



BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE

Deepening Local-Foreign Integration

Supported by



National
Integration
Council

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FOREWORD

The integration of foreigners into the Singapore society is an ongoing journey. While Singaporeans have reasonable concerns over the social impact of the new arrivals, Singapore needs to continue bringing in foreigners to meet manpower demands. If we integrate foreigners well into the Singapore society, they have the potential to enrich Singapore's identity and further enhance our reputation as an international hub.

Supported by the National Integration Council, DBS Bank launched the Singapore Immersion Programme in 2021 to support its new foreign hires in forming meaningful friendships, deepening their understanding of Singapore society and building a sense of belonging. The programme includes helping foreign employees gain a profound understanding of Singapore, encompassing our nation-building history, growth strategies, the complexities of managing contemporary diversity, future positioning, and sociological trade-offs involved in integration efforts. Through a buddy system, both foreign and Singaporean employees engage in the programme via lectures, networking sessions, and experiential walking trails. Many participants have also joined volunteering initiatives, positively impacting the local community, forming meaningful friendships, and nurturing a sense of belonging.

This local-foreign integration guide compiles the experiences of DBS and other organisations such as DLE M&E, Philips Singapore, SBS Transit, Wen Ken Group and Yishun Health. These immersive case studies demonstrate how barriers have been dismantled to create an integrated workforce that thrives together. We hope the guide will inspire other organisations and serve as a resource for leaders and organisational champions as they advance their workforce integration efforts.

WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?



A business leader looking to increase productivity and innovation in the workplace through building cohesive and collaborative teams.

A manager of teams planning to create an inclusive and sustainable workplace culture through policies, practices and learning initiatives.



An organisational champion
(or a group of champions)
seeking inspiration and ideas to improve day-to-day inclusivity, behaviours or well-being in the workplace.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK?

Creating a sustainable integration effort in any organisation requires these five common roles to bring about the desired change. Based on what your organisation currently has in place, you could adopt one or more of the following hats (or 'lens') and be:



The **Visionary** who uncovers blind spots and raises awareness of hidden issues in your organisation.



The **Advocate** who draws inspiration from others' experiences and seeks to adapt them to your organisation.



The **Innovator** who proactively identifies and addresses issues by putting ideas into action, driving change and implementation in your organisation.



The **Educator** who spreads knowledge in your organisation, educating and empowering others through learning and activities.



The everyday **Steward** who sustains the initiatives and progress over time, making necessary adjustments to support organisational success.

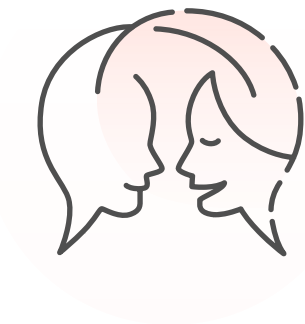


Reflections

Which of these roles do you already identify with, and would continue to hold as you read on?
Are there new roles you would like to adopt too?

OVERVIEW OF **ENABLING FACTORS**

In the following section, we will explore the key enabling factors essential for creating sustainable integration in diverse workplaces. These factors were derived from examining six case studies across different sectors and industries, which highlighted common strategies and practices employed by different organisations. These shared approaches have proven effective in fostering inclusive environments, ensuring successful integration and contributing to a supportive and harmonious workplace culture.



Empathetic Communication

“Meet you where you are”

- Open and empathetic channels of communication
- Feedback loops between staff and management
- Clear and consistent information flow from leadership



Creative Resourcing

“Do what it takes”

- Setting KPIs for habit building
- Embedding integration efforts into daily routines
- Leveraging on internal (staff, programmes) and external resources (government grants and initiatives).



Cultural Sensitivity

“This is about both you and us”

- Facilitating understanding of cultural differences as a business imperative
- Building trust and synergy as means to culture building
- Being intentional with efforts to promote inclusivity



Leadership Commitment

“We will deliver on what we promised”

- Leadership’s endorsement and buy-in to the value of integration for businesses
- Leadership walking the talk
- Sustained active culture building

CASE STUDY

DBS Bank



Empathetic
Communication



Creative
Resourcing



Cultural
Sensitivity

Focusing on equity and fair treatment in
employment and advancement
opportunities.





It's important to position these (integration programmes) as about understanding and appreciating each other, not about resolving problems.

The key to effective integration involves both local and foreign talents, to come together in understanding each other and elevate the quality of their conversations in working together.

These programmes are not an end in itself, but ways to motivate and spark inspiration in employees.



“Building an equitable and inclusive workplace where all employees feel purposeful, invested in, cared for and valued” is the commitment of DBS.

In Singapore, over 90% of the DBS workforce are Singaporeans and it remains committed to building a strong pipeline of local talent. In roles where supply of local talent is limited, the bank welcomes foreign talent. To foster ownership and collaboration, DBS intentionally nurtures trust among employees and co-creates culture.

“When you put various groups of people together for the first time, it’s often challenging and awkward for everyone. How do we facilitate trust building in a way that goes beyond the surface and be prepared to really move into somewhat uncomfortable territories?”

Ms Lee Yan Hong, Managing Director and Head of Group Human Resources, shared DBS’ holistic approach to driving diversity, equity and inclusion practices to enable the bank to attract the best people, build the best teams and produce the best work.

She further added that the bank’s commitment to driving diversity, equity and inclusion across their people programmes and practices is:

- Embracing diversity at all levels: welcoming diverse talent and cultivating a workplace where all can thrive
- Promoting equal opportunity: ensuring fairness and equity across all our people programmes and practices
- Building an inclusive culture: promoting an open and psychologically safe environment for diverse employees to connect and support one another

Challenges & Objectives

DBS’ efforts in these areas have resulted in strengthening internal cultural outcomes such as a stronger sense of connectedness and community amongst its employees. More importantly, these cultural outcomes contribute to the delivery of DBS’ organisational outcomes to the customers and the communities DBS serves in.

Diversity inherently introduces potential tensions within a workplace, with factors such as cultural differences and unequal access to opportunities being prominent examples. However, recognising the importance of addressing these challenges proactively, DBS adopted philosophical approaches aimed at creating a safe and inclusive workplace to pre-emptively manage these tensions.



Nurture Participative Communities **Beyond Programming**

DBS introduced DBS Lean In Circles in 2021 to convene colleagues regularly as a way to support and advance women in terms of opportunities. This initiative, in collaboration with a global organisation - Lean In, aimed to promote workplace inclusivity and diverse leadership. The Circles provided mentorship, mutual support, and discussions on topics like leadership, work-life balance, and gender bias.

Within a year, engagement in the Circles increased, expanding across core markets. Today, participation has evolved from 80% women and 20% men to 70% women and 30% men, with new Circles addressing broader issues. Employees have gained valuable insights and strategies to navigate professional and personal challenges through their respective learning communities.

“The way we drive our employee value proposition must include how we can nurture a sense of belonging in the workplace and one way is to encourage the creation of communities where people can support one another, and build these informal networks to strengthen culture.”

A foreign hire who was part of a Lean In Circle in 2023 shared about how the senior members' openness created a supportive environment for her. A significant revelation was the realisation that challenges faced at work and home are not unique to them; learning from others' experiences instilled confidence and a sense of belonging.

