

Diversity and inclusion in a business imperative

There's a famous saying by diversity and inclusion consultant Verna Myers: "Diversity is being invited to the party, inclusion is being asked to dance, and belonging is dancing like no one's watching".



Cebile Xulu, People Lead: Sub-Saharan Africa, Mondelez International

Organisations worldwide are increasingly taking this to heart and making diversity and inclusion more than just an item on their corporate to-do list.

"Diversity and inclusion should not be a tick-the-box exercise, or about the bottom line – it needs to be a business imperative that is deeply ingrained in the values and purpose of an organisation," says Cebile Xulu, People Lead: Sub Sahara Africa, Mondelēz International.

Being diverse and inclusive means a business can benefit from the power of different thinking and life experiences. This drives innovation, and creative problem-solving as diverse points of view come together.

More than creating a workplace that simply brings different types of thinking and talent together, however, it is critical for organisations to create an inclusive workplace – where people feel they belong and that their point of view and voices are valued, valuable and heard. Only then can a business succeed, because it is able to retain the right talent as people feel enabled to do their best work and truly be themselves.

Creating an inclusive workplace starts with having these crucial conversations – and continuing to have them on an ongoing basis. A company and its leadership cannot assume it is inclusive because it has a policy in place. There needs to be continuous conversations and engagement with people at all levels to understand if what is included in the manifesto is being lived in the organisation. And this needs to be driven by leaders in the business.

Placing diversity and inclusion at the centre of the business agenda

“We are focused on doing what’s right for the business, which is why we have ensured that diversity and inclusion sits right at the centre of our agenda and is included in all leaders and people managers’ objectives and key performance indicators. We are also working on a D&I scorecard for each function in the business. Until diversity and inclusion affects each and every individual, we won’t see change.”

This is backed up further by the appointment of a D&I Council at a global and regional level to make sure diversity and inclusion get the right elevated status within the business and drive its sustainability. The Sub Sahara African D&I Council was instituted in October and will help ensure that the business is able to continue to meet its targets in becoming a diverse and inclusive workplace.

Equality from the ground-up

These targets include bringing more women into the business, including ensuring an equal gender split in the company’s early careers programme and creating an enabling environment to help drive more women in leadership, as well as fostering greater age and racial inclusion and equality from the ground-up and across the organisation’s supply chain.

Mondelez Sub-Saharan African business has already seen success in a number of these areas, with women making up 63% of senior positions. The South African business also does well in bringing different types of talent into the business, specifically through investment in its early careers programme which enables a pipeline that is truly diverse. There is still a concerted focus around the under-representation of black candidates, and it remains a priority.

“Navigating the cultural sensitivities that need to be taken into account in different Sub Saharan Africa markets also remains critical. In Mondelez Nigeria, for example, there is only 10 percent women representation in the workforce, primarily because of legislation that prevents women in certain occupations from working night shifts – as well as societal expectations and concerns around women going into sales roles, centred around safety issues, as well as the impact of extensive travel on the family structure,” says Xulu.

“This shows how vital it is to have regular conversations around these issues and listen to what people say is making them feel excluded as well as what would make them feel a sense of belonging. By doing that, and then making diversity and inclusion measurable – and the business and its leaders accountable for driving that change – companies can ensure that they are on the right track in effecting change and making diversity and inclusion an integral part of doing business.”