

How Co-creation is Enabling a More Inclusive Workforce



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INTRODUCTION

The pace of change across business and society has never been greater.

Innovation is now so rapid, and business environments so dynamic, that organizations are choosing to become much more flexible as a matter of survival.

Many are dropping decades-old planning processes in favour of agile approaches that can adapt to rapidly changing circumstances. This is helped by new technologies that are designed to be delivered as-needed, and that can change in real time as requirements evolve.

Business models are also changing to accommodate the new pace of change, with co-opetition, outcome-based pricing, and the emergence of fluid, project-based organizations. These are all responses to the new reality of markets in rapid flux, which is driving organizations to become more responsive.

At the same time, the accelerating pace of change is creating huge demand for specialist new skills, especially those that enable the new digital technologies. To attract such in-demand talents, organizations are adapting to the needs of a new diverse workforce.

Expectations among the new talent include opportunities to pursue a highly personalized career path, and much greater accommodation for commitments (family, social, educational etc.) outside of the working day. Above all, employees are looking for a more rewarding, authentic work experience, where they can give their best because they have the right tools for the job, the right training, the right support – and they can truly be themselves.

At the core of these changes is a recognition that a rewarding workplace that is flexible to the needs of each employee benefits both the organization and the individual, fostering an environment of mutual trust. At the same time, questions remain about how best to accommodate new ways of working while supporting a diverse workforce as it navigates life's milestones and challenges.

To highlight how working flexibly with a diverse mix of colleagues and partners can enable a more inclusive workforce, teknowlogy Group has partnered with Fujitsu to look at specific examples of best practice. This report looks at the business value of driving a more diverse and inclusive environment, and the role of co-creation across broad ecosystems in driving technology innovation to provide a more supportive and personalized workforce experience.

KEY FINDINGS



Diversity and Inclusion are boardroom priorities today

Commitment to a diverse and inclusive workplace is critical to corporate reputation, both in terms of formal reporting (e.g. on boardroom diversity) and to enhance organizational effectiveness and competitiveness by attracting new talent



A more representative and inclusive workforce drives business improvement

Several meta-analyses of diversity and performance highlight positive associations between gender diversity at board level and performance against other CSR goals, and associations between broader diversity in the boardroom and more effective decision-making. Furthermore there is broad consensus that the positive association extends much further – that business benefits from a workforce from which no-one is left out, spanning age, beliefs, culture, disability, LGBT, race, marital or partnership status etc.



Action is urgently needed to deliver any material improvements in diversity and inclusiveness in the short term

Although changing long-established cultures and behaviors is daunting, some organizations are already demonstrating that rapid change is possible, but those changes must start now to be effective.



Support of the whole organization is critical for rapid change

Organizations that assign responsibility for driving change in diversity and inclusion to a specific team (e.g. to an HR function, or to the Executive Leadership team) tend to move slower than organizations that embrace the need for change at all levels.



Technology solutions are enabling significant improvements in diversity and inclusion

Technology can hold the key to making the workplace more accessible to a broader range of individuals. In doing so, technology is enabling a more diverse and inclusive workforce.



Collaboration across broad ecosystems helps drive innovation

One of the most effective ways to drive technology innovation in the D&I space is to use co-creation methodologies that involve a broad cross-section of participants. Including the target communities in the development enables the team to benefit from differing perspectives, and delivers better outcomes.



THE INCLUSIVITY GAP

Organizations that lack diversity put themselves at a disadvantage, overlooking potential new sources of talent, suffering possible lack of original perspectives, and potentially misunderstanding their customers. Differences between an organization and broader society may lead to the damaging impacts of such an inclusivity gap.

SKILLS SHORTAGE

Many markets are experiencing a major shortage of talent. The UK's Open University Business Barometer Report for 2019 recently found that UK organizations spend **£4.4 billion annually** as a result, mostly on increased hiring costs, inflated salaries, training costs to upskill staff hired at a lower level than required, and costs of contractors when full-time posts could not be filled. Furthermore **68% of employers** reported that they struggled to find workers with the right skills.

