

# SIGMA

## Leadership Series



# Great Leaders Value Diversity



## GREAT LEADERS VALUE DIVERSITY

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**Diversity: the art of thinking independently together.**

**– Malcolm Forbes**

As work becomes more complex, innovative decision-making is needed to give organizations a competitive advantage. Organizations can unlock new insights and facilitate creative problem solving by building teams that have diverse perspectives. For example, research has demonstrated that cognitive diversity in teams is correlated with greater creativity and intrinsic motivation of team members.<sup>1</sup>

Valuing diversity includes celebrating individual differences and engaging with others in a dignified manner. Recognizing the importance of diversity goes beyond appreciating the need for individuals of various ages, genders, races, and ethnicities in your organization. Diversity also exists in terms of experiences, perspectives, education, attributes, etc. A distinction can be made between ‘surface’ diversity (i.e., demographic differences, such as race, that may be notable immediately) and ‘deep’ diversity (i.e., differences in beliefs, values, and experiences that may take more time to emerge).<sup>2</sup> While valuing both surface and deep diversity are important, this guide will focus specifically on the significance of leveraging deep diversity in the workplace.

In assessing your ability to value diversity, ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I value input from employees across all levels of the organization?
- Am I providing direct reports with the opportunity to share their ideas?
- Do I allow one person’s perspective to dominate when making important decisions?
- Do I facilitate independent brainstorming sessions?
- Am I leveraging cross-functional potential?

### Improve Your Valuing Diversity Skills

**A culture of valuing diversity starts at the top:** We tend to look to leaders for ideas on how to act in the workplace. As a leader, illustrating to your direct reports that you value diversity can signal to them that they should also value diversity.<sup>3</sup> Top leaders can illustrate to employees that they want to build a culture of inclusion by engaging in conversations about diversity and speaking out against homogenous thinking and decision-making.

**Provide ways for employees at all levels to connect:** Facilitating informal and formal networking opportunities for individuals at all levels helps them build diverse professional networks. Providing employees with the space to connect across the organization can allow them to find things in common with one another and can ultimately lead to a more inclusive workplace.

**Add objectivity to decision-making processes:** Science-based processes for making hiring and promotion decisions can increase diversity of thought and reduce homogenous thinking in the workplace. Adding objectivity to important hiring and promotion decisions can ensure that your organization is selecting the right person for each position and not relying on subjective opinions or experiences when making important decisions.<sup>4</sup>

## Start Doing These 3 Things Now to Value Diversity Better

The following steps can help you improve at valuing diversity:

1. **Get to know your team.** Show your appreciation for individuality within your team by making an effort to get to know your team members. This can give you a better understanding of who they are and where they come from regarding the perspectives they bring to the workplace. Dedicating time to discuss non-work topics when appropriate can serve as an indication to team members that they are more than their work and can bring their authentic selves to the workplace.
2. **Guard against groupthink.** Leverage diversity of opinions within your team by guarding against groupthink. Groupthink is a phenomenon in which members of a group tend to endorse decisions without thinking about alternative solutions. This process does not capitalize on the benefits of a cognitively diverse team, and results in a decline in decision-making efficacy.<sup>5</sup> To mitigate groupthink, encourage individual brainstorming before sharing ideas with team members. Dedicating time to generating individual solutions is more likely to produce a variety of ideas rather than endorsing the first one that is brought to the table. Generating a variety of ideas also serves to stimulate conversation, which helps promote critical thinking and constructive debate; two elements of teamwork that are largely absent during groupthink.
3. **Communication is key.** Research suggests that initial differences among team members can be overcome by fostering a culture of collaboration. As teams communicate more frequently, surface-level diversity (such as age and gender) has significantly less influence on performance outcomes.<sup>2</sup> To ensure that your organization is able to mitigate any conflict a diverse team may have, facilitate a culture of collaboration and frequent communication. This can entail things like regular meetings, or keeping up to date on ongoing projects with a communications platform, etc.

## Resources



[Pursuing Cognitive Diversity with Matthew Syed](#)



[The Importance of Diversity of Thought](#)



Develop your ability to prioritize by taking advantage of SIGMA's [coaching](#) services.

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## References

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