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Employers tend to conflate diversity and inclusion, and this is hindering innovation, according to an academic.

There's a distinction between diversity and inclusion, but employers tend to "mash these two together", says Monash University academic Dr **Susan Carland**.

"It's important we don't see these terms as interchangeable", she told SAP's recent HR Connect Sydney conference.

"The problem is in our workplaces, we can get stuck at the diversity stage and we don't move on to the inclusion stage. We can feel like, 'as long as I've got a diverse group around me, as long as my team is diverse, my workforce is diverse, that's that handled. I've got diversity handled', and now surely innovation is guaranteed."

Dr Susan Carland, Monash University

But without an inclusive environment, diversity is "pointless", she notes, adding that it's unrealistic to put together diverse groups of people and "expect them to hum".

> *The attitudes and values that we cultivate within ourselves will have a much bigger role than just the things we do.*
>
> — Dr Susan Carland

Employees feel valued, connected, and psychologically safe in an inclusive workplace, and "once you have that diverse workforce in an inclusive environment, that's when you'll start to see the innovation".

Carland says diversity, inclusion and innovation are "interconnected and interdependent", noting that inclusive workplaces are six times more likely to be innovative, eight times more likely to have overall better business outcomes, and six times more likely to anticipate change and respond effectively.
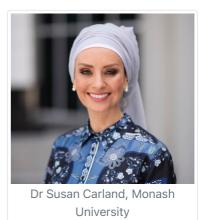
The crux of creating an inclusive environment is psychological safety, she notes. This means individuals feel they can take risks, speak their minds, and "stick their neck out without fear of having it cut off".

Carland says "fear is the enemy of creativity", which is an inhibitor to innovation, but creating a psychologically safe environment doesn't translate to "coddling people".

"Here are two things psychologically safe environments are *not*. A psychologically safe workplace is not a place where everyone is so concerned about not upsetting anyone and making everyone feel safe that we just accept garbage ideas.

"It is also not a toxic environment where people feel free to constantly criticise everyone else's ideas. Seeing the word safe sometimes make people think about coddling people. We're not. We're also not talking about a free-for-all machine-gun criticism environment.

"In fact, psychologically safe workplaces are the opposite of both of those things."

In order to foster an inclusive environment, Carland says there are behaviours and traits that "everyone in the workplace" can implement, and these are "more important" than the practical things employers roll out.

"The attitudes and values that we cultivate within ourselves will have a much bigger role than just the things we do."

Leaders play an important role in regard to this, she notes. "Inclusive leadership isn't just about how we act, it's about who we are.

"If we have a leader or a team member who says one thing and does another, we can all smell that a mile away. We can all smell hypocrites. We want to act with integrity in this area.

"We cannot create that culture of integrity unless we are people of integrity, and there are two things that I've found help."

The first is having a circle of critics, says Carland. "This is just a small handful of people that you've put together, generally people you look up to who you know for certain have your best interest at heart."

This circle functions as a sounding board rather than an echo chamber, and can help course-correct if necessary.

"If you have a circle of critics, you can ignore the masses but still have accountability of people you respect."

The second is to be mindful that *everyone* is influential, says Carland. "We are all role models, whether we like it or not. We don't get to choose that. All we get to choose is whether we are a good role model or a bad role model."

It's important to ensure actions align with values, and "that we don't let our behaviour be dictated by the bad behaviour of others".

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