In this difficult environment where the war for talent is very real, organizations cannot afford to inadvertently exclude any section of the population from their recruitment and development initiatives, or from their leadership teams.

The UK Government's most recent (2018) statistics show that **18% of working-age adults** reported as having a disability, defined as *"a physical or mental impairment that has 'substantial' and 'long term' negative effects on their ability to do normal daily activities"*. At the same time, historical biases within many

68%

of UK employers report that they struggle to find workers with the right skills

organizations have resulted in often unintended barriers to employment of people with disabilities. Where this is the case, those organizations are inevitably increasing the scale of their skills gap problem, by overlooking what amounts to one-in-five of potential new hires.

In a similar way, historical recruitment practices in many organizations have also had the consequence of excluding other groups - whether defined by ethnicity, gender / gender identity or expression, age, religion, sexual orientation or other characteristics – further deepening their skills gap challenge. The inevitable outcome of choosing to fish for talent in an artificially reduced pool of candidates, is a poorer body of employees.

MONOCULTURE

As well as exacerbating talent shortfalls, organizations that do not take steps to become more diverse face the risk of creating a monoculture. This occurs very naturally and usually with no hint of malicious intent: like-minded people come together to form an organization; as the organization succeeds, the existing team hires more people just like themselves to grow their capabilities.

While this is an easy path towards building a cohesive and low-friction team, there is a real risk that such a team will underperform on creativity. Academia tells us¹ that:

“Creativity is an important component of innovation [...] the creative benefits of heterogeneous team compositions have been supported by numerous studies [...] Because cultural differences are associated with differences in mental models, modes of perception, and approaches to problems, they are likely to provide strong inputs for creativity”

In other words, organizations that lack differing perspectives will over time become both less creative and less competitive, because staff lacking diversity will all share the same mental models, perceptions and approaches to problem-solving.

Even relatively diverse organizations tend to limit their own creativity by allowing innovation to be the responsibility of ringfenced specialist functions. These are often mini monocultures – formed of specialists with a single academic background. Co-creation across diverse teams enables organizations to benefit from the differing perspectives and entrepreneurial mindsets of multiple teams. The benefits are particularly marked when the teams reach into external organizations within the ecosystem, bringing different ways of seeing but also different ways of working to

¹ “Unraveling the effects of cultural diversity in teams: A meta-analysis of research on multicultural work groups”, Stahl, Maznevski, Voigt, and Jonsen, Vienna University of Economics and Business; INSEAD, Fontainebleau; IMD, Lausanne; Paul Merage School of Business, University of California, 2009

the table. In practice the co-creation process empowers individuals to contribute to innovation initiatives in ways they never imagined they could.

LACK OF CUSTOMER EMPATHY

Organizations that do not reflect their target customer populations run the risk of misunderstanding their customers' needs, making missteps in their communications and wrongly anticipating how their customers will respond.

These risks arise most particularly when an organization has a single worldview and set of experiences, and when these are significantly at odds with the views and experiences of its audience. The situation then becomes one of cross-cultural misunderstanding, where the organization is only partially aware of how its decisions, actions and statements are seen by the target audiences.

Many organizations seek to delight their customers, and to do so they must first learn to understand them deeply. This is the only sure-fire way to grasp both the challenges customers face, and how they could truly be satisfied. This is also why many of the most effective co-creation initiatives put members of the target population at the heart of the project, providing essential feedback to every step of the undertaking.

ORIGINS OF THE INCLUSIVITY GAP

The causes of the inclusivity gap often lie within the organization itself. This equally means that options for addressing the inclusivity gap lie within the organization's grasp, provided that it is willing to change.

DEVELOPMENT AND RETENTION

At a macro level, some causes are societal rather than organizational. For example, the UK's Institution of Engineering and Technology (IET) recently found that more than half of children surveyed described the typical engineer as middle-aged and white – a perception that does much to explain why engineering is still struggling to embrace diversity.

