

# Promoting diversity & inclusion in the workplace

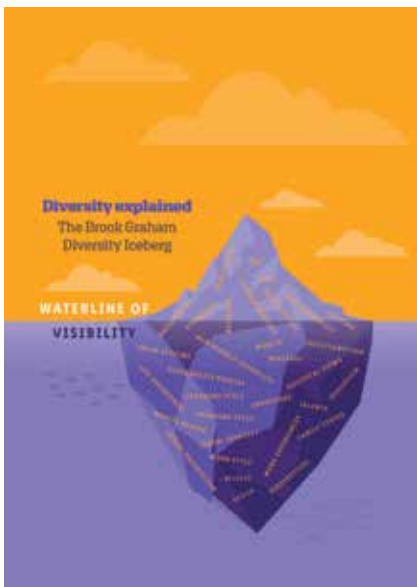
by Avril O'Hehir

Conversations around diversity and inclusion (D&I) in the workplace and its importance in creating a positive working environment have increased dramatically in recent years. With many global companies investing time and resources in creating a more diverse and importantly more inclusive workplace, it's been proven time and time again that companies who champion D&I are more successful in the long term.

## What is Diversity & Inclusion?

Simply put, diversity and inclusion are about making people feel comfortable to bring their whole self to work. Diversity is about differences, seen and unseen. Inclusion is diversity in action. Inclusion creates an environment where people are valued, feel valued and can achieve their full potential. An inclusive environment improves interaction with colleagues, customers, and communities. This is an exciting area for businesses not only because it's the right thing to do, but diverse and inclusive companies find and nurture the best talent, increase employee engagement, and improve customer relations leading to long term sustainable success.

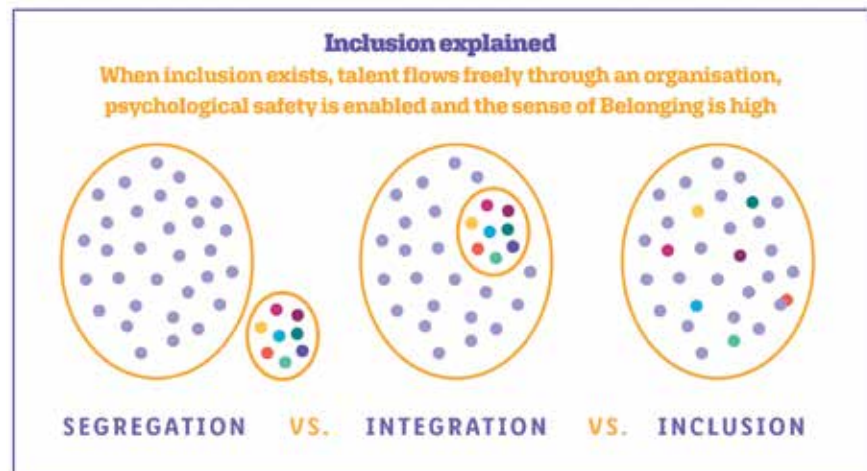
## Diversity Explained



*The Brook Graham diversity iceberg water line of visibility*

Our individual experiences, backgrounds, traits, and preferences [our 'iceberg'] create the lens through which we see the world. Each iceberg is unique. Therefore, we see the world as we see it not as it is.

## Inclusion Explained



When inclusion exists, talent flows freely through an organisation, psychological safety is enabled, and a sense of belonging is high.

## How Can Diversity and Inclusion be Promoted Within an Organisation?

In answering this question, I considered the organisation that I am a part of - the supermarket retailer, Lidl. Lidl is not only one of the fastest growing supermarket retailers in Ireland for the last number of years, but it has also recently been named the Most Reputable Retailer in Ireland by the RepTrak® 2022 study. Reptrak measures the level of trust,

respect, admiration and esteem the public has for organisations. We credit our phenomenal success to our hardworking and dedicated teams that serve communities across the country. In recent years, we've made building a D&I strategy and roadmap a priority.

