CoachHub

Creating a Culture of Diversity and Inclusion Through Digital Coaching

Index

INTRODUCTION:

Why globalisation and advances in technology are increasing the need for more progressive diversity and inclusion initiatives (and how coaching can help)

We live in an increasingly connected and globalised world. Research shows that we might at most be separated by 3.74 degrees from another person. This is unprecedented and much of this connectivity to the rest of the globe is due to digitalisation. Technology has played a huge part in enabling this global connection through social networks, digital tools and workspaces, and increased automation. Beyond everyday life, globalisation and technology have also changed our workplaces. For many international companies it has become normal to have a video call with Singapore in the morning and with San Francisco at night. Colleagues are spread across the globe and thus workplaces have been enriched by different cultures, experiences and languages - a global workforce serving a global customer base.

The result of all these changes are more diverse teams in terms of age, experience, gender, ethnicity, physical and neurological abilities, culture, religious beliefs and functional background, than ever before. And it has been established that increased organisational diversity has benefits that range from better brand perception to increased employee engagement and even an improved bottom-line performance. Diverse workforces are also more disruptive and innovative, socially diverse teams outperform more homogenous groups from problem-solving to productivity, they are better set for growth and capturing new markets, and diversity opens up a huge talent pool.

However, though businesses have been aware of the benefits of creating a diverse and inclusive culture, progress has been slow. The gender pay gap, for example, is still present with **US women making 79c compared to every dollar paid to men, and this comparison is even worse for women of colour.** And there are many more examples where diversity is still lacking or where diverse people are experiencing discrimination. How is this still happening?

In addition, it is important to differentiate between diversity and inclusion (D&I). Too often they are thrown together as if they have the same meaning, while representing distinctive challenges to organisations.

Diversity is recognised in the literature to have two levels, the surface level such as demography, gender, age and ethnicity and deep-level diversity which refers to characteristics that are not immediately obvious, such as

employees' education, occupational background, experiences and their values. When implementing diversity programs, most organisations start by focusing on surface-level diversity as it is more observable and has a more immediate impact. However, for long-term diversity, organisations must consider both surface diversity and deep-level diversity before departing on their journey towards inclusion.

Inclusion then is defined as the degree to which all employees consider themselves to be valued members of their organisation. It requires that employees experience treatment that satisfies their requirements for both uniqueness and belongingness. CoachHub coach Kaveh Mir explains it well: *"Diversity does not mean inclusion. Sometimes, we have diversity around the table but not inclusion. Diversity means we have everyone around the table. Inclusion means that everyone feels safe to speak. Inclusion is more psychological."*

The following pages will explore what has been stopping organisations and teams from embracing diversity and inclusiveness and how digital coaching can support this journey. We will do so by looking at shortcomings of current solutions, how we can address inclusion and finally solutions to foster both diversity and inclusion through digital coaching. Because increasing diversity and inclusion is about more than hiring and promoting people who look a little different to the rest of your employees and waiting for profits to increase. D&I requires a head-to-toe cultural commitment to ensuring that all employees' experiences and opinions are heard, valued and considered. In the following we will discuss how digital coaching can help on this journey.
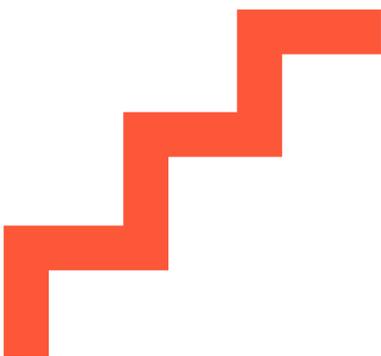
Why diversity trainings fall short

One can argue that diversity training workshops succeed because they break down stereotypes and encourage empathy. However, in a review of hundreds of studies on prejudice-reducing interventions, Paluck & Green (2009) found that the effects of workplace diversity training remain largely unknown.

Considering that **corporations spend an estimated $8 billion annually on diversity trainings** (Hansen, 2003), the evidence suggests that this is not money well spent. Whilst the business case for diversity and inclusion strengthens, its progress is slow (McKinsey, 2020), despite research telling us that discrimination still very much exists; both in its blatant form and via unconscious bias, which impacts numerous minority groups (Jones et al 2017, Talaska et al 2008).

