

Changing culture, from the workplace out

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Does your workplace culture reflect society, or help shift it? Why wait for change to come into the workplace when you can use internal communications as a tool to shift and shape culture, from the workplace out.



It's Heritage Month, which means every company, politician and PR machine will be trying to position themselves and their brands along some form of cultural diversity lines. Including us.

But it actually brings up a good point. This idea of waiting for external factors to influence our internal behaviours. In most cases it's pretty harmless, but being reactive can be harmful, or at least unhelpful, when trying to address a topic as important and sensitive as transformation, diversity and culture.

What if we did something unusual? What if we looked at our diverse workforces and decided to use internal communications as a tool to bridge the gap and build the culture we wish to see in our world? Imagine that. Changing our culture, from the workplace out.

The good news is that if we really want to move the narrative forward, we already have the tools to do just that – internal communications.

Why bother?

Our workplaces reflect our society, which means that diversity and culture are as much a business challenge as a social issue. As a business, you have two choices – you can either be proactive about addressing diversity issues head on, or you can wait for it to impact your workplace and even your bottom line. Because impact it will. One way or another. In fact, there's plenty of evidence to suggest that diversity in the workplace enhances financial performance, problem-solving and employee engagement. And let's not forget about the Millennials in your workplace. In its "state of inclusion" [survey](#), Deloitte found that 75% of Millennials believe that culturally diverse organisations are more innovative, which makes them more likely to retain and engage their talents.

The trouble in South Africa is that, with transformation being a legal requirement, we often don't engage enough with the nuances of cultural inclusivity in terms of how it shifts and shapes out places in ways that make or break our businesses. To our own detriment.

More than just ticking boxes

Yes, we know you have a very progressive transformation and diversity policy in place. And? Policies alone are not enough. They might earn you points and paint a better picture in your annual report, but they won't help you build an inclusive culture.

Workplace inclusion requires a big shift in an organisation's culture. You have to move beyond the demographics to focus on how you engage employees in conversations that will shift the narrative and support a culture of inclusion. From gender-specific language to inclusive content and imagery, diversity needs to start on the inside, with internal communications.

Internal communications as a tool for transformation

Diversity is an action, not an outcome. This makes internal communications the perfect tool to carry out this mandate. This might mean you have to change the way you view internal communications – from something that merely disseminates information to a tool that drives and enables culture. Because the true power of internal communications really lies in the latter – helping your company bridge and build a more inclusive culture, from the inside out.

The question is not why you need it, but how to execute it.

Top tips for communicating culture and diversity in the workplace

Do a workplace audit: How well do you really know your workplace? Race, culture, gender, generational – each of these impact how your employees internalise and engage with the content you are generating. If you don't know who your employees are or what their communication needs and preferences are, how can you create content that drives behavioral change?

Transparency is mission critical: Transparency is always key, but especially when you are trying to unpack and engage a subject as important and sensitive as diversity and inclusion. The opposite of transparency is completely ignoring diversity and inclusion in your communications altogether. Don't wait for Heritage month or a special occasion to celebrate diversity. Let it be the theme that runs through your communications throughout the year. And just make sure that as much as you celebrate your achievements, you also own your weaknesses and share your plans for improvement. Because that's what transparency is about.

Be authentic: Don't just say what you think employees want to hear. And don't speak generically about the topic of diversity either. If you want to engage and have real conversations, start by sharing your company's stories in a way that is honest, open and enables the conversation to continue.

Set the tone: What you say and how you say it sets the tone for the conversation in the workplace. Make sure the content, language and tone you choose consistently encourages an open-minded, accepting and inclusive community where differences are welcomed and debated. A culture that is encouraged to think differently will act differently and celebrate diversity.

Give employees a voice: For diversity to thrive it needs many voices to be heard. Make sure you create platforms for all employees to make their voices heard. Invite people at all levels into the conversation and create opportunities, where possible, for employees to share their ideas and tell their stories in their own words.

Lead from the top: Senior leaders play an important role in workplace inclusion. As communicators, you need to make sure management are visible and vocal about celebrating diversity by unpacking the many benefits and positive impact it has on their teams and the overall business. And make sure it's not the usual once-a-year token message either. That never rings true.

Confront your own biases: If you want to be effective storytellers and internal connectors, you need to be able to identify and own your "blind spots" so you can create strategies around them. We all have biases. The key is to be aware of how they influence our decisions. By creating a simple set of questions to ask yourself, you can start to be more mindful of the voices you choose to feature and how you can actively push for more diversity in your messaging.

Follow and engage with relevant topical issues: Employees are citizens of the world. What is happening in the outside world impacts and plays out internally, whether you like it or not. Keep your finger on the pulse. If you try to ignore real-world events, you not only lose credibility and seem out of touch, you also miss out on the opportunity to start real conversations that can nurture a more inclusive culture in the workplace. The #MeToo movement is a good example. It quickly spread across industries, countries and social media, eventually forcing many industries and organisations to review their policies, procedures and behaviours around sexual harassment. Don't wait for the hashtag to find you. Use it

to engage employees in real issues.

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Don't wait for society to catch up. Use your internal communications to start building a stronger, richer and more inclusive workforce, from the inside out.

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