

talent navigator series

the inclusion imperative.

Taking meaningful action on
diversity, equity and inclusion.



introduction.

Employers have long aspired to create more diverse workforces, more equitable outcomes for employees and a more inclusive workplace culture. To make a significant long-term impact, companies must be willing to take a driven approach to DEI and tackle it like any other business-critical priority, turning rhetoric into meaningful action. Through this discussion, hear how practitioners and leaders across Asia Pacific move beyond corporate trend to business imperative with tactical applications, increase diversity at all levels of the organisation and strengthen leadership and business accountability for diversity and inclusion.

moderator.



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panelists.



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Randstad Sourceright would like to thank our esteemed panellists for a passionate discussion. To listen to the full recording, please [click here](#).

DISCLOSURE: The following is not a transcript taken verbatim but a brief summary with the intent to capture key sentiments and perspectives shared by the panelists.

What does meaningful progress within DEI mean to you, and what does it look like today?



Traditional diversity initiatives fail when the agenda is focused more on compliance, policy, demographical data, targets and quotas. A mature environment is characterised by advocacy inside and outside the workplace, driving systemic change and allyship through inclusive behaviours. When organisations are more concerned with people coming out as allies than about people coming out from the LGBTQ+ community, that is meaningful progress.

Real progress is when each employee and person feels that they are equally responsible for making this world a little more beautiful, and when each of us can take these conversations and attitudes back home, and when confronted, can lovingly question or challenge the bias and prejudice that persists.



However much we have progressed, DEI has not been without threat of being pulled down by long standing forces like politics and policies, religion, business progress and profits - all of which can significantly slow down progress. So as an advocate or practitioner, how does one sustain momentum on inclusion work when it's convoluted by external factors? This is why Allyship is so important.

Advocating for greater inclusion isn't a tick box exercise where completing an e-learning module or unconscious bias training makes us an ally, although that's important. True allyship is a verb and it is important to remember that it is what one does once the training is over that lends itself to real progress - within the workplace, within the community and all the way back to the family dining table. The purpose is to create and foster an environment where different individuals feel psychologically safe enough to express their true selves, without faking it to fit in.

What is the biggest shift in the DEI space in the last couple of years and the challenges and barriers that persist?



The conversation on DEI has moved enough that we have diversity dialogues happening far more frequently, and we are seeing a movement undoubtedly, which is greatly reflected by the recent global and social movements. But the problem is that DEI has also become somewhat of a fad and there's a lot of branding and communications surrounding it without recognising the mindspace, education and bandwidth that the topic truly demands.

On the topic of talent, are we investing enough in developing diverse talent and creating pathways for them into certain sectors? Employers need to not only source diverse talent - for example, women in Tech or in Manufacturing - but to commit to investing and building partnerships with organisations and governments to build and nurture diverse talent pools.

Finally, DEI can be exclusionary in its own way and there are several underrepresented segments or subcultures that do not get mainstream attention within the discourse. For example, are we talking enough about appearance, ethnicity, parenting/caregiving status, relationship status, thinking styles or introversion and extroversion, age and mental health?

In the same way, we have applied a limiting narrative to some of the conversations. This is the opportunity for us to think more holistically about DEI because so much is still being left out of consideration and discussion. We need to look at DEI far more holistically and broadly to better reflect upon everything an organisation does - from its talent, systems, processes, business, conversations and culture and try to see where an inclusion lens can be applied.

Employers today recognise the value of embracing diversity for the strength and value of different perspectives. Across the breadth of diversity initiatives, how can you translate aspiration into practical application in terms of talent selection and career progression processes to build more diverse teams?



Many companies across all industries have set ambitious targets to increase women representation. The tech sector has come a long way in its progress towards gender parity. At foodpanda, nearly 50 percent of our regional and local operations team are female - which is above industry average, but still something we will continue to champion as a focus.

With Singapore as foodpanda's base, the company is committed to continuing investments to grow Asia's digital economy and tech community. In July 2022, it launched PowerUp!Tech Academy, comprising various programmes and partnerships with relevant government authorities and tertiary institutions like [Nanyang Technological University](#) to help groom the local tech talent pool, upskill riders and help merchants digitalise across APAC. In partnership with the [Singapore University of Technology and Design](#), foodpanda signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to nurture future tech talent in Singapore. Finally, together with parent company Delivery Hero's [Delivery Hero Ventures](#), foodpanda has invested more than SG\$120 million in Singapore based regional tech startups to create a more inclusive ecosystem and digital economy.

In terms of talent selection, foodpanda uses tools to help reduce the bias and encourage diversity of thought, which is a big focus. We utilise a diversity recruiting software that syncs to our applicant tracking system (ATS) and helps make hiring decisions bias-free, so that we are hiring on actual skills.



IBM has a rich heritage in diversity and inclusion with many policies, programmes and technology in place to hire more diverse talent. However, inclusive hiring and career progression is not fool-proof even with the help of technology and AI.

