

Ericsson Fosters Inclusive Behaviors through Immersive, Science-Based Learning Experiences

A Modern Communications Technology Firm with a History of Innovation

Ericsson is a global telecommunications and network services company with more than 100,000 employees across EMEA, Latin America, Asia, and North America. Its headquarters are located within Stockholm, Sweden, where the company enables communications service providers to capture the full value of connectivity. Its portfolio spans networks, digital services, managed services, and emerging business services. Ericsson supports its clients in going digital, increasing efficiency, and finding new revenue streams. The organization's innovations have delivered telephony and mobile broadband solutions to billions of people worldwide, but its innovation goes beyond its product and service lineup. Ericsson is deeply integrated into business operations, including how it approaches creating a positive employee experience and culture transformation.

Changing Behaviors to Foster Inclusivity

Starting in 2019, Ericsson's global talent management team sought to proactively support leaders in making better and more fair decisions. Its primary objective is to mitigate opportunities for unconscious bias to influence people management decisions. Despite consistently generating employee buy-in for diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives, Ericsson realized that its approaches weren't translating into employees' behaviors. Further analysis revealed that there was focus on illuminating knowledge gaps rather than building skills and best practices within the workforce. "That's what we hear about most unconscious bias training programs," shared Rosario Saud Geraldino, Head of Talent Management for North America. "They create behavioral awareness, which is a good step to start changing but doesn't actually generate behavioral change. We needed stronger interventions. We needed to give employees the opportunity to practice and apply what they learned to change those behaviors."

Summary

Challenge

- Mitigating systemic bias across teams and people processes.
- Empowering leaders with the skills to proactively decrease the impact of bias on behaviors and decisions.
- Implementing D&I initiatives on a global scale.

Solution

- Ericsson formed an agile task force to include HR professionals and representatives from various business units.
- It fostered collaboration between an inclusion thought leader and a simulation platform that leverages live-controlled, virtual avatars to create psychological safety in learning environments.
- Ericsson embraced the experimentation cycle to test and iterate toward an effective D&I program.

Results

- Three months after the pilot finalized, 80% of respondents agreed that what they learned in the behavior-based D&I program is still continuously applied to their current work habits.
- For the first time in the last three years, Ericsson saw equal results at a global level on the metric of belonging ("I feel a sense of belonging at Ericsson") across all genders, which were above the external benchmark.
- Across Ericsson, its inclusion indicator for respect ("I am treated with respect and dignity") has continued to increase.

Employees shared a similar sentiment. During 2019, Ericsson's talent management team began having conversations across the organization with executives and individual contributors alike. Their focus was on inclusion data from the company's annual employee engagement survey. One common theme arose from these conversations; "Leaders and employees didn't just want to know what they didn't know. They asked to be upskilled," said Saud Geraldino. With this insight, Ericsson reiterated its commitment to driving diversity and inclusion through science-based programming that's anchored in behavioral change. The big unknown that remained was figuring out where to start.

“ *We underscore everything we do in working with our people with the principle of making better and fairer decisions.*

Emma Birchall, Global Head of Diversity and Inclusion, Ericsson

Bringing Internal and External Stakeholders Together to Effect Behavioral Change

With the knowledge that Ericsson wanted to build a science-based D&I program focused on behavioral change, the talent management team put together a task force of 25 individuals representing employees from across the business. This was an intentional decision.

“ *This was a business impact initiative, not an HR project. To support the business in a meaningful way, we spoke to managers first, then process owners and then leveraged our own expertise to create a sustainable solution that is linked to our overall culture transformation. Our design mantra to always design with a filter of 'scientific, simple and human.' That is exactly what we did here.*

Selina Millstam, VP & Global Head of Talent Management, Ericsson

Ericsson knew that to drive sustainable change, it had to think small and focus on specific elements of the employee experience. The task force began its efforts by dissecting the entire employee journey through people data. “We sought to understand and map moments that matter in our people processes—moments where decisions had to be made by people,” said Saud Geraldino. To accomplish this, Ericsson partnered with MoreThanNow, a behavioral science firm. Together, these organizations conducted randomized control trials across the performance management and recruitment processes that were in place at Ericsson to clarify what elements should be targeted for change. “We assessed whether our processes provided an accurate nudge to drive inclusive behaviors and had science backing up what the journey ahead should look like,” shared Saud Geraldino.

