

## **Diversity is More than Skin Deep**

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In two earlier blogs I wrote about statistics on bias and diversity issues in engineering and on how you can help improve diversity and inclusion in engineering, with examples based upon activities of various IEEE volunteer leaders. In this piece I would like to talk about how including diverse experiences and viewpoints can lead to better engineering and greater innovation.

More than ever before in the history of our species, people from all over the world and from every possible background, sex and experience can interact and have an impact on each other. Technology has made this possible. In addition, something invented or manufactured in one country is generally available all over the world, enriching and enabling the lives and livelihoods of people everywhere.

According to the World Economic Forum<sup>1</sup>, “The coming together of people of different ethnicities with different experiences in cities and societies is a key driver of innovation.” You can see this in the diversity of ethnic foods that we eat and in successful musical genres like jazz, rock and roll and hip hop that are the result of the blending of cultures.

Likewise, in technology, diverse points of view will help us make products that appeal to and enhance the lives of more people in the US and throughout the world. We have only to look at some of the centers of technological innovation in the US such as the Silicon Valley (where I live), and you can see the impact that immigrants and people of very diverse backgrounds have had on the development of technology. According to a 2018 Mercury News article<sup>2</sup>, about 71% of tech employees in the Valley are foreign born.

Being diverse can help businesses be more successful. A 2017 BCG diversity and innovation survey found that more diverse organizations had about 20% higher revenue generated by new innovative products and services compared to less diverse organizations<sup>1</sup>. A 2018 McKinsey Delivering Through Diversity report found that corporation that embrace gender diversity on their executive teams were more competitive and 21% more likely to experience above-average profitability<sup>3</sup>. They also had a 27% likelihood of outperforming their peers on longer-term value creation. A video featuring Frans Johansson at the 2018 RSA conference presents some examples where diverse teams are many times more creative than non-diverse teams<sup>4</sup>.

A 2018 Deloitte Millennial Survey<sup>5</sup> (see results below) shows that diversity and inclusion are important factors in a Millennial workers job search, greater than for Gen-Xers or Baby

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2019/04/business-case-for-diversity-in-the-workplace/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.mercurynews.com/2018/01/17/h-1b-foreign-citizens-make-up-nearly-three-quarters-of-silicon-valley-tech-workforce-report-says/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/organization/our-insights/delivering-through-diversity#>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZDylEWbS7Is>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www2.deloitte.com/global/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/millennialsurvey.html>

Boomers. Working with people with different backgrounds appears to be a key element in attracting the next generation of innovators.

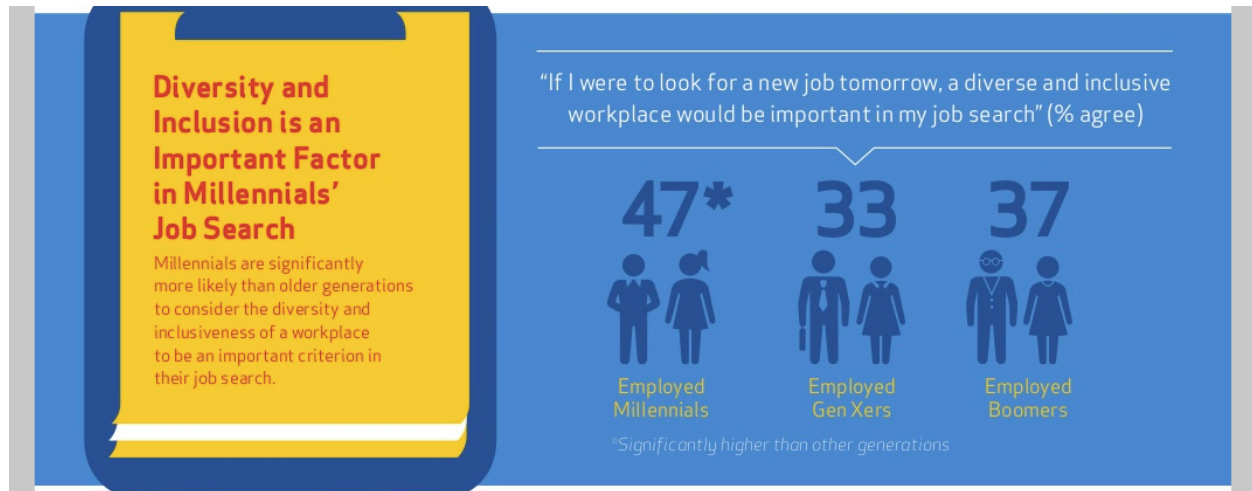


Image: Weber Shandwick

Diversity is more than skin deep. It is what is inside a person that makes them unique as well as reflecting their background and culture. It is the blending of ideas resulting from differing perspectives and different experiences that creates insight into new and innovative ways of solving shared problems. Inclusion is what enables that blending to occur.

Working together we can harness different perspectives and skills and accomplish far more than if we were all the same. This is true of engineering, technology in general and business. We need all the help we can get and from every type of person to solve the daunting issues that face the world and to make sure that future generations will continue to prosper and gain in their understanding and management of the world we live in.

