

Leveraging inclusiveness



In conversation with Kathleen L. McGinn

Cahners-Rabb Professor of Business
Administration at Harvard Business School

What can companies do to really promote inclusion? Here are some keys for fostering egalitarian gender attitudes and more inclusive organizational cultures, leading to better outcomes for all.





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In recent years, many companies have made strides in increasing the diversity of their teams. In order to gain the benefits of diversity, however, a feeling of inclusiveness has to be present. While diversity refers to the makeup of your organization, inclusiveness is the extent to which members of diverse groups feel they belong and can contribute in meaningful ways. Kathleen L. McGinn explains why companies are increasingly investing in inclusiveness as a way to gain competitive advantage.

Why has inclusiveness become a priority in companies?

Inclusiveness is not about being good-hearted, as some might think. Organizations are increasingly investing in inclusiveness, not just because they believe it's the right thing to do, but because it

brings results. When implemented well, it forms part of a sound business strategy: it allows companies to tap a much larger talent pool and boost their market competitiveness. And in this time of social and technological upheaval, we need the best people in our organizations.

Diverse groups of people are better at creativity because they have different backgrounds and competencies. They think in different ways, so they come up with better and more creative solutions. But the payoff only comes when this diversity is accompanied by a sense of inclusion. In our research at Harvard, we've tried to figure out what companies and executives can do to really foster inclusiveness.

What's the most challenging part about developing inclusiveness?

A key problem is that people often feel they are either *insiders* or *outsiders*. For instance, men more often consider themselves insiders in terms of decision-making and influencing the company. Women, on the other hand, often feel like outsiders.

These kinds of stark differences show up in many interesting ways, such as the emotions felt at work. For example, we asked workers in a tech company to give us four words that described how they felt about working in their company. The four words that men most often gave were "exciting," "learning," "fun" and "chaotic." When we asked women in the company the same question, they also said

