

You thought diversity was difficult?

Resa Furey, Director of Marketing at Stantec for the global mining sector argues that many mining companies have made workforce diversity a central component of their company goals, yet the real challenge looms: inclusion

In mining companies around the world, diversity and inclusion have become a common – if not standard – part of the company strategy. Diversity – defined as being composed of differing elements or qualities – is often easy to see and quantify. Diversity gets an assortment of people in the room. On the other hand, inclusion – defined as taking in diverse members so they are part of a group in a beneficial way – is much more challenging. Diversity is being invited to the meeting, while inclusion allows, even expects, everyone in the room to contribute and consider the ideas and opinions of others. More simply, diversity is having mixed company, inclusion creates a safe space where all thoughts and ideas can be freely expressed, heard and thoughtfully considered.

Why is inclusion so important?

According to Culture Amp, a platform that provides companies data and analytics on their corporate culture, inclusion exists when a company's employees have a fundamental sense that they are important and are valued. In a wide-reaching survey on the topic, Culture Amp found that a sense of belonging was the only attribute that was a consistent and universal predictor of employees' workplace commitment, motivation, pride and willingness to recommend the company to others.

The survey also found that employees, "who feel they belong perform better, become more willing to challenge themselves, and are more resilient." Conversely a lack of belonging leads to frustration and employee turnover. From this data it's clear: the more employees feel they belong, the more engaged they are and the better they perform.

Now the real work begins: inclusion

The best way to help employees feel included is to focus on mitigating exclusion. By ridding the workplace of exclusion, we also avoid the toxic atmosphere it creates: feelings of rejection, lost sense of meaning, reduced self-esteem.

Prominent writers on the topic of inclusion recommend that managers make changes in behaviour today to improve inclusion and communicate to employees that they are valued, including:

- Make a personal connection. When managers take time to talk and build relationships they

make personal connections that build respectful, collaborative work environments

- Open communication channels and, where possible, involve co-workers in decision making. If involving employees in decision making isn't possible then add transparency to the decision-making process. This can be achieved by taking time to explain events and issues within the larger context
- Help co-workers view differences as assets rather than liabilities. For example, converse about the advantages and wisdom that 'digital natives' or older workers bring
- Become culturally informed by making time to learn about your colleagues from cultures, races, religions and backgrounds different from your own. An inclusive environment can be fostered by sharing backgrounds, customs and practices. Be curious!
- Recognise, manage and mitigate biases. Unconscious bias training can make employees aware of biases – the first step toward successfully mitigating them
- Fight collusive behaviours and educate employees on how to best challenge such behaviours. The ability to recognise and challenge exclusionary behaviours can put a company on a path to becoming an inclusive workplace.

Beyond an individual manager's actions, diversity and inclusion experts all agree that companies can support inclusion through thoughtful policies and practices. To measure whether workplace policies are inclusive, look at outcomes. When implemented as intended, does the policy facilitate a work environment in which no employees are excluded, treated unfairly, or prevented from accessing resources, responsibilities, opportunities or benefits of employment?

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What does this mean for the mining industry?

We are seeing positive progress in the mining industry, as companies continue to focus on workforce diversity and inclusion. In October 2016, Andrew Mackenzie, CEO of BHP publicly announced the aspirational goal to achieve a gender equal workforce by 2025. At mining conferences around the world, organisers are finding ways to include a broader array of speakers who bring different characteristics and life experiences. And many mining companies are making real efforts to incorporate individuals with distinct backgrounds at the executive and board level.

While we are seeing many efforts to increase diversity, inclusion is the litmus test. The industry must now make moves to ensure the workplaces for our diverse teams are inclusive. Improving inclusion is key to the mining industry achieving its diversity goals. By creating a culture of inclusion, all will benefit. 