This isn't new information. Research has long shown that classroom-based training alone fails when it comes to mindset change, development of interpersonal skills, and sustainable behavioural change. If new information isn't applied, we'll forget about 75% of it after just six days. Furthermore, personalised approaches have the strongest impact on the transfer of learning.

Booster Event

Memory Retention [%]

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8

Days After Training
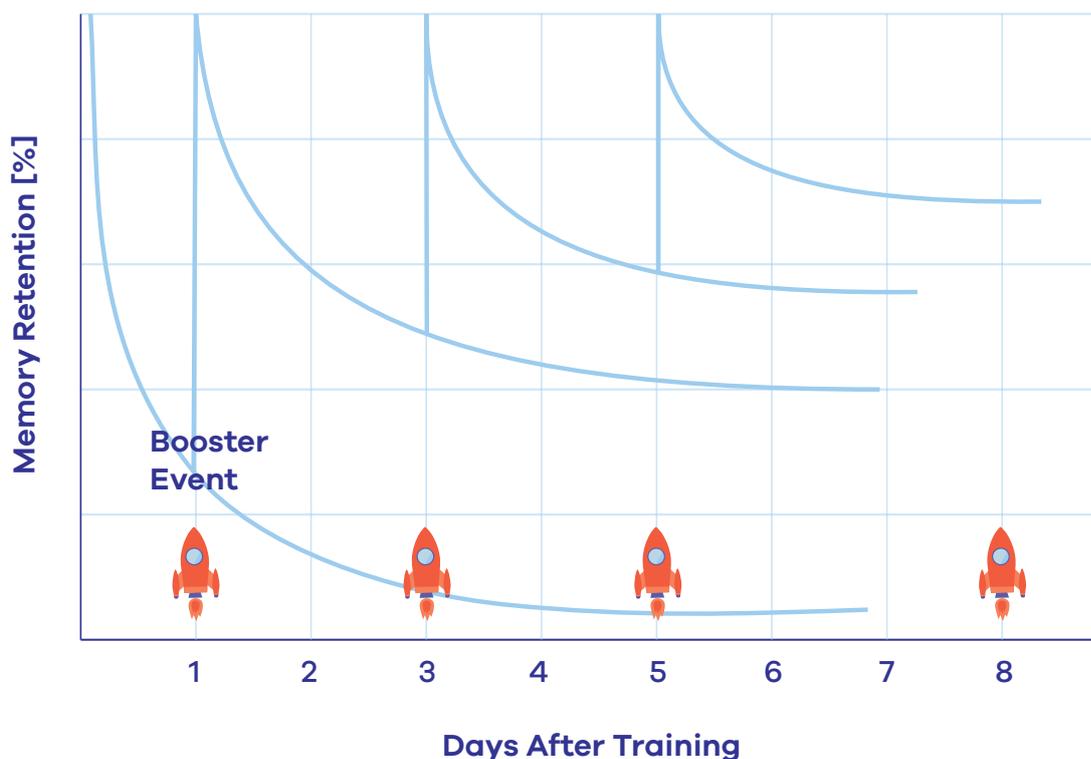
Ebbinghaus' forgetting curve

In order to make any real change, prejudice-reducing interventions need to tackle both mindset and behaviour change. This requires an ability to understand our own and others' mental state, also known as mentalisation, and is what underlies overt behaviour. This is what leads to actionable allyship, which Sheree Atcheson states *"is a continual investment of time in supporting others, holding ourselves accountable when mistakes are made, apologising and being prepared to rework the approach towards allyship as needs change".*

Ultimately, this indicates that diversity training is missing an important element - a psychologically safe environment for employees to immediately apply learnings from training into their personalised context, and be held accountable for implementing changes.

THE ROLE OF BELONGING AND UNIQUENESS IN EMBRACING DIVERSITY AND CREATING AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE

Belongingness and uniqueness

Diversity training alone cannot create a diverse and inclusive organisation. Companies must also address the inherent tension that lies at the heart of organisations' desire to create an inclusive culture. To feel wholly included, employees require both a sense of belongingness and a sense of uniqueness. They want to be seen as both individuals and as part of a group.

What is belongingness?

