diversity &
inclusion

Inclusive Environment

inclusive environment

Does everyone feel like they belong?

"Each year in this country, more than 2 million professionals and managers in today's increasingly diverse workforce leave their jobs, pushed out by cumulative small comments, whispered jokes and not-so-funny emails...unfairness costs U.S. employers $64 billion on an annual basis."[1]

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inclusive environment

A key aspect of retaining a diverse workforce is to ensure that there is an inclusive, welcoming workplace environment that values the contributions of each staff member. A recent Corporate Leavers Study by the Level Playing Field Institute documented that up to 9.5% of people of color, 5.6% of gays and lesbians, 4.6% of White women, and 3% of White men have left their firms solely due to unfairness.[2] Respondents who strongly discouraged others from joining the r form er firm cited experiences such as being bullied, being publicly humiliated, offensive jokes, unwanted sexual attention, being compared to a terrorist, being passed over for promotion, and being excluded from key groups.

The survey also asked respondents to identify the top elements that might have made them stay. Figure 1 clearly shows three main thematic clusters: a positive and respectful work environment, a management aware of ability that assigns work based on qualifications, and a flexible schedule that allows more personal or family time. Maintaining an inclusive environment is a relatively low-cost management decision, a fundamental management attitude, and a matter of managers engaging in personal relationships with their staff.[3]
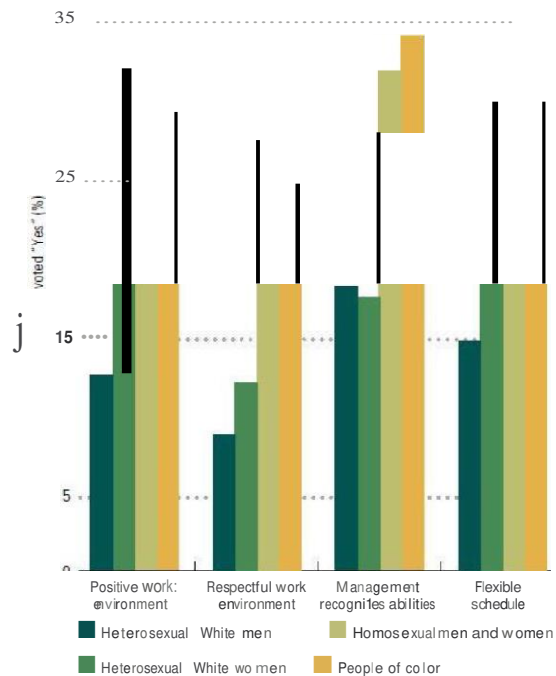

Fig. 1: **Top criteria for workforce retention**•

Feeling Different
20-minute activity with discussion

Activity Objective

This activity and discussion intend to have participants articulate the feelings of difference from a personal point of view, connecting the personal and emotional feeling to internal business operations.

Note: This activity can be used in a small group setting or with a classroom environment. For rich discussions have participants team up by tables or in groups of 2's or 3's. This pairing will allow a variety of thoughts and stories to accompany responses to the activity and debrief questions.

Facilitation Steps
Allow 2-3 minutes
[As participants gather into the room] Ask participants to read through the Inclusive Environment Diversity & Inclusion Knowledge Card; front and back.

Allow 10 minutes
When it seems as if all participants have read through the front/back of the card, ask them to think about a time when they first remember feeling different. Explain that for some of those sitting in the audience, it will be a story from their early childhood, while others it may be a much later time.

Share a story of when you; as the facilitator, can recall feeling different. *Note: Be careful not to craft your story in such a way that no audience member feels their story is "good enough."*

Encourage a short story from everyone indicating that "…we all have felt different at different times, but all were based on our worldviews or how we grew up and the environment that shaped those worldviews."

After each story, ask what would have made it better?

Allow 10 minutes.
Explain to participants that we all have varying degrees of feeling different and our reactions and results. The differences have shaped how we grew up, what we explored, where we went to school, to the friends and co-worker relationships we have today.

Explain that today companies focus a lot of efforts to make employees feel included and valued. Why? Why does it matter?

Define the term Inclusion: **INCLUSION.** Miller and Katz (2002) present a common definition of an inclusive value system where they say, "Inclusion is a sense of belonging: feeling respected, valued for who you are; feeling a level of supportive energy and commitment from others so than you can do your best work. Inclusion is a shift in organization culture. The process of inclusion engages each individual and makes people feeling valued essential to the success of the organization. Individuals function at full capacity, feel more valued, and included in the organization's mission. This culture shift creates higher performing organizations where motivation and morale soar.

Ask participants to take a few minutes, within their pairings or at their table, to flipchart the kinds of events, activities, learning, etc. that are available to employees, within your company, that make them feel welcomed, valued, and engaged each day - Included?

Now, think about your workplace again and make another list—exclusionary attributes, practices, or behaviors.

Ask participants to present their lists. Then ask them:
- What can you do to change the "exclusive" attributes and/or enhance the "inclusive" attributes?

- What can leaders and managers do you help encourage more inclusive behaviors and practices in their roles? On their teams?

Allow 5-7 minutes.

Use the questions below to ask while groups are creating their lists. The questions can also be used as a way to facilitate a debrief discussion:

- How can an organization at large ensure that individuals feel valued and trusted?

- What can you do within your team to encourage all people and ensure that they feel valued and respected?

- What are the characteristics of an organization that is likely to retain women and people of color?

- What evidence visibly represents and reinforces a commitment to diversity and inclusion within your organization?