Creating a more inclusive work environment

An inclusive environment is one where employees feel heard and trusted to take ownership of their responsibilities. Inclusivity creates higher levels of employee engagement and productivity, and can help leaders to make more informed decisions.

Leaders are often guilty of waiting until there's a trigger to improve inclusivity, whether it's a rising staff turnover rate or the breakdown of communication on a key project. However, there's no need to wait for a crisis – there are steps you can take right now to create a more inclusive environment for your staff.

Get buy-in from your leadership team

Make sure your leadership team and managers understand why it's important to create a more inclusive environment

- Be specific about challenges the business has faced with inclusivity
- Explain how a more inclusive environment will be beneficial in the future (eg. more engaged employees, better collaboration)
- Outline the steps you plan to take and why
- Be clear about what you expect from them (eg. more regular check-ins with their team, changes to the format of meetings or appraisals)

Listen to employees

Your staff know your business better than almost anyone, so listen to what they have to say.

- Send out a survey to gather feedback across the business. Make it anonymous or add an incentive to encourage responses
- Allow people to add their own explanations and context in answers – qualitative data will be essential when getting to the root cause of issues
- Host a company-wide meeting to thank everyone for their responses, summarise the common points and explain how you plan on responding to them
- Work through the feedback and prioritise based on what's most urgent or will have the greatest impact
- Create a focus group of employees to determine potential solutions. Attend the group but make it as employee-led as possible – your role should primarily be to listen

Review communication streams

Poor communication between employees, teams and leadership create barriers to inclusivity and damage productivity.

- Talk to staff about how they communicate with immediate colleagues and other teams across the business
- Ask for specific examples of misunderstandings or a breakdown in communication – why did it happen and what can you learn from it?
- Examine whether new software is needed to streamline communication
- Reflect critically on your own communication to your workforce, including:
  - The language you use (is it accessible or do you use terms or concepts that some people won't understand?)
  - How you communicate (do you talk to staff face-to-face or is it done over email?)
  - How often you communicate (weekly, monthly, quarterly)
  - What you're willing to share (how transparent are you?)
- Get feedback on how employees feel about the communication with management:
  - What information do they want from leaders?
  - How often do they want updates and what's the preferred format?
  - Is there anything management could do to make communication more open? (eg. office hours, a weekly update email, an "ask me anything" feedback box)

Give people ownership

Ownership shows that you trust people and value their work. The last step is to look at whether you're giving employees enough opportunity to take ownership of responsibilities.

- Think honestly about whether you trust your staff – is there more work you need to do on your own mindset?
- Ask each manager to come up with three tasks in the next three months that employees can take ownership of
- Explore your company's process for delegation – do managers have a clear understanding of how to delegate and communicate their expectations to staff?
- Look at how the business can better support staff when they're taking ownership of new tasks, for example:
  - Quarterly career development meetings that outline tasks or experiences that will help them advance in their careers
  - Monthly one-to-ones with managers to discuss tasks they've enjoyed and any challenges in the last few weeks
  - Offering training opportunities based on staff feedback and your own analysis of skills gaps