The moment people interact with one another, unconscious human bias comes into play. So the importance of awareness and mindfulness is foundational to enabling more diverse and inclusive talent selection and career progression.

This is because awareness is the seed that inspires individuals to take personal responsibility in shaping their teams, workplace, industry, community and beyond.

In a visual originally produced by Craig Froehle on equity, it showcases three individuals looking over a fence, with some of them standing on boxes to gain the same perspective and vantage point of the landscape.

In order to better welcome and support the diversity agenda, do you think that hiring managers should be given additional relief on productivity objectives and the ramp to productivity, and should organisations provide additional coaching to better support individuals on that path to productivity?



Aspiring towards a more equitable world means that we must acknowledge that everyone has had a different starting point. As a leader, it's our responsibility to use resources to try and bring everybody to equal standing. Then you can apply merit. If you apply merit at the very beginning, then you start to see homogenous teams emerge and the same type of people taking up leadership roles, leaving out minority representation.

Sometimes our voice alone within the community is not enough and that is why practitioners like us use the power of the brand to push things forward, because the might of the brand has money, reach and impact. That being said, while DEI is the biggest strategy pillar in every organisation, it often has the smallest budget in the company. So you have to be extremely creative with corporate innovations, partnerships and collaborations between like-minded brands.

Here are two examples at Manulife:

Disability hiring and inclusion is a focus at Manulife in Asia. Leaders have a commitment towards a 1% representation target in 2022 for people with disabilities in all markets in Asia. We are focussed on building the disability narrative within Manulife and hiring more talent with disabilities, offering hiring managers bursary funds that are fully funded for three years to reduce friction around budget and productivity targets.

To support this target, Manulife also partners with local NGOs such as [Springboard Consulting](#), [SENSational Foundation](#), [CareER Hong Kong](#), [Philippines Autism Society](#) and [Leonard Cheshire Foundation](#) who collectively support Manulife through training, sourcing of persons with disabilities (PWD) candidates and access to resources in developing accessibility and accountability guides & standards. Although Manulife's involvement with disability inclusion is relatively new in Asia, its progress has advanced quickly.

Another example is the Diversity Champion Summer Internship Program in Hong Kong launched in 2021 together with Herbert Smith Freehills and Hyatt Hotels Corporation. This was the first cross-industry partnership of its kind in Hong Kong, offering a rotational internship program that exposed six students to different industries and career paths, all from diverse backgrounds: ethnic minorities, disabilities and LGBT. For one month, the students worked across a range of jobs at each of the participating companies. The programme is now launching in other countries across the region.

Are there additional examples of DEI related partnerships and initiatives from foodpanda?



foodpanda also sees tremendous value in building strong partnerships within the community to help drive our key areas of focus, one of them being disability inclusion. We are proud partners with a few organisations in Singapore, specifically [HIDE & SEEK](#) and [Tomowork](#), where we joined the 2022 Tomowork Talent Accelerator as a corporate partner for a 6 weeks programme with persons with disabilities & students with special educational needs to enter a business challenge, work on innovative solutions, pitched their prototypes and contribute to product development ideas. The final outcome of the programme was wildly inspiring and rewarding.

Another practical way of bringing DEI into action is to review the policies and ensure they are relevant with the times, and truly inclusive. For example, several of our family care policies are not exclusive to married partners in traditional heterosexual relationships, but also include cohabiting partners.

What actions can individuals take inside and outside of the workplace to become better allies?



I would like to encourage individuals to take simple actions that hold so much potential. Firstly, do not make assumptions about the experience held by another person. Stay curious and humble by simply asking. Secondly, expose yourself beyond the circuit you are used to, and invite someone different to breakfast, lunch or dinner. Thirdly, engage in dialogue without a paralyzing fear. Rest assured, people watch for intent, not verbiage.

Can you offer other practical applications for how to strengthen leadership and business accountability?



Sometimes it's about showing that DEI can generate money. In our industry, our employees are also our customers and from a business perspective, there are many underrepresented communities that are underinsured, like HIV+ individuals and same-sex partners. Developing specific products for customers in this community has been one more way to pay better attention and drive the inclusion agenda.



It's crucial that all leaders take accountability and responsibility for hiring, promoting, and retaining diverse talent. Their 'skin must be in the game' just as much as DEI and HR functions. At IBM, we train our leaders to understand that DEI is a human and business imperative and when a leader gets appraised, they do get an inclusion score associated with their performance appraisals. This helps to encourage leaders to be bold and brave allies.



The mission of strengthening business accountability is made possible when we encourage leaders to explore the aspects of diversity and inclusion that they are most passionate about. When we look at companies that have done this work very well, there is usually one leader who has put their reality and personal journey behind the movement towards progress.

access more insights on how to
drive your DEI efforts forward



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