INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE:

The Guide to Making Everyone Feel That They Belong

EAGLE'S FLIGHT™

FORWARD-THINKING COMPANY LEADERS HAVE LONG HELD THE VIEW THAT A DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE CORPORATE CULTURE IS CRITICAL TO SUCCESS.

Diversity and inclusion often get lumped together, but it is important to understand the difference between these concepts, because focusing on only one will not achieve the desired results and could even cause harm. Inclusion is about creating an environment where individuals feel willing and able to bring their authentic selves to work and contribute all they have to offer. In this environment, people feel involved, valued, and respected for who they are and what they contribute regardless of gender, age, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, marital status, physical abilities, neurodiversity, work experience, or education.

Inclusion goes beyond diversity practices, such as hiring, to focus on the behavioral and cultural aspects of the workplace and their impact on the employee experience. As one article for Glassdoor put it, "Diversity is used to put people in seats; inclusion helps keep them there."[1] The benefits of striving for a diverse and inclusive corporate culture are plenty; for employees, the organization, and your customers. A workplace where everyone feels valued is far more likely to be empowered and motivated to make their customers feel the same.

Between the countless research studies and the frequent discussion on this topic in company boardrooms, lunchrooms, and on social media, inclusion has quickly risen to the top of the corporate priorities list. In fact, 72% of surveyed organizations are putting a conscious focus on creating a culture of diversity and inclusion.[2] This is because when organizations actively focus on ensuring that the work environment is inclusive, every individual in the organization feels that they can be their authentic selves and that their input is welcome and valued. This results in a competitive advantage because employees are more likely to contribute their ideas, champion new projects, and be more engaged with the growth of the organization overall. An inclusive culture also helps increase employee retention rates and thus decreases recruitment costs, because people will be more likely to stay in a role where they feel their contributions are welcomed and valued.

So, the question is not whether there is value in becoming inclusive, because globally it appears organizations have come to the consensus that, yes, it is in fact valuable. The real question plaguing organizations and the employees charged with creating diversity and inclusion now is, how do you maximize the impact of the investment?