However, at a micro level, organizations that recognize their lack of diversity can do much to become more representative of society at large. In particular, the ways that employees are selected for development and advancement has historically reduced diversity at more senior levels in organizations.

In the past, leaders have tended to support the development of co-workers that were demographically similar to themselves. Consequently, staff from under-represented populations have often chosen not to apply for development programs

or promotions, because they feel that senior roles in that organization are not open to “people like me”.

Of course talented employees that feel they have little chance of development and/or advancement will “vote with their feet” to find alternative employment. As well as demotivating or disengaging the individual, this reaction also comes at a huge cost to the organization, since there is a significant investment required to replace the lost skills and experience of the departing colleague.

In spite of the current “skills gap” job market where organizations are fighting to fill vacancies, this is not the only way that organizations are unintentionally guiding valued co-workers towards the exit door.

In many organizations, physical presence in the office is still seen as important, even for individuals that could work remotely without loss of productivity. Organizations that adhere to this rather traditional view of the workplace will almost inevitably experience greater staff attrition among parents, carers and people with limited mobility. Conversely organizations that fully embrace flexible working are much more likely to retain employees for whom an office-based 9-5 routine is no longer convenient.

Equally organizations that are unaware of their employees’ cultures and beliefs are likely to trip up over these issues. This typically happens when leadership teams do not reflect the make-up of the broader workforce. As before, falling employee engagement is the typical outcome, with similar risk of rising hiring costs to replace staff that leave.

In summary: organizations that do not take deliberate steps to become more inclusive risk losing current staff and future leaders through inadvertent ignorance and developmental neglect. Conversely, organizations can improve employee engagement through co-creation projects, as implemented in organizations as diverse as Lego, BMW and Unilever. These help engender greater staff loyalty and mutual trust, because of the fulfilling nature of the work, and the positive interpersonal interaction. Equally, learning organizations reduce the risk of staff disengagement and attrition by developing staff continuously. Again this enriches the work of the individuals, promoting loyalty and making more efficient use of existing talent.

RECRUITMENT

The way staff are hired has historically had considerable impact on the exclusion of potentially valuable job candidates.

Recruiters often work with hiring managers to build a profile of the candidate they are seeking for each specific vacant role. This is typically based on candidates that have previously proved successful in that role, and hiring managers often end up specifying backgrounds and work experiences that reflect themselves. Hard-pressed recruiters are also very likely to return to traditionally successful sources of expertise.

While this is natural enough, the approach will strongly focus the process on candidates that are near clones of the existing team. This risks excluding excellent potential candidates, as well as limiting the diversity of the future team. Even very neutral-seeming parts of a job description can inadvertently exclude candidates. For example, specifying “*must be experienced in MS Office*” could exclude disabled candidates that are highly competent users of equivalent accessible software that is specifically optimized to their disability needs.

The process of automating recruitment is further accentuating the inclusivity gap, since algorithmic searches are even more limited in scope. Applicant tracking systems are programmed to search for particular qualifications, employers or keywords. Candidates (however exceptional) that do not use the required words in their resume or covering note risk being sifted out at the first pass.

At the same time that good candidates are inadvertently being excluded by unconsidered recruitment processes, the jobs market is peppered with very serious shortages of skilled staff. The UK in particular is experiencing a period of record employment, which naturally makes the recruitment environment more competitive. Specific technical skill shortages are fueled by rapid emergence of in-demand technologies, causing surges in demand that significantly outstrip supply (e.g. for AI, cyber, biotech, IoT, data science etc.). These spikes of demand are even more marked in markets where startup communities are vibrant and well-funded, and will likely persist until the technologies in question become more generally understood.

In summary: organizations that are not intentionally inclusive in their recruitment planning and execution, inadvertently reduce the size of their candidate pool. This makes it harder to fill vacancies, pushing extra work onto current staff, and generally stressing the efficiency and wellbeing of the rest of the workforce.