Famous humanistic psychologist, Carl R. Rogers explained belonging as a unique and subjective experience that relates to a desire for connection with others, the need for positive regard and the yearning for interpersonal connection: *"... a sense of belonging does not depend on participation with, or proximity to, others or groups. Rather, belonging comes from a perception of quality, meaning and satisfaction with social connections."*

The failure to create a sense of belonging is part of the reason why so many D&I programs fail and **40% of the workforce still claim to feel isolated at work**. And isolated employees neither feel nor foster a wider sense of inclusion - a fact that gains even more significance when considering the challenges of creating a sense of belonging for remote workers.
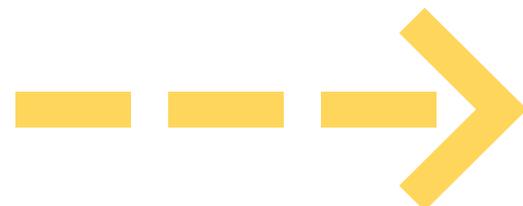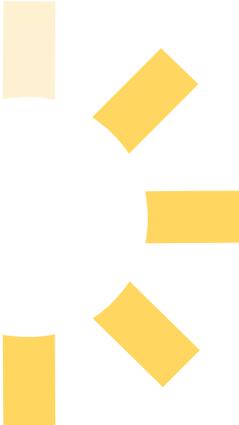
What is uniqueness

While employees want to feel included and like part of a group, they also want to be recognised and accepted for their individual backgrounds, experiences, skills, personalities, values and ambitions.

It can be tempting for even well-meaning organisations to arrange and consider employees as only members of groups, but that is to overlook intersectionality — the fact that no employee falls into just one category — which can be especially damaging as it pertains to diversity and inclusion.

For example, a black woman may experience bias for being an ethnic minority, a gender minority, and maybe even a mother. She is all of those things equally and at all times and faces challenges that neither black men nor white women face. Therefore, it's important to understand her and how she can be valued, heard and included as an individual.

Positive outcomes of belongingness and uniqueness

A highly-diverse workforce is associated with a whole range of advantages over a more homogenous group, from increased innovation and better decision-making to economic growth. However, in certain circumstances, more diversity within teams can also lead to increased conflict levels, which can limit the group's efficiency in bringing ideas to fruition.

Creating a company culture in which both minority and majority employees feel that they belong and feel that their unique perspectives are seen, can minimise conflict and resistance and can maximise the gains associated with diversity.

In Workplace Contextual Supports for LGBT Employees: A Review, Meta-Analysis, and Agenda for future Research, for example, Webster et al. find that an LGBT supportive climate with supportive workplace relationships has a significantly more positive impact on work attitudes and stress and wellbeing levels, than simply adopting formal LGBT policies and practices.

Other benefits of adopting a culture of belongingness and uniqueness have been shown to include:

- High-quality relations with group members.
- A sense of psychological safety.
- Increased job satisfaction.
- High intention to stay with the company.
- Improved job performance.
- A rise in organisational citizenship and organisational commitment.
- A boost in wellbeing.
- Increased creativity.
- More career opportunities for diverse employees.

One key factor in developing a sense of belonging and uniqueness can be the opportunity to experience individual coaching as part of a D&I strategy. By reflecting one's own unique traits and perspectives, as well as ways of communicating and living them, employees can be empowered to integrate their uniqueness more into the workplace and learn to consider the unique perspectives of others even more. In the same way can the opportunity to reflect on one's own way of integrating others, as well as strategies for networking and socialising, benefit the sense of belonging of one's self and others.

How digital coaching creates a culture that embraces diversity and fosters inclusiveness

In the coaching process, coachees develop their own solutions that are tailored to their respective context. The support provided by a coach is then highly personalised and focused which increases the transfer rate of what has been learned and reflected upon into everyday life. This leads to positive effects on the individual and the organisation (Bozer & Jones, 2015; de Haan et al 2019).

Part of that process involves helping coachees increase the reflective space that helps them become more self-reflective and aware of unconscious biases. Being cognisant empowers employees to comprehend the negative feelings associated with exclusion, while also providing the psychological room to process and understand today's hypercomplex business and societal landscape.

Moreover, the psychological transformation that coaching affects in leaders is long-lasting, with increases in self-efficacy, developmental support, positive affect, developmental planning and openness to behaviour - still noticeable six months after coaching ends.

