HOW
DIVERSITY
CAN HELP *Business*

The integration of a diversity and inclusion strategy into an organization not only allows the workforce to be more diverse but also creates a source of innovation for marketplace connectivity. While the conversation about diversity is nothing new, businesses have taken greater strides to develop these conversations into context in recent years. Increasingly, smaller businesses are developing their strategies for success in this area as a means of creating opportunity and developmental growth in the areas of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Management's perspectives and responses to the call for diversity strategies can help generate a more collaborative culture that benefits the internal organization as well as the client and prospect relationships.

So, what is diversity at its most characteristic level? The understanding of diversity is an understanding of the differences in what resources and perspectives are brought to the workplace by different individuals. This can include distinctiveness of need, preference, working expectation, or lifestyle. An organization that is effective with its diversity program not only acknowledges diverse perspectives but works to attract and retain a diverse workforce. This then leads to increased competitive advantage in the marketplace as this diversity comprehension expands into client service and marketability.

Workforce Diversity
Many trends are shaping the diversity conversations within our workforce and helping to advance the practice of diversity and inclusion throughout the working world. While we have seen an increasingly diverse workforce emerge over the past few decades, only within the last few years have we begun to see the necessity and value of adopting diverse practices to help shape and benefit the workforce.

Diversity has become an increasingly broad topic with categorizations that expand well beyond what most consider top of mind. Race, age, and gender have all been seen as valuable in the creation of balance in the workforce. But now we are seeing new inclusions with just as much value, such as sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, traditional and non-traditional family units, health, ability, and mental capacity, among countless others. This shows that the topic of

diversity is only expanding and therefore its comprehension is exceptionally important.

How to manage diversity comes with a multitude of adaptations and is specific to individual understanding, acceptance of challenges, and need. The general framework for managing diversity looks to create a balance between the management's response to internal and external pressures of diverse needs, the organizational response which creates competitive advantage, and then the implementation of tools and resources.

AIM's diversity event facilitator and internationally renowned diversity expert Roy Gluckman says, "Diversity, equity, and inclusion is a mindset that changes, shifts, and grows with time. Conversations of diversity and inclusion are by no means new and while some have a more specific focus in our present climate, the topics are endless, and each has a specific value in creating a uniformly cohesive society."

Goals of Diversity & Inclusion
For those that have yet to implement or adopt a company-specific diversity program, the best place to start is with the conversations. AIM Diversity Council member and Goldstar's Kenny Ved says, "Don't be afraid to ask questions. Be open to opportunities of dialogue among your colleagues and peers." Conversations have the power to educate and create a foundation for understanding. Diversity programs are not something that a company simply adopts

without inquiry. It should be a challenge but one that is evolutionary. Asking questions and being open to areas of concern or confusion is a great place to start. This vulnerability will give others a chance to share the value of the conversation.

Another goal is management's perspectives and priorities. Managers guide the creation and value of diversity programs. While there are certain legalities connected to diversity and inclusion, many of which are associated with equal opportunity employment and affirmative action, the development of an internal diversity program can be done with an eye on competitive advantage. A company with programs that represent diversity and the comprehension of diversity not only helps to improve the perception of service quality to customers and prospects, but can also help embrace diversity in how it relates to a more diverse market.

Something of increasing importance among the implementation of diversity and inclusion in the organizational response can be reactive or proactive. Some reactive diversity efforts can be seen as situational and can fall flat if not connected to a more widely accepted diversity program. Proactivity gives an organization the chance to implement programs that will help ease future challenges within the diverse context. The more systematic an inclusive program, the greater response from staff and clients.

Next Steps
According to research done

by the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), there are three main categorizations to which diversity programs should be divided from a workplace perspective. These include structures of responsibilities, educational programs, and networking or mentorship opportunities. Each of these areas can help create a foundation of success for developing and implementing a program that not only benefits internal diversity comprehension but also creates a natural competitive advantage through greater market acknowledgment.

First, structures of responsibilities begin with managerial focuses such as affirmative action plans. These are not only critical, but they are legally binding. Responsibilities can then include internal and external stakeholders in joint efforts such as diversity committees and task forces. Larger organizations have also found it valuable to identify someone on staff who is a champion of learning about and implementing new diversity and inclusion efforts. Next, educational programs create diversity training that

can be evaluated to show the evolution of diversity comprehension within the organization. Within this stage, managers need to be able to accept feedback over challenges to the perception of diversity programming.

Finally, networking and mentoring programs can be created by any size organization and are a great tool to help define necessary structural interventions before implementing anything. This is a place where conversations can progress in a more unified and governed space.

Diversity and inclusion practices are designed to adapt to the human process. They should be looked at as a valuable challenge that advances a company's ability to exist effectively in the modern world. There is not no-point to the extent of diversity education, knowledge, and acceptance. It is a fluid and dynamic area and one that will continue to be critical to the success of ours and all industries.

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