



# DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN THE NIGERIAN WORKPLACE: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

A diverse workforce (in age, religion, nationality, gender, and sexual orientation) can be very beneficial to any organization. There are numerous benefits of diversity in any organization from increased innovation to better decision making, and higher rates of job satisfaction and greater impact.

## ***What exactly is diversity in the workplace?***

Workplace diversity refers to the understanding, collaborating, accepting, and valuing the differences between individuals. These differences include differences in ethnicities, gender, race, religion, and sexual orientation, as well as differences in education, personalities, and knowledge levels.

Acknowledging and embracing our individual differences, apart from offering a more rounded solution to organizational challenges, a diverse workplace has the following benefits:

1. Increased employee and customer engagement and satisfaction, owing to the fact that all kinds of people are represented in the company.
2. Research has shown that diverse teams are able to solve problems faster than teams with more similar people.
3. Being in an environment with different people with different perspectives can increase creativity, as employees are exposed to multiple perspectives and worldviews.

It is important to note, though, that a diverse workforce is one step towards creating and building inclusivity, to retain that diverse workforce. Inclusivity means creating a culture where all backgrounds feel represented.

Inclusion means creating a workplace that is collaborative, supportive, and respectful environment that increases participation and contribution in the workplace. Inclusion refers to all the policies, strategies and initiatives that support a balanced workplace and removes all barriers, discrimination, and intolerance.

### ***In an organization, what does this really mean?***

While the actual modalities for the integration of diversity and inclusion will differ from organization to organization, general best practice for diversity and inclusion include:

- Diversity education and capacity building
- Deliberate strategies to aid inclusion.
- Representation across all levels of the organization
- Focus on innovation and creativity.
- Evidence of Management's commitment to inclusion (Creation of a role within the organization responsible for this)
- Complaints Management System
- Integrating diversity and inclusion considerations in recruitment, appraisals, and leadership assessment
- Reporting goals, setting commitments, and measuring progress.

Diversity and inclusion should be a high-level organizational strategy, driven strongly by Human Resources. The journey to building a diverse and truly inclusive organization is long and the gains might not reflect instantly, but it is rewarding on all fronts.

Interested in integrating diversity and inclusion into your organization? Here are 5 immediate steps you can take.

#### **1. Engage, Engage, Engage**

The first step to creating a workplace that is inclusive is engagement across all levels; Communication provides clarity and increases participation. Through engagement, an organization can discover pain points and develop strategies that will deliver impact, particularly for the less represented groups. Similarly, all policies, procedures and important information relating to employees should also be disclosed as appropriate.

#### **2. Become an equal opportunity recruiter.**

In building a diverse workplace, it is important to recruit talent from a wide range of backgrounds. This can be done through using gender neutral terminology in

recruitment information, ensuring a diverse interview panel, and setting targets for recruitment.

### **3. Document policies and procedures**

Creating policies and laid down procedures moves an organization from talking about inclusion, to integrating diversity and inclusion into the company's DNA. Diversity and Human Rights policies should be communicated across the institution frequently and shared with all new hires.

### **4. Set Targets and Commitments**

What gets measured gets done and a great way to hold an organization accountable is by setting commitments and working towards achieving those commitments. Examples of targets include:

- Achieve 50% female representation by 2023.
- Build a mother's room across all locations.

### **5. Build Capacity**

Companywide trainings on diversity and inclusion should not be a one-off. There are a range of issues to touch on regarding diversity and inclusion, from sexual harassment trainings to Emotional intelligence trainings, there is a lot of information that employees have to learn, unlearn and relearn.