

## Emerging Diversity and Inclusion: Xero

Being open to diversity and inclusion is allowing software company Xero to recruit the brightest and the best and build products that speak directly to its diverse customer base.

Xero is a fast-growing global software-as-a-service (SaaS) company with offices in New Zealand, Australia, United States, United Kingdom and Singapore. It has 1700 employees globally, with more than 950 of those based in New Zealand.

“Diversity and inclusion has always been part of our DNA. One of our core values, Human, is all about ensuring understanding, collaboration and respect. Everyone can bring their whole selves to work,” says Head of People Experience - NZ Linda Bateson.

Early in 2016, Xero began its diversity and inclusion initiative, appointing an external agency to help with support and advice.

The process involved reviewing internal policies, guidelines and documents, looking at the diversity demographics contained in HR data, running focus groups or phone or email surveys with men and women working across the business in New Zealand, Australia, the UK and the US, and looking at Xero’s Global Diversity Survey from 2015.

Relevant speeches, articles, videos and other material were also reviewed, and all this research was used to create a Diversity & Inclusion Snapshot Review Report.

The 10 members of the Xero Executive Team and other senior leaders across the business were taken through the key findings and given the opportunity to provide feedback and their commitment to the Xero vision.

With buy-in from leaders and the research findings, Xero was able to create a global Diversity and Inclusion Strategy, which outlines the key priorities to be rolled out in FY18.

Xero CEO Rod Drury has always been a passionate advocate of greater diversity at Xero - particularly getting more females into the tech sector, Linda says.

At a leadership offsite in November 2016, Rod and the Executive team agreed that diversity and inclusion should become a strategic business priority: 'Lead diversity and inclusion inside Xero and across our community'.

The Executive team's performance is measured against a diversity and inclusion scorecard so they are all accountable for the success of the initiative. In April 2017 Xero appointed a Diversity and Inclusion Manager who reports directly to the Chief People Officer, and is responsible for driving and implementing the strategy.

“Senior leaders across the business are committed to providing compelling and consistent internal communications around D&I at Xero - explaining the business case, the challenges, and our action plan. They do this through articles on our intranet, posts on our social media platform, speaking at our fortnightly global meetings and via other internal communication channels,” Linda says.

"The focus group sessions provided us with a stack of great ideas and feedback from across the globe. All of this has formed the basis of the key priorities in our D&I Strategy and it's ensured that people have greater ownership and engagement with the strategy. That's where we will really see the benefits to our organisation."

Twelve months ago there were no women on the Xero global Executive team - now it's 50 per cent women. Xero has also increased the percentage of female Directors on its Board from 12.5 per cent to 29 per cent.

Here is some of the staff feedback on the diversity and inclusion initiatives.

"I really loved the opportunity to participate in the diversity and inclusion focus group sessions. They were a very open, relaxed and supportive way to get us all talking and sharing our experiences and ideas. I really appreciated how everyone felt like they had a role to play in making Xero a more diverse and inclusive place. It's been great to see already some great stuff happening at Xero such as flexible working guidelines and unconscious bias training." - Jo James, Global Talent Sourcer

"I'm proud to be part of Xero in my role as Marketing Project Manager. I've been involved with Xero as a contractor multiple times during the past eight years and recently become a true Xero employee by accepting a permanent role. This change hasn't impacted my work/life balance in the least with Xero giving me the flexibility to work reduced hours (32 per week), work from home when needed and extended annual leave (a great mix of paid and unpaid) to pursue a passion for family travel. As a result I can still be Mum to two full-on teenage girls at the times they need me, I can contribute to my local community through volunteer work and get the time for exercise and my own wellbeing." - Andrea Key, Marketing Project Manager.