Leading in a world of diversity, equity, and inclusion: creating a sense of belonging

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INTRODUCTION

Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) is not only a matter of compliance, but is imperative for organisational success, good corporate governance, and sustainability of business. In the context of a dynamic and globalised world, organisations have come to embrace diversity and foster inclusive culture, not only as an ethical and moral essential, but also to yield tangible and significant benefits.[1] Employees who are engaged and feel valued are more likely to be committed, dedicated, and motivated to give their best at the workplace[2] (see Figure 1). In an attempt to empower historically disadvantaged persons, South Africa enacted legislation in the first decade of democracy, such as the Employment Equity Act No. 55 of 1998, the Skills Development Act No. 37 of 1998, and the Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Act No. 4 of 2000, amongst others. The measurement of the efficacy of these pieces of legislations has proven to be complex.[3] Reflecting on the progress made, the figures make the task seem impossible. However, learning from previous successful projects, and celebrating small gains, could be the impetus that is required for organisations to pursue the noble idea of DEI. Extensive research and advocacy in the international context have underscored the pivotal role of DEI in the modern workplace.[4] Combining employees from diverse backgrounds, thereby creating an inclusive culture, allows the organisation to receive fresh perspectives about complex problem-solving, sparking creativity and driving needed innovation within the organisation.[5]

The purpose of this reflective article is to remind us of our context and reasons for believing that DEI is imperative for the success of organisations, and to share good stories.

INTER-GENERATIONAL WORKFORCE PROFILE IN A WORLD OF DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

For the first time in history, there are four generations in the workplace as people are living longer and working into their old age. The strategies used to manage different generational groups working in an organisation are expected to focus on reducing the differences between them, whilst maintaining their diversity. Choosing the most effective strategy starts with knowing and understanding the characteristics of each generation[7] (see Table 1).

The generational mix poses a major challenge to leaders in creating an inclusive culture and a sense of belonging for all workers. It is, therefore, important that organisations adopt nuanced and tailored strategies that acknowledge and accommodate intersecting identities of the workforce, to enhance psycho-safety within teams and aid employees to be authentic.[1] A one-size-fits-all approach should no longer be the order of the day in the workplace. Each generation, by and large, has its own unique world view and is motivated by different factors.

