

Thought Leaders

Ellie Angell on The Virtuous Circle of DE&I: "I Am Better At My Job Than I Was Before"

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In case you've been living under the proverbial rock for the last few months, it's clear we're officially in the age of Trump 2.0.

Love him or loathe him, there's no denying that things have changed; not least of which is the concerted, energetic efforts of his administration to destroy the concept and application of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I) programs; a virus that is spreading to other western nations, Australia included.

As a trans woman, I'm caught in some big crosshairs right now, and it feels like 'trans' as an issue is so divisive that it is essentially leading 'anti-DE&I' ideology. I'm a poster-girl for why DE&I is so dangerous.

This is as big a case of the tail wagging the dog as I've ever seen, because – of course, and obviously – the scale and breadth of DE&I is so, so much bigger: people of colour, people of different cultural backgrounds, different religious beliefs, different socio-economic backgrounds, different physical abilities. People who are neurodiverse. Women – all women.

I'm not a trained DE&I professional. As a lay-person, I can only add real value through personal perspective and lived experience. But I believe improving people's wellbeing through DE&I programs leads to better productivity and commercial outcomes, which then leads to improved

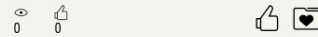
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wellbeing. It's the virtuous circle of DE&I.

That's certainly been the case for me. I am more professionally effective, and of more value to my organisation post-gender affirmation. For the first time, I feel I'm in an inclusive environment that actually supports me, and I am better at my job than I was before.

Here's my circle:

With fear of discovery or 'what if' removed, and with an inclusive workplace (and industry) around me, I feel a greater sense of acceptance and security and, over time, ever-more normalised, rather than someone being stared at.

Feeling accepted and secure means that I don't have to 'hide in plain sight' the outer essence of who I am – which, in my case, is my clothing, my appearance, my body-language, my voice, my reactions. With less fear of gender-based reprisal, there's less hesitancy; I'm more open and honest with people, and have no discomfort about just being myself in a professional context. This makes me more likeable (this isn't just me guessing; many people have told me that my general likability, as I turn my face away from shadow and towards the sunlight, has improved).

Being more likeable washes away a good deal of negative self-perception, with the net effect that I have far less work-related anxiety.

Having less work-related anxiety makes me more approachable. People are open with me, in different ways, which leads to better professional discussions internally and externally.

Being approachable equates to a boost in what I'm terming mutual confidence – my confidence in myself and others, and others confidence in themselves and me.

Being more confident gives me improved work-powers – decisiveness, willingness to speak up, empathy, consultative sensitivity, professional expression – which can, if I get things right, lead to better commercial outcome, and for me, professional opportunity.

And, to complete the circle, improved work powers and professional opportunity gives me a greater sense of acceptance and security in the workplace.

Despite my surname, I'm no angel; like everyone else, I'm a work in progress. I don't always react in the right way to things. Some people will still dislike me. I'll still make lots of mistakes. You get the idea.

But there is no doubt that the existence of DE&I has made me a more commercially effective person. A better human being. A more fulfilled human being. It is, literally, life-saving.

But I'm still a lay-person. Still a sample size of one. Let's broaden the argument.

The anti-DE&I efforts of Trump and his cohort of mostly white, mostly male, universally affluent, able-bodied and (at least publicly) heteronormative buddies are ably supported by powerful corporate entities, which appear to be so immediately cowed by or supportive of right wing political hubris, or so immediately scared of customer or stock market backlash, that they roll back their investment into their own efforts.

All this conveniently ignores the fact that DE&I is not political; also, it isn't fluffy woke leftist propaganda. My virtuous circle exists. DE&I programs, via improvements in people's wellbeing, opportunity creation and cultural or workplace environment improvements, have demonstrable commercial benefit.

If we search 'Studies on workplace happiness and productivity', what do we find? There's the University of Oxford's 'Happy Workers are 13% More Productive' (a 2020 study); Harvard Business Review's 'Creating a Happier Workplace is Possible – and Worth It' (2023); National Institutes of Health's 'Are Happy Workers More Productive?... Employees [in the banking sector] who are happier at work cross-sell better' (2020); and University of Pennsylvania's 'The Science of Happiness at Work...Work cultures that embrace positive psychology are more likely to result in healthy work environment...' (2023). among

many others.

Now, let's search, 'Does DE&I promote happiness in the workplace?'

Again, many results. I'll pick out one, an article from Forbes in 2023, which states, "While there is ample evidence that DE&I can bring benefits such as innovation, creativity, customer satisfaction and employee engagement, these outcomes are often hard to quantify and attribute to specific DE&I actions", but goes on to explain that "A new study by TechTarget's Enterprise Strategy Group (ESG), sponsored by Amazon Web Services, addresses this issue by trying to quantify the impact of a well-executed DE&I strategy."

Basically, the study found a clear and positive correlation between the maturity of an organisation's DE&I program, and workplace positivity.

Imagine the vicious inverse of my virtuous circle – where I'm not accepted or sure of acceptance, in a non-inclusive workplace (or a workplace in which DE&I initiatives and programs are publicly being rolled back).

As I see it, the heart of DE&I beats for one cause. Better humans, for better humans - for us all to be better humans, to level playing fields and enable other humans to better themselves.

In the age of Trump 2.0, let's not ever lose our feel for that heartbeat. Let's never stop trying to keep it alive.



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