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SEVEN METHODS TO USE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION TO FUEL INNOVATION

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In my experience of collaboration within many organisations, diversity of all types produces improved solutions to the most complex problems. The most pressing issues are solved in inclusive settings with a diversity of viewpoints where team members can participate based on their preferences as to where they do their best thinking.

When confronted with challenges and problems we need to support the emergence of ideas and innovative solutions by fostering an inclusive culture that promotes diversity of thought.

Here are seven strategies to foster an inclusive environment where innovation can flourish.

1. Encourage teamwork - sometimes it is more difficult to present a proposal on your own, and less senior colleagues might be discouraged from doing so if they do not have the backing of a team. Safety for the mind is important, and comes from having a mix of newer and more experienced colleagues working together with a common purpose or desired outcome identified.
2. Hold regular “think tank sessions” to promote proactive teamwork and create opportunities for connections to be forged between various business, IT and IT security teams that will produce better cross-pollination of perspectives and more expansive ideas. These sessions could be online brainstorming sessions lasting 60-90 minutes with a variety of co-workers to identify issues and solution options that may need further exploration in a separate session.
3. Provide a diverse range of innovation events for your team in which they can explore new ideas, connections and technology, keep abreast of what is happening and identify options for now and the future.
4. Permit the submission of ideas anonymously. Anonymity can also remove any barriers of

judgement and any concern submitters might otherwise have of appearing stupid. Anonymity also encourages submissions with a broader range of ideas.

5. Leverage external coaches and/or facilitators who can assist teams to express their ideas. Writing or presenting an idea is not everyone's day job, and it can be particularly difficult for early career employees and non-native English speakers. Colleagues can learn from a coach how to create a well-formed idea proposal and the best way to communicate it.
6. Seek a diverse group of reviewers to assess ideas against success criteria. This makes sure the advantages and disadvantages of each idea are considered from multiple angles.
7. Provide time for people to think about a topic or issue and the desired outcome. Provide a detailed brief on the context of what you want to achieve and the background to the problem, including the history of where it came from. Provide at least 72 hours' notice to give team members the opportunity to think at the time and in the place they do their best thinking: AM, PM, evening or whilst doing something such as walking the dog, exercising, hanging the washing or having a shower. Research shows some of the most innovative ideas emerge outside of work hours.

There are other ways in which team members can participate even if producing innovative ideas is not their core strength. One is by voting on the suggestions made by other people. Voting gives team members a say in which ideas the business pursues, and encourages team engagement and involvement. By voting on multiple ideas, team members can express views based on their experiences and their requirements. The outcomes can be unexpected, insightful and powerful.

Making sure all team members feel welcome to contribute their ideas for innovation pays



off. Their increased engagement increases the range of strategic options and produces better business solutions.

ABOUT VANNESSA MCCAMLEY

Vanessa McCamley is a leadership and performance expert specialising in neuroscience practices that help individuals, teams and businesses grow in meaningful ways whilst delivering measurable results in healthy ways. She has a passion for helping people and businesses to overcome obstacles and enabling them to reach their strategic goals. She brings a strong background in IT security and more than 20 years of business experience to collaborating with individuals at all levels and from several industries. She is the author of *Rewire for Success*, an easy guide to using neuroscience to improve choices for work, life and wellbeing.

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