It's a daunting task, as there is so much to consider and no clear place to begin but we started with setting up steering groups, operational groups and forums designed to support the business in promoting our D&I agenda and ensure we are aligned in our commitment to have a positive impact on society. From a leadership perspective, we have also chosen different areas of diversity and inclusion to personally champion, as well as focusing our roadmap on a few key areas for our first year of activation. As a business, we already had a strong track record of forging corporate partnerships and launching initiatives that have a real tangible impact while also promoting inclusivity within society.

We see ourselves as a brand that champions women and girls through our longstanding partnership with the Ladies Gaelic Football Association to being the first retailer in the world to launch a dedicated initiative to combat period poverty in stores nationwide. We also pride ourselves on being a leading employer in the country and have a well-developed benefits programme that caters for all employees at any stage of life – from top of the range pension schemes to paid leave for employees who have experienced miscarriage or those undergoing IVF fertility treatment. We have a strong partnership with the COPE Foundation through which we run programmes that are designed to give people with disabilities the opportunity to work in our stores.

We have approached our communications of our D&I agenda as a continuous process with concrete action steps and a clear goal. Drawing on our experience in Lidl, the following action steps and positive initiatives could help further the D&I agenda in your organisation:

### Defining your D&I Goal

It is important that you define what your D&I goal is from the beginning, so you know how to measure success and ensure that you stay aligned to your overall company vision and mission. Every organisation is different and therefore the D&I strategy should be unique to your organisation. At Lidl, to help us articulate our D&I ambition we have defined the below goal:

'Our goal is to make life better by building a Lidl for all. Bringing together our diverse workforce to reflect the communities we serve in an inclusive environment'.

It is important that the goal is simple and easy for all in the organisation to understand – no essays.

### Communicate your D&I goals

It is vital to communicate to all the members of your organisation that a diverse and an inclusive work environment is not just an ideal but a necessity. For those who fit into socially acceptable standards, inclusion is usually

a given, but for those who fall outside these standards every day they can go into a world filled with unconscious bias and systemic barriers. Therefore, it's an exciting opportunity for all businesses to be progressive and a beacon of leadership of D&I by creating a sense of empowerment among employees and by setting an industry standard that can pave the way for change across society.

### Take Stock

In building a D&I strategy, it's imperative to first take stock of where you are - review your current policies, procedures, partners, and available data to see how diverse and inclusive your stakeholders perceive you to be. Speak to colleagues in your organisation by conducting confidential surveys, focus groups or interviews with leadership to help build a better understanding of how people feel so you can identify what the key strategic focus areas should be.

Assess diversity and inclusion as two separate but interlinked topics. Your company may have a diverse workforce in terms of age, race, religion, nationality, sexual orientations, gender, gender identity, and national origin, however just because there is diversity in the workplace, it does not necessarily mean there is also inclusivity. Having a diverse workforce is essential however all the people from diverse backgrounds must feel like they are truly included, otherwise they won't stay with the organisation. Therefore, inclusion is the key to maintaining workplace diversity.

### Address the Gap

Address the gap that may exist between how leadership and managers perceive the culture in their organisation versus how diverse and inclusive their colleagues perceive it to be. There can often be a stark difference in perceptions and it's important that one of the strategic aims of any D&I strategy is focused on reducing the distance between these perceptions and increasing trust between leadership and colleagues. Some of the ways this gap can be addressed is by:

- Creating a space for conversation and listening by introducing dedicated diversity and inclusion exchange

forums e.g., an area on a company intranet site for feedback, ideas, stories, D&I resources, celebratory days, activities etc.

