

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Businesses with diversity and inclusion have an edge



BELONGING

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DIVERSITY

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IDENTITY

Speakers at the Middle East edition of the Dive In Festival shared insights into the issues of wellbeing, mental health and the future of diversity and inclusion in the workplace and how companies can address them.

By Cynthia Ang

This year's Middle East edition of the global festival for diversity and inclusion in insurance aligned with Dive In's theme of 'Active Allyship', calling on the industry to turn its intention into action. It aims to educate, equip and empower leaders and all people in positions of privilege to understand how to be allies and champions for all.

In Dubai, the virtual event was themed 'My wellbeing matters – strategies to improve and thrive' and shed light on how companies can survive and thrive and what they can do to support their employees' wellness and mental health. The Dubai event was supported by AIG, the Chartered Insurance Institute, Chubb, Kennedys, Lisa Drury Consulting, Lloyd's and Mercer Marsh Benefits.

It's OK not to be OK

Mercer Marsh Benefits senior employee benefits consultant Samantha Hayes said the pace of change inherent in businesses has been accelerated by the pandemic as witnessed by these measures:

- 87% arranged for all or some employees to work from home
- 58% arranged special flexible hours
- 35% coordinated virtual wellbeing resources
- 44% addressed employees' psychological stress
- 85% cancelled all international travel

More companies are now seeking help on the 'what' and 'how' to implement mental health programmes. Ms Hayes said, "In addition to fostering an

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Maya Mattar
Positive Coaching
Psychology

Samantha Hayes
Senior Employee Benefits
Consultant
Mercer Marsh Benefits

environment where people can thrive, there are four main pillars of mental health benefits that employers can offer.”

The pillars are:

- Prevention: Resilience, mindfulness and digital solutions
- Access, treatment and coverage: Employee assistance programmes, networks, speciality areas (e.g., addiction) and virtual care
- Support at work: Colleague manager training and peer-to-peer support
- Support away from work: Flexible working hours, sabbaticals and remote working

She said, “The modern workforce has changed. I don’t think it is ever going back to the pre-pandemic normal. As an organisation, we need to keep up with the modern workforce today.”

Sharing her personal experience in overcoming mental health burnout, Ms Hayes said, “It’s OK not to be OK. The reality is that everyone has some mental health-related issues such as anxiety and stress. It can be very minor or very extreme.”

Remote working and isolation have made the situation worse, so her advice was to talk to someone instead of keeping silent or seek professional help if needed.

Psychological safety in the workplace

Separately, psychologist Maya Mattar discussed the importance of creating wellbeing, managing emotions

and improving psychological safety and order. She said diversity and inclusion efforts contribute directly to creating psychological safety in the workplace, thereby contributing to the overall employee wellbeing.

“Psychological safety is a condition in which you feel included, safe to learn, safe to continue and safe to challenge the status quo – all without fear of being embarrassed, marginalised or punished in some way,” said Ms Mattar. “This is the main objective of creating diversity, inclusion and psychological safety in the organisations ... Organisations that are going to provide this type of environment will have an edge and will retain more of their employees.”

Allies and courage matter

As part of this year’s Dive In Festival in Jordan, IGI’s PR and marketing AVP and diversity and inclusion leader Aaida Abu Jaber interviewed Jordanian/Palestinian film director Najwa Najjar on how she became a successful writer and director in the male-dominated movie industry.



Ms Najjar said the importance of having allies that encourage and strengthen career progress, no matter the industry, is integral to the overall success of the team.

She described the younger generations as “major change-makers in the world” and they are becoming more important and influential because of technology and alternative media. She discussed the importance of the adequate and fair representation of women in the workplace, with the belief that a woman’s role can be infinite. Ms Najjar said, “I’m a writer, a director and a mum.”

Ms Najjar’s parting wisdom for the aspiring professional in any industry was, “Take the plunge. Hold your breath and you will come out on the other side. And if the door is closed, take the window.” She said, “You must be absolutely sure, determined and persistent. And don’t let anyone ever tell you that you can’t do it. Because you can”.

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