



"Tapping The Hidden Talent Pool"

In this latest instalment of "Our Stories" our Founding Director Oliver Fenghour talks with Robert Baker Diversity and Inclusion Leader at Mercer about all things Diversity & Inclusion.

OF Why is it important for organizations to have a clear Diversity & Inclusion Strategy?

RB: Many of the CEOs and CHROs I meet tell me that their organisations face increasing challenges in dealing with disruption in their markets and in driving innovation and growth. They believe that diversity of thought is becoming increasingly important to their business as they seek out the best new ideas and to outperform the competition. They recognise they need to attract, develop and retain diverse talent in order to tap into this diversity of thought. But they recognise that this diverse talent will not thrive (or even stay) in their business unless it feels it can be open about its diversity and is accepted and valued for the difference it brings. As a result, senior leaders now accept that building an inclusive culture is critical to retaining and bringing out the best in diverse talent. They now see that developing a strategy for diversity & inclusion and building this into the organisation's business and workforce strategy is essential for success.

OF: With the way organizations are run constantly evolving how do you see organizational structures adapting to meet the demands of stakeholders and investors?

RB: Investors seek optimal company performance and recognise the evidence from studies (like the Credit Suisse 3000 Survey) which show that organisations with more diversity at board and executive management level are correlated with superior investment performance. Executives also recognise that other stakeholders like customers are becoming increasingly diverse and that in order to meet their needs their organisation must develop more diversity in its marketing and sales strategies and in its employees in these fields. Organisational structures are evolving to become less rigid and hierarchical in order to accommodate and get the best from diverse talent. One key solution is flexible working, which many organisations are now adopting in order to attract and retain diverse talent.

OF: In your opinion what do major organizations need to be better at in helping the 1 billion disabled people into employment?

RB: People with disabilities have a huge amount to offer in the workplace and often bring ways of thinking and other skills that complement those of the "abled" workforce. So, it is vital that

organisations do all that they can to attract, develop and retain employees whatever their level of ability. Some of the key actions organisations need to take to be better at this include:

- Adopting a people strategy that clearly articulates, both inside and outside the organisation, the value that people with disabilities bring. This means outlining a clear statement of the business case
- Encouraging senior leaders to speak out on this and to role model attitudes and behaviours that support employees with disabilities
- Adjusting their recruitment, promotion and training programmes to make them attractive to disabled employees and also ensure the working environment is disability friendly
- Educating and training line managers to understand the needs of disabled employees and how to enable them to give of their best

OF: How do you see organizations in the future finding effective solutions to root out negative forms of bias within their businesses?

RB: Organisations need to recognise the key talent processes where negative and unconscious bias can play a major part in holding back diverse talent, particularly people with disabilities. These include:

- Talent acquisition, where technology can play an important role in removing human bias in the wording of job adverts, recruitment interviews and in the talent selection decision.
- Talent development, where line managers can undergo inclusive leadership training to help them identify how to remove or reduce bias in decisions on employee development and promotions
- Talent retention, where flexible work place environments and practices can support diverse talent

OF: Why is it important that organizations have a good culture and ethos and in your view what does a good organizational culture look like?

RB: Culture is one of the key determinants of organisational performance and a good culture is critical to attracting and retaining diverse talent. A good culture:

- Is based on clear values and a commitment to produce good outcomes for all stakeholders
- Is focussed on people, is inclusive and values diverse talent in all its fullness
- Promotes learning and development and recognises that potential over the longer term is more important than past achievements
- Supports “considered” risk taking and is open to trying new ways of working
- Regards “failure” as a learning opportunity

In summary, organisations that value and integrate people with disabilities into their workforce will enhance their ability to meet customer needs, benefit from diverse thinking and ultimately achieve superior outcomes for all of their stakeholders.

So, what are we waiting for? Let’s get moving and step up the pace of change today!