Conversely, organizations that deliberately plan inclusivity into their recruitment thinking benefit from a significantly larger pool of potential talent. By bringing a much more open mind to hiring, organizations can raise their talent bar, resulting in better outcomes, and as a side benefit, help ensure compliance with the UK’s 2010 Equality Act.

“customers prefer socially inclusive companies, and so do job-seekers – in particular, millennials, who will comprise close to three-quarters of the global workforce by 2025”

Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, “Neurodiversity At Work”, 2018

WELLBEING

Ensuring employee wellbeing is not only a basic duty of all employers, but also essential to enable the organization to perform to its full potential.

At its most basic this involves ensuring a workplace that is free of physical dangers i.e. basic health and safety. Increasingly however, a healthy workplace will also feature positive, trusting and respectful relationships with co-workers; valued, varied and rewarding roles; employee input into how their job is performed; and learning and development opportunities for all staff.

It is also inevitable that during their period of employment, staff will have to navigate some of the major milestones of their personal lives - births, deaths, illness, engagement, civil partnership, marriage, divorce etc. When a team-member is experiencing stress or physical, emotional or mental health challenges, they greatly benefit from appropriate support, and their employer has a huge role to play in this. Properly prepared and trained, colleagues and managers can provide invaluable support to their team-mates, and ideally also be trained on how to spot issues before they've fully surfaced.

While these issues are particularly sensitive, systems and tools can still help employees, managers and co-workers to prepare for, identify and respond sensitively to co-workers coming to terms with life-changing events, both in the immediate aftermath, as well in the longer term.

By investing in a healthy workplace, organizations can develop a healthy workforce in its broadest sense, together with the associated gains in employee productivity and loyalty. Conversely in a highly competitive job market, organizations that fail to create a healthy working environment will struggle to hire and retain staff.

In summary: organizations that put in place measures to promote a healthy workplace, and that offer flexible supportive care and enabling technologies to colleagues facing wellbeing issues are very likely to improve staff engagement and productivity. In contrast, organizations that stick to an "employee handbook" proscribed list of responses to specific circumstances are likely to disengage and lose valuable staff.

***“for every £1
we spent, we
got £8 of
benefit back”***

Anglian Water Chief Executive, Peter Simpson, in The Financial Times, 2017, on the impact of putting employee wellbeing at center of boardroom discussions



TECHNOLOGY ENABLERS

Although the key to becoming a more diverse organization is organization-wide determination to “make it happen”, experience shows that technology can be a valuable enabler towards this goal.

One collaborative methodology pioneered by Fujitsu specifically to accelerate customers’ digital journeys is what the company calls “Human Centric Experience Design” (abbreviated for convenience to “HxD”). Essentially a variant of well-established Design Thinking principles, the process used in Human Centric Experience Design ensures that suppliers, users and partners are all joint co-designers and stakeholders in the success of the eventual solution. An important advantage of the HxD approach is its immediacy: by deliberately homing in on specific aspects of an issue, the process aims to jointly develop a proof of concept that shows how tricky issues can be mitigated with tangible solutions.

These qualities have proven to be particularly well-adapted to developing solutions to increase diversity and inclusion in the workplace: the collaborative aspect of the development ensures that solutions are not externally imposed, while the rapid initial development provides a working prototype that stakeholders can use to secure further input and investment, as explained further in the following examples.

BUDDYCONNECT™

BuddyConnect™ is the result of an innovation project designed to make the onboarding experience easier on newly hired autistic people. People on the autism spectrum are very under-represented in the UK workforce, with less than 16% of

autistic adults in full time employment. One consequence of under-representation is that employers and managers are uncertain how best to support autistic people as they start a new job.

The goal of the project was to provide a simple and accessible source of basic “day one” survival information: how to find your way around the workplace, how to use the office amenities etc. At the same time BuddyConnect™ keeps each new starter in contact with an existing employee - the new hire’s “buddy”.

