

Review

This book is a must-read for engineering leaders, offering a fresh perspective and practical guidance on embedding diversity, equity and inclusion into the profession, writes **Mariska van der Velden**.

The SAFE leader

Author: Mark McBride-Wright
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THE SAFE LEADER IS A COMPELLING and insightful exploration of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) in the workplace, viewed through the analytical lens of an engineer. This book stands out in the crowded field of DEI literature by offering a refreshing and pragmatic approach that links physical health and safety to mental health and DEI. Dr Mark McBride-Wright, a white, able-bodied, queer man, brings a unique perspective that straddles both privilege and diversity, making his insights particularly valuable for understanding the nuanced dynamics of inclusion in the engineering sector.

The engineering industry is notoriously lacking in diversity and inclusion, with significant underrepresentation of women, people of colour, LGBTQ+ individuals, and people with disabilities. McBride-Wright addresses this issue head on, noting that many white male engineers, who dominate the industry,

often fail to see the necessity for a more representative workforce. He contends that the conversation about inclusivity has mostly been centred around the experiences and needs of underrepresented groups. While these voices are essential, McBride-Wright suggests that this approach has had limited impact because it often does not engage the majority demographic in engineering: white men. The aim of his approach is to include this majority and help them understand that better DEI will benefit them too.

At the heart of *The SAFE Leader* is McBride-Wright's assertion that the principles of health and safety (H&S), which are deeply ingrained in engineering culture, can serve as a robust framework for advancing DEI. He argues that just as engineers meticulously manage physical safety to prevent accidents and injuries, they should equally prioritise mental health and safety and strive to create a diverse and inclusive environment. Preserving life is a core tenet of engineering organisations' culture, yet this principle has not been explicitly extended to mental health by addressing the high suicide rates among men in engineering fields. This comparison is not only innovative but also highly practical, providing a tangible way for engineers to grasp the importance of DEI initiatives.

One of the book's most compelling arguments is that embedding DEI into the fabric of engineering culture, much like H&S, can lead to more effective and lasting change. The book makes a strong case for the idea that better DEI practices inherently lead to better health and safety outcomes. Numerous examples and case studies illustrate this point, showing how diverse teams are more innovative, make better decisions and create safer work environments. This holistic view of safety – encompassing both physical and psychological aspects – reinforces the idea that a truly safe workplace is one where all employees feel valued, included, and allowed to freely speak up.

McBride-Wright emphasises the importance of leadership commitment, continuous education and the

implementation of concrete policies and practices. He encourages leaders to view DEI not as a compliance issue but as a critical component of organisational success and employee wellbeing.

McBride-Wright's writing is both accessible and engaging, making complex concepts easy to understand without oversimplifying them. His position as a white, queer man provides a distinctive vantage point; he acknowledges his own privilege while advocating for better diversity. This dual perspective enriches the narrative, offering readers a well-rounded view of the challenges and opportunities in fostering DEI in engineering. Interesting to note is that the book has been designed with accessibility in mind, from the font type to clear chapter structure, and a straightforward tone of voice. It is a very comprehensive read in which one can navigate easily to relevant sections and key takeaways are highlighted at the end of each chapter.

In conclusion, *The SAFE Leader* is a must-read for anyone in the engineering field, particularly those in leadership positions. It offers a fresh perspective on DEI, adapting the familiar principles of H&S, and provides practical guidance for creating more inclusive workplaces. By linking better DEI practices to better H&S outcomes, McBride-Wright presents a compelling case for why diversity and inclusion are not just ethical imperatives but also business necessities. This book is a powerful reminder that a truly safe and successful engineering industry is one that embraces and celebrates diversity in all its forms.



Mariska van der Velden
 MSc

Mariska is a Project Engineer at Eckersley O'Callaghan, where she contributes to the EDI committee with her passion for pushing the diversity agenda in engineering.

