



Inclusive From the Beginning, Engaged to the End

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This is not another article about how to recruit diverse candidates. It's not even about why diversity is important to your business. This article is much more about inclusion than diversity. Specifically, this article will provide practical pointers for helping you hire people likely to embrace and execute inclusive behaviors. It's these people who develop others and maximize their potential, and cultivate go-to performance in others.

Why inclusion matters

Let's first clarify the difference between diversity and inclusion. The two words have been used too interchangeably for a distinction between them to be clear. Yet, consider this simple explanation:

Diversity: The extent to which an organization **has** employees with a variety of critical characteristics.

Inclusion: The extent to which an organization **embraces, utilizes, capitalizes on, and provides equal treatment to** employees with a variety of critical characteristics.

Note that in neither case do we limit diversity to gender, race, and other dimensions that are the focus of traditional workplace diversity initiatives. We apply it to any characteristic on which people are likely to differ substantially – language, conflict-resolution style, people from sales versus people from operations, etc.

Having a diverse organization is not the same as actually engaging the diverse talent that it presents. An organization can be diverse without inclusively engaging everyone. All other things being equal, the inclusive organization wins.

But why? One reason is that the inclusive organization has more people using more skills. This will probably lead to better problem solving and execution. A second reason is that as more people participate in critical ways, their engagement is increased. This should in turn lead to better commitment and service to both internal and external customers. Third, as engagement increases, so should retention.

Examples of inclusive behaviors and why they are important

Inclusion is typically thought of in a context of diversity, and therefore addresses the extent to which all people are provided the same opportunities and assignments, not just at surface level, but down to the subtleties. Here is what inclusive behavior might look like:

- A manager spreads important assignments throughout her group and lets all staff members prove themselves equally. She assumes that all her direct reports can handle responsibility, regardless of demographic characteristics. She sets an expectation that becomes a positive self-fulfilling prophecy.
- A manager inherits a department that was realigned. He coaches his new team members with the same rigor as his own legacy employees, so that they can grow and contribute. He actively seeks to learn from them, since they had a different way of doing things than he was used to.

Yet, how many times have you seen a manager rely on one or two go-to people on a team? How many times

have you observed legacy employees enjoying the inside track on choice assignments? That's not inclusion, and it holds the organization back. Inclusion is the subtle variable that converts diversity to productivity.

Hiring people likely to embrace inclusion

An organization that wants more go-to performers should hire people who demonstrably and inclusively see the capacity for everyone around them to achieve critical goals. Behavioral interviews have been shown repeatedly in organizational literature to be relatively valid gauges of subsequent performance. Therefore, if we can identify exactly how we want inclusion to be demonstrated, we can ask behavioral questions about how candidates have demonstrated such inclusion in the past.

Behavioral interview questions ask the candidate to provide a specific example of a time when they demonstrated a specific job-relevant skill – teamwork, getting results, attention to detail, planning and organization, using Excel, etc. For example: "Describe a situation where you had to meet a challenging deadline. How did you go about it?" Or, "Tell me about a time when you coached a staff member to embrace a difficult change. How did you do it, and how did it work out?"

The logic behind the approach is that candidates provide more in-depth information than they would with simple attitude questions. In the example about deadlines above, a candidate will provide much more revealing information by describing the specific steps taken than by generically saying, "I love a good challenge."

Behavioral interview questions that directly target inclusion

The behavioral method lends itself well to hiring for inclusive behavior. The following questions target a candidate's inclination to capitalize on the range of diverse talent and experience that others can offer.

- Describe something you've done that shows how you try to learn from people who approach things differently than you do.
- Tell me about a situation where you assigned a project to people with different styles or backgrounds so they could work together and learn from one another.
- Describe an example that shows how you mentor people from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives.

Perspectives of interviewers who've applied the approach

Let's look at a few actual examples where this was done. Peggy Davis, Bureau Chief of Policy and Programs for the State of Montana, asked the following question when interviewing for a Human Resource Specialist position: "Describe a specific time when you contributed to a team climate where differences are valued and supported." Explains Ms. Davis, "I was looking for the ability to describe how people brought different strengths to a team, and that through the course of them bringing different strengths, the whole of the group would be stronger."

Mary Noel, Chief of Medicaid Managed Care Bureau for the State of Montana, asked the following question when interviewing for a Care Management Supervisor position: "Describe a specific time when you sought out the diverse perspectives and talents of others to accomplish an objective." "I asked the question to see how adept they were at getting advice from other people and not just relying on their own knowledge and background," explains Ms. Noel, "and to make sure they are not just going to one person all the time, that they would get a variety of perspectives."

Cary Descoteaux, Manager of Claims Quality and Audit for Neighborhood Health Plan of Rhode Island, explains: "If you can't think of a time when you've actually applied a particular practice, it is not something that is going to be ingrained in you ... Our staff reflects the diverse demographics of the people we serve, so being able to recognize, appreciate, and work with differences is essential for success with both external and internal customers."

What your organization can do

Through behavioral interviewing for inclusion, the people you hire are more likely to work and/or manage inclusively. They will also likely pursue business practices that bolster inclusion. This leads to better

organizational decisions, better support for decisions, and more engagement. These of course are stepping stones to better productivity.

To travel the inclusive path, your recruiters first would have to recognize that inclusion is a job skill worth hiring for. Second, recruiters would need to be trained in behavioral interviewing techniques. Third, they would need to know how to ask behavior-based questions that explore inclusion.

The most important take-away is that interviewing for an inclusion orientation is a potent step to enhancing an organization's inclusiveness. Many organizations focus on training toward this end, without capitalizing on the hiring potential. New employees who walk in the door with an inclusion orientation are more likely to be highly engaged from the start, more likely to support the engagement of their co-workers, and more likely to remain engaged until they walk out the door at the end of their careers.

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Perry was instrumental in designing Novations' online program that automates and simplifies the job analysis and interviewing process. He has a Ph.D. in Educational Psychology and Research.



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As a management consultant, Greg works with organizations and individuals to increase their productivity by building work environments that are broadly inclusive so that people can better engage the full range of their capabilities in the workplace and throughout their lives. Greg has an MBA from Stanford University.