Positioning Integration Programmes as Enablers to **Work Better Together**

Ms Lee Yan Hong shared, “It’s important to position these (integration programmes) as about understanding and appreciating each other.” The key to good integration involves both local and foreign talents, coming together to understand each other and elevate the quality of their conversations in working together. These programmes are not an end in itself, but ways to motivate and spark inspiration in employees.

“It’s a journey we need to continue doing, which is why a lot of the work that we want to drive is around building these communities. We bring people together not only to understand one another, but also the context, history, cultural and societal norms.”

One key integration and inclusivity programme DBS stands by is their unconscious bias training, aimed at enhancing the awareness of diversity and inclusion for all employees. This training equips them with the skills to recognise, understand, and manage hidden biases across different dimensions of diversity. Employees learn to identify different forms of unconscious bias, understand their impact on workplace interactions, and recognise their own biases. As part of navigating the relevant workplace dynamics, they acquire strategies to mitigate bias in their work.

Integration into **Company and Community**

Designed for new and tenured foreign hires, with local hires encouraged to join, the Singapore Immersion Programme (SIP) helps participants adapt to local life and integrate into Singaporean society. Supported by the National Integration Council since 2021, the SIP engages participants through immersive lectures, experiential walking trails, pairing with a Singaporean buddy, and community engagement via the bank's People of Purpose programmes.



A key aspect of the SIP emphasises that foreign hires are not just here to fulfil a role within the company, but also to contribute positively to the community they live in. This belief encourages foreign colleagues to view themselves as active members of society who have a role to play in making a difference beyond their professional duties.

Many appreciated the program's efficiency in helping them connect with communities in a short span of time. This also helped in ensuring a smoother transition and facilitated their ability to contribute meaningfully to both the company and the community.

Additionally, an interesting revelation from the programme's evolution is the emergence of a group of employees, both Singaporean and foreigners, who are eager to take ownership and lead similar initiatives for their colleagues. This highlights a sense of empowerment and the desire to pay it forward, as gratifying outcomes of the SIP.

***"It is not just about the company,
but the community."***



BUSINESS AND SOCIAL OUTCOMES

By being very deliberate in their purpose for integration and collaboration, DBS has been able to consistently achieve the following business and social outcomes they set out to achieve.

1

Deepened understanding and resonance with the organisation's mission.

2

Strong belief in culture by design to create **impactful outcomes for our organisation, customers and communities.**

3

Open communication, deep integration programmes, and **enhanced employee satisfaction and retention** as a result of genuine care, support and familial atmosphere among employees.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

The three key takeaways from DBS' story that can offer inspiration to any organisation embarking on its own integrated initiatives are as follows:



Integration as a means to Culture Building

Integration within the organisation should not exist in isolation but should be seen as a crucial component of driving and facilitating the larger cultural vision. It is about intentionally creating an environment where employees feel that sense of ownership and can contribute to co-creating the desired culture.

Building Trust and Synergy through Integrated Programmes

Trust is foundational to successful integration efforts, especially when bringing diverse groups together. Intentional efforts to involve local colleagues in integration programmes to support foreign colleagues helps to build trust. Designing programmes with activities that facilitate deeper understanding beyond surface interactions help to foster greater workplace synergy.





Sense of Connectedness with the Community

Integration programmes can act as catalysts for inspiring and motivating foreign colleagues to contribute beyond their roles, fostering a sense of connectedness with the community. This efficient approach enables quick community integration while being effective in fostering meaningful connections with local colleagues and beyond, with the communities they plug themselves in.



Reflections

What ideas from DBS integration efforts would be relevant for your organisation?

How might your organisation incorporate trust-building activities and create spaces for deeper understanding beyond surface interactions?

CASE STUDY

DLE M&E



Empathetic
Communication



Cultural
Sensitivity



Leadership
Commitment

Highlighting empathetic leadership and a family-like environment in a traditionally tough industry.



“

*These are our core values – Respect,
Teamwork and Continuous Improvement –
we must abide by them and walk the talk.
It's not just on the wall.*

”

For any small-medium enterprise (SME) in Singapore, the ability to use and develop your resources well is often a major factor for survival. DLE M&E Pte Ltd, a Singapore-based engineering and construction company, has been sustaining its business for close to 50 years and believes fostering workforce integration is a key survival enabler.

Mrs Sarah Tham, Director and a second-generation leader at the company, shared with us how integrating and retaining a cohesive workforce helped DLE build its brand of quality and reliability with its clients. In an industry where talent poaching is common, repeat DLE clients are often surprised to meet the same DLE project teams years after their last project together.

Challenges & Objectives

DLE's workforce are mostly from India, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Malaysia, Philippines, China and even Australia. This spread presents a significant communication challenge in integrating such a diverse workforce in an industry known for its tough working conditions.

The key business sustainability objective is to develop and integrate its diverse workforce into effective teams for the long term, while strengthening the sense of belonging to the company to reduce the likelihood of employees leaving after being poached. The following areas are what DLE has focused on over the years to meet this objective.



Practise Company Values and Care to **Foster Trust**

Mrs Sarah Tham shared DLE's commitment to practising core values of Respect, Teamwork and Continuous Improvement has aided DLE in creating a culture of care and trust with its workforce. Despite not having a common language amongst employees, intentionally embedding these values as ground rules in daily work practices allow for teamwork and the understanding of each other to grow over time.

It is often the small details that matter. Creating common purpose, focusing on problem solving instead of blaming others, and taking the effort to talk to individuals and seek their feedback are ways to continuously build trust amongst colleagues and with the company.

"It is unrealistic to expect everyone in the workplace to get along perfectly. However, the issue is not the presence of conflicts and differences, but how we choose to resolve them constructively."



Communicate from the **Receiver's Perspective**



"I think I spend more time thinking about communication and engagement. Communicating the rationale is important, to explain to the people directly and indirectly impacted. What is fair to these people, and are there things we can do for them?"

Engagement and communication in DLE are intentionally done in-person and targeted at different levels of the workforce to ensure the message gets across correctly. These take the form of breakfast meetings with site team leaders, or speaking directly with individuals. During Covid-19, video messages were created by the management to retain the human factor.

It is more important that the person understands the gist of the message, rather than sending a nicely worded email or WhatsApp message that the employees cannot comprehend. Translation might change the meaning of the message and lead to misunderstandings.

Create Affinity through **Shared Purpose & Experiences**

DLE organises events for employees to know each other better outside of the work context.

One example was their community day with the clear common purpose to uplift the lives of those in need. DLE partnered Blessed Grace Social Services to rewire one-room rental flats, clean their homes, or change their furniture. Employees of different nationalities, along with their loved ones, participated in this event.

“I have a site supervisor who promised his wife that he'll bring her to see snow one day and finally fulfilled his promise when we went to South Korea for our staff retreat. These are anecdotes I keep close to my heart, because they're real stories from people whose lives have been impacted.”

Another is organising overseas staff retreats where family members can join at half the cost. It is a way to bond on multiple levels: as a company and also with the employees' families. This fosters a greater sense of belonging and community within the company and forms part of their retention strategy — going beyond salaries.



Train Leaders as **Role-models of Culture**

Leaders and managers are trained annually to align on values and managerial practices. It creates an environment where everyone communicates the same way, has a common lingo and language for appraisal.