Revamping Processes Before Reinventing D&I Training

Once the task force identified which points of decision were potentially vulnerable to bias, Ericsson decided to begin effecting change. Rather than starting with a D&I training redesign, the task force first redesigned and improved people processes through an iterative and agile experimentation journey. “From the beginning, we worked with the business to conduct redesign conversations,” said Saud Geraldino. “The task force started very small, then expanded, then reduced, and then expanded again based on what we found throughout our journey and what business perspectives we needed to pull from.”

As processes and workflows evolved, the talent management team began working closely with process owners from Ericsson’s people team. “I then had the responsibility of finalizing the processes so that it would minimize unintentional bias from creeping in,” said Saud Geraldino.

Fostering Third-Party Collaboration to Turn Vision into Reality




After redesigning the processes and minimizing potential entry points for biases, the task force began to focus on fulfilling the shared desire amongst employees to be upskilled in interpersonal behaviors. Work swiftly began developing a new behavioral-focused program called “Upskilling for an Inclusive Future.”

“We wanted to develop a science-based program that balanced theory with practice,” said Saud Geraldino. To achieve this, the task force coordinated a partnership between two third-party entities: Dr. Grace Lordan, Founding Director of The Inclusion Initiative¹ at the London School of Economics, and Mursion, a vendor that provides interactive simulations that foster psychological safety through avatars controlled by human actors in real-time (see Figure 1 on the next page).

“Dr. Lordan is a power force,” shared Saud Geraldino. “Her content really resonated with our principles of science-based, courageous decision-making, cooperation, and collaboration.” Ericsson collaborated with Dr. Lordan to develop training modules and supplemented the training with hands-on practice facilitated by human-powered avatars through Mursion.

1 [The London School of Economics and Political Science – The Inclusion Initiative](#), 2022.

Figure 1: A Partnership-Driven Journey: Ericsson's Collaborators

	<p>Creating a diverse and inclusive organization is core to Ericsson values. "That's why we nurture it in everything we do. It's important that we do this for our people, our customers, and for society. We truly believe by collaborating with people from different experiences we drive innovation, which is essential for our future growth."</p>
	<p>Led by Dr. Grace Lordan, Founding Director of The Inclusion Initiative, discover how to build resilient teams, avoid "groupthink," and become an experimental leader using behavioral science.</p>
	<p>Research shows that practice in Mursion simulations translates to significant and observable improvements. Studies show the use of avatars provides a higher level of psychological safety and mitigates the inaccuracies in effectiveness due to the Hawthorne/Observer Effect.</p>

Source: Ericsson and Mursion, 2022

Fostering Psychological Safety through VR Technology and Avatars

The Mursion platform is based on more than a decade of psychology research, which has informed how the vendor harnesses the best of technological advancements and human interactions to deliver effective learning experiences. Mursion specializes in simulations of situations requiring high-stakes

interpersonal skills. In these simulations, learners can interact with human-powered avatars either 1:1 or in a group. The avatars are controlled by a human simulation specialist who provides live spoken dialogue in response to participants (see Figure 2). The simulations blend human conversations and the avatars' AI-driven body language. The conversations are based on predesigned scenarios with specific learning objectives that were designed by Dr. Lordan, Ericsson, and Mursion.

Figure 2: Sample Mursion Scenario (with Avatars, Pictured) to Practice Inclusive Leadership Skills via Simulation

Addressing Implicit Bias


Denise Garcia is being considered for a promotion and is not in the room. You, Gordon and Gabrielle are on a panel considering her promotion. Denise is a strong critical thinker and team player who consistently goes above and beyond. These characteristics have been identified as important for consideration in the new role.

Gordon has concerns. He has been with the company for many years but has not worked directly with Denise. Gabrielle has worked closely with Denise and believes a promotion is due.

Desired Outcome: You may witness a microaggression or two during this conversation. Identify the microaggression(s) and "call-in" the micro-aggressor to address the situation in the moment.

Use intervention strategies like:

- Tune into your emotions - know how and when to regulate those
- Ask clarifying questions to better understand the perspectives of people in the room.
- Assume great intent but also focus on the **IMPACT** of the microaggression.



