimble, and much more likely to be connected to their local community, giving them a closer insight into local diaspora and are better able to build genuine relationships with key community leaders for different groups. Multinationals on the other hand have a hard time getting passed being seen as 'faceless', and shifting priorities mean community relations can often fall by the wayside. Likewise, it is far easier to shift the internal inclusive culture of a small business, compared to a large organization employing thousands of people.

So with this in mind, I have created a list of actions small businesses may want to consider. These are intentionally bitesize to take into account limited resources, as well as the relative strengths small businesses have:

- Have you asked how your employees feel? Have you asked them what it is like to work in your business? How do they feel about diversity and inclusion?
- As a small business, you are likely already well-linked to your local community groups. Explore these avenues further to get a better understanding of what potential customers are out there, and what needs are currently not being met for them. Take a particular look at those from different backgrounds you may not have considered before.
- Review your promotional material and website. How representative are they of different groups? Would they appeal to these groups?
- See where you are advertising. Is there a way you can diversify your approach, e.g. getting in contact with local mosque, diverse community groups, ethnic diaspora local newspapers etc.?
- And if you would like to go a step further, take time to see how diversity and inclusion can be incorporated within your wider business plan and strategy.

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5. Concluding thoughts

I hope you have found this workbook helpful. If you've completed the questions, it may be an idea to revisit this in a month's time to see whether they have had an effect. If they have, then great! I'm happy that this may have helped you. If they haven't, have a think about what prevented you from doing so – perhaps you were too busy, or when you tried some other issue came up.

I created this workbook with the hope that it will prompt positive change. Sometimes the answers are quite simple – i.e. shifting one or two small behaviours. Sometimes, they are more complex, and trying something new raises more questions.

If that is the case, I encourage you to try new things until you find something that works. You can follow what I write, or equally find a new source of inspiration from someone else. If you would like me to respond to a situation you are facing, feel free to drop me a line at tahmid@chowdhury.co.uk, I always welcome new ideas for articles.

I am also a qualified coach, where I work with clients to overcome their challenges through ongoing support. I work with those who are genuinely committed to change through the medium to long term. I prefer holistic change rather than quick fixes, as such I work with clients who are genuinely willing to commit to development that might at times be uncomfortable and difficult. I do this as I believe this is what is required for us to truly learn, whilst shorter relationships tend to be shallow in impact.

If this is something you might be interested in, get in touch with me at tahmid@chowdhury.co.uk