Core values are also broken down into DLE core competencies for appraisal to ensure the right behaviours are embodied by both leaders and employees. This allows the development of desired values and behaviours across the organisation, with impact not just within the organisation but also in the interactions with clients.



“Building a strong culture takes time and effort. Trust is a fundamental component of our culture, and while it takes time to build, it can be easily broken. We must continuously nurture both our culture and trust with our team.”

BUSINESS AND SOCIAL OUTCOMES

The intentional approach DLE took in integrating their workforce as part of their long-term business sustainability objective, led to the following results.

1

Improved trust and teamwork among employees of different backgrounds, while fostering a sense of community and belonging in the workforce.

2

Enhanced staff retention over the long-term, despite industry norms and challenges.

3

Affirmative feedback from clients regarding quality and reliability of DLE teams and deliverables.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

The three key takeaways from DLE's success in integrating its workforce while meeting its business outcomes are as follows:



Leadership Commitment to Build Desired Culture

Building culture requires consistent effort by leaders across the organisation to “walk the talk” in every aspect of work practices and communications. A shared belief and alignment in their behaviours enables role-modelling to develop the desired values in employees.

Being Intentional and Thinking from Others' Perspectives Improves Outcomes

Building trust and culture requires a leader to be intentional with how you engage others and consider whether your engagement method will allow others to receive you as intended. It is more important that others understand you accurately and they know what they need to do to produce the desired business outcomes.





The Small Things Matter

It is the day-to-day human interactions that matters more when it comes to building trust and a sense of belonging between people, supporting the employees' integration with the workforce. Overtime, the organisation has greater ability to retain a skilled workforce that it has invested in.



Reflections

What stood out about DLE's approach to foster integration?

How might you adapt these ideas for your organisation?

CASE STUDY

Philips

Singapore



Creative
Resourcing



Cultural
Sensitivity



Leadership
Commitment

Adopting a strong philosophical approach to integration, diversity and inclusion through culture building without KPIs.





Our ambition is for everyone to thrive and feel valued for who they are and what they contribute.

We're striving to create a culture where differences are embraced, where people feel cared for and listened to, and where everyone can be at their best.



As a leading health technology company from the Netherlands, Philips' purpose is to improve health and well-being through meaningful innovation.

Recognising the value of a diverse and inclusive workforce in enhancing innovation, performance, and employee satisfaction, Philips is committed to building a culture of diversity and inclusion at its workplaces across the world. Its APAC office in Singapore, housing over 430 employees from 27 nationalities, exemplifies their commitment to inclusivity and diversity.

"Our ambition is for everyone to thrive and feel valued for who they are and what they contribute. We're striving to create a culture where differences are embraced, where people feel cared for and listened to, and where everyone can be at their best." shared Ms Ivy Lai, Country Manager for Philips Singapore, and Chief Finance Officer of Philips APAC.

"We have a diverse and inclusive workforce of different races and ethnicities, but we can't take this for granted,"



Set by Leadership, **Driven by Employees**

Philips fosters an employee-led culture with inclusive leadership to maximise the benefits of diversity. Leaders must advocate for diversity, inclusivity, and integration, inspiring employees to also drive culture in their work every day, said Ms Ivy Lai.

In 2021, Philips launched a Global Diversity Council comprised of senior executives to govern diversity efforts, promote and role model company-wide behaviour change, and communicate progress. This is further driven by employee champions leading informal initiatives to bring people together.

Ms Ivy Lai emphasised the deliberate efforts of including integration elements in these initiatives and work practices to help employees connect personally outside of work projects.

“Leadership must genuinely want to build a diverse and inclusive workforce, not just to check a box. It is not only the right thing to do, it makes business sense.”

Diversity and Inclusion Is **Always a Work In Progress**

Even with the company's long-held tradition of pushing the envelope on progressive workplace culture, leaders remain sensitive to any issues that might arise.

Philips Singapore holds both global and local onboarding induction programmes for new hires, and the local onboarding programme includes local nuances and culturally acceptable behaviours. These allow foreign employees who are new to Singapore to learn and integrate better into the workplace and socially.



Creating an inclusive and welcoming culture doesn't lie on one member of the group. Everyone has an important role to play.

Setting the Intention for Inclusion and Integration

Inclusion and integration require intentional actions. This is evident across various festivities and company events that Philips Singapore purposefully organises to foster cultural understanding and build meaningful connections among its diverse workforce.

“These integration and bonding activities are very beneficial to building our company culture - breaking silos and building meaningful connections among our employees, leading to a stronger spirit of collaboration and innovation at work.”

For example, every Lunar New Year celebration, employees from different nationalities gather to celebrate together. Particularly, two British employees from the management team make an effort to dress up according to the year of the zodiac as a means to actively participate and connect with local employees.

Another example is Philips Singapore's international food market event where employees from different nationalities set up booths to share their favourite national dishes.

During company team building events, the organising committee will include specific mechanisms to ensure a mix of different genders, nationalities, and ethnicities from multiple departments. This allows employees to engage with and learn more about one another and their cultures in an informal setting.

Embracing Diversity Through Fairness, Transparency, and Integrity

Underpinning Philips' focus on diversity and inclusion is its commitment to transparency, fairness, and integrity. The company is dedicated to hiring to grow and takes proactive strategies to minimise bias while building psychological safety in teams.

Philips believes its workforce should reflect the markets they serve, leading to diverse nationalities and ethnicities across departments, even for country or market-specific departments. Its employees are empowered to build high-performing teams with diverse experiences, knowledge, and skills.

“We assign opportunities and roles to individuals who are the best fit, regardless of their nationality. It is more about one's competence and market familiarity than one's ethnicity.”

Philips' hiring practices reflect this commitment, with diverse interview panels and members completing unconscious bias training before the interviews. To eliminate biases, and optimise opportunity for diverse candidates, the company uses competency-based interviews to focus on candidates' strengths and areas of opportunities, mitigating bias from the selection process.

BUSINESS AND SOCIAL OUTCOMES

The deliberate approach Philips Singapore takes in integrating their local and foreign employees to harness the advantages of diversity creates the following results.

1

A felt sense of psychological safety is present in the workplace, where everyone is encouraged to put forward their thoughts, listen carefully, and build on collective ideas. Embracing diverse backgrounds, expertise and insights help Philips better **anticipate the needs of customers and to leverage more business opportunities.**

2

Increased retention and engagement of employees and generating ground-up initiatives that benefit the organisation.

3

The opportunities to integrate through company events led to increased informal social gatherings held across departments, fostering a stronger sense of belonging in the organisation. This translates into a **more collaborative, creative, and innovative workplace** at Philips Singapore.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

The three key takeaways from Philips Singapore's story that could benefit any organisation in their integration journey are as follows:



It Takes Active Leadership to Build a Culture

In building a desired culture of integration, leadership must recognise and believe in the value of the integration to the organisation. Employees will then trust and reciprocate a culture that is actively and sincerely driven.

Be Deliberate with Integration

Be deliberate with your integration efforts. When employees feel safe and valued, they are encouraged and motivated to contribute their diverse ideas and perspectives, fostering more innovation and creative thinking, which are critical for businesses.





