Accessibility for All

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The World Health Organization reports 1 in 5 people have disabilities, and only 1 in 10 of people that need it have access to assistive technology. Disability is part of the fabric of society, and technology can help to bridge the gap between the individual and the working environment. Accessibility is imperative for all organizations to consider, and those that do, benefit from being able to personalize customer experiences, improve productivity, and mitigate risk from compliance & regulations, as well as fueling innovation. Inclusive organizations can attract and retain top talent, and studies show that companies embracing best practices around accessibility outperform their peers, achieving higher revenue, income, and profit margins. Organizations that successfully adopt an inclusive accessibility framework create equity in the workplace, encourage trust in the organization, and increase employee productivity.

Equity in a workplace means everyone receives fair treatment. It also means people feel valued for their unique contributions and are empowered to advance the mission and cause of the organization they serve. For this to happen, the organization needs to take proactive steps to develop a culture of diversity, inclusion, and trust where individuals with disabilities, including long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments, are supported through policy and technology. A definition found in the Merriam-Webster describes equity as; "freedom from bias or favoritism." From this perspective and by extension of this definition, accessibility creates equity because acknowledging and empowering the intrinsic value in all people, including those with disabilities, is the antithesis of exclusion and the genesis of trust.

When the espoused values of an organization's culture resonate through the lived experiences of the community, the conditions which engender trust will flourish. Individuals who feel empowered to make unique contributions regardless of ability inherently trust the enabling

system. Therefore, trust and accessibility go hand-in-hand. As employees increasingly scrutinize how organizations contribute to the common good, the demand for accessibility as a practice grows as the population ages. According to the World Health Organization, in ten years, by 2030, two billion people will need access to at least one assistive product. (World Health Organization, 2018) This means organizations around the world need to consider the needs of the few to meet the needs of all, to stay relevant, trustworthy, and competitive.

Studies show trust positively impacts a team's performance (Jong, Dirks, & Gillespie, 2016), and by extension, organizations that intentionally adopt a thoughtfully designed accessibility framework will see a return on the investment made in their people. A commissioned economic impact study conducted by Forrester Consulting on behalf of Microsoft revealed; "80% of private sector and 74% of public sector organizations agreed that by addressing accessibility, they can create workforce technology solutions that help the broader, nondisabled workforce." (Parks & Sedov, 2016) The study shows a majority of the 319 business and technology leaders who participated in the study, agreed all employees – not just employees with disabilities – can benefit from tools and policies that allow them to work more efficiently. The impact of making accessibility an organizational priority has a snowballing effect on the rest of the organization, making it easier for everyone to get work done.

Accessibility, at its core, is an inclusive model that combines people, process, and technology. Empowering people with disabilities and evangelizing the framework for accessible impact is more than beneficial; it is transformational. When organizations lean into this conversation and adopt accessibility as a principle and an equitable right, the environment they create helps all employees trust they belong to a culture that values their unique contributions, which also removes barriers for everyone to achieve more.

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