While 62% of surveyed organizations leverage their diversity and inclusion program to attract talent or comply with legal requirements, only 19% are leveraging their efforts and investment to achieve greater business results, such as innovation or improved financial performance.[3] In this guide, we will reiterate the numbers that support the importance of diversity and inclusion in the workplace, along with tangible actions you can take to maximize your efforts to create a workplace that makes everyone feel they truly belong, and thus motivated, encouraged, and inspired to live up to their full potential.
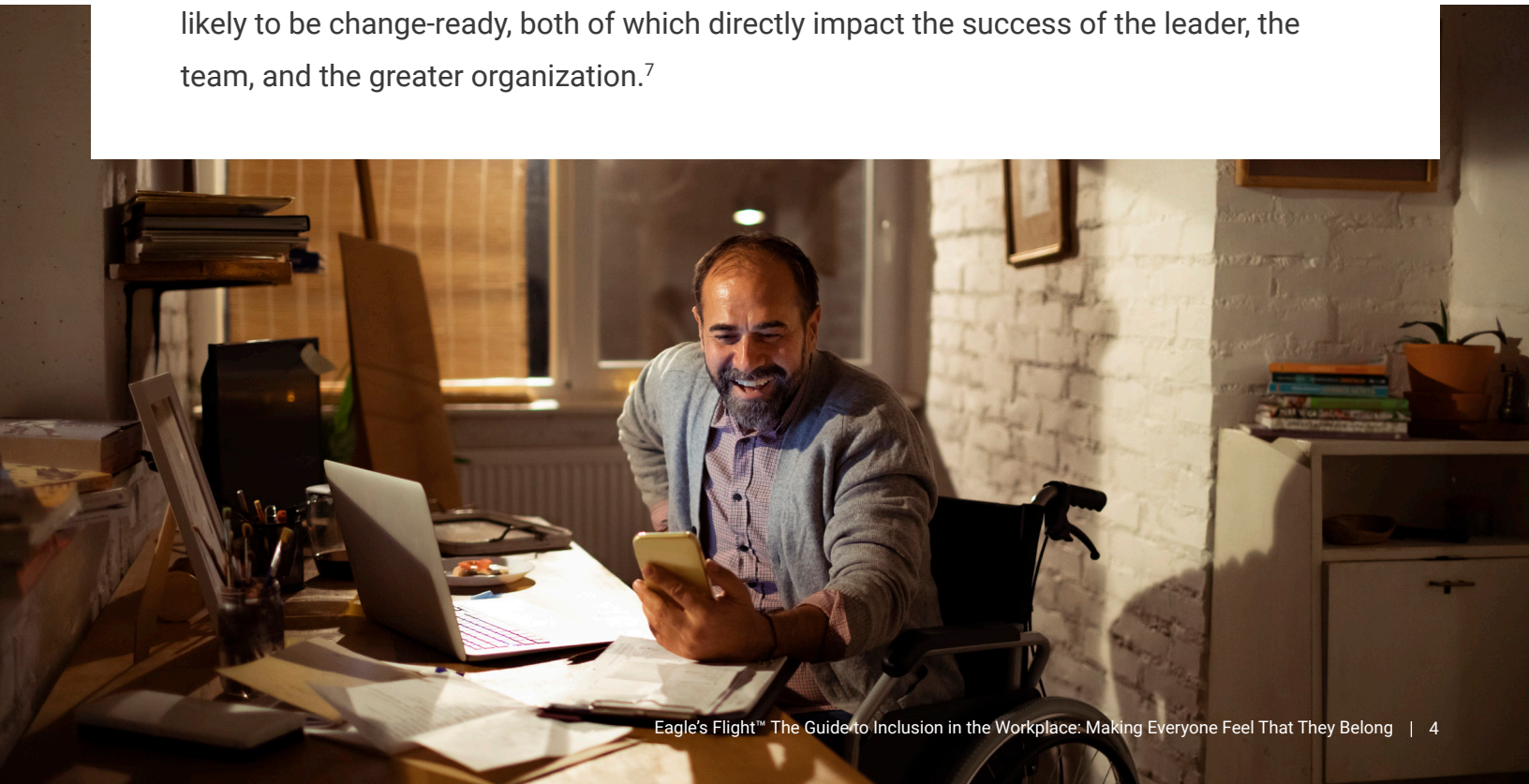
THE NUMBERS SUPPORT BUILDING A CULTURE OF INCLUSION

Inclusion Improves Team Performance

When all team members feel that they belong and their contributions are valued, teamwork and collaboration thrive. In fact, inclusive teams make better decisions 87% of the time, and make them twice as fast with half the meetings.[4] Also, gender-diverse and inclusive teams outperformed gender-homogeneous, less inclusive teams by 50%, on average.[5] By focusing on creating an inclusive environment where all team members' contributions, thoughts, and approaches are welcome, teams can collaborate better and more efficiently, leading to better results.

Inclusion Boosts Individual Performance

Inclusivity also has significant impact on individual performance, as employees who feel more included are more willing to go "above and beyond the 'call of duty' to help other team members and meet workgroup objectives."[6] Not to mention the impact an inclusive environment has at the leadership level. Another study found that those who felt included were 1.7 times more likely to be innovation leaders and 1.8 times more likely to be change-ready, both of which directly impact the success of the leader, the team, and the greater organization.[7]

Inclusion Reduces Turnover and Attracts Employees

In a world where there are more jobs available than employees, candidates have a lot of power in where they work and why they choose to work there.[8] Diversity and inclusion are becoming increasingly important considerations, with 67% of job seekers reporting that a diverse workforce is important to them when evaluating a job offer.[9] Also, nearly 20% of 24-35 year olds said a reputation for ethical behavior, diversity, and inclusion, as well as workplace well-being, were important when choosing an employer.[10] Therefore, if organizations wish to reduce turnover, retain top talent, and attract the very best talent going forward, an emphasis on diversity and inclusion must be factored into the equation and efforts made.