Digital coaching diversifies your coaching pool

Given how effective coaching is in helping organisations lay the groundwork for diversity and inclusiveness, it's somewhat ironic that coaching itself has lacked diversity in the past. Although there is roughly a 50:50 split in terms of gender, coaches in the US and Europe have tended to look very similar regarding age and ethnicity.

Consider the attraction paradigm — that people find it easier to interact and identify with people who have similar backgrounds, values and beliefs — and that can be challenging for minorities in search of a coach to trust and confide in. Coaching has also been a source of inequality in the workplace. A far higher percentage of senior managers are provided with coaching than regular employees, with most coaches stating that their clientele makeup has remained broadly unchanged since 2015. **More than 50% of coaches say their clients are either executives or managers**. This serves only to widen the skills gap and experience void of minority employees who are more likely to be further down the ladder and have no coaching access.

"The reliance of traditional formats on in-person coaching sessions, which is inflexible, time-consuming and unscalable, has kept coaching out of reach for all but the most senior staff," explains CoachHub managing director, Yannis Niebelschuetz. "Digital coaching addresses those issues and completely democratises coaching."

Almost 50% of coaches either always or frequently engage with clients face-to-face. That adds a geographical limit to the number of coaches available to employees and also vastly reduces the options for minorities who may want to build a relationship with a coach who shares their mother tongue, background, religion or culture.

Almost 10% of UK employees and 20% of US employees speak languages other than English at home. Some of these people may express themselves better in other languages. The nature of digital coaching means that coaches and coachees can be based anywhere, thousands of kilometers apart, making a language match much easier to find.

38% of coaches perceive a lack of budget as the main obstacle to creating a strong coaching culture. The increased flexibility and reduced need for travel and space makes digital coaching far more cost-effective than traditional coaching.

For employees who are disabled or are unwell and find travel difficult, remote employees, employees based in smaller towns and villages, and even employees with packed agendas and responsibilities outside of work, digital coaching, which can occur anywhere at any time, also increases the accessibility of coaching.

As we discussed earlier, a sense of uniqueness is vital for creating a culture of inclusiveness. Digital coaching provides employees with a feeling of agency in choosing their coach and topics and the time and location for coaching to take place. This helps employees to feel respected and valued as individuals. Research into self-determination theory in the workplace has also found that "perceived autonomy, perceived competence and perceived relatedness" increases the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation for using e-learning tools.

What are your next steps?

Companies can successfully transform their cultures at scale and measure its impact on D&I by implementing digital coaching in the following ways:

1. Accelerate the development of diverse employees
2. Create a coaching ripple effect that develops an inclusive culture
3. Start with key influencers across your organisation
4. Make coaching proactive and strategic; democratise across your organisation

1. Accelerate the development of diverse employees

When employees are represented across the organisation, there is a greater sense of belonging, which enhances motivation, performance and wellbeing. For example, **women account for just 16.9% of seats on corporate boards worldwide**. Why, when the benefits are so clear, is progress so slow? At a macro level, the main barriers to progress in diversity are:

• Outdated workplace cultures.
• Overt and unconscious bias.
• Lack of sponsorship, mentors and role models.

Many diverse leaders have highlighted the role that coaching has played in their rise to the top, supporting them with self and personal identity development, relational ability and transformational learning. This personalised and confidential approach to people development is precisely where coaching with CoachHub comes in. We have a global pool of coaches, who can help diverse employees develop their leader self concepts, enhance their wellbeing, and strengthen their personal and professional development.

Through this approach, companies can support advancement and drive diversity at the top. A Boston Consulting Group report also discovered

that **diversity at the leadership level also correlates with a 21% bump in innovation-based revenue**.

"We chose to partner with CoachHub to support our future female talent programme because of the flexibility of their platform and diversity of accredited coaches," explains Catriona Pitkethly, Principle Talent Development of the European Bank For Reconstruction and Development. *"We specifically wanted to focus on a strengths-based approach which CoachHub could accommodate with ease to really build coachee confidence and reinforce the learnings from the programme as a whole to ensure we had a rich pipeline of top female leaders in years to come."*

2. Create a coaching ripple effect that cultivates an inclusive culture

Much of the research conducted on coaching has centered on the impact that coaching has on either individuals, in the case of one-to-one coaching, or on teams via group coaching formats. What has been overlooked until relatively recently is the role that people play as change agents within organisations; that coaching has a far-reaching ripple effect that goes beyond the individuals who have been coached.