KPIs are a good starting point

KPIs are a great starting point to build a diverse and inclusive culture over time. As these work practices become ingrained, the focus can shift from formal metrics to informal mindfulness, ensuring long-term success and truly embedding diversity and inclusion in one's culture.



Reflections

Using Philips Singapore philosophy towards integration, diversity and inclusion, what are the areas your organisation could work towards?

What habit(s) does your organisation have to build or strengthen to embody this philosophy?

CASE STUDY

SBS Transit



Creative
Resourcing

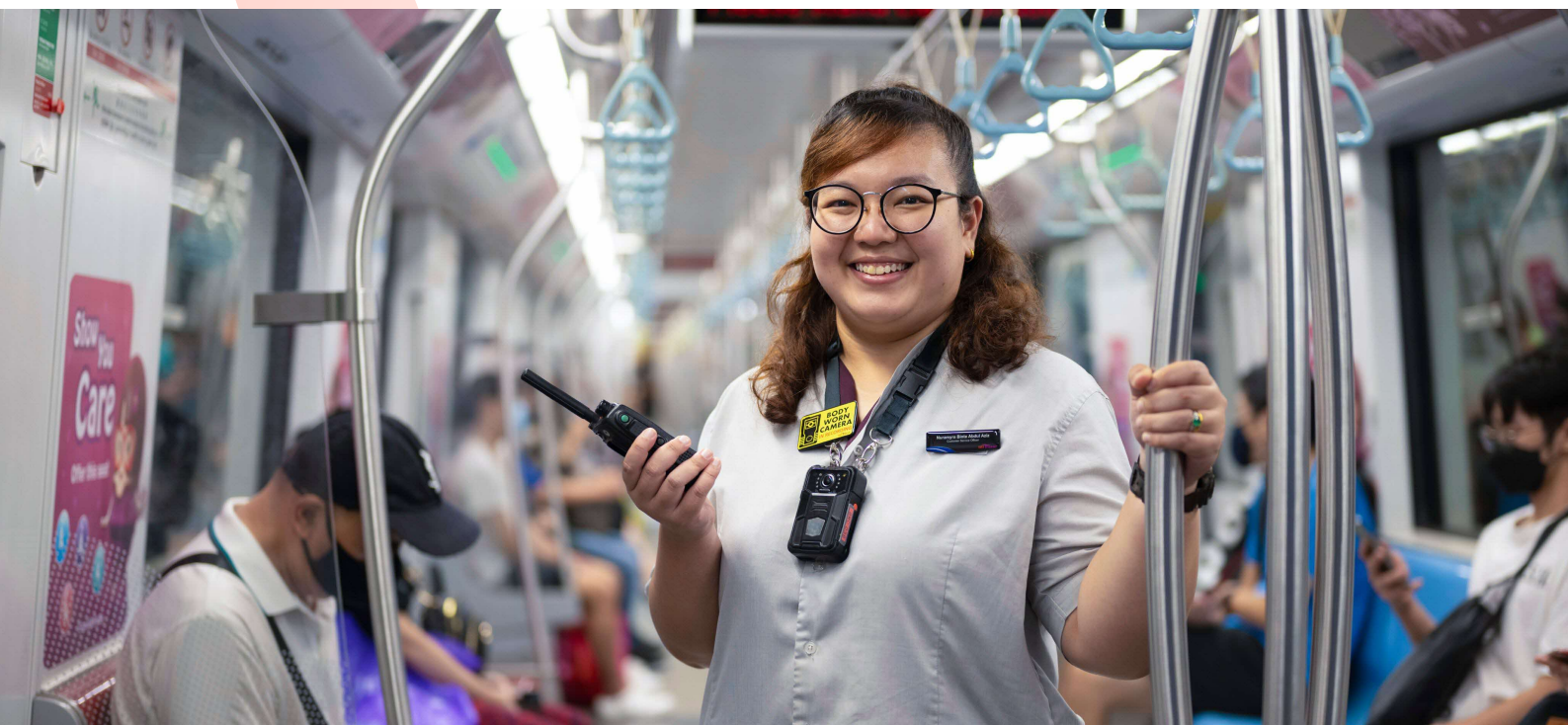


Cultural
Sensitivity



Leadership
Commitment

Showcasing resilience in integrating a diverse workforce with strong union collaboration in a challenging public transport sector.





The key to our success is our communications. We make no secrets, anything good we quickly share it.

We quickly tell the guys to share the story. So that before the official communication goes out, they (bus captains) already expect what is going to happen.



Commitment and agility are key to sustained success. A strike in 2012 by bus captains from China disrupted the public transport system, driving home the importance of labour relations for SBS Transit, a major public transport operator in Singapore. This incident started SBS Transit on its thoughtful journey in integrating its bus captains' (BC) diverse needs and preferences.

The commitment by SBS Transit and its willingness to learn and adjust existing initiatives to improve labour relationships resulted in a BC workforce that directly increases public satisfaction of bus services. With a productive and cooperative workforce, it is no surprise SBS Transit has also achieved sustainable operating profits over the years.

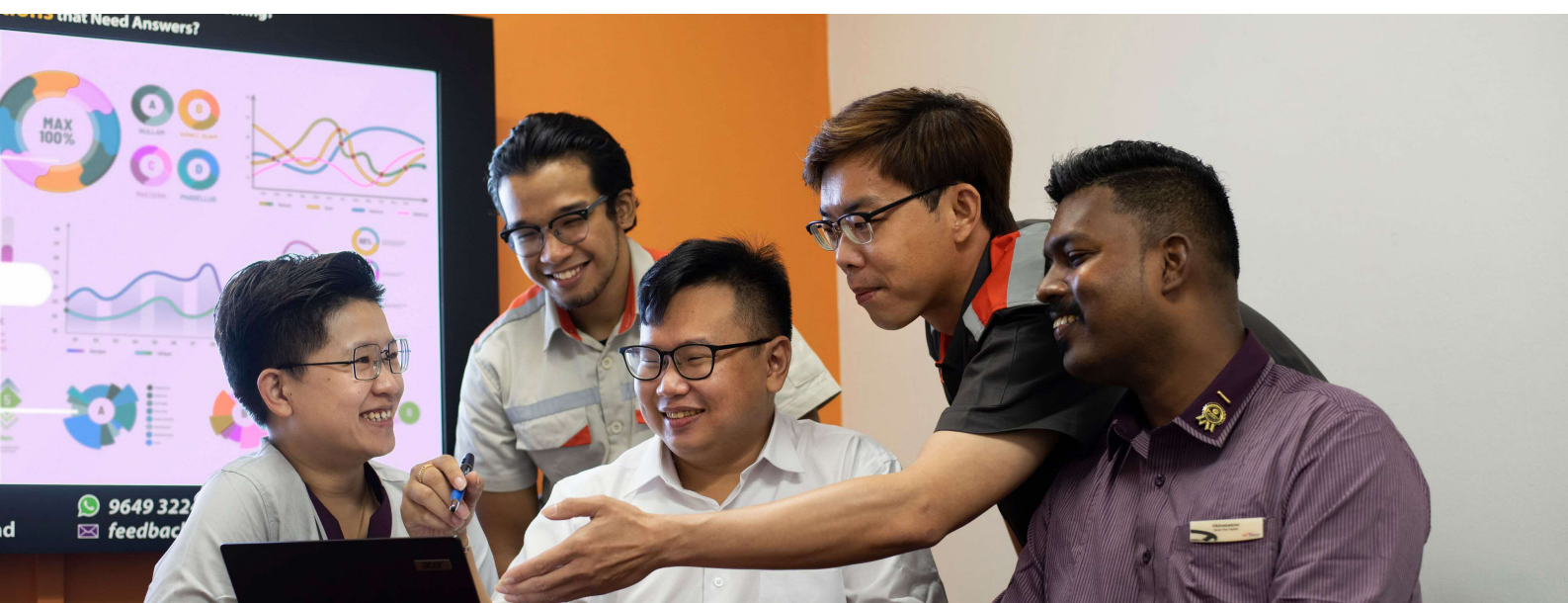
Challenges & Objectives

Mr Eric Lim, Vice-President, Learning & Organisational Development, shared SBS Transit's main tension is in managing and