The development followed the HXD process, looping in Fujitsu’s internal Autism Champion to provide expert insight into the workplace challenges faced by neurodiverse starters. These included a preference by some to avoid social interaction, and a need for very clear information. Armed with this information, a diverse team was pulled together that included digital consultancy *Nodes*, support from Nottingham Trent University on product roadmap, along with a number of Fujitsu staff.

The outcome is a mobile app that enables users to let their “buddy” know how they are feeling simply by clicking on red, amber or green. The same app provides essential workplace information, as well as enabling voice or text conversations with the buddy. While the app is still currently a prototype, it has clearly proved the benefit of a discreet and accessible tool that lowers the barrier to asking for help in a stressful situation.

DISABILITY & ADJUSTMENT PASSPORT

Employees with disabilities or health conditions (physical, mental or emotional) often have specific requirements to make their workplace more usable. These are usually minor changes and inexpensive adjustments, and by offering a more personalized workplace, organizations can become truly open to all. Since reorganizations and changes of staff are commonplace, there is value in creating a single record of the adjustments needed by each individual, and this is what is known as the Disability and Adjustment Passport.

The Disability Passport scheme was a collaborative development by *Support & Engage Employees with Disabilities* (‘SEED’), Fujitsu’s disability employee network, comprising employees with disabilities, carers, and other supportive employees. When SEED was formed, it prompted discussion of how to improve working conditions of disabled people throughout their careers.

An important early finding by SEED was the contrast between the high level of consultation and support that employees with disabilities received when they first joined Fujitsu, relative to the support received during career changes. Employees with disabilities were finding that the process of reestablishing previously agreed workplace adaptations was upsetting, distracting and impacted their productivity. To reduce the impact of inevitable changes in line management during the course of a career, the team evolved the idea of the Disability and Adjustment Passport.

Supporting neurodiversity in the workplace enables organizations to tap into a unique set of skills that can significantly enrich their business

The establishment of the disabled employee network doubled the number of staff that identified as disabled from 3% to 6%.

By being open about disability, employees are able to get the support they need, which is recorded permanently in their Disability and Adjustment Passport

The outcome is a digital record of adjustments employees require. This is held centrally by HR, acting as a reference point for employees to get the support they need, and is only available to the individual, their manager and a very limited number of HR professionals. The scheme is effective in minimizing disruption when staff change jobs or work locations, and gives their new managers more confidence to discuss adjustments that employees need.

AUTISTICA CITIZEN SCIENCE PLATFORM

In January 2019 Fujitsu and Autistica (the UK's leading autism research charity) started a two-year partnership. One of the first projects that the two organizations are collaborating on, is studying the impact of the environment on sensory processing for autistic people.

Parts of the problem are well known: many autistic people experience sensory overload simply from exposure to their everyday environment. The specific sense or senses that are over- or under-sensitive vary from person to person, but people on the autism spectrum often find that the effects of sensory overload are overwhelming. This can effectively prevent some autistic people from entering certain environments where they can expect sensory overload, and this is a real challenge for health, work and access to support services.

An early requirement from the project is to gather a significant volume of data on the issue, as a basis for further research and potential mitigations / solutions. The data will be collected as a citizen science project, spanning all the senses (sound, temperature, texture, light etc.) that impact autistic people. The data is intended for statistical analysis, so the project hopes to gather data from thousands, and perhaps hundreds of thousands of individuals.

Autistica is an enthusiastic advocate of co-creation, firmly believing that working with intended beneficiaries is more likely to improve people's lives. This pervades Autistica's own culture – the charity (like Fujitsu) employs many autistic people, some of whom are directly involved in the project.

To support the project, Fujitsu has committed an agile development team that is working as part of the open source community that is developing the front end for the platform. Their goal is to enable autistic people to record their everyday sensory experiences, to provide a significant body of data on which environments are problematic to them, and which are not. The front end is being built with a scalable web architecture to enable there are no limitations on the number of participants, and for user convenience it will be highly focused on mobile access.

