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How to Effectively Manage a Diverse Team in 2023

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EFFECTIVELY LEADING A DIVERSE TEAM HAS NEVER BEEN MORE CRITICAL. HERE ARE FOUR TIPS TO MAKE SURE ALL EMPLOYEES STAY ENGAGED.

Team diversity refers to the differences across individuals of a team based on various identifiers like gender, culture, age, ability, education, and overall experience and perspective. It's no secret that teamwork is integral to any company's success, but nurturing a diverse workforce provides many benefits and often results in more inclusive and innovative solutions. Michael Jordan, the winner of six NBA championships with the Chicago Bulls, said it best, "Talent wins games, but teamwork and intelligence win championships."

So, how do leaders manage individuals to empower diverse and high-performing teams in an ever-changing environment?

Here are some ways to keep diverse teams engaged for long-term success.

1. RECOGNIZE ALL ASPECTS OF DIVERSITY

Recognizing all aspects of diversity is the first step in managing a diverse team. To understand diversity across teams, we must acknowledge that differences exist and be open to the value that those differences provide.

Communicating openly about the importance of diverse thoughts and ideas empowers team members at all levels of an organization. By nurturing open communication around

these topics, managers reinforce that individuals can be honest and voice their opinions.

Empowering individuals across groups creates a safe space for the entirety of the team, encouraging team members to:

» Feel safe to share ideas.

» Be creative.

» Collaborate with team members.

» Formulate innovative solutions.

The key to nurturing a safe space includes transparent communication and active listening. Managing a team in this way helps ensure that each individual feels seen, heard, and respected. An inclusive work culture requires the ongoing promotion of these values to keep employees empowered to reach their potential and produce at the highest level.

2. PRACTICE EMPATHETIC LEADERSHIP AND GET TO KNOW THE INDIVIDUAL

Taking an empathetic approach to leadership and understanding individual motivators is vital for successful managers today, but where should you start?

Ask questions. Effective managers know the team's success does not rely solely on themselves. Instead, identify skill sets in your team and delegate tasks that encourage professional development in the areas they find rewarding.

Some examples might include the following:

» What motivates you?
» How do you like to receive feedback?
» How do you produce your best work?
» Do you face common challenges that I can help address?

Opening a dialogue to understand if what they enjoy doing is the same as what they are good at doing reflects a culture of transparency.

Understanding the strengths within your current talent pool will allow you to adjust employees' responsibilities to suit their strengths and maximize their contribution to the company. It can also present development opportunities that the employee would not identify otherwise. For example, you could pair an employee who enjoys writing with an employee who enjoys researching on an assignment, leveraging their unique talents and interests to arrive at a final product.

Transparency around these topics reinforces that managers nurture their employees' talents, which often results in higher organizational commitment. Organizational commitment refers to employees' loyalty or bond toward their work and organization. This bond or attachment often leads to higher employee engagement, resulting in motivated employees that produce high-quality work and deliver results for their team.

3. IDENTIFY BARRIERS TO DIVERSE TEAMS

A barrier to managing diversity and inclusivity in the workplace is the ability to quantify progress. It is crucial to identify a measurement framework that spans all levels of an organization to overcome this barrier. By identifying obstacles at the onset, a company can implement governance and initiatives to help achieve its diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEI&B) goals.

Some common ways to measure DEI&B goals include:

MEASURING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT AT THE INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

Pulse Surveys: Allow managers and organizations to understand employees' challenges better and provide a framework for employees to give feedback openly. Questions can cover various topics, from daily tasks, projects, professional development opportunities, and overall well-being. They provide managers with actionable information to improve the employee experience and boost engagement.

Stay Interviews: One-on-one, manager-initiated conversations to understand how a manager can support an employee's growth and get them to "stay" at the company. This framework encourages employees to be honest about their feedback and helps managers understand what employees enjoy about their role and the company and why they would ever consider leaving. The goal is to increase employee engagement, retain employees, and take a holistic approach to organizational commitment.

SMART Goals: SMART is an acronym that guides setting goals and objectives that are specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound. A consistent approach to measuring particular DEI&B goals across the organization ensures that the daily objectives align with the overall strategy. They also provide mid-level managers with a framework to quantify team growth and communicate it to senior management.

MEASURING THE EFFECTIVENESS OF DEI&B INITIATIVES AT THE ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

Unconscious Bias Training: Unconscious bias training raises awareness that unconscious bias exists in the workplace. Training is the first step to increasing self-awareness and actively eliminating bias at the organizational level. At the same time, training alone will not remove discrimination and prejudice in the workplace; it is a step to combat workplace marginalization.

Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DE&I) Steering Committee: A DE&I steering committee ensures that targeted initiatives prioritize education and awareness around DE&I within an organization. This type of structure ensures that business strategy is inclusive of DE&I and there is governance and accountability in measuring the progress of these activities.

Employee Value Proposition (EVP): An employee value proposition is a statement of commitment that provides a roadmap for accountability. It highlights the importance of fairness, respect, collaboration, and growth at the organizational level. EVPs can also attract potential employees by outlining what the organization will provide.

With the proper measurement framework, managers at all organizational levels can take actionable steps to nurture growth successfully and manage diverse teams.

4. CREATE A POSITIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT BY CELEBRATING DIFFERENCES

You've gotten to know your team, identified barriers, and set goals; now what?

Encouraging inclusivity in the workplace extends past the immediate group of people with whom you work. Collaboration across teams shows a commitment to DEI&B throughout an organization.

Managers create a psychologically safe space when they empower employees to bring their whole selves to work. 53% of employees note how being valued for their differences contributes to their sense of belonging in the workplace. Encouraging open dialogue across generations, ages, genders, sexual orientations, religions, ethnicities, abilities, and cultural backgrounds can spark creativity, enhance innovation, and improve the employee experience.

Prospective employees can see one primary indicator of a company's commitment to inclusivity through the presence of resources focused solely on DEI&B. One example of this is the promotion of and participation in initiatives like Employee Resource Groups (ERGs).

ERGs are employee-led groups rooted in identity, shared life experiences, and allyship that create a safe space and provide opportunities for professional development and personal growth. Individuals across an organization comprise an ERG. They can include everyone from C-suite executives to interns and employees with various life experiences and career levels. ERGs celebrate differences and raise awareness of timely and relevant issues these groups face.

Successfully managing diverse teams in 2023 requires managers to ask questions and listen to the responses actively. Maintaining open and transparent communication at all levels of an organization builds trust. It empowers individuals to perform at their highest level, and a measurement framework shows accountability to increase diversity in the future.

While Michael Jordan highlights the importance of teamwork to win, his coach, Phil Jackson, highlights what is transformative about the diversity of the individuals within a team: "The strength of the team is each individual member. The strength of each member is the team."

About the Author

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About the Article

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