

# GENDER INTELLIGENCE

Creating the right culture externally requires getting the gender of your culture right internally, writes **Bec Brideson**

**IT'S NOT** good enough that our current MO for resolving the gender problem is D&I support groups attended only by the marginalised. There's a growing frustration surrounding this concept, as preaching to the converted won't grow the church. My challenge, therefore, to any HR leader is to simply ask yourself two questions.

First, is your culture overtly male or female? If you find yourself answering this question instinctually, great. If you find yourself wondering what that means, chances are a gender intelligence audit may be in order. In either case, keep reading.

Now ask yourself: does the gender of your internal culture match the gender of your external audience? If the answer is a big fat 'no', then Houston, we have a problem.

Somewhere in the decades of forward movement on equality, our confusion around gender discrimination muddied the waters. Equality has been equated with sameness, and we have started to neglect the insight that comes from difference. We're not making a moral judgment, but gaining insights into how to better meet the needs of all of our stakeholders.

To understand our confusion, we must first grasp the heritage of business. Men built our business environment, while women traditionally stayed in the home. Thus, business has been set to the default of a male perspective – internally and organisationally, as well as in delivery to external audiences.

Over the last century, society has made great strides: women are out of the home, working their two shifts – in the workplace

and domestically. As a result, women have grown both their economic might and financial influence. Course-correction is needed – not one that disparages or destroys what men have proudly built, but one that includes the contributions, attributes and innovations that women bring to bear: the female lens. Thanks to society's fostering of better diversity and inclusion, alongside the rise of the new global female economy, for business it is a golden opportunity waiting to be realised and leveraged.

**“True gender intelligence is the ability to acknowledge that gender differences are powerful. This vision is smart, not discriminatory”**

HR leaders, without question, have a big part to play in leading this charge. Having everyone in your business understand the powerful female economy is more important than ever. EY reports that by 2028, women will be responsible for 75% of household discretionary spending. It is essential to get gender intelligence right. If there are not enough female-lensed people in your business, then you risk missing valuable opportunities for growth.

Female-lensed vision shouldn't be confused with hiring more female staff, or even invoking feminist ideology. The female lens is a second scope for us to see through to improve our stereoscopic vision of the world. True gender

intelligence is the ability to acknowledge that gender differences are powerful. This vision is smart, not discriminatory, and looking through both lenses leads to market growth and unseen opportunities. Being gender-insensitive, however, breeds a culture where an overt gender presides and shuts down the capabilities of the other. Two recent high-profile examples illuminate this causation.

Google has been on a dedicated path to bias enlightenment, through the implementation of worldwide D&I training since 2013. The swift handling over erroneous prejudices on female talent has signalled a devotion to creating a gender-equal environment and was supported top-down. While the culture and employees continue to be divided, Google is proving itself to be a brand that is committed to being better.

Uber, on the other hand, was the exemplar of a fish rotting from its head – employees were given a message that sexism and harassment would be overlooked in the case of high performers. The recent instalment of a female leadership group brings a new hope.

Uber serves as a cautionary tale on the

hazards of not creating the right culture internally. Doing so means you will have the culture right externally – not just with women, but with other ignored segments, too. HR is responsible for ensuring the inside of your business matches the values, expectations and behaviours of those it hopes to attract – most likely, a powerful audience holding immeasurable discretionary power. And when it does, the business will be sure to thrive. **HRD**

Bec Brideson is a pioneer and innovator in marketing to women, and author of *Blind Spots: How to Uncover and Attract the Fastest Emerging Economy*.