Inclusion Influences Bottom-Line Results

The measurable benefits of inclusion, such as empowerment, sense of belonging, innovation, and so forth, have the potential to have a significant impact on an organization's bottom-line financial results. One survey found that inclusive workplaces bring in 2.3 times more money per worker than less inclusive companies over three years.[11] Also, those companies that were found to be more racially, ethnically, and gender-diverse had a higher likelihood of outperforming industry financial medians.[12]

Bearing all this in mind, the conclusion is clear - inclusion matters. It matters to the success of an organization right now and in the long term. It will be what separates the good from the great organizations as we move forward in an ever-increasingly connected and conscious world. Luckily, if your organization is one of thousands around the world that is committed to actively improving diversity and inclusion, you could not be doing so at a better time. The meaningful actions you can take to do so and maximize your investment will be discussed in greater detail in the following chapters.

TAKE ACTION: BUILD AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE

There is no singular ideal company culture because every company's culture will be as unique as the characteristics of the individuals within it. Organizational culture is (or should be) a reflection of what is important to the organization and what is required to achieve success. What makes a company's culture truly great is how well it translates into the experience of every customer, employee, and stakeholder. In the case of an inclusive culture, all employees and leaders, at all levels and in all departments, are committed to inclusion in all their actions and behaviors. Their inclusive actions culminate in an experience with the organization that makes everyone feel they belong and can be their authentic selves.

To build an inclusive culture requires an organization-wide strategy involving the support and engagement of every employee and must be modeled by leaders across the entire organization. It is a strategic initiative that must become a part of the organization's greater corporate strategy, so that all decisions can be made and executed in alignment with the greater goal of becoming truly inclusive.

As you can imagine, building a culture that values diversity and focuses on inclusion requires a shift in the organizational mindset that will require time, resources, corporate alignment, and effort to make it a reality. To do so will require nothing less than a unique solution for your organization that provides:

Leadership Alignment

Before embarking on a journey to change your culture, it is imperative that company leadership from the very top is aligned on the strategic goals of the initiative, and works together to create a plan on how to achieve them without jeopardizing other important corporate priorities and daily business needs.

Customization

Every organization is unique, meaning the path to becoming truly inclusive will need to be created to reflect the realities of your workplace. When selecting a training and development partner, look for one who not only offers a customized solution, but requires it, in order to guarantee success, relevance, and impact.

A Communication Plan

Once you have established leadership alignment and started working on a customized solution, it will be imperative to implement a communication plan that reaches every individual in your organization, as creating an inclusive culture takes involvement from everyone. A brilliant communication plan will not only communicate when the journey will begin, but explain the why behind it and the plan to make it a reality, which is key to building conviction for change.

Training for Employees

It's critical to deploy training for all employees to understand and appreciate individual differences, become aware of their own biases and how to manage them, and understand the role they play in creating an inclusive culture. Employing an experiential learning approach, whether it is in-class or virtually, to inclusion training not only allows your employees to learn what will make them truly inclusive at work, but gives them the chance to practice the skills and build confidence.

Training for Leaders

Leaders are a linchpin in a company's culture. Without their active support, participation, and promotion of the importance of inclusion, your investment runs the risk of falling short of its potential. For that reason, training for leaders will be absolutely vital.

Reinforcement and Retention

The forgetting curve, or learning decay curve, is a very real threat to the success of any training and development initiative. It represents how much information individuals can retain after learning something new. For most people, about 70% of the new information is lost within 24 hours, and after a month the retention rate is closer to 5-10%.[13] To curb this decay and keep the conviction to change strong, a reinforcement, retention, and measurement strategy is required.

Ongoing Support

If you hire a consultant to help with your diversity and inclusion initiative, be sure to choose a partner who will be there to support you throughout the entire duration of your journey. From getting alignment at the very start, to employing reinforcement techniques months after training, to creating a plan to bring new employees up to speed, seek a partner who is collaboration focused and committed to seeing you succeed, not just now, but long after the transformation has taken root.