Gordon Brune, Gabrielle Madison

Source: Mursion, 2022

The use of avatars also fosters psychological safety by enabling employees to focus on practice and growth rather than the fear of making mistakes or offending a colleague. Research suggests that two 30-minute simulations with two attempts per scenario are enough to influence behavior.²

Upskilling for an Inclusive Future

Upskilling for an Inclusive Future is a seven-month, five-module program based on behavioral science (see Figure 3).³ In the current version of the program, participants watch short video lectures during each module, which are accompanied by activities. Once these elements are completed, participants engage in one live session per module hosted by Dr. Lordan. In these live sessions, employees debrief program concepts and have meaningful conversations with their peers and colleagues. Each module concludes with virtual reality (VR) simulations that provide practice with conversations about topics such as unconscious bias and microinequities.

Ericsson leverages the program across the globe. “It’s good to have that continuity of message and how people talk about diversity and inclusion across many different regions. That’s

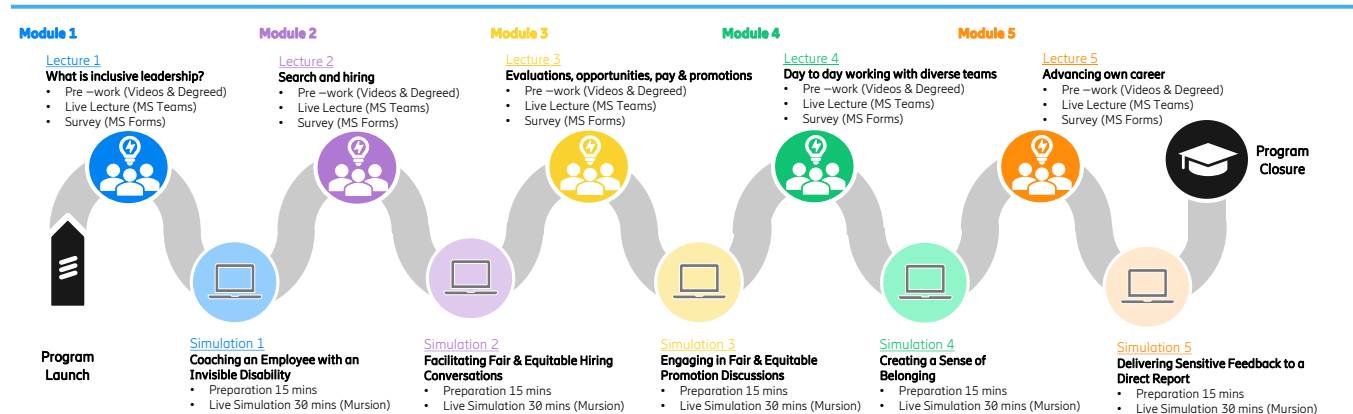
been really powerful,” said Emma Birchall, Global Head of Diversity and Inclusion.

Implementation

With the behavior-rooted educational content from Dr. Lordan and the avatar-based VR solution from Mursion, Ericsson launched soft-pilot the Upskilling for an Inclusive Future program in August of 2020. “We were running experiments, learning what worked and what did not. It was critical to be resilient—to openly share that no experiment is ever a failure. There is always gain. You either learn what works or what doesn’t,” said Saud Geraldino.

For the pilot, the talent management team leveraged employee resource groups to assist with the communication and promotion of the training. Leaders and individual contributors were asked to participate and provide feedback throughout the multimonth program. They engaged in an A/B testing model where both group and individual simulations were tested. The response to both simulations was positive and both types are still being offered through the global program. Participants provided anecdotal feedback that the avatars in the simulated experience removed the fear of judgment, meaning the focus of each simulated session could be on practicing actions and behaviors.

Figure 3: Upskilling for an Inclusive Future Program Outline



Source: Ericsson, 2022

² [Using Simulated Virtual Environments to Improve Teacher Performance](#), Lisa A. Dieker, PhD, Charles E. Hughes, PhD, Michael C. Hynes, PhD, and Carrie Straub, PhD/School-University Partnerships, 2017.

³ [Grace Lordan – About Grace](#), 2022.

“*We were running experiments, learning what worked and what did not. It was critical to be resilient—to openly share that no experiment is ever a failure. There is always gain. You either know what works or what doesn’t.*”

Rosario Saud Geraldino, Head of Talent Management for North America, Ericsson

Results

Midway through 2021, Ericsson launched its first official, full-scale pilot of its Upskilling for an Inclusive Future program. This pilot was a large rollout across the globe.

