

The secret ingredient in Axe's success

How a diverse and inclusive workplace is the secret ingredient in Axe's success.

By Keerthi Chilukuri · 26th of November 2019

A lack of diversity in the workplace is a long-standing issue, particularly in tech. But while some organisations have made progress towards an equal balance of male and female employees, a recent report by McKinsey shows that this shift is inadequate, with women continuing to face discrimination at work. Also, problems across all stages of the talent pipeline reveal that women are still struggling to reach senior leadership positions.

At Axe Group though, diversity is more than simply a buzzword or 'the right thing to do'. For us, it's ingrained in our culture and is a key ingredient in our business success.



But how does it make a difference? Let me run you through how it works in practice, and the benefits that greater diversity brings to both us and our clients.

The value of inclusivity adds up

In Australia, 9.3% fewer women participate in the labour force than men. One of the key obstacles cited is that women are more likely to be the primary carer for children or other family members. At Axe, however, we do our best to ensure that having responsibilities at home doesn't become a barrier to a successful career by not assuming the type of work our staff are wanting to take on.

Keerthi Chilukuri, Product Specialist explains, "In my experience, it was never 'this person has a young child so they may not be a good fit for a very demanding project'. For the last four and a half years I have consistently worked on those kinds of projects almost every single day."

We also recognise that having a family to care for places additional responsibilities on our staff, so we offer flexible working arrangements to ease the challenge.

Following the birth of her first child our Project Director Pallavi Bakre realised that juggling the demands of her new family with full-time hours was unsustainable. We understood her struggle and offered options that enabled her to continue adding value to Axe. "HR offered me part-time hours, any number of days a week, as many hours as I would like," says Pallavi.

"I had freedom of decision making. There was no interference from anyone – as long as there was progress and I could manage my time; I could be flexible; nobody ever questioned it. In fact, I kept moving ahead and getting more responsibility."

We're proud of the fact that our flexible approach has resulted in a 47/53 female/male gender split – and because we've been able to retain female staff throughout their careers the number is even higher in management roles.



