

Media Alert

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Work with Pride: How gender inclusion helps Filipino companies drive employee growth

LGBTQ+ members and allies from Manulife Philippines share their experiences and aspirations for diversity, equity, and inclusion in the country

Manila, Philippines — Many people in Asian countries believe that being a member of the LGBTQ+ community hinders career prospects, according to [Manulife's 2020 co-sponsored study, "Pride and Prejudice,"](#) in partnership with The Economist Intelligence Unit. Only 11% feel that being openly LGBTQ+ is advantageous to career progression, while 40% think otherwise. Further, 36% of respondents feel that it is easier for LGBTQ+ people to advance professionally if they keep their sexual orientation and gender identity private. These sentiments show the importance of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) programs in the workplace, which help encourage employees to be their authentic selves at work, and allow and create "safe spaces" for personal and professional development.

Global life insurer Manulife, grounded by its corporate values of "Doing the right thing," and "Sharing your humanity," has implemented key DEI programs across its markets around the world, including the Philippines, to ensure that everyone in the company has equal access to growth opportunities, regardless of background, and to cultivate an open, inclusive, and supportive work environment for all.

"At Manulife, we are building a workplace where everyone feels included and valued, and where they can bring their whole selves at work every day. We also encourage our team members to bring diverse ideas and experiences to the table so we can help our organization innovate and grow," shared Richard Bates, President and Chief Executive Officer of Manulife Philippines. "Because we cultivate an open, supportive, and collaborative environment, we have become even more committed to put in place gender-inclusive programs and policies, and create comprehensive financial solutions that allow everyone to protect themselves and the future of those who matter to them, regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity or expression," he added.

To better understand the importance of inclusivity within and outside the workplace, Manulife Philippines' employees and agents share their perspectives and experiences on how the company's inclusive programs help drive their personal and professional growth, and contribute to their sense of fulfillment.

A diverse workforce can better serve a diverse customer base

As an agency leader at Manulife, Julius Mamauag shared that some of his LGBTQ+ clients have personally expressed that they are worried about their future. They felt that it would be challenging to avail themselves of policies that protect them and their partners.



“While I did not encounter any inequality issues when I became a Manulife advisor, I felt the insecurity of some of my LGBTQ+ clients in getting insurance and exploring investments. Fortunately, Manulife allows lifelong partners to be beneficiaries of their policyholders,” shared Mamauag. “I feel more fulfilled knowing that my work helps those who want to secure the future of the most important people in their lives, regardless of gender or sexual orientation.”

Echoing Mamauag’s view, Bam Reyes from Manulife’s marketing team also believes that having an employer who recognizes every person’s right to protection is essential. “Manulife also accepts domestic partners of their employees as legal dependents. More than being accepted in the community, what’s important for me personally is knowing that my employer recognizes our right to protect and financially secure the future of our loved ones, without biases, and notwithstanding age, gender, or preference.”



Sharing an insight from *Creativity Inc.*, a book written by Ed Catmull, co-founder of Pixar Animation Studios, Reyes also added: “There is a part of the brain that makes people jump easily to conclusions, seeing an image only as is. It made me think of how putting labels or stereotypes makes it difficult for people to empathize because before we get to know them, we’ve already judged them. So, we have to be mindful not to use these preconceptions, and instead treat everyone with fairness.”

Diversity brings innovation

Manulife is second home for Kim Patrick Santos, who has been a Manulife financial sales associate for the last eight years. For Kim, diversity in the workplace inspires different ideas and perspectives, which results in innovation and making every day better. “By understanding and accepting differences, and fighting unconscious biases in places where we live, work and serve, diversity essentially empowers us to make better products and services, enforce more efficient systems that increase productivity, and produce higher customer engagement,” Santos said.



Santos also stressed the importance of using inclusive language and avoiding stereotypes in everyday encounters and conversations, whether in the workplace, at home or in our communities. “The core of an inclusive workplace is respect. Gendered language reinforces harmful stereotypes and binary-based assumptions. As we know, words can either hurt or inspire, so we must educate ourselves, engage in self-examination, and practice empathy and compassion at all times.”

Inclusivity strengthens employee relationship and retention

Many of Manulife’s LGBTQ+ community members have been with the company for many years, showing how a supportive workplace strengthens employee retention.

Jayvee Bascos, from Manulife’s Operations Excellence department, shares that Manulife’s programs that support LGBTQ+ rights have helped him become more confident and perform better in his eight years at the company so far. He shared: “There were no inclusivity programs in my previous job. I appreciate how Manulife’s PROUD initiative has made me feel accepted. I feel that I belong here,” Bascos said. “We in the LGBTQ+ community have been fighting for our rights for the longest time. We do not ask for special treatment, only equal treatment,” he added.



Across its various markets around the world, Manulife's Professionals Reaching Out for Unity and Diversity (PROUD) aims to promote an inclusive workplace for LGBTQ+ employees to encourage their full and unencumbered contributions at work. In addition, PROUD organizes various events to promote inclusion and diversity and to educate the wider community about the importance of equality, acceptance, and allyship.

In 2020, the United Nations (UN) Women 2020 Asia-Pacific Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPS) Awards also honored Manulife as one of the Philippines' most gender-inclusive workplaces, and the only insurance brand to have been recognized in the awards.

"To foster a culture of belonging, we do not view diversity, equity, and inclusion as merely a 'check-the-box exercise,' but a key differentiator and driver contributing to the growth of our business," said Sudesh Thevasenabath, Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Head of Manulife Asia. "As we continuously take action and keep our momentum as strong DEI champions, we will continue to build more inclusive products and solutions to take to the market, and create greater inclusion across the company through diverse talent, and enhanced training and leadership, which in turn drives high performance and develops inclusive leaders. By propelling ourselves forward on how we think and act as an organization and within our wider society, everyone can feel they belong."

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About Manulife Philippines

The Manufacturers Life Insurance Company opened its doors for business in the Philippines in 1907. Since then, Manulife's Philippine Branch and later The Manufacturers Life Insurance Co. (Phils.), Inc. (Manulife Philippines) has grown to become one of the country's leading life insurance companies. Manulife Philippines is a wholly-owned domestic subsidiary of Manulife Financial Corporation, among the world's largest life insurance companies by market capitalization. Learn more about Manulife Philippines by visiting their website www.manulife.com.ph and following them on Facebook (www.facebook.com/ManulifePH), Twitter (@ManulifePH), and Instagram (@manulifeph).

About Manulife

Manulife Financial Corporation is a leading international financial services provider that helps people make their decisions easier and lives better. With our global headquarters in Toronto, Canada, we operate as Manulife across our offices in Canada, Asia, and Europe, and primarily as John Hancock in the United States. We provide financial advice, insurance, and our global wealth and asset management segment, Manulife Investment Management, serves individuals, institutions and retirement plan members worldwide. At the end of 2020, we had more than 37,000 employees, over 118,000 agents, and thousands of distribution partners, serving over 30 million customers. As of March 31, 2021, we had CAD\$1.3 trillion (US\$1.0 trillion) in assets under management and administration, and in the previous 12 months we made \$31.3 billion in payments to our customers. Our principal operations are in Asia, Canada and the United States where we have served customers for more than 155 years. We trade as 'MFC' on the Toronto, New York, and the Philippine stock exchanges and under '945' in Hong Kong.

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