

Case 10: How to Be More Inclusive

Liz is an accountant at Olsen Blackwell, a mid-sized accounting firm. She's recently met with three other female accountants to talk about initiating an employee resource group (ERG) called "Women in Leadership" so women at Olsen Blackwell can come together to create community and discuss issues they face as women in the accounting industry. They hope to deliver a monthly newsletter, create new initiatives and a mentorship program, review policies and procedures, and hold roundtable discussions. They also hope to provide a safe space for women to discuss their lived experiences.

After making a presentation looking for approval for this ERG, the CEO signs off on it and allocates a certain amount of financial resources. She also suggested that Amara, a member of the executive team, join the group. With Amara, there should be more streamlined communication between the group, and it will better facilitate organizational change.

Over the next half year, the new "Women in Leadership" group meets monthly in person and biweekly over Zoom. Anyone is welcome to attend. The meetings typically start with a roundtable discussion about anything anyone wants to bring up. Since Liz is one of the leaders, she has a list of topics to discuss in case attendees are on the quieter side. Recently, the group discussed representation within Olsen Blackwell, women being perceived as "bossy" instead of authoritative, pay equity issues, and accessibility to daycare for working mothers.

Liz feels great about the group. Everyone finds comfort in hearing from other women, and they are starting to make organizational changes. For example, the firm will be undergoing a compensation review next year to ensure pay equity across genders.

One day, during lunch, Liz is sitting with her friend, Hector. They're discussing the "Women in Leadership" ERG. Hector asks Liz what the group talks about. Liz tells him the topics they've recently discussed in the meetings and how great it is to hear how other women handle different workplace situations. When the topic of daycare comes up, Hector says he struggles with the same issues. As a single father, every day he must drop his children off at his parents' house before coming into work, so one of his parents can take him to school. Otherwise, he would be late for work every day.

Hector mentions to Liz that it would be helpful if the group could find a way to have a more flexible work schedule for *all* working parents, not just the women. Liz tells him that allowing working parents more flexibility so they can complete some of their work from home or shift their hours around would be great. Liz writes out the time and location of their next in-person meeting, which is occurring at the end of the week, and tells Hector that he's more than welcome to join. But Hector laughs her off. "I'm not so sure," he says. "It is a women's group, after all. It's called 'Women in Leadership.' I think what you're doing is great, but I don't think I'll fit in." Liz is disappointed. She understands how he feels. When she created the group, it was never her intention that it be exclusive.

At the next meeting, Liz takes note of the attendees. They're all women, and most of them are white. There are many women of color at the organization, so why haven't they attended? How could the group better include the people of colour at the organization who might be facing similar struggles to the ones they discuss?

Questions:

- (1) Why are the "Women in Leadership" working sessions mostly attended by white women? Do you think the group was created specifically for white women? What would need to be done to create a safer space so women of all racial and ethnic backgrounds could attend?
- (2) What might have happened if Hector had accepted Liz's invitation to attend the meeting? Does Hector have the right to attend a "Women in Leadership" group? What might be gained from Hector's attendance?
- (3) Is Olsen Blackwell's "Women in Leadership" group inclusive? How might this group be considered exclusive? How could Liz have created a similar, more inclusive group with the same goal?
- (4) What are some topics that may never be discussed because most members are white women? Consider the concept of intersectionality.
- (5) What needs to be done in order to make the current "Women in Leadership" group more inclusive?

Additional Resources for Case 10:

- 3 Small Ways to Be a More Inclusive Colleague (article by Harvard Business Review), [here](#)
- 10 Actions You Can Take Today to Be More Inclusive At Work (article by The Diversity Movement), [here](#)
- 15 Tips for Building a More Inclusive Workplace in 2022 (article by WorkTango), [here](#)

Source: DEI Case Collection for Professional Accountants, University of Toronto Professional Accounting Centre, 2023, PAC website <https://www.utm.utoronto.ca/pac/case-collections/dei-case-collection-professional-accountants>.