For example, leaders have a direct influence over their teams and an indirect influence over the rest of the company at large. Coaching a leader to become more aware of their unintended biases and their role and responsibilities for supporting D&I within their organisation goes beyond their office walls; it is felt and influences a huge number of other employees and stakeholders.

Time
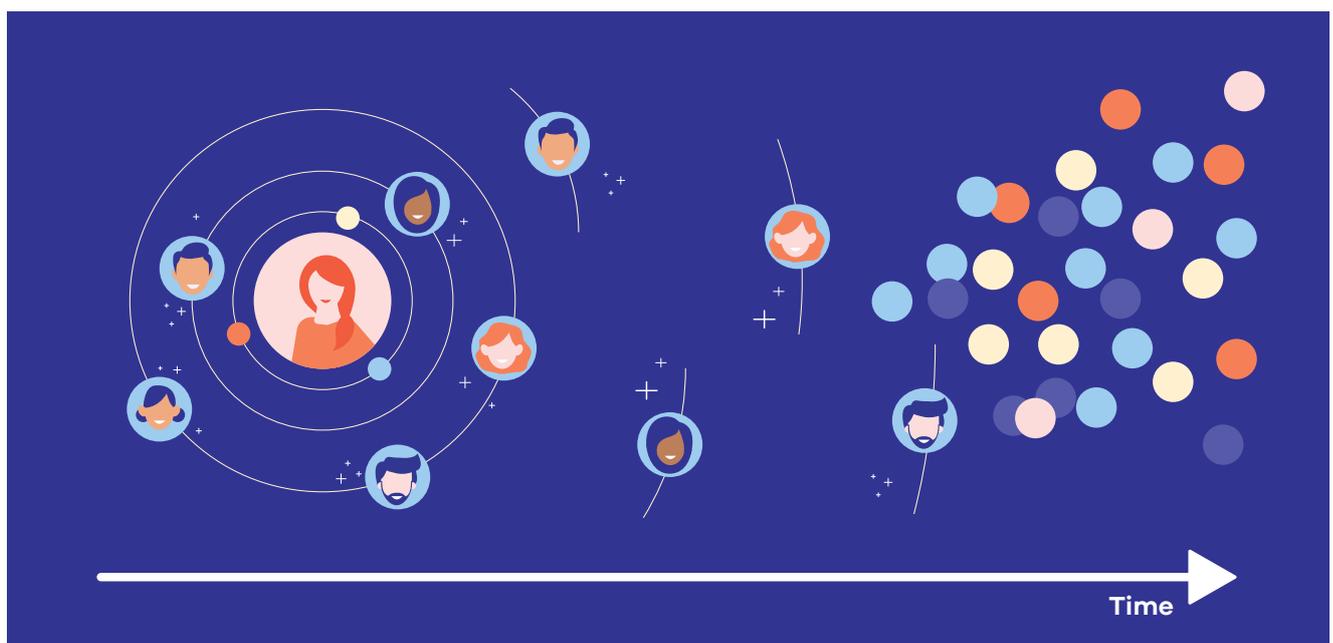
The coaching ripple effect builds organic momentum towards a culture that embraces diversity and fosters inclusion.

3. Start with key influencers across your organisation

The idea that people leave managers, not companies, is a well-worn one in HR circles. It's borne out by the data too. Gallup's report reveals that **50% of employees have left a job to escape a manager**. Meanwhile, **for employees who stay at the company, their manager accounts for as much as 70% in the variance of engagement levels**. It is hard then to overstate just how vital managers are in delivering and accelerating a diverse and inclusive culture within an organisation.

However, employees in non-managerial roles may not consider themselves to have quite the same level of influence, but the ripple effect of the coaching they receive will inevitably also be experienced amongst their colleagues.

