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RESEARCH ARTICLE

INCLUSION FACILITATED BY STORYTELLING/DISCUSSIONS.

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Manuscript Info

Abstract

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Have you ever walked into crowded room and then realized that you don't see anyone else who looks like you? Have you ever experienced an awkwardness unexplained when there is no balance in group discussions? Sounds like a bad nightmare but this is an experience that occurs in many workplaces where diversity or inclusion is not a priority. Homogenous environments are settings where everyone tends to look the same and or think the same.

What are the bigger implications for business settings? How can we further increase awareness about underrepresented groups acknowledging their value to business practice? Groups such as; women, persons who are disabled, LGBTQ, racial and ethnic groups, Black/African American, Latinx, Native American and Asian Americans.

In the workplace we have the opportunity to elevate and promote inclusion. There are many strategies that could be considered. Using platforms such as panel presentations or group discussions can be a great start to introduce and facilitate awareness and meaningful dialogue. When an employer is strategic and takes such actions it also conveys a commitment to the employee's wellness and value. Our workplace is complex an imperfect so why not create conversations to better understand those dynamics. Inclusion facilitated by storytelling or discussion can also inspiring new ways of thinking which can enhance the decision making amongst the team.

Why is this important?

Discussions that focus on the inclusion and equity can help organizations become stronger by recognizing what is meaningful to their teams. As a team's awareness increases they can begin to question; How effective are the communication and marketing strategies? Are the right people on the team that can answer such questions? How are we reaching the underrepresented groups? Also for groups that are underrepresented in industry, conversations that are relatable can contribute to increasing their engagement. Organizations should also be prepared in the event that some employees may feel uneasy with certain challenging topics of discussions. This is a stage where it is critical to establish a 'code of conduct' to assure that respect for all remains present. By increasing awareness and empathy for others we take steps towards eliminating the disconnects.

Organizational 'cultural norms' may need to change in order for progress to be experienced (Forbes, 2012). We may need to question how onboarding is managed or how promotions are granted. The American dream has always implied that opportunities can occur for all 'if you work hard.' This notion continues to attract the attention of tens of millions of people who play by the rules and yet they have experiences in the U.S that demonstrate barriers and exclusive practices. Women and minorities make up two thirds of the population and 57% of the workforce and they

only represented 3% of senior positions in fortune 1000 companies according to the Glass Ceiling Commission report (Leadership Conference, 2017). Organizations have an opportunity to be an example of inclusion by challenging legacy practices and identifying exclusionary barriers.

Practical Strategies:-

We can learn valuable lessons from listening to others as we continue to learn about ourselves? Organizations can implement, as a priority, training that incorporates inclusion. By doing so it also conveys to the employee that their growth is equally as important as generating company revenue. Listed below are few platforms to consider:

Panel Presentations: generally this platform is where speakers can describe their experiences as they convey different perspectives. This approach can also increase awareness by providing historical context and the present conditions within industry and or society. Listening to diverse speakers also provides motivation, encouragement, and hope for those who may be seeking solutions of how to persist under challenging conditions (Firestone, 2012). It is recommended that the program facilitator offer a video or reading recommendations prior to the event to help provided context.

Framework example: Panel Discussion

- Step 1. Introduction (15 minutes)
- Step 2. Keynote/Topic Presented (15 minutes)
- Step 3. Panelist provide their prospective (10-15 minutes each)
- Step 4. Provide Questions and Answer time (15 minutes)
- Step 5. Facilitate Group Discussion-optional
- Step 6. Panel Discussion (ABA, 2017)

Group Discussions: The benefit of having group discussions on diversity and inclusion is that it can help workplace settings recognize how their own biases might be contributing to matters of equity (Ellis, 2015). This type of awareness can strengthen team decision-making and positively influence administrative retention. As an example, Coffee Klatch is an intimate yet casual way to engage people in meaningful exchanges. It is recommended that the leader provide the participants with some thought provoking questions or readings before the gathering. This will spark the thinking of the participants in advance.

Framework example: Coffee Klatch (60 minutes)

- Step 1. Start the introductions (10 minutes)
- Step 2. Leader introduces the topic (10-15 minutes)
- Step 3. All participants engage in conversation about the topic (20 minutes)
- Step 4. Sharing of pivotal moments in the discussion. What was learned? (10-15 minutes)
- Step 5. Provide direction where continued dialogue can occur (online forum or another event) (ABA, 2017)

This approach could be considered as a kick-starter to a bigger discussion platform. Active participation is required by the participants in order for learning and awareness to be experienced.

Virtual Engagement: Practitioners can opt to use virtual tools to elevate their messaging. These types of presentations can be as active as you choose. This method requires each user to have a computer interface. Generally in this format there is a viewing of a PowerPoint presentation followed by a discussion. Using this approach you can reduce any financial barriers and geographic challenges one might experience. There are also multiple virtual platforms one might consider to facilitate this engagement; Google Hangouts, Adobe Connect, Go to Webinar and Skype.

Framework example: Hosting Webinars

- Step 1. Determine the format of your webinar
- Step 2. Create an agenda for the event
- Step 3. Create your visuals for the presentation- Example, PowerPoint
- Step 4. Conduct a practice run of the webinar (Knight, 2016)

Spotlighting: This is another method that can help increase inclusion within your environment by elevating your internal or industry talent that is most often not highlighted. In most homogenous settings it is very easy for explicit biases to occur. This is when the standards of what is considered good, beautiful, talented does not adequately have

a broad perspective. This standard should be challenged periodically by identifying the 'who' is in the decision makers and what metric tools are being used to define talent. By highlighting underrepresented talent you demonstrate an interest for inclusion. Spotighting, as a strategy, can help elevate the untold stories bring them to the forefront, which will attract those that may feel disconnected or not represented. This method is a great way to attract young audiences by showing them relatable professionals practicing within industry.

Framework example: Showcasing

Step 1. Identify your underrepresented talent

Step 2. Meet with your team and decide which format you would like to use: Exhibition of their work, embedding in existing award ceremonies, virtual platforms-Company page, Facebook, LinkedIn, etc.

Step 3. Decide on how your team will curate assuring assets.

To assure the projects intention are clear it is very important to showcase the persons value and contribution to industry (AIGA, 2017).

Conclusion:-

It is helpful to have a clear understanding on the distinctions between diversity and inclusion. 'Diversity' could be illustrated by thinking about attending an event where you see lots of people from different cultures in the room but 'Inclusion' would be if some of those diverse cultures not only attended the event but also had been invited to help plan it. The intentions of encouraging inclusion by discussion is to further inspire us to dedicate time to our most valuable human resources, the 'people' throughout our organizations. It would also be beneficial for organizations to embed anonymous surveys having the interest of capturing program impact.

These suggested platforms could help facilitate greater awareness. Organizations have the ability and opportunity to increase awareness and empathy. As an example here are a few topic areas that can enlighten team members; what are some of the barriers experienced by women in the corporate world? What stereotypes from LGBTQ community are causing harm to their elevation as a community? Are there harming generalization made about groups underrepresented? Are there missed business opportunities from those generalizations? If we stop and listen to the different groups and learn from their various perspectives our engagement and business decisions will be better informed. As our awareness grows we can then begin to challenge ourselves and determine if we are contributing to social challenges or are we helping to break through barriers. The goal of inclusion is to create a business culture where all are valued and included. This can be facilitated by discussion and effectively listening.

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