

# Google Culture Conversations in India

Harnessing employee creativity to innovate company culture

Towards the end of 2018, Google India leadership, in partnership with Communications and PeopleOps (HR) teams, came together to discuss how best to nurture Google’s culture of openness, trust, and inclusion. As the company’s presence in India grew steadily, “we agreed on the need for a more proactive, grassroots approach to culture-building—one that would be led by Googlers themselves,” reflects Siddharth Jain, internal communications manager at Google India. “We realized that not everyone experiences Google the same way, and we’d have to create platforms for an open, participative dialogue across our India sites.”

Google India now organizes quarterly conversations to share resources and crowdsource new culture initiatives. The conversations, first held at each of four country sites, are now divided by business and engineering units to

better identify specific needs. To build a grassroots, employee-driven agenda, Jain and colleagues highlight existing best practices and source conversation topics from culture clubs and ERGs across the country. This approach surfaces the issues that matter in each site and unit, rather than rely on US-centric DEI topics.

Siddharth periodically runs campaigns and initiatives to support these culture conversations. One example was a 2019 contest that encouraged employees to form teams and interact with “My Google,” an internal tool providing an extensive list of company resources. Another is *Idea To Initiative*, a formal program for employees to submit culture-enhancing ideas, many of which are showcased along with company news and internal events and updates in the weekly *Wassup India* newsletter.

## EY Belonging Strategy in Mexico

Company leaders signal support for employees who face othering in society

The strength and reach of the EY organization's belonging strategy is evident in Mexico, where company leaders take a stand against societal issues that impact employee belonging at work. Mauricio Ariza Barile, diversity and inclusiveness manager of Latin America North, Mancera S.C (EY Mexico), recalls a turning point in 2017, when the just-launched Unity professional network participated in the Mexico City Pride march, despite reluctance from some employees. "There was a fear that clients would distance themselves from EY Mexico in a context where 'macho culture' can be a way of life," he reflects. "On the contrary, by being visible in our support of the LGBTQ+ community, we strengthened our brand. That led us to start exploring a lot more diversity and belonging initiatives."

EY Mexico's Leadership Matters workshop grounds senior employees in the business imperative of D&I and edu-

cates on leading practices for inclusive leadership. In March, when women across the country staged "A Day Without Women" strike against violence against women, company leaders publicly announced support for the cause, encouraging employees to participate. In June, leaders in Mexico followed an example set by EY India for the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia, circulating videos of LGBTQ+ and ally employees' stories and experiences about belonging at EY.

Recently, EY Mexico issued a statement of leading practices and recommendations for businesses to follow when addressing vulnerable communities and workers affected by COVID-19. When leaders in Mexico speak up about belonging and inclusion, says Ariza Barile, "it not only is a great opportunity to make people feel like they belong, but also levels the hierarchy a little."

## Johnson & Johnson Mexico Open&Out ERG

Breaking ground for LGBTQ+ inclusion in a challenging cultural climate

In 2018, Johnson & Johnson's document controller Ricardo Pichardo and a few colleagues accepted the challenge to launch Mexico chapters of the company's LGBTQ+ and allies ERG, Open&Out.

Pichardo, now the campus chair of the ERG's *Juárez* branch, knew the roll-out would land differently across the country. In *Juárez*, a smaller, conservative-leaning city, initial attempts to engage employees fell flat. "We decided to tread lightly and establish a bedrock of education," Pichardo recounts.

ERG members first educated the site's administrative personnel, tying programs to holidays and milestones. The team used Valentine's Day to explore the theme "love is love" and International Day Against Homophobia to share information about violence against LGBTQ+ people. They partnered with

the US consulate in Juárez for a panel discussion to address employee questions about the LGBTQ+ community.

Two years on, the chapter boasts a major victory: Pichardo and a colleague negotiated with two labor unions to extend marriage benefits to same-sex couples in *Juárez*. Today, Johnson & Johnson Mexico holds the HRC Foundation's designation of "*Best Place to Work for the LGBT Community*." "It took a while to establish our LGBTQ ERG, for people to be comfortable with it," says Alejandro Tobolski, head of diversity & inclusion, LATAM. "But today, the LGBTQ population in Mexico, at least at Johnson & Johnson, is more visible than ever."

