

# Inclusive hiring and decision-making processes, women empowerment and diverse team-spirit.

## Information on the case study:

**Organisation:** SAP SE

**Size:** 105.000. + employees

**Location:** Walldorf, Germany

**Sector:** Software development

## Operational context

SAP, one of Germany's largest tech companies, has a highly diverse workforce spread globally, with employees from more than 157 nationalities. With the shift towards remote work, the company noticed potential barriers to reporting discrimination in an increasingly virtual environment. Therefore, SAP has been implementing its D&I strategies to foster a global workplace culture. The initiatives that promote diversity and inclusion are illustrated annually in the "Integrated Report"<sup>1</sup> with detailed data on the most impactful projects and the achieved goals. This case study will in particular take into account the Report from 2023 and showcase the most inspiring ideas to enhance inclusivity and diversity in the workplace.

## The problem/opportunity

According to SAP, the organisation believes that a work culture where employees feel empowered to be their authentic selves can largely impact both business and society. In the context of the ReWork project, this aspect becomes even more relevant when we consider the rising influence of artificial intelligence in the workplace. While it is currently under debate if AI can reduce the risk of bias in hiring processes when designed as an ethical and fair tool,<sup>2</sup> it also increases demand for a sense of belonging in a rapidly changing work environment. With this background in mind, SAP established the so-called Employee Network Groups (ENGs)<sup>3</sup> several years ago: voluntary and employee-led groups which have created a common digital space where everyone can share their unique perspectives. SAP currently counts on 13 different global ENGs whose addressed topics vary from autism inclusion to accessible workplaces in case of disabilities, flexible schedules for working parents and representation of different cultures overall (e.g. Latinos, Indigenous, Pan-Asians and Black employees). Through

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<sup>1</sup> [Moving Towards Greater Impact, SAP 2023 Diversity & Inclusion \(D&I\) Report](#)

<sup>2</sup> The Future of Life Institute is designing a top-of-funnel process to eliminate the pre-hire bias due to the limited capacity of the manual recruiter. Many companies admitted how only a small portion of the millions of applicants are ever reviewed. Technologists and lawmakers should therefore work together to create tools and policies that make it both possible and mandatory for the entire pipeline to be reviewed. From F. POLLI, [Using AI to Eliminate Bias from Hiring](#), Harvard Business Review, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Currently representing more than 50 countries with 800 leads across the globe. From SAP CAREERS, [Employee Network Groups](#), 2022.

mentorship, formative learning, community engagement, events for cultural celebration and outreach, SAP's ENGs represent a way to let employees celebrate their own identities while also enabling them to develop networking opportunities despite working remotely or in different parts of the world.

## What was done

In order to continue to broaden the diversity of its workforce, SAP reports to have reached a number of goals in 2023, including the engagement of more than 14,000 employees in the Inclusive Mindset Challenge (IMC) and the participation of over 1,000 managers in the Intentional Inclusion Workshop.<sup>4</sup> According to SAP, the purpose of such initiatives is to stimulate the desire to learn and self-develop. The IMC, for example, is a learning platform which "challenges" the thinking of employees. This happens via quick exercises concerning mental health, LGBTQIA+ issues, bias and other unconscious behaviours that need to be addressed in order to raise awareness on D&I. For example, one challenge called "Deaf and Thriving"<sup>5</sup> shared techniques that could come of help towards colleagues who have hearing impairment and may be at a disadvantage in situations like a meeting room with poor audio quality or understanding different accents on the phone. Small adjustments like directly facing co-workers when speaking or provide room near the screens during meetings to allow the reading of live captions can make a great difference. This challenge was also an important occasion for deaf and hard-of-hearing colleagues to share their experience and to minimise the stigma attached to deafness.

As far as women empowerment and gender parity are concerned, SAP set the goal to fill 25 % of executive roles by women by 2027. Hiring policies reflect this trend: 41,6 % of the SAP workforce were women, included tech roles.