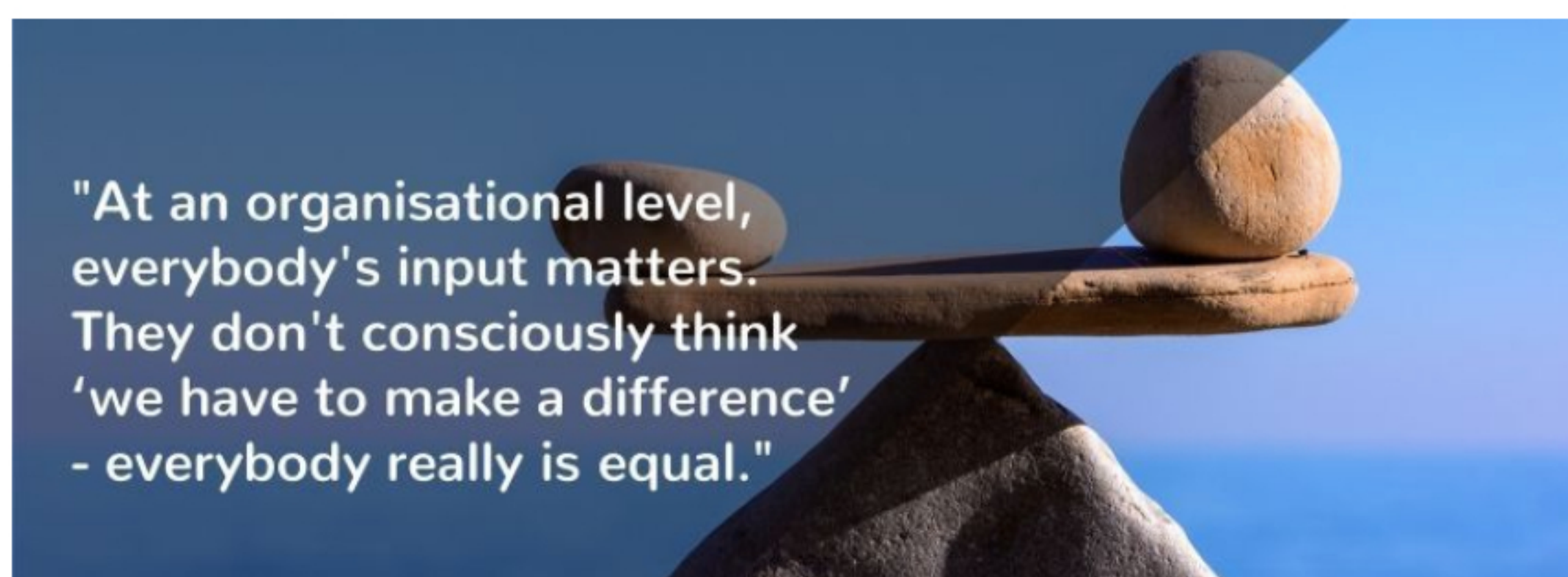
Walk the walk

Keerthi is quick to point out that this inclusivity isn't just for women, "It's for everyone, it's purely based on what you're capable of."

Kimberley Lathe, MD, echoes this sentiment, "It's more about not closing the door to people; as long they're bright and capable they can come on board. We just want to make sure that they have the skills and the cultural fit to enter the organisation."

Importantly, the company doesn't just pay lip service to diversity and inclusion, as Keerthi explains, "It's how they make you feel, or rather it's how they don't make you feel – they don't make you feel guilty for who you are – it's really your capability that matters."

While it seems like this is the result of concrete policies, our culture of inclusion has developed organically rather than being a conscious effort. "At an organisational level, everybody's input matters. They don't consciously think 'we have to make a difference', everybody really is equal," says Keerthi. "It's a real representation of the kind of people we have, the core at Axe, they're good people, and because they don't differentiate, the rest don't think along those lines either."



Kimberley shares a similar view, "We haven't necessarily pushed that; it's just happened naturally. I think we've walked the walk, not just talked it."

The benefits of an inclusive organisation

Diversity is of course a worthy social goal, but for us, it's far greater than that. We've seen tangible benefits throughout the company and for our clients.

Every good idea is able to surface

Kimberley explains that because of the organisation's flat structure, "anybody can talk to anybody else, and as a result, the ideas really flow".

Trust is another important factor. As Pallavi puts it, "People are not hesitant to express their opinions because they know they are respected."

This freedom directly translates into customer success. One of our retail life insurance clients commented, "The best thing [about Axe] is that they bring us new ideas. It's great to get those insights, which you don't get from other vendors."

This equitable culture at Axe has allowed us to attract and retain some of the best talent in the industry. Having this expertise and depth of knowledge in-house gives us a huge advantage in providing the best service to our customers. "We've retained the majority of our core staff over the years and consequently retained our knowledge base. We're well equipped to advise our clients when they face critical issues," explains Pallavi.

This strength has been noted by our clients. According to one of Australia's largest financial services companies, "What we like about Axe is the fact that they are quite agile and are able to turn products around quickly. One of their other strengths is they have a lot of permanent staff – if they find someone good, they keep them."

