

Measures for success

Assessment of two E's—engagement and enablement—can give organizations powerful insights on inclusion beyond diversity.

Companies for years measured the diversity of their workforce to determine how effectively they attract, retain, and develop underrepresented talent. But few organizations have cracked the code on measuring inclusion, which goes beyond diversity alone to capture the competitive advantages of changing demographics in the workplace and marketplace (Tapia and Lange 2016).

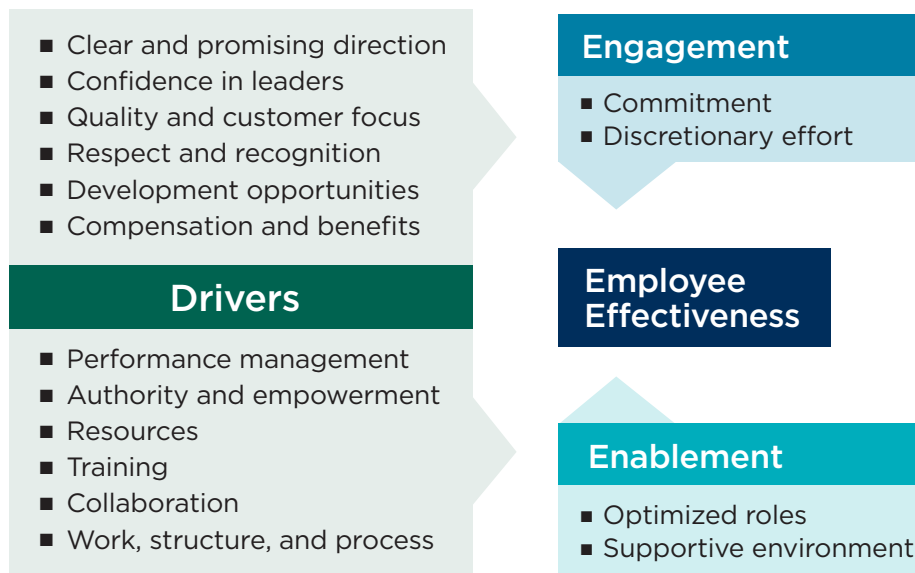
The workplace dynamic most widely measured and analyzed by demographic differences is employee engagement. But, as Korn Ferry Hay Group has observed in its work with clients globally, engagement alone does not suffice. Instead, the firm suggests that another key measure for assessment is employee enablement: How equipped are employees with the tools and processes that actively address their frustrations, and how empowered are they to “go the extra mile?”

The firm sees potential to help clients gauge the effectiveness of inclusion practices by measuring enablement, especially for women and minority group members. This will give companies insights into how poorly defined job roles and unsupportive work environments affect underrepresented talent in performance and transitions (i.e., hires, transfers, promotions, and staff reductions).

It's not enough to know that underrepresented groups are engaged. How are they enabled—what tools and processes do they need to “go the extra mile,” and what obstacles block their appropriate, desired, and effective empowerment?

Compelling business cases support enablement. Organizations cannot afford to squander the energy of motivated employees by positioning them poorly for success. Adequate support is necessary across the employee life-cycle to avoid employee burnout. Top-performing organizations combine effective employee engagement and enablement programs—the two “E’s” to success—to reduce staff turnover and drive performance (See Figure 1).

Figure 1
Combining engagement and enablement.



Combining the two E’s results on average in 50% of employees exceeding expectations, compared with 10% when companies offer engagement alone, our case studies show. Other results from combining engagement and enablement include: reducing employee turnover by 54% (versus 40% with engagement alone); increasing customer satisfaction rates to 89% (versus 71%); and boosting revenue growth by 4.5 times (versus 2.5 times).

Using enablement survey data, companies can quantitatively measure inclusion. This could boost diversity and inclusion to greater effectiveness.

Six enablement drivers to measure inclusion.

Through four decades of experience and working with more than 4,000 clients globally, Korn Ferry Hay Group identified six enablement drivers also useful in measuring inclusion by examining employee roles and work environment.

Performance Management: There are multiple variables that influence performance ratings. These, related to inclusion, include: accessibility to networks; relational skills; influential skills; confidence; access to direct manager feedback; and developmental assignments. In non-inclusive roles and environments, these variables can suffer. By remaining vigilant, companies can prevent adverse effects on performance.

Tapping into the full capabilities of human resources information systems (HRIS), data can be analyzed by demographics to uncover disparities in performance management ratings. Organizations can see which groups perform well—and the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that affect performance for each demographic group.

Authority and Empowerment: These enablement drivers reflect groups' feelings about obstacles that impede progress or processes that discourage full talent utilization. Research (Cunningham and Platow 2007) consistently has demonstrated that people are more apt to empower those who are similar to them (e.g., by work style, interests, gender, or race). These become the “go-to” people. Often they benefit from advantages such as working on high-visibility projects, receiving more support for risk-taking, getting more managerial coaching, and access to more opportunities and management interactions.

Resources: To be effective in their jobs, workers need components that are tangible (e.g., technology and staffing) and intangible (e.g., information and budget). But securing these resources is highly dependent on the strength of formal and informal relationships, and how receptive decision-makers are to resource requests. Workplace studies show that non-dominant group members often are less persuasive when approaching dominant group members, and their arguments are less likely to be remembered (Wilder 1990). As a result, it can be difficult for leaders from underrepresented groups to secure and retain department budgets, employee training, additional staffing, or a new technology platform.

Training and Development: Inclusion is directly affected by training and development, beyond developing cultural dexterity or building cultural competence. Training opportunities depend on factors such as manager nomination, performance ratings, high-potential designation, and position transfer. Each of these variables relies on an inclusive work environment and managers' perceptions of their direct reports.

Collaboration: Effective collaboration within and beyond work groups depends on the strength of internal networks and processes. For diverse groups, research has shown that work outcomes vary with the degree of cooperation (Chatman and Flynn 2001). Therefore, the benefits of diversity may be realized only after fostering greater cooperation among group members.

Work Structure and Processes: Typically, employees are encouraged to be as productive as possible through work structure and processes. But work structures can lend themselves to silos, narrow definitions of success, and obstacles to innovation. The same processes that support talent acquisition and talent management similarly can perpetuate exclusivity, homogeneity, and high-potential identification.

Brought together, these six drivers of enablement offer insights into how inclusive an organization is in attracting, developing, and empowering diverse talent.

Conclusion

Most employees can perform at high levels, given the right mix of engagement and enablement. In the face of continued challenges associated with an increasingly diverse customer and talent base, organizations need to identify what impedes optimal performance from their teams. Applying an enablement approach to inclusion supports a culture in which all employees can do their best work.

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