That the influence of coaching goes far beyond the individual being coached has significant implications for organisations. How many ripples would it take to 'touch' the entire organisation? It's exactly this multiplier effect that makes coaching the most effective tool for change management within any organisation.
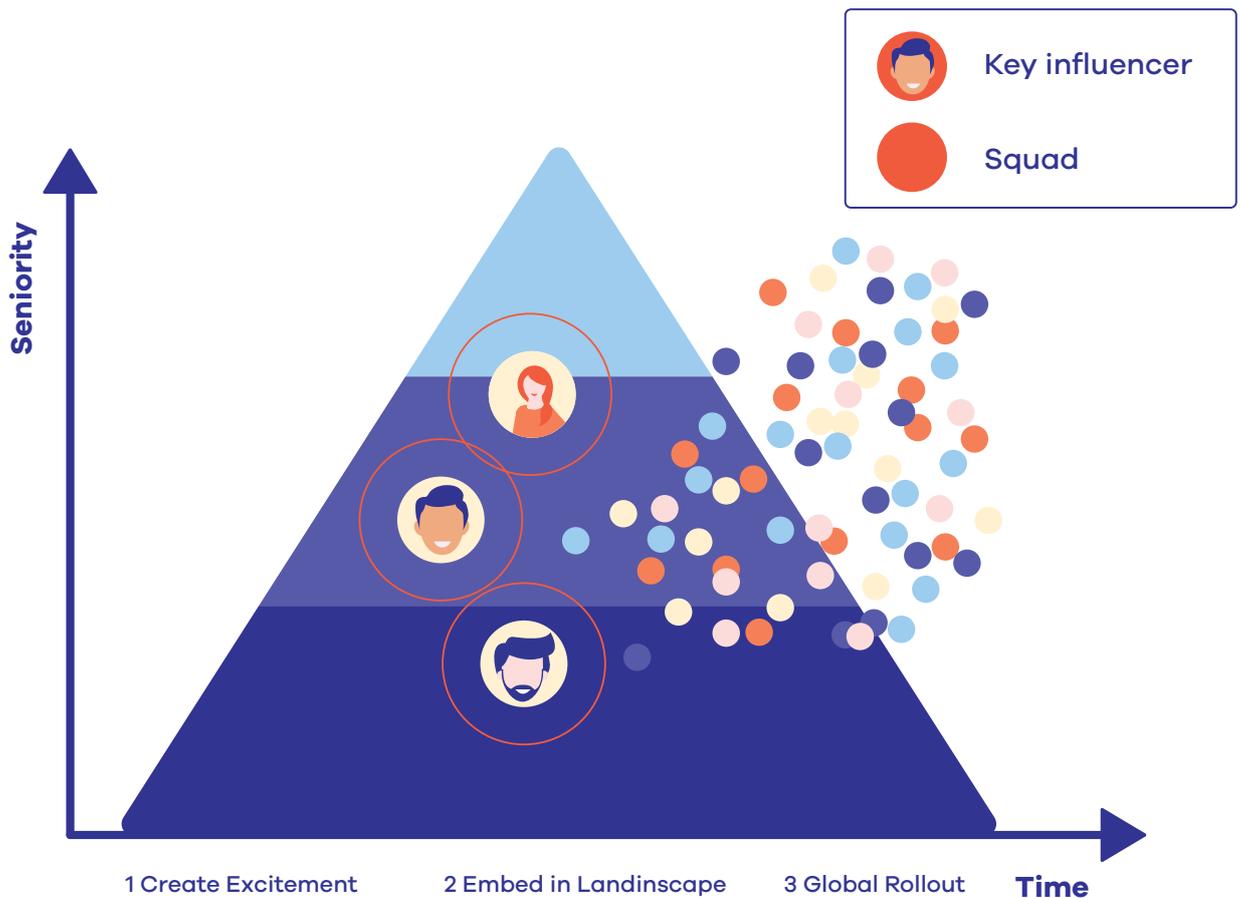
Start with coaching key influencers from across the organisation to build momentum towards a coaching ripple effect that maximises the impact of coaching.

4. Make coaching proactive and strategic; democratise it.

Below is a preview of CoachHub's Diversity & Inclusion coaching framework - although it must be noted, D&I is everyone's responsibility and is an ongoing conversation that requires regular reviews and fresh perspectives. To reinforce this mindset, closely align coaching to organisational goals and business objectives. This, in combination with offering coaching to all career levels worldwide, is what helps your employees to proactively embrace diversity and become more inclusive.
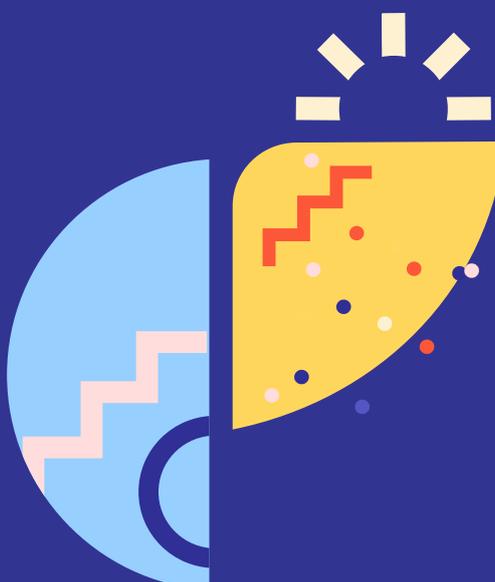
Belonging

