



Diversity and Inclusion

When diversity's portrayed, it's often shown as a mixture of people of different ages, abilities, gender, or with other visible differences.

But look at this. Sam and Chloe have been friends for years. They lived in the same street, went to the same school, liked the same boy bands, and have a lot in common. But they were born in different countries.

Geraldine, went to the same private school as her mother, and then onto one of the most prestigious universities.

There are some things that all three have in common, and other areas where they're all very different.

The point is, when we talk about diversity, we're talking about all of us, and all the ways we're different. It can include things like the type of education we had, where we were born and grew up, our family background. Our physical and mental abilities, and also our values, attitudes and beliefs. Some of these are visible, but many of them aren't. Here's an example.

Pete's great at problem solving, analytical thinking and staying focussed on tasks. He can assimilate and retain lots of detailed information. He's a punctual, reliable, and dedicated employee.

But Pete finds it hard to 'read' people which makes some situations difficult for him. Some see him as being aloof and unfriendly, but that's not fair or true. He'd like to be more involved, but he often feels anxious and unsure of himself.

Pete's difference is sometimes described as a thinking style, or being neurodivergent, and in the past, this was often seen as an impairment, but now people are beginning to see beyond the differences to the person behind them. And a good example of this is from the television show, 'Britain's Got Talent'.

Susan Boyle was one of the contestants, she looked a little awkward during the introduction section, and stumbled on some of the questions. There were some



knowing looks from the judges, and everyone was expecting a really awkward performance. But when she sang, she sang beautifully. After her performance, Amanda Holden, who was one of the judges, said, "I'm so thrilled, because I know that everybody was against you. I honestly think we were all being very cynical, and I think that was the biggest wake up call ever."

Many organisations now value the benefits that a diverse workforce can bring – and here are some of the reasons they give.

We need a balanced team with a mixture of skills, experiences and ways of looking at things.

We're all different so we don't define someone by their differences – instead we value people for what they have to offer.

Diversity helps us drive productivity and profits, and gives us a competitive advantage.

We have fair and equal selection and promotion practices. This means we have a larger pool of candidates to select and promote from. And this leads to diversity throughout the whole organisation.

Our customers come from all walks of life – and so do our staff. That means as an organisation we have a better understanding of our customers and are more representative of them.

In order for a diverse group of people to work together successfully, the work environment needs to be one where everyone is able to contribute to their full potential, and where no one is defined by, or held back - because of their differences.

Here are some of the things that organisations are doing to help support inclusivity.

One is removing barriers that restrict disabled people. For example, someone with a visual impairment may not be able to use a mouse or other pointing device with a computer.



Instead they use the tab key to navigate and a screen reader to read out the text. For this to work, documents must be formatted with headings, subheadings and so on. Formatting documents in this way is actually good practice, and it helps everyone who uses the document, including any customers.

Another example is making sure passageways are wide enough, and kept clear, so that people with physical disabilities can move around a building more easily. And also installing equipment such as induction loops for people who use hearing aids, or have cochlear implants.

When there are diverse attitudes and ways of looking at things, there's a chance that previously held assumptions will be challenged. Many organisations are supporting and encouraging a culture of openness so that new ideas and perspectives can be discussed freely.

Flexible working hours, working from home, or job sharing, can make the difference between someone, especially someone with other commitments, being able to continue working or having to give up their job. A flexible working environment may also make it easier for someone to return to work after a break.

Some social activities might exclude people, and therefore not be inclusive as a work-related activity.

For instance, a team get together over a drink is unlikely to be suitable for a recovering alcoholic, someone who has to drive, or possibly someone on medication. And there are more inclusive alternatives.

Of course, they're not saying a group of friends from work can't go out for a drink. This is about making sure people aren't excluded from work-related activities because of their personal situation.

Language and images can be offensive. A shared environment with colleagues and perhaps customers and visitors, isn't the same as a private space, so again being inclusive is about being respectful of other people's values and sensibilities.



You're probably familiar with some, or all, of these ideas, and over the years many of them have been met with mixed reactions. But there are lots of examples of behaviours that were seen as normal, or were tolerated in the past, which are no longer acceptable, and especially not in the workplace.

Not so many years ago, smoking in public buildings and offices was commonplace, but not anymore. And even though legislation was used to enforce this, it's hard to imagine many people wanting to return to those days.

There's a saying that when technology works, it's invisible. We flip a switch and the light comes on. We turn on a tap and water comes out. And we only notice technology when something goes wrong.

And inclusion's a bit like that.

When people aren't included it's noticed, people are left out, or not able to participate. But when inclusion is a part of a culture, we tend not to notice it, as our differences are either irrelevant or help to make us stronger.