

Dealing with Organisational Resistance

What is organisational resistance to diversity and inclusion, and why does it happen?

Resistance to diversity and inclusion at work is a complex problem where employees may show behaviours that go against efforts to create a more diverse and inclusive environment. This resistance can show up in different ways, like not wanting to join diversity training, ignoring inclusion policies, quietly opposing changes in team dynamics, or openly disagreeing with diversity efforts.

This resistance often comes from deeper reasons, not just a simple dislike of diversity:

- **Fear of Change:** Employees might resist because they're worried about how diversity and inclusion will change how things work in the workplace. This could include changes in how people talk to each other, who has power, and how different perspectives are valued.
- **Feeling Threatened:** Some employees resist because they think diversity and inclusion will take away their status, identity, or sense of belonging in the company. They might be afraid of losing special treatment, facing more competition, or feeling uncomfortable with changes to the company culture.
- **Lack of Real Involvement:** People might resist if they feel like efforts to promote diversity and inclusion are just for show and don't really include everyone. When employees feel like their opinions aren't heard or respected, they might resist because they feel ignored or left out.
- **Unconscious Biases:** Resistance can also come from biases that people don't even realise they have. These biases affect how they see diversity efforts and can make them resistant to change.
- **Communication Problems:** If employees don't understand why diversity and inclusion are important or how they'll work, they might resist because they're afraid of what might happen or because they misunderstand what's going on.

How to address resistance to diversity and inclusion at the leadership level

Addressing resistance to diversity and inclusion among leaders involves taking strategic actions to tackle both the surface-level and underlying issues causing the resistance. Here are some effective strategies:

- **Demonstrate Commitment:** Leaders should publicly show their commitment to diversity and inclusion through their actions and by making it a core part of the company's values and strategies.

E.g. The CEO launches a diversity and inclusion initiative by visiting various sites to discuss its importance, sharing personal stories or experiences, and outlining clear diversity targets in company-wide communications.

- **Educate and Raise Awareness:** Implement thorough education programs that go beyond basic training, covering why diversity and inclusion are important and addressing unconscious biases.

*E.g. Develop a series of workshops focused on cultural competence, especially relevant to operations in areas with **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander** communities, ensuring employees understand the value of diverse perspectives and the importance of inclusive practices in sustainability and community relations.*

- **Foster Open Dialogue:** Create safe spaces for employees to discuss their concerns about diversity and inclusion openly, without fear of backlash.

E.g. Host regular town hall meetings at remote locations, inviting employees to share their experiences and concerns about diversity and inclusion efforts, with senior managers actively participating and responding to feedback.

- **Promote Inclusive Leadership:** Train leaders to lead inclusively, emphasising empathy, cultural understanding, and flexibility in managing diverse teams.

E.g. Implement a mentorship program that pairs senior leaders with employees from diverse backgrounds, aiming to develop inclusive leadership skills among managers while providing growth opportunities for underrepresented employees.

- **Highlight Value:** Clearly communicate the business benefits of diversity and inclusion, including how they lead to innovation, better decision-making, and improved employee engagement.

E.g. Share case studies in a company newsletter that illustrates how diverse teams have developed innovative solutions for environmental management, or improved community engagement practices, demonstrating the tangible benefits of diversity.

- **Incorporate into Policies and Practices:** Integrate diversity and inclusion into all organisational policies and practices, from recruitment to performance evaluation.

E.g. Revise company recruitment policies to include partnerships with educational institutions serving underrepresented communities, ensuring a diverse pipeline of talent for technical and engineering roles.

- **Set Clear Goals:** Establish measurable diversity and inclusion goals and regularly track progress to hold the organisation accountable.

E.g. Set specific targets for increasing the representation of women in leadership positions within the company by a certain percentage over five years, regularly reporting progress in internal and external communications.

- **Recognise and Reward Inclusive Behaviour:** Acknowledge and reward behaviours that support diversity and inclusion, such as inclusive leadership and innovative solutions.

*E.g. Present an annual award for teams or individuals who have made significant contributions to fostering an inclusive workplace, such as implementing initiatives that support the inclusion of **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander** peoples or enhancing gender diversity and enters the awardees in state or national awards.*

- **Leverage Diverse Perspectives:** Ensure diverse viewpoints are considered in decision-making processes to enhance decision quality and demonstrate the practical importance of diversity and inclusion.

*E.g. Establish a diversity advisory board composed of employees from various backgrounds, including **Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander** representatives, to consult on decisions related to new project sites or community engagement strategies.*

- **Continuously Improve:** Stay open to feedback and adapt strategies based on evolving best practices and internal input to continuously improve diversity and inclusion efforts.

E.g. Conduct an annual review of diversity and inclusion initiatives, incorporating feedback from employees across all levels and locations, and adjusts strategies to address new challenges or opportunities.