Although currently in its early days, this project will ultimately provide detailed data on the impact for autistic people of sensory information from a broad selection of everyday environments. This will help inform how environments can be made less challenging to autistic people, and will also identify successful strategies for handling sensory overload.

Fujitsu's partnership with Autistica aims to spread understanding and awareness of autism throughout the company. It also seeks to kickstart life-changing research, campaigning and innovation that should benefit thousands of families across the UK



EXPERIENCES FROM THE ECOSYSTEM

The final part of this study looks at front-line experiences of participants in co-creation projects.

JONNY CRAWLEY, NOTTINGHAM TRENT UNIVERSITY

Jonny Crawley is Strategic Partnership Manager at Nottingham Trent University ('NTU'), where he has a specific focus on digitalization and engineering. In this role he is responsible for creating mutually beneficial partnerships that help the university flourish while providing value to its partners. NTU is keen to give its students experience of working with Fujitsu, an acknowledged leader in global IT, to gain critical industry practice, and engage on collaborative projects to address global business challenges that have significant positive impact on society and/or the economy. In return, NTU seeks to offer expertise that compliments Fujitsu's capability, as well as access to the student body which at 32,000 strong is a significant testbed, with a diverse demographic profile.

NTU has participated in a number of different innovation initiatives run by Fujitsu, several of which made use of the company's Digital Transformation Center ('DTC') in London. The DTC is specifically designed to support sprint hackathon sessions. These draw out knowledge and experience from a wide range of participants with a broad set of skills, often provide full- or half-day 'taster' experiences of co-creation.

"The goal is widening capability – the ability to be innovative"

Jonny Crawley, NTU

Since Fujitsu is already well-known for its IT competencies, Jonny is careful to provide complementary skills for co-creation projects organized by Fujitsu. For example, as part of the further development of the BuddyConnect™ app to support autistic people, NTU was able to contribute an expert in gamification to encourage user engagement, as well as additional App functionality relating to emotional state monitoring.

Subsequently much broader use-cases have been identified where employees would benefit from easily accessible support from a co-worker or friend, which is substantially what BuddyConnect™ offers. For example, NTU co-created with Fujitsu to find a solution to suicide on rail tracks. The project benefitted from an NTU academic expert in suicide prevention, whose expertise was grounded in experience within the prison service.

JON SPIERS, AUTISTICA

Jon Spiers is CEO at Autistica, the UK's leading research charity for autism.

Autistica first became involved with Fujitsu when it was chosen by employees to be the charity partner for Fujitsu UK&I for a two-year period from January 2019. The choice reflects the reality that many people at Fujitsu are themselves autistic, or have autistic family members. It also reflects a recognition of the very limited funding and investment into autism compared with many other life-changing conditions – something that many Fujitsu staff would like to help with.

The joint plan agreed with Autistica involved fund-raising by Fujitsu staff, providing Fujitsu technology and know-how to support Autistica's research goals, helping Fujitsu become more supportive of neurodiverse staff, and helping raise awareness of Autistica and its mission.

One of the reasons that Autistica was keen to work with Fujitsu was the company's commitment to co-creation. In Jon's view, most autism research has historically been done "to" autistic people rather than with them – and the bulk of research has not improved the lives of people with autism. The participation of autistic people in everything to do with their support is ingrained in the way Autistica chooses to operate – which is why Fujitsu's principles of co-creation resonate so clearly with the charity.

Alongside work with Fujitsu on BuddyConnect™, Autistica has worked with Fujitsu on ways to make meetings more relaxed for autistic participants. The result was a set of recommendations including enabling remote participation; providing an agenda in advance (and keeping to it); and allowing time to process information. Following these recommendations enables autistic people to participate much more fully in meetings – and as a side benefit also makes meetings more relaxed for everyone.

