

The Power of Diversity

One of the biggest challenges to creativity and innovation is lack of diverse thinking. When hiring, many leaders want to find replications of themselves, thinking this is what will make the organization thrive. However, the reality is that what allows companies to be innovative is diversity. Think about it: how can diverse ideas be exchanged when everyone thinks the same?

Homogeneous working environments may make team bonding easier; however they leave little room for ideas to flourish. There is a term for this, called the Medici Effect, which states that a diverse team has a better chance of generating groundbreaking ideas. This is because people of different backgrounds, experiences, and knowledge each bring a different approach to solving a problem, which can lead to ground breaking new ways of doing things. When everyone on a team thinks from a similar perspective, it is too easy to agree on what first seems obvious and overlook other possibilities, often because they're never even brought to the table. In fact, studies by Henley Management College, Forbes, and Ford Germany have shown that diverse teams are more productive, innovative, creative, and have a higher level thought processes. This is why the majority of companies making over 10 billion dollars a year actively create diversity.

Important areas of diversity:

- **Ethnic and Cultural Background:** People with a diverse ethnic and cultural background may naturally have different life experiences that will influence the way that they see a problem and the ideas to solve them. In what ways can you increase the ethnic or cultural diversity within your creative team?
- **Work Function and Experience:** The level of experience people have with a specific job function will affect how creative they are and what they believe to be possible. Bringing in people with different areas of expertise, educational background and work experience will greatly diversify ideas of possible solutions. What departments or individuals can you include in this process that will bring different perspectives and areas of understanding?

- **Seniority:** Sometimes the longer someone is with an organization the more likely they are to be set in their ways. They're also more likely to have a strong bias toward what they believe is not possible. On the other hand, the new employee may have a very different way of looking at a situation because they may not yet have a concrete set of beliefs and expectations regarding how things should or can be done. At the same time, longevity in a position or a company allows for insights that a newer employee may not have. Therefore, placing seasoned employees with newer employees will increase creativity and bring out the best in both employees. What specific employees can you invite to participate in the creative team that will create this variety?
- **Personality Type:** Hiring and creating groups of different personality's types is also a great way to increase diversity and creativity. While one person may naturally see the shortest, fastest way to accomplish a desired result, another may be great at seeing the big picture and the long-term impact of changes. Both perspectives are valuable and, combined, lead to team to a more well-rounded decision. In what ways can you ensure you have a variety of personalities participating in your creative team?

Interdepartmental Collaboration:

Creating a diverse team does not necessarily mean that you have to hire new staff. It can be as simple as expanding who attends your meetings and who works on what projects. In other words, you can bring in people from different departments or send your team to other departments. Each department then has the opportunity to gain a better understanding of the activities and perspectives of different segments of the company. This exchange between different department increases knowledge, insights, and creativity on all sides. There are many ways to facilitate interdepartmental collaboration:

- You could have someone from accounting, human resources, and customer support all participate in brainstorming and idea generation related to any number of topics, such as annual budget or staffing needs. Seeing how decisions affect each department, as well as

how each business function impacts the others, can lead to insights that can transform an organization. In what ways can you pull in employees from other departments to participate in meetings or projects?

- Outside of formal teams, meetings, or projects, you can simply create opportunities for different departments to interact and spend time together in informal settings on a regular basis. This allows time for information and ideas to be shared. In what ways can you increase the contact that employees have with other employees outside of their normal circle or department?
- You can even do short-term job swaps to help employees get a new perspective to each other's roles. If you were to implement an activity like this, what sorts of insights would you be hoping each participant received and how would a program like this look in your company?/

Bringing in an Outsider:

Another option is to bring in an outsider who has a unique expertise or skillset. This person will see a company's operations from a fresh perspective and can share insights that an insider would never be able to see clearly. Sometimes having an outside perspective is exactly what is needed to help push an environment that is stagnant or stuck in the direction of new ways of approaching the situations they face. With the project you're working on, are there any needs for diversity that are not met internally? If so, who and how would you bring in an expert or other person with a divergent perspective?