## “Do’s and Don’ts” for DE&I in China

Canadian Em Roblin has spent the last 15 years based in Beijing, China. With her diversity and inclusion consulting firm, Inner Circles, she partners with local and multinational organizations to develop DE&I programming with a focus on inclusion and women’s leadership. She shared with us a few lessons as a Westerner immersed in Chinese culture for successful cross-cultural management and DE&I strategy.

### **Embrace norms of respect**

Western leaders might be surprised or embarrassed by employee displays of respect—but should resist the urge to insist against them. “People will literally trip over each other to open a door for the leader. It’s hospitality,” Roblin says. “As a leader, to push that off would be disrespectful. It could make people feel like they’re not doing their duty or that you have a negative opinion about them.” To show your respect, Roblin advises, “attend banquets and social events. As a senior leader, this is 100% a must for your company events.”

### **Don’t be baffled by unproductive meetings**

Historically, Chinese culture encourages a top-down approach to teaching and management, which can clash with Western norms of all-team brainstorming and collaboration. Don’t misread respect for this norm as lack of interest: “Meetings in China are often more of a formality, they’re not a discussion forum,” Roblin shares. “In a Chinese context, you could be silent in a meeting and be totally engaged in your job.” She adds, “some of the best brainstorming ses-

sions I’ve had are with Chinese teams, but only after psychological safety has been set and people feel encouraged to share.”

### **Build trust through one-on-ones**

Roblin advises that managers hone their abilities to build trust during one-on-ones—both to elicit the best ideas, and to deliver feedback. “A rookie mistake for a Western leader is to approach someone at their desk and deliver any kind of negative feedback in an open office setting,” Roblin points out. “People will lose a lot of trust in a leader who does something like that, even if they know he or she didn’t mean anything by it.”

### **Connect diversity to innovation**

There’s a cultural tendency to react to a score of 99 out of 100 with the question: “what went wrong?” “At the root of this mentality is a healthy growth mindset,” explains Roblin. New information, ideas, and ways of doing things tend to be met with enthusiasm, so highlighting the link between DE&I and innovation—couching it as an exciting way to compete and grow—is a fruitful entry point for Chinese audiences.

### **Focus on “inclusion,” not “privilege”**

The strong desire for group success and harmony in China can mean individualist concepts don’t always resonate. DE&I practitioners often teach about “privilege” as a way to open people’s eyes about bias and differences. In China, this concept may not translate effectively within the cultural context. Exercises that focus on experiences that make people feel included or excluded are more likely to resonate.

# Intel Inclusive Leaders Program

Uncovering market-specific needs and creating agents for positive culture change through peer learning

## Participants

Open to all Intel employees on an opt-in basis.

## Content

Peer Learning Groups are led by trained employee facilitators. Discussions focus on universal, inclusive skills such as owning your story, listening to build trust, and seeking feedback courageously. Conversation prompts encourage groups to reflect on how those skills show up in their culture, region, and context.

## Structure

Since its launch in 2017, the program is continually improving to meet employee needs. Formats shift between single gender and mixed “cohorts.” The number of participants and length of sessions also vary.

## Results

Participation in the now-global program has more than quintupled. Creating a safe space for dialogue about inclusive leadership has surfaced cultural nuances and unique development needs in each new market. In India, facilitators discovered a need to help address potential biases at work. In Mexico, low female representation in the program highlighted a need for greater female representation at the senior leadership level. In China, program leads encountered hesitation to participate for both in-person and virtual programming, prompting an ongoing dive into more effective discussion starters for future participants.

**“We’re not forcing the conversation in these sessions to go a specific way. We give groups an agenda, but we encourage facilitators to deviate from it if they want to. It’s better to have great conversation.”**

- Chirona Risom, Inclusion Program Manager, Intel