integrating a multinational and multicultural BC workforce mainly from Singapore, Malaysia and China. To ensure a smooth service delivery, there is a need to balance diverse needs, preferences, language skills, and work ethics, while ensuring operational efficiency and effectiveness.

SBS Transit faces integration challenges and complexities among its diverse workforce, including varying salary structures and allowances among foreign BCs, potentially causing perceptions of unfairness. Geographical dispersion across multiple bus depots complicates communication efforts, while distinct lifestyle and shift preferences contribute to group segregation.

With labour relations of paramount importance to the business goals of SBS Transit, Mr Eric Lim shared they have tried and adjusted various initiatives and found the following key initiatives have enabled their integration outcomes over the years.



Create **Open and Transparent** Communication Channels

SBS Transit attributes the success of its integration strategy to its dedication in ensuring open, transparent and robust communication channels established with its BCs over the years.

i) Working with the National Transport Workers Union leaders to finalise and communicate official information and news: Regular engagements with various stakeholder groups are held to ensure there is alignment in understanding and a space to discuss issues.

ii) Appointing and developing Bus Interchange Managers and service leaders as part of the communication network ensures timely sharing of information and news. These trusted and experienced leaders support communication and help surface ground-up issues and concerns for HR to address preemptively.

iii) Training corporate leaders to communicate inclusively enables them to engage effectively with BCs during festivities and corporate-level celebrations. Leaders embodying openness and inclusivity encourage the BCs they engage with to behave similarly.



Create Opportunities for **Celebration and Personal Interactions**

Due to the geographical dispersion of SBS Transit BCs, Mr Eric Lim shared celebrations and festivities are typically held at the depots and interchanges. This allows everyone to celebrate major holidays together and understand the importance of these festivals to one another. This supports BCs to be more inclined to help cover for each other when their colleagues go on leave to spend time with their families.

The adversity of COVID-19 created bonding opportunities for Malaysian and Chinese BCs as they spent extended time staying together. The phone-savvy Chinese BCs taught Malaysians BCs how to use FaceTime, WhatsApp, and WeChat for video calls and send gifts via e-commerce platforms. These spontaneous interactions further strengthened bonds, and they also invited each other for meals together and learnt about each other's families, children, and concerns.

“During Chinese New Year, the Malays and PRC Chinese will all help out the local Chinese. And during Hari Raya, Chinese and Indians will all help out the Malays, so on and so forth. And the PRC guys, some of them do go back during Zhong Qiu (mid Autumn), ... it's a big thing for them, apparently because to the Chinese, Tuan Yuan is not restricted to only Chinese New Year.”

Build Leadership Commitment and a **Culture of CARES**

Mr Eric Lim highlighted a prevailing leadership culture of relative unselfishness across SBS Transit's various levels of leadership, where leaders exhibit personal touch and empathy. This is a culture which has developed since our service excellence culture, CARES (Caring – Adaptable – Reliable – Earth-friendly – Safe & secure), was rolled out in 2008.

The CEOs have been particularly caring and empathetic, accommodating employees' family commitments and lifestyles. Such role-modelling sets the tone for leadership behaviours throughout the organisation.

SBS Transit has recently expanded their CARES culture, and use it to focus on developing leaders through their CARES leadership framework. Besides training, they also focus on supporting existing leadership culture through various ways:

- Develop a playbook to guide leaders on expectations, effective communication with BCs, and understanding different nationalities and cultures.
- Coach service leaders to become strong advocates for labour relations and integration, exemplified by leaders who have improved and now excel in engagement.
- Establish leadership training programmes at various leadership levels to enhance communication, bonding, and relationship-building skills, promoting inclusion and integration.



Establish Welfare and Recognition Schemes that **Communicate CARES**

SBS Transit has implemented big and small schemes that have helped anchor their BCs in the organisation and in Singapore. It has resulted in BCs relocating their families in Singapore and for some of them eventually naturalising as Singaporeans. These schemes include:

- Productivity payments for all BCs to share productivity gains by SBS Transit
- Study awards to sponsor BCs to upgrade their education and skill sets
- Education awards for employees' children who have excelled academically

"All the CEOs that I've seen so far have a high level of empathy. I see this as a corporate culture which was naturally evolved from our CARES. What had happened is that it evolves from a commuter centric culture to become an organisation wide culture, working both externally and internally."

BUSINESS AND SOCIAL OUTCOMES

The integration strategy and initiatives of SBS Transit has shown that it produces attributable and tangible business results and outcomes. It is not just for the purposes of bringing people together, but to also feel good and celebrate small successes.

1

Initiatives implemented led to a **more cohesive and productive workforce**, with notable improvements in employee satisfaction, enhanced understanding across different cultural groups, and a sustained operating profit over the years.

2

Their efforts also saw an **improvement in the public satisfaction**, with the compliment-to-complaint ratio improving from 6:1 to 10:1.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

The three takeaways from SBS Transit's success in achieving its integration outcomes are as follows:



Cultural Sensitivity as a Business Imperative

Bridging and facilitating understanding of cultural differences and sensitivity creates a more respectful and resilient workforce. Employees who understand each other's needs well are better able to care for or support one another in times of crises and minimise impact on business operations.

The Importance of Leadership Commitment

Human relations and trust are developed through an intentional and consistent effort. Building a well-integrated workforce that balances both efficiency and effectiveness requires leaders to sustain day-to-day interactions consistently over a prolonged period in order to see results.





Open and Empathetic Communications Create Harmonious Relations

Attributed as a key strategy for SBS Transit by Mr Eric Lim, ensuring open and empathetic communications creates a sense of transparency and being listened to. The leadership team's willingness to listen to the union leaders and their employees have allowed issues to be surfaced preemptively and resolved harmoniously.



Reflections

What strategy employed by SBS would be relevant for your organisation?

Which stakeholders would you need to consult or engage in order to adapt these strategies to your organisation?

CASE STUDY

Wen Ken Group



Empathetic
Communication



Cultural
Sensitivity



Leadership
Commitment

Emphasising respect by overcoming language barriers and cultural misunderstandings in a diverse, multi-national workforce.





Wen Ken's leadership philosophy revolves around removing language barriers to drive greater connection and productivity as well as encouraging win-win approaches at every level of engagement.

The middle managers adopt the very essence of this philosophy and proactively work within and across departments, elevating the culture of care.