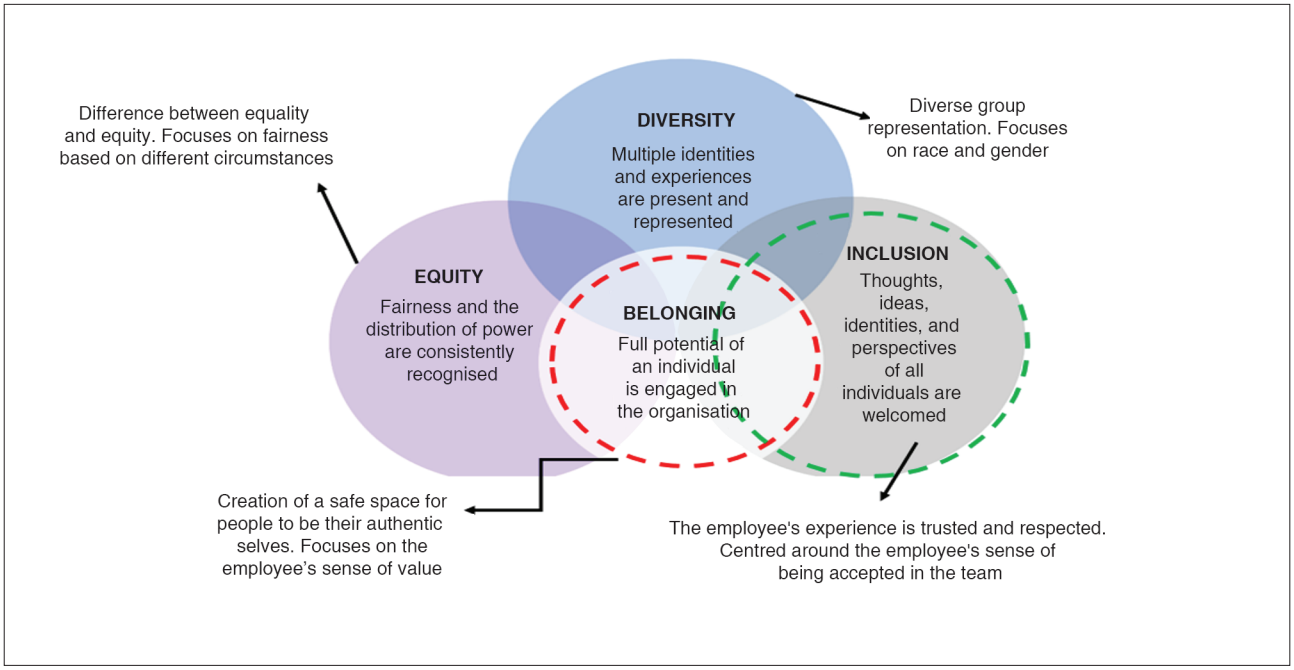

Figure 1. Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging
Adapted from Burnette, 2019 [6]

Table 1. Traits of different generations

Boomers
Motivated by: positive attitude, economic prosperity, navigating complex environment
Worldview: strong work ethic, resilience, no-nonsense attitude
Career: organisational career defined by the employee

Gen X
Motivated by: independence, clearly formulated expectations, career development, short-term results
Worldview: autonomous, pragmatic, lifelong learning, opportunities to enjoy life
Career: loyal to the profession, not the employer

Millennials
Motivated by: responsibility, the quality of their manager, unique work experiences
Worldview: seek challenge, development, growth, fun, work-life balance
Career: work with the organisation, not for them

Gen Z
Motivated by: diversity, personalisation, individuality, creativity, innovation
Worldview: self-identity, value independence and individuality, exploration, new technologies
Career: want to enjoy themselves in the workplace and prove themselves

It is, therefore, imperative for leaders to treat work team members as individuals, if they are to build high-performing teams and create sustainable organisations.

Source: Managing different generations in the workplace [7]

Table 2. Leadership and female representation at Harmony Gold Mining Company

	HDPs[1]			Female HDPs		
	Target %	Actual FY24	Actual FY23	Target %	Actual FY24	Actual FY23
Board[2]	50	**67**	67	20	**25**	25
Executive management	50	**57**	60	20	**24**	25
Senior management	60	**62**	58	25	**27**	27
Middle management	60	**63**	60	25	**29**	28
Junior management	70	**72**	70	30	**21**	21
Core and critical skills	60	**74**	73	n/a	**n/a**	n/a
People living with disabilities	1.5	**0.3**	0.3	n/a	**n/a**	n/a

[1] HDPs include women and exclude white males and foreign nationals
[2] Harmony's three executive directors are included as board members

FY: financial year, HDPs: historically disadvantaged persons

Source: ESG Report 2024 [8]

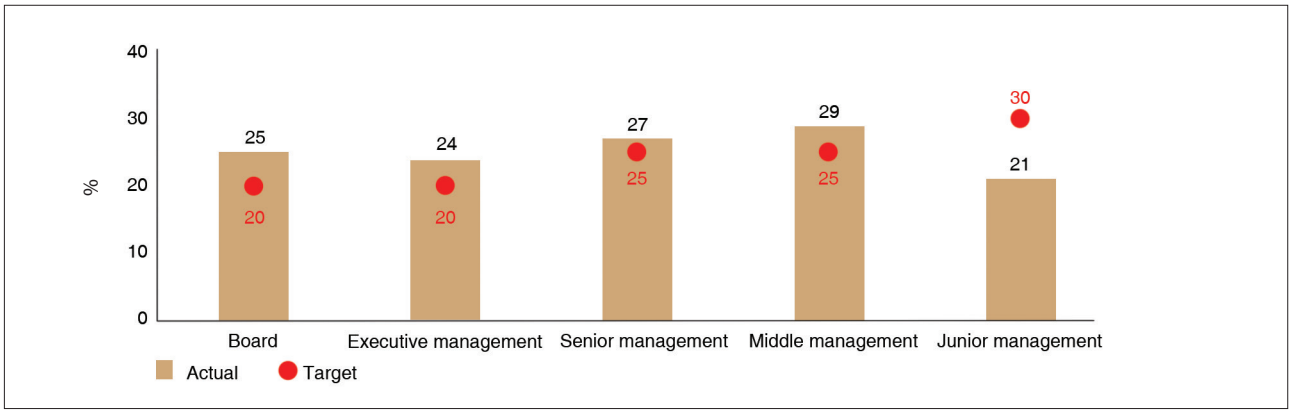

Figure 2. Women in the Harmony Gold Mining Company workforce

Source: ESG Report 2024 [8]

CELEBRATING SMALL GAINS

At Harmony Gold Mining Company, we firmly believe in mining with purpose, and building a sustainable future, where mining is not only about extracting resources but also about empowering communities, advancing environmental stewardship, and driving inclusive economic growth.

