

INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP CASE STUDY: NEON EIGHT TECHNOLOGIES

Mauro Orru is the managing director of investment group, Neon Eight Technologies, that specialises in online gaming platforms and software. He has held the role for eight years.

Mauro has spent the last eight years building a company that thrives, in large part, because of its inclusive and diverse workforce. The company was founded in 2014. It had three employees. Today it employs 350 people globally, in offices in the UK, Romania, Dubai, India and China. In 2022, it will see expansion across Australia and into the US. Mauro directly attributes the success of the business to its strength in its diversity; it creates an environment of engaged and productive employees, in whichever territory it puts down its roots.



Attract, retain and protect

Mauro experienced homophobia in his early professional life, including being quizzed about his sexuality during an interview with a FTSE 500 company. Promptly ending his engagement with those companies when the incidents occurred, he felt they had lost out on something extremely valuable to any organisation: talent.

He now believes that it is impossible for a company to succeed if they do not attract, retain and protect the very best people they can find. And to find them, you must look everywhere and exclude no-one.

Mauro recounts the difficulties of recruitment in a sector that has historically attracted mainly male employees. Despite creating gender-neutral job roles and anonymising every application before it is considered, male applicants tend to have accumulated more directly relevant experience than women. To counter the bias, he encourages his managers to hire laterally and dig out transferable skills and experience from other sectors to add to their team.

Lost in translation...?

EDI challenges present themselves differently in different global regions, says Mauro. While nurturing an inclusive culture in his China office, Mauro realised there was no easy translation for “gender neutral”. Job adverts could therefore not be constructed in a gender-neutral way as per their global policy; the terminology simply didn’t exist. To get around this, he made careful choices when hiring translators, and adapted local hiring practices.

While expanding across Eastern Europe, Mauro realised that location matters; setting up their offices in Cluj Napoca, a vibrant university town, attracted progressive, liberal thinkers who are receptive to the organisation’s inclusive approach.

Cultural propagators

The organisation invests significant time and money getting its senior management teams right. Through lots of time spent with the company in social and team-bonding events as well as careful pathways for promotion, HR managers identify members of staff who will be propagators of an inclusive culture within their own team. The organisation enables regional management to take immediate disciplinary action over inappropriate behaviour, which Mauro believes to be just as effective a communication of their values as the visibly diverse team of board members and the posters, leaflets and printed material that are present in all offices. Every team has access to a list of local charities and support groups, and Mauro engages directly with non-government organisations (NGOs) as well as reputable chartered bodies such as CMI to keep his teams well informed about issues concerning minority groups.

Inclusive practice is at the very heart of Mauro’s organisation, permeating all policies and activities.

“The benefits of a good EDI policy is the ability to attract better talent,” he says. “People are smart because they are smart. We need our people to be really smart, and you can’t possibly determine where those people are going to come from... if you are going to be restricted in terms of the people you can attract, retain and protect within your business, then what are you doing?”