At the heart of Wen Ken's story lies a collective aspiration towards a harmonious and integrated workplace. With operations spanning across Malaysia and Singapore, Wen Ken encountered the challenge of integrating a diverse workforce comprising various nationalities and cultural backgrounds, including Malay, Chinese, Nepalese, and more.

The Managing Director of Wen Ken, Mr Fu Siang Jee, and Executive Director, Mr Fu Shou Jee, had a clear vision of creating an inclusive culture that embraces diversity while promoting effective communication and understanding among employees. The core narratives anchoring Wen Ken's integration efforts stem from Mr Fu Siang Jee's & Mr Fu Shou Jee's philosophy around caring for the employees, breaking language barriers and encouraging a win-win approach. This is evident in their policies and initiatives focused on addressing the language barriers, cultural misunderstandings, and a need for stronger interdepartmental relationships.

Challenges & Objectives

The diverse composition of Wen Ken's workforce meant that work situations commonly involve three prominent native languages in the mix. While English serves as the common language, the diversity of teams pose communication difficulties.



“Mr Fu's philosophy is always win-win – it is not about looking at one side, we always look at both sides.”

Additionally, the spectrum of distinct cultural backgrounds often see employees preferring to interact within their own groups. These are integration complexities that the organisation is determined to overcome.

Anchored by Wen Ken's leadership philosophy and direction, Ms Julia Foong, Human Resource Manager, shared the key strategies implemented to enhance workplace communication and in turn, improving the operational efficiency and productivity.

“I heard from Mr Fu that he just wants to have the cultural understanding and to break all language barriers. He also welcomes the employees to talk more, to share their points of view so that we can create a better Wen Ken for them.”

Multilingual Documentation

The organisation recognises the importance of clear communication across linguistic backgrounds and implemented strategies to ensure accessibility and understanding for all employees. This involved translating essential documents, such as company policies and procedures, into multiple languages (English, Bahasa Malay and Nepali) to cater to the diverse linguistic needs.

In the process of translating essential documents for the Nepalese employees, Ms Julia Foong shared that they talent scouted a Nepalese employee for support, ensuring accuracy and cultural relevance in the translated content.

Assigning a Nepali leader to oversee the translation process further strengthened the connection between the policies and the Nepali-speaking employees, enhancing their understanding and appreciation for each other. This initiative not only promotes inclusivity but also demonstrates respect for the Nepalese employees, fostering a sense of significance and belonging.

The HR team's effort to communicate with inclusivity created a cohesive and supportive work environment where every employee can fully engage and participate.



Encouraging **Cross-Departmental Interaction**



Cross-departmental interaction is a vital aspect of Wen Ken's workplace integration effort. For instance, the HR team is consistent in taking intentional steps to pre-plan seating arrangements, ensuring employees are well-mixed across departments during training, company events and festival celebrations. These attempts create more opportunities for interactions, thereby strengthening connections and forging deeper bonds.

This intentional inclusion is keenly appreciated by the employees. Ms Julia Foong shared that colleagues would thank the HR team for their efforts in setting up opportunities for cross-departmental interaction and business unit heads would also highlight the integration efforts during monthly meetings. Similar sentiments were also captured in employees' feedback.

"During training, festive celebrations and our annual dinners, we will select different department employees to sit together because we want to mix around and build relationships with one another."

To the HR team, company activities and employee events are perfect opportunities to bring the employees together. Festive celebrations like Chinese New Year, Hari Raya, Deepavali, and Christmas have supported Wen Ken Group to enhance the quality and depth of cultural exchanges as well as forge deeper bonds amongst the employees.

BUSINESS AND SOCIAL OUTCOMES

These are the positive business and social outcomes Wen Ken Group yielded by incorporating language inclusivity and cross-departmental interactions into their practices.



Wen Ken achieved a **substantial increase in productivity gains of 20% and revenue of nearly 50%**. This growth is driven by the team's heightened commitment to fulfilling sales orders, indicating enhanced employee engagement and operational efficiency.



Their integration efforts saw **increased employee satisfaction** reported in their employee survey. The findings also pointed to improved communication and understanding across cultural groups. In particular, the successful integration of the Nepalese workforce, expressed appreciation for the consideration of their language and culture.



KEY TAKEAWAYS

The three key takeaways from Wen Ken Group's workplace integration journey are as follows:



Dual Approach – Support from Top Leadership and Middle Management

Wen Ken's leadership philosophy encourages a win-win approach at every level of engagement. The middle managers embody this philosophy and proactively work within and across departments, elevating the culture of care.

Open Channels of Communication Enhance Organisational Alignment

Clear top-down communication and bottom-up feedback minimises misunderstandings, and fosters collaboration. A two-way communication culture ensures policy refinement and employee alignment with organisational goals, promoting open dialogue and shared responsibility.





Consistent and Continued Efforts Ensure Sustained Inclusivity

Regular initiatives and feedback mechanisms reinforce the organisation's commitment to integration. Employees feel valued and respected, knowing their input matters. This ensures ongoing success in embracing diversity and promoting inclusivity.



Reflections

What do you think your leaders and middle managers can do to demonstrate your commitment to integration through your daily interactions with employees?

What strategies can your organisation implement to ensure that integration efforts are consistently prioritised and sustained over time?

CASE STUDY

Yishun Health



Creative
Resourcing



Cultural
Sensitivity



Leadership
Commitment

Practising empathy and care through
supportive integration initiatives to
ensure holistic workplace well-being.



“

We want to remind them that they are not alone in a new country. We want them to know that when they come here for work, it is an opportunity to make new friends and colleagues – hopefully even see them as their new family here.

”

Integrating New Foreign Hires — The YH Singapore Induction Programme

The YH Singapore Induction Programme, informally known as the acculturation programme, was introduced as a response to the integration difficulties experienced during an influx of new hires during COVID. This half-day programme, supplemented by eLearning, aims to familiarise foreign hires with the Singaporean culture, workplace norms, and social expectations. It targets all foreign hires but focuses on nursing staff due to their significant representation in the workforce — approximately four in 10 of the nursing staff are foreigners.

“The programme helps to manage issues caused by cultural differences, or a lack of understanding of Singapore culture. After our new staff gain this knowledge, they know how to interact with patients and colleagues better to reduce misunderstandings.”

Revamped from what was previously a self-guided presentation deck, the induction programme was expanded to offer foreign nurses cultural sensitivity training. It equips them with knowledge about local customs, language nuances, and healthcare expectations.

By elevating cultural awareness, the L&D team hopes to better prepare foreign nurses for interactions with patients and local colleagues, navigate potential misunderstandings and enhance patient care experiences and work relationships.

In the making of this induction programme, the L&D team gathered relevant stories and leveraged the experiences of foreign-born nursing educators to mentor new foreign hires. These educators share their own stories of integration and adaptation, providing real-life examples and reassurance to new staff.

One impactful story involved an educator who discussed her early challenges and career advancement at YH, serving as a powerful testament to the potential career paths available to foreign hires.

This underscores that YH's integration efforts, which go beyond programme design with a deliberate focus on affirming and addressing new hires' concerns. This holistic approach ensures foreign staff feel supported and valued throughout their integration.



“We want to have a programme that is genuinely beneficial to our new staff and not just for show. We want to make sure that this program fits the purpose, which is why we first need to understand them before we go into content development.”