“It's interesting for Universities to show that a capability has significant societal and financial impact”

Jonny Crawley, NTU

“Research that is informed by autistic people is much more likely to improve autistic people's lives”

Jon Spiers, Autistica

JONATHAN BOAKES, NODES AGENCY

Nodes is a digital agency specializing in digital product development. The company was formed in 2008 and today is one of the 23 subsidiaries of the global Monstar Lab Group, with 130 nodes staff spread across offices in Aarhus, Amsterdam, Berlin, Copenhagen, London, Manchester, and Prague.

Jonathan Boakes is the client solutions manager at Nodes' London office, where he is responsible for ensuring that Nodes assembles the right team for each individual client project. He first engaged with Fujitsu on an unrelated project, which allowed Nodes to demonstrate the agency's approach to rapid digital innovation. This resonated strongly with Fujitsu's belief in co-creation, so the agency was invited to facilitate further projects.

This included extending the BuddyConnect™ concept to support people living with and recovering from cancer, as well as supporting their managers and co-workers. For that project Nodes worked with a cross-functional team that brought together cancer charity CLIC Sargent, expertise from Nottingham Trent University, and Fujitsu employees who have experienced cancer. Node's main role in this was as facilitator, combining user experience, design and strategy functions.

The central issue that the team chose to address was how to support people with cancer through their workplace journey, from diagnosis, to being off work, to treatment, and then returning to the workplace. Once a number of technology concepts had been discussed, one was further developed as a prototype. To test the concept, Node deployed a mobile user testing kit that quickly gathered user reactions. These were streamed in real time to the rest of the development team, enabling the design to be adapted directly in response to user feedback.

After a very short period of time, the team was able to hand over to Fujitsu a working front-end prototype, enabling Fujitsu to carry the project forward with additional work on back-end systems. Node is now optimistic that their work with Fujitsu could be further expanded towards the development of a "Health Connect" solution. However Fujitsu wants to proceed, Nodes will want to stay closely aligned – the agency has learned that the tighter the partnership with their client, the tighter and slicker the outcome will be for the end user.

Fujitsu and Nodes started digital change management together, introducing 5 day sprints into Fujitsu's innovation process

CONCLUSIONS

Employers today are all too aware that their people are both an increasingly precious and an increasingly scarce asset. Taking good care of the workforce, and driving greater diversity and inclusion is not only the right thing to do, it is also critical for business momentum.

To progress these goals, organizations are transforming themselves from monocultures built in the image of their founders, into towards organizations that more truly reflect the make-up of their markets.

However in many organizations this change is happening at a pace for which the description “slow but steady” is perhaps too kind: indeed the World Economic Forum predicts it will take another hundred years to achieve gender pay equality at current rates of progress.

Across all sectors, the shortage of skilled staff has become a sustained and intractable challenge, and organizations that fail to hire from a fully diverse pool of candidates put themselves at a self-inflicted disadvantage. Equally businesses that do not support staff through illness and life-changing events will lose those individuals’ skills and experiences, and also incur costs to recruit their replacements. Conversely there is clear consensus that diverse and inclusive organizations are better at creative innovation, and are more effective at decision-making.

To make real progress, organizations have to embrace diversity and inclusion at all levels, and treat goals for inclusiveness no differently than any other challenging targets. When tackled with pragmatism and commitment, rapid change is possible: for example in 2019, Fujitsu set a big vision to eradicate their gender pay gap in UK within three years.

Technology as an enabler can do much to make the workplace accessible to a broader and more inclusive range of individuals, and one of the most effective ways of harnessing technology is through co-creation. This taps into the immense potential of broad ecosystems, bringing together divergent perspectives with an entrepreneurial mindset, and ensuring that communities supported are fully involved in the development.

Ultimately, the critical factors for rapid progress on diversity are courageous leadership and full organizational commitment. With technology co-creation to further enable inclusiveness, there is no reason why all organizations should not set themselves bold targets – what are you waiting for?

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ABOUT TEKNOLOGY GROUP



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