In this regard, another important project was the SWICS Programme, initiated in 2021, in order to improve cybersecurity training and thereby raise the employability of women.<sup>6</sup>

Finally, as far as inclusive hiring is concerned, SAP emphasised diversity by using tailored strategies to ensure representation at every step of the recruitment process. Key aspects in this regard are:

- Strengthening relationships with initiatives like *Returnship programs*<sup>7</sup> in North America, which aims to support mid-career professionals with 5 or more years of work experience who have taken a career break for caregiving, immigration or military service by offering remote and hybrid positions, varying from sales to marketing or other corporate functions.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Launched in 2023, the Intentional Inclusion Workshops consist in interactive sessions which provide practical guidance on unconscious biases and ways to foster respect, inclusion, and psychological safety. [Moving Towards Greater Impact, SAP 2023 Diversity & Inclusion \(D&I\) Report](#), page 5.

<sup>5</sup> Life at SAP, [Inclusive Mindset Challenge: Deaf and Thriving](#). YouTube, 2023.

<sup>6</sup> S. PRAKAASH, [Empowering Women in Cybersecurity: My Swics journey](#), SAP Community Blog, 2023.

<sup>7</sup> A 20-week paid project which includes workshops, coaching and a dedicated mentors to ease the transition back to the workforce. [Moving Towards Greater Impact, SAP 2023 Diversity & Inclusion \(D&I\) Report](#), page 13.

<sup>8</sup> SAP Careers, [SAP Returnship Program](#), 2018.

- Collaborating with the ENGs to let all employees connect with SAP team members who share similar backgrounds.
- Training hiring managers to prioritise cultural contribution and be mindful of biases with initiatives like the Intentional Inclusion Workshop.

This inclusive framework has helped SAP increase the hiring of women, early-career talent, and underrepresented ethnic groups in 2023, particularly in the U.S., where the hiring of Asian, Black, and multiracial candidates exceeded workforce representation.

## Outcomes

In 2023 SAP achieved many important recognitions for its D&I strategies. For example, the company's Autism at Work program<sup>9</sup> was recognised as a Lighthouse Program by the World Economic Forum and received the Corporate Compassion Award from the HollyRod Foundation.

This inspired SAP to further broaden their D&I strategies, and as a result they launched their *Global Anonymous Self-Identification Diversity Survey*,<sup>10</sup> which enabled the company to gain better insights into its workforce diversity.

## References

- Career Corner Blog Posts, [Deaf and Thriving at SAP](#), SAP-Community, 2020.
- Moving Towards Greater Impact, [SAP 2023 Diversity & Inclusion \(D&I\) Report](#)
- Life at SAP, [Inclusive Mindset Challenge: Deaf and Thriving](#), YouTube, 2023.
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- SAP, [Autism at work overview](#), Sap.com.
- SAP Careers, [SAP Returnship Program](#), 2018.
- SAP CAREERS, [Employee Network Groups](#), 2022.

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<sup>9</sup> Launched in 2013 in India, the programme is aimed at people on the autism spectrum who have completed an apprenticeship in the STEM field or are about to. Candidates can apply in all areas of the company, but the majority of available positions are in the software development sector (including quality management or service & support). SAP is committed to equal employment for candidates with physical or mental disabilities, because when neurodiverse perspectives are missing from the workforce, innovation and creativity go missing. As time passed, hundreds of organisations felt inspired from this initiative and therefore signed the SAP's Autism Inclusion Pledge, a document sharing the program methods. From SAP, [Autism at Work Deutschland - Initiativbewerbung](#), 2024 and SAP, [Autism at work overview](#).

<sup>10</sup> The survey invited employees to voluntarily share personal characteristics, such as their ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, disability status, nationality, military/veteran and caregiver status, among others. In its first year, the self-ID survey achieved a significant 12% response rate from employees and management. [Moving Towards Greater Impact, SAP 2023 Diversity & Inclusion \(D&I\) Report](#), page 9.