A united team is an agile team

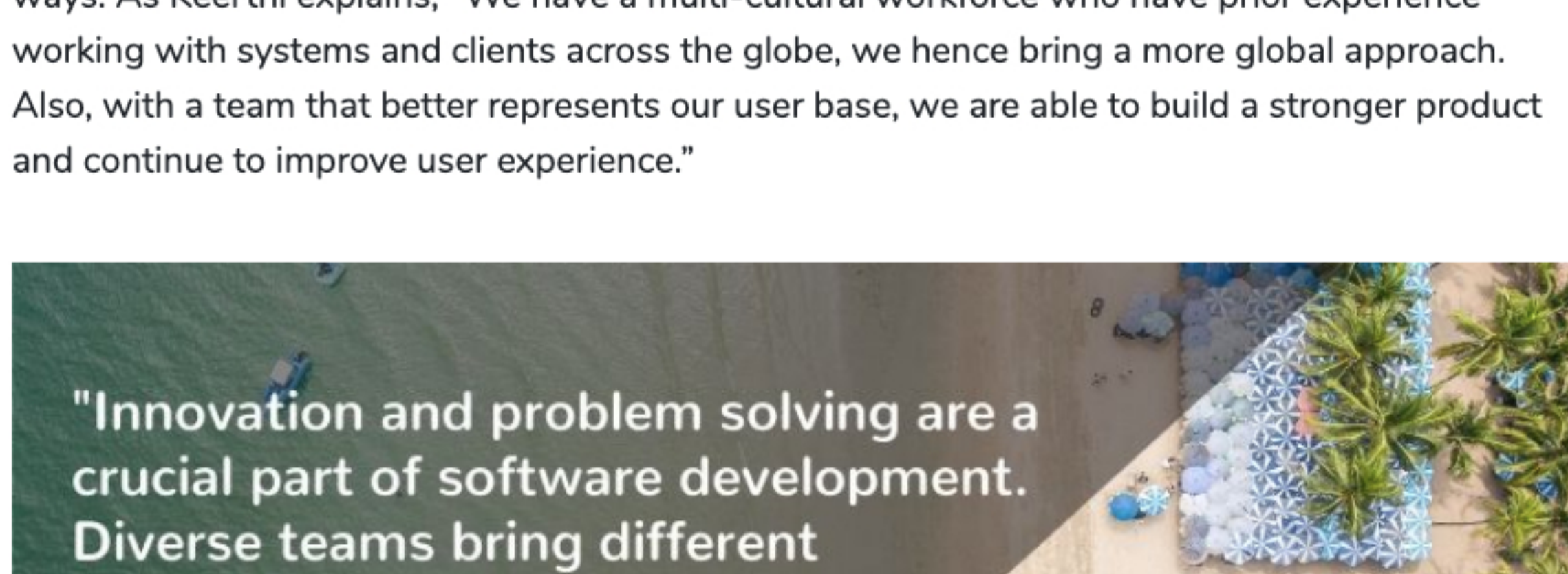
Such an inclusive culture feeds directly into our agility. Kimberley explains, "I think that you've less stress because you're not playing the political game. Having that environment where you don't have the hierarchy and you've got more openness; I think it's much faster."



Pallavi shares a similar view, "We've a foundation which is completely united. At Axe we don't think about individual contributions, we just work together and focus on achievements as a team which translates into client success, top-quality deliverables, and high productivity."

More diverse perspectives to problem-solving

Innovation and problem solving are a crucial part of software development. Diverse teams bring a mix of different perspectives and backgrounds that allow problems to be addressed in new ways. As Keerthi explains, "We have a multi-cultural workforce who have prior experience working with systems and clients across the globe, we hence bring a more global approach. Also, with a team that better represents our user base, we are able to build a stronger product and continue to improve user experience."



Final thoughts

We know there is still a long way to go to improve diversity in tech as a whole. In our experience, the key to success at an organisational level lies in nurturing a culture where inclusion becomes unconditionally automatic, rather than a deliberate effort. In this way, the ethos becomes ingrained in the organisation.

While many companies continue to pay lip service to diversity, we've actively incorporated diversity and inclusion into our culture. As a result, we're reaping the benefits of greater innovation, an improved ability to recruit and retain top talent, enhanced agility, and ultimately, the delivery of a better service to our clients.

Whether you're looking for an innovative platform to support business growth, you're over capacity and need to outsource a project, or you're in a jam and need a rapid solution, Axe is ready to support you.

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