

Enabling Business Beyond Bias

An Interview with Anka Wittenberg,
Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer, SAP

EDITORS' NOTE *Anka Wittenberg is an economist and pivotal change agent on how to design and implement a healthy, diverse and inclusive workplace and culture. At SAP, Wittenberg is responsible for the development and implementation of SAP's diversity and inclusion strategy, which includes gender equity, cross-generational intelligence and support, culture, race and LGBT awareness and equality, and the integration of differently-abled people into the workforce. Her role in technology extends beyond her work with SAP employees to companies looking to use technology to reduce workplace bias. Wittenberg is a frequent speaker at global conferences and is active with UN Women helping to drive Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that aim to end poverty, combat inequalities and promote prosperity while protecting the environment by 2030. In addition, Wittenberg is the Chair of the Board of the World Childhood Foundation, an organization that defends the rights of children and promotes better living conditions for vulnerable and exploited children at risk all over the world. She is also on the supervisory board of a family-owned company in the oil and gas industry.*



Anka Wittenberg

do – especially the way we do business. I truly believe the role of the chief diversity and inclusion officer at SAP is to create an environment that is future-focused to ensure that our workforce and business environment is ready to address this kind of change.

Bersin by Deloitte released a study in July 2017 – later updated in January 2018 – that talks about the positive impact of a truly inclusive culture. The report shows that highly inclusive organizations are six times more likely to be innovative and six times more likely to be agile.

The role of the chief diversity officer is to ensure that we have inclusive leaders, and therefore, an inclusive environment. When this is achieved, employees feel they are being treated with fairness and respect, have feelings of individual value and belonging, and are inspired by each other. My role is to help define inclusive leadership and create an inclusive culture, while also encouraging other businesses to promote a diverse and inclusive culture.

For instance, when we evaluate how businesses have integrated women into the workforce, we notice that what we have done in the past 20 years is train women to behave like men. However, this means that one also needs to work hard at being someone else. We have seen that women have a higher rate of burnout – it's the same with some of our LGBT colleagues. If they are not able to be themselves, they lose on average 25 percent of their productivity and it has an impact on health, according to the study "LGBT Diversity: Show me the business case" by Out Now.

At the size and scale of SAP, how challenging is it to maintain a unified culture?

It is a challenge. We have 92,000 employees right now. At our headquarters in Germany alone, we have 90 different nationalities working together. On a global basis, we have 140-plus nationalities working together.

Years ago, we decided that our go-to-market strategy requires that we enable the business to tell the story. We have regional councils throughout the world, which are chaired by members of the executive leadership team and includes someone from the global diversity and inclusion office. We also have D&I representation in each business unit, which requires

COMPANY BRIEF *SAP (sap.com) is the world's largest provider of enterprise application software. Founded in 1972 and headquartered in Walldorf, Germany, SAP empowers people and organizations to work together more efficiently and use business insight more effectively to stay ahead of the competition. SAP applications and services enable more than 350,000 customers to operate profitably, adapt continuously, and grow sustainably. SAP is listed on several exchanges, including the Frankfurt Stock Exchange and NYSE.*

How do you define the role of a diversity and inclusion officer?

From my education, I'm an economist and what I learned from my training and professional life is to consider how we can ensure that our business remains sustainable, how we can ensure it stays relevant, and how can we look at the return on investment.

Through the digital transformation and the speed of technology, rapid and exponential change is impacting everything we

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You also serve as Head of People Sustainability for SAP. Is this role integrated into the diversity and inclusion role?

Absolutely. Ensuring that we have an inclusive and healthy culture is what we need in order to drive people sustainability forward.

orchestration at a global level to ensure that the strategy can scale to meet regional needs today and in the future. While this is challenging, we know it's possible to maintain a unified culture because our go-to-market strategy is to enable the business to drive diversity and inclusion in a way that helps them meet their goals.

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How broadly do you define diversity at SAP?

When we designed our approach to diversity and inclusion, we focused on three things that we knew would have an impact: employee engagement, innovation and customers, because we need to reflect the diversity of our customers to truly understand and meet their needs.

leaders by the end of 2017. We reached that goal six months ahead of time and we started our new goal, which is to have 30 percent women in leadership roles by 2022. We are extremely transparent about sharing our KPIs, so every quarter, we are communicating with our leadership teams where we stand toward our goals by region and business area, using our own HR analytics to measure against goals.

We focus on diversity and inclusion because it's the right thing to do, but also because it helps us be successful in our business.

We also decided that the strategy had to be comprehensive and focused on four areas. The first is gender intelligence to ensure that women and men work together in an intelligent way. The second is cross-generational intelligence since we have five generations in our workforce today and each reacts to a different leadership style and flexible work arrangements. The third is culture and identity, which include LGBT awareness and inclusion as well as employee network groups and cultural intelligence skill development programs. Additionally, SAP's refugee programs fall under this category. The fourth and final area is differently-abled people to focus on the strengths of differently-abled people and provide an environment that is accessible for everybody. We have also been running the SAP Autism at Work program for five years, which integrates people on the autism spectrum into our workforce.

In this type of work, how challenging is it to put metrics in place to track impact?

At SAP, we believe what gets measured gets done. If we take gender intelligence, for example, our goal was to reach 25 percent female

In your role, how critical is it to have the support from SAP's leadership team?

For the organization to realize the importance of diversity and inclusion and make sure it's taken seriously, direction needs to start with the business leaders, top-down.

We have a great program called Focus on Insight, which is our internal diversity and inclusion training. This training is strongly recommended for all SAP employees since it helps them become aware of their biases, understand challenges that underrepresented people face in the workplace, and move forward with more knowledge as well as a greater sense of empathy.

What was the purpose behind the creation of SAP's Business Beyond Bias initiative?

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Since we only hire a person for the position who has the right qualifications, we must ensure that our unconscious bias is not hindering the right talent to apply for the job. Technology can be used to make the unconscious bias visible and help make better decisions once that bias has been revealed. For example, we sometimes see that we're using a job posting with gender-biased language. Based on research and what is revealed through our technology, we've learned that many women are not attracted to certain adverbs and, thus, are not attracted to applying for those positions.

We have since integrated these requirements into the SAP SuccessFactors product portfolio. Now, when someone posts a job, they can scan the job posting and it will show where they have used gender bias and where gender-neutral language would be useful.

How does your background as an economist help with this type of work?

One of my chief roles is to enable the business to be successful, so I must make sure that I understand the business and that I speak the language of business. Being an economist, I both understand SAP's business and speak the business language.

We focus on diversity and inclusion because it's the right thing to do, but also because it helps us be successful in our business. I know that when employee engagement goes up by one percent, it has an impact on our operating profit by at least 48 million Euros – and makes our CFO smile when he sees me.

Do you take moments to celebrate the wins?

Yes. My role is to ensure that we bring projects into the organization to make us a more inclusive culture. Once we hit a milestone, we celebrate. It's healthy to reflect and think about what we achieved before we move on to the next goal.

What makes SAP so special?

Technology is the catalyst for change. We see exponential change in the world right now and, to move this in the right direction, we need to ensure that we have diverse teams who develop products. Through my work and activities outside of SAP, I am happy to say that I can have an impact on how the world is moving forward. SAP is taking this very seriously and as a result, we have an 85 percent employee engagement. ●