- Exploring the possibility of reverse mentoring which could help foster conversations between leaders and our diverse colleagues
- Ensuring hiring practises are fair and inclusive – for example, all of Lidl's hiring managers receive dignity at work and interview training with a focus on unconscious bias as standard to ensure our hiring practices remain fair and transparent

### Change Ready

To ensure that your organisation is ready to champion D&I you need to prepare everyone for the big change. This starts from the top - with senior leaders and helping them to prepare for the change ahead and their role within it. This involves evaluating our mindset behaviours and decisions through a D&I lens, examples of how this can be put into action are:

- Supporting leadership teams with training to better understand D&I so that they can have confidence in navigating this often-intimidating topic
- Diversity training should focus on hiring and building diverse teams and working groups to further the success of the organisation through idea generation and out of the box thinking. However, for diversity to flourish inclusivity must exist
- Ensure your policies and procedures support the change. For example, to remove bias from the hiring process standardized aptitude tests should be reviewed to ensure they are more inclusive to those who may not speak English as their first language and a blind system of reviewing job applications should be in place, so you don't see demographic characteristics
- Be transparent as an organisation on key issues and show clearly how you want to achieve your goal – for example, Lidl recently announced our first gender pay gap report and action plan. Since 2016, Lidl has invested

in upskilling a number of senior leaders with an executive coaching qualification. As part of Lidl's gender pay gap action plan, we are currently working on dedicated investment in upskilling all female executive leaders to ensure adequately trained mentors are available for employees looking for this support. A full mentoring programme will follow this training that is set to be launched later in the year

- Ensure your actions support the change. An area of focus in Lidl's D&I strategy is to support our female colleagues in their career development. Our commitment to advertising all non-specialist role vacancies internally before publishing them externally is enabling internal development and allowing females to successfully progress through the business and move into more senior roles. We also have dedicated initiatives to target specific areas of the business such as a 'Women in Logistics' referral scheme launching in 2022 to encourage more females to join our regional distribution teams

## Building Skills

To achieve your D&I goals the whole organisation must understand the goals set, why they are important and be given the skills to achieve success. Beginning with the topic of inclusion is an important piece of the puzzle because everyone should feel included regardless of their background identity or circumstances. The following initiatives will help foster a culture where every voice is respected, welcome and heard:

- Ensuring all colleagues receive D&I and dignity at work training, with the latter specifically focused on bullying, harassment, and sexual harassment. This suite of training is important to train us to stop and think about our behaviour and the impact it can have on others; this can be as simple as stopping to think before sending your next WhatsApp message because what may be a joke to you could be harassment
- Using internal communication channels like a D&I hub on your



company intranet or a poster on your company noticeboard to help educate, engage, and inform. It is important that colleagues have a forum where they feel safe to express their opinions without fear of repercussions. This also helps all in the organisation to understand and embrace diverse viewpoints

## Ownership

Demonstrate to your teams how committed you are to making a diverse and inclusive environment. To achieve this D&I needs to be embedded into each aspect of your business so you can measure your progress and be accountable for how you are performing. The following ideas are ways to show you are serious about delivering on your commitment to D&I:

- Introduce a diversity and inclusion policy as a foundation to build on. This policy must be available to all colleagues in your organisation
- Align D&I as a key business KPI so it's being integrated into your overarching strategy. This will help to ensure ownership and accountability for the topics
- Communicate your commitment internally and externally to make it known that you are committed to D&I and are more accountable. A way in which Lidl has done this is being one of the first retailers to sign up to the ELEVATE PLEDGE. Among other commitments this pledge ensures a company conducts annual reporting which will help your organisation benchmark itself against other businesses across the country

- Establish a colleague network or forum who will help to advance diversity within an organisation. Members of this forum can help champion D&I throughout the organisation and support colleagues in understanding and embracing the topic.

## Take a continuous and sustained approach

A key element to advancing diversity and Inclusion is committing to a sustained approach. Each of the elements are part of a long-term road map towards a goal of building an organisation for all. Your road map will continue to evolve as you listen and progress your journey and must always form part of your overarching corporate strategy, rather than being an add on, in order to be successful.



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She has vast experience working internationally and holds an MBA from Warwick Business School, UK and a BA from Technological University Dublin, Ireland.