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ESTABLISHING EFFECTIVE NETWORKS

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WHY EFFECTIVE INCLUSION NETWORKS MATTER



Connected employees who feel that they belong often feel more comfortable to bring their authentic selves to work and can fulfil their full potential are engaged employees. Research

shows that increased employee engagement drives productivity levels and that disengaged employees can be significantly costly for businesses.

A great way to ensure employees are engaged is by investing in effective Inclusion Networks, otherwise known as Employee Resource Groups. These are a powerful lever of belonging and critical partners for change, helping to inform Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) strategy, and where members can share their values. Not only do impactful Inclusion Networks give employees the space to find allyship and meet like-minded colleagues with shared experiences, but they also provide the platform to raise awareness of key DEI issues that can be weaved into DEI strategic efforts.

Inclusion Networks are a great way for employees to come together, celebrate shared interests & differences, discover allyship, and create a platform for open communication about key challenges they face and share. They also help to build out colleagues' awareness and knowledge of key DEI issues and enable them to develop personal and professional skills. In turn, Inclusion Networks help to create a deeper sense of belonging at work, increasing retention

levels and reducing voluntary turnover.

Effective Inclusion Networks:

- Are employee-led and mostly voluntary groups.
- Aim to raise awareness of issues facing marginalised groups in the workplace.
- Often advocate for better, more socially responsible business practices, and an inclusive workplace.
- Align their goals with wider business objectives, and act as integrated business partners.

This guide outlines a number of ways that organisations can develop effective and impactful inclusion networks. This guide is not exhaustive but is designed to be a guide to explore the importance of building effective Inclusion Networks and any key considerations when establishing them in the workplace.

ESTABLISHING AN EFFECTIVE NETWORK

There are a number of factors to keep in mind when establishing an effective network that will act as a key business partner to supporting with wider DEI strategic efforts:

Building a Business Case

- Approach the conversation with a business context in mind and elucidate why there is a need to ensure a quality employee experience.

- Ensure you build your case using business targets and research supporting your Inclusion Network mission/purpose.
- Educate yourself on different cultures, working styles and personality types to understand where your Inclusion Network mission might be coming from.
- Ensure you have senior leadership buy-in and advocacy. This is a good indicator that your mission aligns with business objectives. Establishing an effective governance structure by assigning a senior leader with decision-making capabilities at the top of the organisation helps to move the dial.



Barriers to Active Membership

- Network membership and active participation is voluntary. However, voluntary roles often leave the most proactive members overburdened. It is therefore important to split key tasks where possible to disseminate the workload for maximum impact and incentivise participation through recognition. In doing this, we suggest you ask colleagues to volunteer for key roles, such as Network Co-Chairs (we suggest having two in place), and clarifying succession planning processes, to evaluate these roles on an annual basis.
- A lack of allyship can lead to a ‘preach to the choir’ effect, which can slow down positive change. Ensure you work to engage allies to support your network’s goals.
- Some DEI events can alienate some groups, e.g., pink cupcake days for women on International Women’s Day. Work intentionally to include all groups in branding and key DEI initiatives.
- Identify and support the ‘niche and harder to reach’ audiences such as those who may feel marginalised within an underrepresented group, such as parents of LGBTQ+ children within the LGBTQ+ network, or trans women within your Gender Inclusion Network.

Don't Limit Participation!

- Invite others beyond the Inclusion Network's dominant culture and those who are not like you to contribute to your mission. For example, a Black Inclusion Network should actively seek participation from White colleagues, to help drive a consistent message and positive change amongst other ethnicity groups.
- Combat 'groupthink' and encourage constructive diversity of thought and contributions across and beyond the network.
- Educate yourself on other networks' visions & missions to see where your network aligns.
- Understand the unique needs and requirements of other networks' challenges and opportunities to see how you can work with them to tackle your own challenges.
- Actively seek out alternative opinions and contributions from other networks, encourage cross-network idea sharing and work to tackle the challenges and opportunities of other networks and diverse teams.

Reputation Building & Outreach

- Build strong external networks of diversity partners and not-for-profits that align to your DEI strategy.

- Look to competitors or like-minded businesses to benchmark 'what good looks like'.
- Engage with key DEI topics and trends on social media to promote your inclusion network's purpose and vision.
- Seek out speaking and event opportunities to promote your network's goals and objectives.
- Encourage diversity on panels at DEI events. Strongly, but respectfully, question homogenous panels.
- Identify DEI experts to rely on for soundbites and speaking opportunities. It is critical not to exclude dominant group voices, but instead help them understand why we need to check for diversity before committing to speaking opportunities.
- As your network gains momentum, and internal impact is demonstrated, identify DEI awards to apply to and consider DEI conferences to attend. This helps to increase the visibility of your network and attract further members.

Consider Intersectionality

- None of us can be defined by one singular dimension, so we need to take effective networks to the next level and address the plurality of identities that define us through cross-network collaboration.

- Ensure cross-pollination of knowledge across all Inclusion Networks, to ensure that content is intersectional.
- Host events with an intersectional spin. For example, if your Gender Network hosts an event on Menopause, seek collaboration from your Disability Network for their insights on the barriers that Menopause can pose to women at work.
- Ensure that the network's mission statement and objectives use inclusive language, and that all networks work together to align objectives and actions.
- A quarterly cross-network meeting can be incredibly helpful when having intersectional conversations, and to ensure consistency in core messaging.

Measuring Success

Prioritisation:

- We suggest that each network supports 3-4 DEI initiatives annually to ensure focus and impact and look at what is most impactful rather than just fun or easy.
- Initiatives should build out of the DEI strategy to ensure initiatives are as streamlined and refined where possible. This ensures initiatives don't exist in silo, and that they reflect the wider business strategy. Close partnership with your DEI team is critical for this.

- Challenge each proposed initiative to ensure it aligns with the overall DEI strategic objectives.

Measurement:

- Instil best practice to measure return on investment for all initiatives.
- Identify core goals and facilitate what measures we could use, e.g., social media post shares, likes, event attendance, survey feedback).