TAKE ACTION: TRAIN AND DEVELOP LEADERS TO BE INCLUSION-MINDED

Leaders are arguably the most influential group in an organization for employees, especially when it comes to creating an inclusive workplace. In fact, turnover costs can be significantly reduced when leaders demonstrate a high overall level of inclusiveness in their relationships with group members.[14]

Leaders are the ones who set the standard of what to care about and how to behave for employees. Therefore, to become truly inclusive, leaders need to own their critical role in ensuring that everyone feels they belong. It's not enough for them to say they agree with the initiative – they need to publicly proclaim and demonstrate their commitment to inclusion every day through their actions and behaviors. Doing so will make it an undeniable priority, especially in the eyes of the employees. This was confirmed in a PwC study which found that tasking leaders with specific diversity and inclusion goals is key to driving results. Unfortunately, only 25% of surveyed organizations invested in diversity and inclusion have adopted this practice, and even fewer measure progress towards the achievement of these goals.[15]

By providing training specifically developed and delivered for leaders, your organization can help them become inclusion-minded as they learn how to lead an inclusive team, coach employees to manage their unconscious biases, and empower individuals. No matter if the training is delivered online or in the classroom, consider taking an experiential approach to training as it will provide leaders with an opportunity to learn by doing among their peers, not just listening, watching, or reading passively.

TAKE ACTION: PROVIDE TRAINING THAT SOLIDIFIES A COMMITMENT TO INCLUSION

It has been found that only 25% of surveyed organizations' diversity and inclusion training programs focus on embedding inclusive behaviors, while 45% use training to focus on non-discrimination and regulation compliance.[16] If you are committed to becoming an organization that is inclusive in the eyes of employees, stakeholders, customers, and the outside world, this is where you can take action to maximize your investment.

Simply providing information on compliance is not going to change behaviors, inspire conviction to change, or produce a mindset shift. What will is training that teaches employees to understand and appreciate individual differences, become aware of their unconscious biases and how to manage them, and know the role they play in creating an inclusive culture. Learning this means that participants will return to work equipped with the skills they need to participate in an organization where diverse points of view and backgrounds are celebrated and harnessed.

Making this kind of learning happen either in-person or online will not be accomplished through passive, lecture-style training. You will want to seek out a training partner who specializes in experiential learning methodology. This methodology allows employees to learn by doing through experiential activities, engaging group discussions, and personal reflection, all in the safety of the training session. Not only does this methodology resonate with a wider audience, but it creates a learning environment that fosters confidence, builds relationships, and builds conviction to act and think differently immediately back on the job.

CONCLUSION

Becoming a truly inclusive organization requires a deliberate focus on changing the mindset and behavior of employees at every level of the organization, to create an environment where everyone walks in every day feeling they truly belong there and can be their authentic selves. As the research suggests, this is the type of organization today's employees are actively seeking out, and organizations in turn are feeling the pressure and obligation to answer.

In your quest to make inclusion an everyday reality for employees, leaders, and customers, it will be imperative that everybody understands the vision for the organization and has support from the very top. At Eagle's Flight, we understand that creating a culture of inclusion is a process that requires the involvement and commitment of every person in the organization. To ensure that you are optimally successful, diversity and inclusion experts with the right tools, team, delivery methods, and experience will be critical. At Eagle's Flight, we've worked with numerous organizations and helped them implement targeted solutions to problems related to inclusion, corporate culture, and leadership development.

YOU'RE NOT IN IT ALONE

Contact us to learn more about how we can support your inclusion efforts.

RECOMMENDED VIEWING:
PAPA JOHN'S SUCCESS STORY

Intentionally building a culture where employees and leaders embrace diversity and inclusion can have tremendous benefits for any organization. Watch this video to see how Papa John's is doing exactly that.

EAGLE'S FLIGHT™

Since our founding in 1988, Eagle's Flight has developed and refined a framework for creating predictable, sustainable behavior change. We specialize in experiential learning and provide organizations with a better outcome by truly engaging the learner. Successful organizational development programs require ongoing work, but this can easily get lost in the shuffle of daily tasks that feel more urgent. Partnering with a provider that has a strong track record of helping organizations achieve long-term measurable change will help ensure that your development goals are met. If you would like to learn more about how Eagle's Flight can support your corporate culture goals, contact us today.

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