Harmony is intentional and strives to maintain and enhance DEI programmes across all its operations. We recognise that mining is still a predominately male industry, and we foster an inclusive culture through development of gender-sensitive policies. We aim to create a level playing field for all employees, with an equity eye on women with respect to skills development and representation

across all (including technical) levels (see Table 2 and Figure 2). We also focus on creating a conducive and safe environment for women, so that they want to work for Harmony. We are intentional about understanding gender issues across all our operations, with the aim of continuously improving the everyday working experiences of our employees, particularly women. To support this, we conducted a survey about gender-based bias and workplace bullying, including sexual harassment. The findings have been widely communicated to all our employees, stakeholders, and executives up to Board levels, where implementation plans are monitored.

Harmony has been recognised for its commitment to gender equality, as evidenced by its inclusion, for the fifth consecutive year, in the Bloomberg Gender Equality Index. The Index tracks the performance of public companies committed to supporting gender equality through policy development, representation, and transparency. In 2024, Harmony was honoured for its efforts in striving for DEI, and was awarded the overall winner in the Standard Bank Top Women Awards, in the category of Standard Bank Top Women Business in Construction, Infrastructure and Mining 2024.

The story of Khethiwe Mothobi, the managing director of Tailor Made Trading and Projects bears testament to this. The company, which was founded by Khethiwe in 2017, is based in Welkom, Matjhabeng Municipality. It is the only black women- and youth-owned company in South Africa that specialises in demolition, rehabilitation, and shaft filling.

Khethiwe, as the founder and managing director of Tailor Made, shared her success story with the Harmony family. She partnered with Harmony Enterprise and Supplier Development (ESD) for procurement readiness, gap analyses, and pre-technical assessment in a mentorship programme. In 2020, her company was awarded its first contract; in 2021, she received a three-year contract to supply bulk cement; in 2022, she was awarded a five-year contract to run the Harmony canteen at the company's mine worker hostels; and, in 2023, she was awarded additional rehabilitation contracts. In 2024, Khethiwe was featured in the 19th Edition of Standard Bank Top Women.[9]

Khethiwe was asked: "*How has Harmony's ESD and mentorship impacted you and your business?*" She responded: *"Harmony was a turning point to me. The mentorship sessions from ESD equipped me in ways no other school of life could have. I learned about managing finances, human resources practices, and importance of having systems, procedures, and policies in the workplace. My workforce grew by 50% just from the investment Harmony made and contributed to Tailor Made. My finance got a massive boost as well, but most importantly, we managed to grow our service offering not just vertically anymore; we are now horizontal as well. I can never thank Harmony enough for what they did and continue to do for me and Tailor Made."*

This is one of many beautiful stories of meaningful partnership that gives Harmony, as a company, a reason to continue to empower women in the interests of creating an inclusive economy.

IMPORTANCE OF DEI IN THE WORKPLACE

- Improves bias awareness – avoiding unconscious biases in decision-making
- Promotes a healthy and conducive working environment for all
- Increases the talent pool (attracting Millennials and Gen Z employees)
- Boosts employee engagement (creating successful teams)
- Improves decision-making (multiple perspectives)
- Improves performance (diverse companies were reported to have up to 36% more profitability) (Hunt et al., 2015)[10]

A Deloitte University study, published in 2020, found that DEI and belonging offers a company a 46% competitive advantage in the industry, 40% better and more accurate decision-making, 34% increase in financial performance, improved retention rates, and more cutting-edge innovation.[11]

CONCLUSION

There has been progress in promoting DEI, but challenges remain. With commitment from leadership, companies can employ various strategies to enhance DEI within the workplace. Companies that prioritise DEI will enjoy significant benefits, including an abundance of innovation and creativity, increase in employee engagement, improvement in retention rates, and improved financial performance. Implementation of gender-sensitive and anti-discriminatory policies improves organisational ability to promote DEI.

Organisations that show commitment to DEI are recognised and honoured by global societies/bodies that promote DEI. For the managers of today to manage intergenerational group differences effectively, whilst maintaining diversity, they need to understand and appreciate the characteristics of each generation.

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