Create a climate of inclusion by fostering a sense of connection with oneself and others, and actively form diverse, interpersonal relationships.

Uniqueness

Create a climate of inclusion by interacting with others in accordance to one's true nature, and encourage, embrace, and celebrate everyone's unique strengths and differences.

Fairness

Treat others justly by being deeply curious about oneself and others, reason with empathy, and think clearly and rationally about what to do or what to believe.

Empowerment

Empower oneself and others to collectively work towards creating a diverse and inclusive culture that embraces hard conversations.

Commitment

Develop the passion and perseverance to set and achieve long-term goals, even when progress towards those goals are halting and slow.

Flourish

Positive personal development that enhances will and waypower, belief in one's capabilities to succeed, ability to bounce back and grow from adversity, and make a positive attribution about succeeding now and in the future.
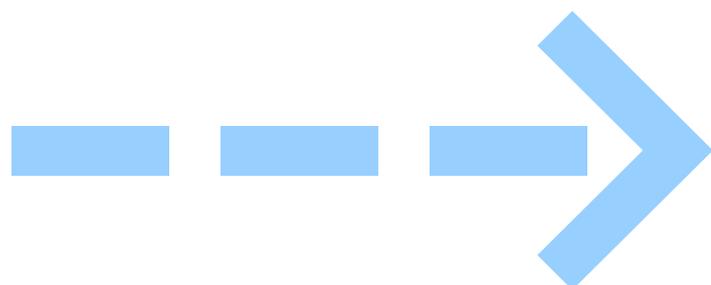
Summary

The motivation to create diverse and inclusive working organisations that reflect the dazzling multiplicity of our society should be a moral one. It is the right thing to do. But it is also the best commercial decision companies can make.

That doesn't mean it is an easy one. Many classical approaches to diversity and inclusion training fail to reach their goals of long lasting change, by missing to integrate opportunities to apply and to consolidate what was learned.

The diversity that brings innovation, better decision-making and access to new markets is dependent on more than just a willingness to hire different looking employees and to offer classroom training. It is about creating a culture in which employees of diverse backgrounds and with different abilities can feel included - which ultimately comes down to fostering a sense of belonging and acknowledging individual uniqueness.

Coaching can support this process in multiple ways. It can help individuals to reflect and understand their unique perspectives, problems and solutions, to help them not only support themselves in finding their place and bringing their unique perspectives to the table, but also to help others in doing so. Through coaching ripple effects, influential individuals can also have an immense impact on their surroundings, which further helps to generate an atmosphere of inclusiveness and support.

Digital coaching has democratised what was itself an elite and homogenous service until recently. No longer limited to leadership in the boardroom and with coaches themselves representative of the breadth of genders, races, backgrounds and abilities that make up society, digital coaching is not only able to support individuals, teams and corporations in generating a culture of diversity and inclusion - it is ultimately able to do this by being diverse and inclusive itself.

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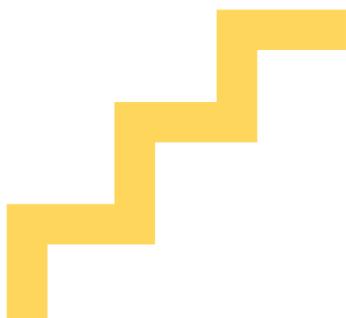
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About CoachHub

CoachHub is the 'mobile coaching cloud' that enables personalised coaching for employees at all career levels. A pool of top coaches from all around the world and an application for web and smartphone allow live coaching sessions via video conferencing.

We turn managers into inspiring leaders, boost team performance, and help employees grow personally and professionally.

Our vision is a personal coach for every employee, accompanying them as a guide to measurably advance their accomplishments.

For more information visit
www.coachhub.io