Ensuring Holistic Care and Support **Beyond Induction**



Beyond the acculturation programme, YH has implemented several initiatives to bolster the well-being of its staff and its foreign new hires in particular. These include:

Staff Wellness Programmes

“It is important for them to have opportunities to interact and bond with their colleagues and not just during work. We organise wellness activities to encourage bonding beyond working. This also helps to enhance their mental well-being.”

As part of encouraging staff wellness, the nurses gather for sports interest groups, such as bowling and running clubs and even going on road trips to Malaysia. These are avenues outside of the professional environment where foreign and local colleagues get to interact on a more personal level, fostering friendships and a sense of belonging.

PALS Hotline

PALS – Peer Around Lending Support is a peer support system offering a 24/7 hotline, manned by in-house trained social workers and psychologists who volunteer their time to support the healthcare community at YH. This platform aims to provide a safe space for any staff to share their concerns and receive support. The HRD team and nursing educators may occasionally signpost the new foreign nurses to PALS if they require support with integration, which can affect their physical, emotional as well as psychological well-being.

BUSINESS AND SOCIAL OUTCOMES

Yishun Health demonstrates a deliberate approach to programme design by prioritising careful needs analysis before curriculum development, which yielded sustained integration outcomes for the foreign new hires:

1

Increased team synergy as new nurses are more equipped with the skills and knowledge necessary to **navigate cultural differences and interpersonal dynamics.**

2

Enhanced peer support networks empower foreign new nurses with **guidance, encouragement, and a sense of belonging.**

3

The tailored courseware directly addressed real-life situations, helping foreign nurses feel more confident in interacting with colleagues and patients, **enhancing workplace harmony and effectiveness.**



KEY TAKEAWAYS

The three takeaways from Yishun Health that could strengthen team synergy and workplace harmony are as follows:



Obtain Leadership Support

Securing buy-in from key leadership figures, such as the chief nurse, was essential to garnering support and resources for the integration programme. The endorsement helped facilitate the smooth execution of the induction programme and ensured its success. Additionally, with leadership support, it communicated YH's stand on a culture of inclusion, where integration is prioritised and valued throughout the organisation, fostering a sense of commitment among the staff.

Emphasis on Peer Support and Daily Integration Efforts

With programmes and initiatives in place to kickstart local-foreign integration, YH recognises the importance of daily efforts contributing to a continuous culture of inclusion. This is evident in the peer support networks established across the organisation that ensure new hires receive formal guidance as well as personal support where necessary.





Utilise Internal Resources

Leveraging internal resources and initiatives proved to be effective in promoting integration without significant budgets required. By having existing staff members for peer support and embedding integration efforts into daily routines and practices, integration efforts can be sustainable and achievable even within existing budget. This approach also reinforces the notion that integration is a collective effort that relies on the commitment and participation of all staff members.



Reflections

What are some integration ideas your organisation could try to embed in daily routines or practices?

How can your organisation balance time constraints and budget limitations to ensure the success and sustainability of your integration efforts/programmes?

HOW TO USE THE NEXT SECTIONS



Empathetic
Communication



Creative
Resourcing



Cultural
Sensitivity



Leadership
Commitment

Four enabling factors are featured throughout the stories of the six organisations - Empathetic Communication, Creative Resourcing, Cultural Sensitivity and Leadership Commitment. Additionally, we also identified key ingredients that will sustainably support the success of every organisations' integration efforts.

How can you make these work for your organisation? We created the following sections as aids to help you think about what you can do when designing good integration initiatives.



The **ingredient list** is an exercise to help you review your existing integration initiatives.

You do not need to have all ingredients to be successful, though having more ingredients will increase your chance for sustainable success - *just like a soup that becomes richer and tastier with more appropriate ingredients added over time.*



The **worksheets** are designed to guide individuals to think about creating new integration initiatives or tweaking existing ones using the five key ingredients.

If you are the sole person working on integration in your organisation, this section will be most suitable for you.



The **conversation cards** are designed to guide a team, committee or group of volunteers to dialogue in co-creating a vision, purpose, and next steps on creating new integration initiatives or tweaking existing ones.

If you are leading a team, committee or simply a part of a group of individuals invested in creating a workplace that everyone can feel they belong in, this section will be helpful to you.

FIVE KEY INGREDIENTS

We have learnt from these organisations that it takes five key ingredients for a workplace integration effort to be truly sustainable and effective at creating long-term positive impact for any organisation.

- Leaders believing in the value of integration
- Bridging and facilitating understanding of cultural differences

AWARENESS

EMOTIONAL BUY-IN

- Building trust and synergy through integrated programmes
- Integration initiatives promoting inclusivity and harmony

ACTION

OUTREACH

- Sustained leadership commitment
- Embedding integration efforts into daily routines

SUSTAIN

- Leaders fostering a culture of inclusion
- Being intentional and deliberate with integration

- Encouraging peer support networks
- Involving staff in communication and feedback processes

Are all five ingredients required for success?

We believe it to be highly situational to the organisation's circumstances. Every effort to improve on the workplace environment is still a win! Take the following illustration as an example.

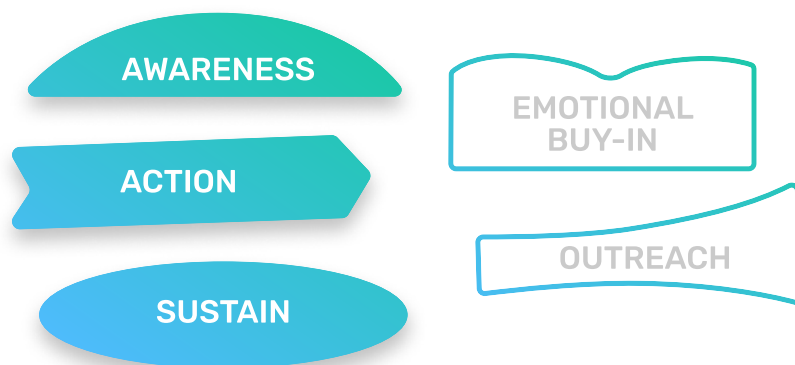
Company X is a local company with 50 staff of five nationalities and cultures, that develops mobile games in a highly competitive and fast-paced industry. The company's leadership believes that speed-to-market is the competitive advantage of a software company and is the core of their Agile development processes. With the focus on getting the product out to market at any costs, Company X has a high turnover rate typical to the industry.

Bob, a new but experienced manager hired to replace a vacant Head of a development team, gained **Awareness** and took on a Visionary role when he noticed the low morale of his team and their non-participation during brainstorming discussions. He decided to take **Action** as an Innovator based on his experiences with good practices, to set aside time to have bi-weekly

team lunches and 1-hour non-work sessions together, to build trust and understand each other's diversity of strengths. Bob persisted in **Sustaining** his efforts as a Steward to strengthen his team despite his director's scepticism to the loss of valuable time.

Over a period of 8 months, Company X's leadership began to notice a gradual increase in productivity from Bob's team, with shorter development time and higher quality outputs leading to an increase in positive customer feedback. Chats with Bob's team members also resulted in positive staff engagement feedback that indicated stability within the team. Even though Company X leadership had no real Awareness of what was done, they were interested in replicating Bob's effort in other teams to further improve Company X business outcomes.

