

Building a sense of belonging

Thursday 13 October 2022 | 1.00 - 2.00 pm BST.

Against the backdrop of the 'Great Resignation' and changing work patterns, building an inclusive organisational culture has never been more important for people and businesses alike to thrive. During this session our panel discussed the importance of addressing identity covering in the workplace, the effect of flexible working on expressing one's identity, the impact of identity covering on both individuals and an organisation, and practical steps to make organisations inclusive spaces where people are proud to express their unique identities.

Identity Covering - what is it?

- Identity covering is a term used to describe instances where individuals hide an aspect of their identity in an attempt to 'fit in' to a perceived mould within an organisation.
- Identity covering can occur both consciously and unconsciously at all levels of seniority within an organisation. However, at a more senior level, individuals may feel freer to express their unique backgrounds and identities which can create environments that encourage junior individuals to be confident in expressing themselves fully.
- Over time, having to cover one's identity can chip away at a person's sense of self and can lead to exhaustion, and inevitably affects an individual's self-esteem and productivity. Conversely, individuals who can be themselves at work are more likely to feel engaged and view an organisation as a community, contributing to their wellbeing and performance.

How does it affect an organisation?

- Organisations that focus on inclusive cultures are more likely to retain employees who feel a sense of belonging. But the 'Great Resignation' has illustrated it can be a risk for organisations, as individuals will seek out roles within other organisations if they feel their unique identity and needs will be supported.

- It's not just a talent retention issue. Prospective employees often research organisations' cultures prior to joining and those that authentically demonstrate inclusion are more likely to attract top talent than firms with a reputation for hiring specific types of people.
- Products and services benefit from the input and experience of people with diverse identities and backgrounds. Developing products that appeal widely starts in-house.

The virtues of flexible working

- While this wasn't always by choice, the emergence of flexible and remote working over the course of the pandemic has opened individuals up to being more honest about their unique circumstances.
- The distinctions between working life and personal life have become blurred. While this presents risks if not addressed properly, it has also allowed many of us to balance our personal and working lives more effectively so that one is not overlooked in favour of the other.
- As organisations begin to encourage people to return to the office, it's important not to renege on the benefits flexible working has provided. Be clear on what you are asking employees to come back to the office for and why it will not be to the detriment of their own specific needs and circumstances.

Top tips to foster inclusive spaces in your organisation

- It starts at the top, and should continue all the way down. Senior leaders within organisations are ideally placed to steer a firm's culture and values. This can be made more visible within an organisation by designating ambassadors or role models.
- Recruitment should also be guided by inclusivity by ensuring inclusive messaging in job descriptions.
- Provide a range of spaces or forums to talk about identity and belonging. In-person discussions can be helpful, but people can also find it less intimidating to engage with personal issues via channels such as webinars, messaging groups or blog posts.
- External inclusion and CSR initiatives breed a culture that reflects inwards by creating a common purpose of equity, inclusion and valuing diversity within the organisation. Track your progress. It's important to have specific KPIs and performance measures to ensure your organisation is realising the values it subscribes to. Consider also requesting suppliers to provide information on how they accommodate for diversity and inclusion in their own organisation.

#WeAreNotNeutral

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