When pilot participants were asked whether their experience positively impacted how they treated their colleagues or worked with their team, 80% of respondents reported “yes.”

The Mursion simulations have proved engaging for Ericsson participants, yielding a net promoter score of +50 and an average 4.41 out of 5 rating (where 5 is “strongly agree”) for the survey question, “I learned and/or practiced something that I can apply to my day-to-day work.”

Ericsson observed a relationship between its investments in culture transformation—including the upskilling program—with employee engagement. “It’s powerful to hear from participants how the program has supported their thinking process, especially at moments that matter like when recruiting or promoting, that’s exactly the impact we want to create with the program,” said Natalia Farfan Santos, Head of Diversity and Inclusion Programs.

Lessons Learned

Ericsson utilized an agile, iterative approach to redesign some of its people management processes and pilot its new behavioral-changing and culture-shaping training experiences.

The task force identified the following lessons learned as key success elements:

- **Identify the roots of unconscious bias and address them first.** Ericsson identified “moments that matter” in its processes that were susceptible to bias and it prioritized improving processes to mitigate the overall potential for bias in people management operations before reinventing its D&I practices.
- **Incorporate business representatives in project task forces.** Ericsson focused its efforts with precision when redesigning its processes due to the line of sight provided by its task force, comprised of individuals from multiple business units.
- **Increase inclusion through science-based behavioral change training.** Translating knowledge into action is a significant gap in the D&I training efforts of many organizations. Ericsson leveraged third-party content and delivery solutions, enabling the task force to create and launch its first pilot within months. The task force achieved results faster by leveraging experts and choosing not to reinvent the wheel internally.

Continuing to Pave the Way for Inclusion through Science-Based VR Experiences

Multiple early indicators suggest that the Upskilling for an Inclusive Future program successfully fosters inclusion within Ericsson. In the upcoming years, the organization plans to conduct further analysis of employee engagement and participant survey data to assess whether there are indicators of increased inclusion across additional identities. The intersectionality of identities will also be considered. Furthermore, Ericsson will continue to leverage science-based knowledge from global experts alongside one-to-one and group VR sessions to balance local preferences with program effectiveness.

About the Authors



Josh Bersin

Josh founded Bersin & Associates in 2001 to provide research and advisory services focused on corporate learning. He expanded the company's coverage to encompass HR, talent management, talent acquisition, and leadership and became a recognized expert in the talent market. Josh sold the company to Deloitte in 2012 and was a partner in Bersin by Deloitte up until 2018.

In 2019, Josh founded the Josh Bersin Academy, a professional development academy that has become the "home for HR." In 2020, he put together a team of analysts and advisors who are now working with him to support and guide HR organizations from around the world under the umbrella of The Josh Bersin Company. He is frequently featured in publications such as *Forbes*, *Harvard Business Review*, *HR Executive*, *The Wall Street Journal*, and *CLO Magazine*. He is a popular blogger and has more than 800,000 followers on LinkedIn.



Nehal Nangia

Nehal is the director of research at The Josh Bersin Company. In this role, Nehal drives empirical research on key workforce-related topics and the development of actionable insights and powerful stories for today's talent executives. Nehal has over 15 years of professional experience in human capital, with a focus on learning and development; performance management; employment value proposition; workforce transformation; and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). She is the research leader for learning and leadership at The Josh Bersin Company.

Prior to joining The Josh Bersin Company, Nehal was a global advisor for clients at Deloitte and published several studies on pertinent topics such as DEI, performance management, and bias. Nehal lives and works in India and has a master's degree in psychology. Nehal has also led deployments of benchmarking and diagnostic products at Gartner for clients across EMEA, APAC, and ANZ.



Jordan Schmitting

Jordan Schmitting joined The Josh Bersin Company as a senior research analyst after interning through the organization's Big Reset Initiative. Passionate about the intersection between behavioral sciences and the workplace, Jordan pursued a neuroscience degree before obtaining her master's in Human Resources and Industrial Relations from the University of Minnesota, Twin Cities. She is a certified HR professional and brings experience from multiple industries, including commercial real estate, industrial process solutions, higher education, transportation and retail.

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