

# Diversity and Inclusion: Open Doors of Opportunity

By Alona Puehse

**D**IVERSITY & INCLUSION (D&I) HAS BEEN A DELIBERATE AREA of focus for several competitive companies over the past several years. By now, it has become clear that to fully leverage the value of a diverse and inclusive workforce, D&I must be viewed as an overall business strategy that can lead to improved performance and competitiveness.

A 2014 article published by Deloitte University Press, states that while nearly one-quarter of executives (23 per cent) believe their companies have done an “excellent” job creating a culture of inclusiveness, and defining what it means (24 per cent), the overwhelming majority rate their effort as “adequate” or “weak.”

That said, how can inclusion drive the culture of results in a company? By creating an internal infrastructure that supports a diverse and inclusive workplace, HR plays an impactful role in achieving the company’s strategic priorities in many ways, including recruitment, performance management, training and development, and compensation and benefits.

## Recruitment

Once leadership is committed to supporting a diverse workforce, how can HR professionals attract candidates from talent pools that may not have traditionally been targeted?

1. **Revisit your job postings.** Will they attract candidates from diverse populations and are they accessible? A posting that includes a link to a plain text version of the document demonstrates an understanding that candidates who may be visually impaired can better access the posting with screen-reading aides. Are there options for candidates who may struggle with online forms?
2. **Think about where you’re recruiting.** There are hundreds of community agencies across the province that work with job seekers who represent diverse backgrounds and abilities. For example, Open Door Group, a BC-based non-profit organization, matches hundreds of job seekers with disabilities to employers each year. Many of these job-matching services are free of charge.
3. **Demonstrate your commitment to a diverse and inclusive workplace.** If a potential candidate visits your website, who do they see representing the company? Companies that go beyond the standard statement of “We are an equal opportunity employer” by featuring some staff profiles build credibility as a place that appreciates its team.

## Onboarding and Staff Training

1. **Re-think your hiring and onboarding process.** Does the process create an environment that encourages people to come forward with what they need to perform at their best? As part of onboarding, are new employees introduced to the company’s commitment to a diverse and inclusive workplace?
2. **Does your company offer cultural competency training?** Cultural competence is a set of attitudes, skills and behaviours that enable organizations and staff to work effectively in cross-cultural situations. A common fear is the risk

of offending someone who may be different from them. Improving cultural competency promotes inclusive interactions among staff, as well as improved customer service.

3. **Make new employees feel welcomed.** Businesses often assign a co-worker to mentor new hires through business practices and procedures. Ideally, this mentor should introduce the new hire to the company culture to help them navigate the day-to-day challenges of the workplace and be a connection with the current staff.


## Performance Management and Recognition

1. **Tie it to performance.** In the 2013 Canadian Institute of Diversity and Inclusion report titled, “What Gets Measured, Gets Done,” research suggests companies that tie leadership and management accountability to D&I outcomes make significant strides towards an inclusive culture. A growing trend is to include the promotion of diversity, inclusion, and respect for all as part of each employee’s performance evaluation.
2. **Find your champions and recognize them.** If a staff person goes above and beyond in making people feel included in the workplace, celebrate it. Diversity and inclusion is not about accommodating differences but rather celebrating the positive impact that these differences collectively make.

## Compensation and Benefits

1. **Do your benefits reflect the needs of a diverse workforce?** For example, consider an EFAP provider that offers counselling and supports in a number of languages and includes access to culturally diverse supports such as access to an Elder for Aboriginal employees.
2. **Recognize culturally significant events** such as International Day of Persons with Disabilities, Diwali, Gay Pride celebrations, etc.
3. **Consider providing flexible schedules** or offering a float day for employees to use at their discretion to observe such events or days.

The accountability of establishing a truly diverse and inclusive workplace does not fall on HR alone, but must be driven from the top to become a pillar of organizational culture. If a company is able to achieve this, in part through the support of HR’s internal infrastructure and practices, there is no question that the business will reap the benefits of a highly engaged workforce, increased creativity and innovation, and credibility among the diverse customer base it serves.

Looking to learn from other employers how they have accelerated performance and results through establishing diverse and inclusive workplaces? On March 9-10, 2014, Open Door Group is hosting the third annual BC Workplace Inclusion conference. For more information, or to register, visit [www.untappedconference2015.ca](http://www.untappedconference2015.ca). 

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