After using the model to identify the five key ingredients, Company X decided to further look into the following aspects:



This illustration shows that having practical awareness and starting small, by establishing or adding to the key ingredients, is the most important first step.

Take a moment and reflect on the integration-related efforts present in your organisation. In areas where you feel efforts are underway, fill in the adjacent box with descriptions of what is currently being done.

AWARENESS

**EMOTIONAL
BUY-IN**

ACTION

OUTREACH

SUSTAIN

If there are empty adjacent boxes, what are the ways your organisation can start looking into them? Write some quick pointers down.

WORKSHEET FOR **NEW INITIATIVES**

Congratulations on taking the proactive step towards fostering integration within your organisation! Recognising the importance of building a cohesive and inclusive workplace culture is the first crucial stride towards creating a thriving environment where every individual feels valued and empowered.

As you embark on this journey, it is essential to affirm your efforts and dedication to this cause. Your commitment to fostering integration not only strengthens your organisation but also paves the way for a more harmonious and productive work environment.

To guide you through this process and assist in structuring your integration efforts effectively, we have developed a comprehensive worksheet. This worksheet serves as a practical tool to help you plan your integration strategies methodically.

Let's explore how you can utilise this worksheet to streamline your integration initiatives and maximise their impact on your organisation's culture and performance.

AWARENESS

- Why invest in integration? What is the issue you are hoping to solve?
- What are the wins you are hoping to achieve through these integration efforts?
- What ideas/initiatives illustrated in the case studies caught your attention? How can these be applied within your organisation?

EMOTIONAL BUY-IN

- What role do you see leadership playing in your organisation's integration efforts, and how can you foster greater executive support and involvement, as illustrated in the case studies?
- What other forms of support could you pull together to move this initiative forward?
- What national movement/trends could you leverage to get stronger buy-in for your initiative?

ACTION

- What is the idea or initiative that you wish to implement? What resources are available for this initiative to take place?
- How can you work within the constraints? Are there ways to tap on other funded initiatives to creatively embed your intention for the initiative, or embed your ideas within work processes?

OUTREACH

- What relationships/social groups in your organisation could you leverage on to champion or encourage others to participate in the initiative?
- What relationships could you build that will help move your initiative forward and ensure its sustainability?

SUSTAIN

- What types of diversity will you have to consider in the design and implementation of the initiatives?
- What are the ways you can, as much as possible, make everyone feel seen and included?
- How are you intending to measure the success of these integration initiatives in your organisation?

WORKSHEET FOR **EXISTING INITIATIVES**

Congratulations on taking the proactive step to foster integration within your organisation! Recognising the importance of building a cohesive and inclusive workplace culture is the first crucial step towards creating a thriving environment where every individual feels valued and empowered.

To support your desire to improve workforce

integration in your workplace, we have developed this worksheet as a tool to help you reflect and gain clarity towards achieving your desired outcomes.

Let's explore how you can utilise this worksheet to maximise the impact of your integration initiatives on your organisation's culture and performance.

AWARENESS

- What current integration initiative in your organisation would you like to improve on?
- Why is it important for your organisation to improve this initiative?
- What business and social/relationship outcomes would you like this improved initiative to create for your organisation?

EMOTIONAL BUY-IN

- What role does leadership play in your organisation's integration efforts, and how can you foster greater executive support and involvement, as illustrated in the case studies?
- What other forms of support within your organisation can you leverage to move this initiative forward?
- What narrative do you need to create to gather support for your improved initiative?

ACTION

- What resources are available inside and outside your organisation for this improved initiative to take place?
- Can you tap on other funded initiatives to creatively incorporate your intention for your improved initiative?
- Can you design this intention into existing work practices or processes to reduce resource requirements?

Launched in 2019 to support integration projects, the National Integration Council's **Community Integration Fund (CIF)** provides co-funding for ground-up integration projects. Please visit the Community Integration Fund website to find out more.

<https://www.mccy.gov.sg/sector/initiatives/community-integration-fund>

OUTREACH

- What relationships/social groups in your organisation can you leverage to champion or encourage others to participate in the improved initiative?
- What relationships can you build or strengthen to ensure the sustainability and effectiveness of this improved initiative as you move it forward?

SUSTAIN

- What are the types of diversity present in your organisation that have to be considered in the design and implementation of the improved initiative?
- What are some ways to make everyone feel included, seen and heard in the process of implementing your improved initiative?
- How might you evaluate your improved initiative? What implications does it have on sustainability of your initiative?

Awareness

What has your organisation done that supports integration between you and your colleagues?

Building An Inclusive Culture
Conversation Cards

Awareness

What can your organisation do to make the workplace more integrated?

Building An Inclusive Culture
Conversation Cards

Awareness

What organisational issue(s) are you hoping to manage through better integration?

Building An Inclusive Culture
Conversation Cards

Awareness

What is your view towards integration? How does it overlap or differ with your organisation?

Building An Inclusive Culture
Conversation Cards

Awareness

What might be the desired organisational scenario from your integration efforts?

Building An Inclusive Culture
Conversation Cards

Emotional Buy-In

What role do you see leadership playing in your organisation's integration efforts?

Building An Inclusive Culture
Conversation Cards

Emotional Buy-In

What are some other forms of support you can leverage to strengthen integration efforts?

Building An Inclusive Culture
Conversation Cards

Emotional Buy-In

What other influencers in your organisation can you persuade to help you move your integration efforts forward?

Building An Inclusive Culture
Conversation Cards

Emotional Buy-In

What emotional narrative does your organisation need to create to aid participation in your integration efforts?

Building An Inclusive Culture
Conversation Cards

Action

What resources are available within and outside of your organisation for this initiative to take place?

Building An Inclusive Culture
Conversation Cards

Action

What other funded initiatives can you tap on to creatively embed your intention for the initiative?

Building An Inclusive Culture
Conversation Cards

Action

How might we integrate the initiative's intentions into existing work practices or processes to optimise resource utilisation?

Building An Inclusive Culture
Conversation Cards

Action

Who else might you be able to tap on to drive your integration efforts forward?

Building An Inclusive Culture
Conversation Cards

Outreach

What relationships/social groups in your organisation can you leverage to champion or encourage others to participate in the initiative?

Building An Inclusive Culture
Conversation Cards

Outreach

What relationships can you strengthen to gain more support in ensuring the sustainability and effectiveness of this initiative?

Building An Inclusive Culture
Conversation Cards

Outreach

What ways can you incentivise your colleagues to participate in integration efforts?

Building An Inclusive Culture
Conversation Cards

Sustain

What are the types of diversity to consider in the design and implementation of the initiatives?

Building An Inclusive Culture
Conversation Cards

Sustain

What are the ways you can, as much as possible, make everyone feel seen and included?

Building An Inclusive Culture
Conversation Cards

Sustain

What are possible metrics or indicators the organisation can use to evaluate the integration initiatives?

Building An Inclusive Culture
Conversation Cards

Sustain

What stories have you heard that are encouraging for you as far as integration is concerned?

Building An Inclusive Culture
Conversation Cards

CARD CHECKLIST

- Awareness – 5 cards
- Emotional Buy-In – 4 cards
- Action – 4 cards
- Outreach – 3 cards
- Sustain – 4 cards

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