

Diversity & Inclusion: Not Just Buzz



What you should learn from this article:

- Understanding diversity and inclusion
- Measuring diversity and inclusion
- Initiatives for diversity and inclusion

INTRODUCTION

Diversity and Inclusion have become huge buzz words in the world of work. But they are not just buzz words, organizations are realizing the importance of diversity and inclusion and are focusing on incorporating both into their performance management systems or into their overall strategy. In fact, according to Forbes, organizations spend approximately \$8 billion dollars on diversity and inclusion efforts (Elsesser, 2019). However, it seems that organizations continue to lag in building a successful diversity and inclusion strategy. So, what can they do to improve their efforts? Understanding what is meant by diversity and inclusion is a key first step.

WHAT IS DIVERSITY?

Workplace Diversity is the differences between individuals on any attribute, such as background, experiences, etc. that create a mix in your organization (adapted from Jackson, 1992; Triandis, Kurowski, & Gelfand, 1994; Williams & O'Reilly, 1998, as cited by Van Knippenberg & Schippers, 2007).

Diversity is multi-faceted. There are two main typologies of diversity (Van Knippenberg, & Schippers, 2007):

- Surface demographic diversity, E.g. gender, age, etc.
- Deep diversity, often unobservable traits. E.g. attitudes, characteristics.

When discussing diversity, it is also important to acknowledge intersectionality, that is, how multiple identities combine and influence one's experiences (Shore, Randel, Chung, Dean, Holcombe Ehrhart, & Singh, 2011). Often overlooked, intersectionality is important to understand how these identities interplay and influence an employee's experience at work.

WHAT IS INCLUSION?

According to Optimal Distinctiveness Theory (ODT; Brewer, 1991), humans have an innate need to belong and be accepted by others, as well as to feel valued for their uniqueness. Shore et al. (2011) have proposed that a balance between these two needs – uniqueness and belonging – achieves inclusion. Thus, inclusion is the feeling of both being accepted for who you are and being appreciated for your uniqueness.

Shore et al. (2011) expanded this conceptualization of inclusion by proposing an Inclusion Framework. When an individual experiences feelings of low belongingness and uniqueness, it results in exclusion, while the opposite (feelings of high belongingness and uniqueness) results in inclusion. When an individual experiences low belongingness and high uniqueness, they may not feel like an insider (or feel accepted), but their uniqueness is salient and valued (Shore et al., 2011). In this situation, an individual may experience discomfort in being different. Their uniqueness becomes the focus of their identity and can result in stereotyping. An individual may also experience high belongingness and low uniqueness; they feel like they belong, but do not feel valued for their uniqueness. This can lead to an individual hiding certain parts of their identity, compromising who they are to fit in, and potentially concealing who they are to avoid stigma or prejudice.

HOW CAN YOU MEASURE INCLUSION?

Measuring inclusion can help illustrate if you have made improvements pre and post diversity and inclusion strategies, or can simply give you a pulse on how your organization is doing in terms of diversity and inclusion. Pulling from academic research, there are two key measurements for investigating inclusion:

- Inclusion climate (Nishii, 2013). This measure has three different parts: equitable employment practices, integration of differences, and inclusion of decision making.
- Perceived Group Inclusion Scale (Jansen, Otten, van der Zee, & Jans, 2014, influenced from Shore et al., 2011). This measures both belonging and authenticity.

When deciding on a measurement for your organization, you may want to use these measures to guide your survey development.

INITIATIVES TO HELP IMPROVE YOUR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION EFFORTS

The following are some of the top recommendations for improving diversity and inclusion efforts.

In Recruiting:

- Transparent hiring and selection practices (Galinsky, Todd, Homan, Phillips, Apfelbaum, Sasaki, Richeson, Olayon, & Maddux, 2015)
- Transparent compensation practices (Galinsky et al., 2015)
- Inclusive language in job postings and in other areas of public relations/marketing (Galinsky et al., 2015)
- Recruiting from job fairs (or school fairs, etc.) in different areas to make your applicant pool as diverse as possible

In Day-to-Day:

- Framing diversity efforts as inclusive and for the benefit of all (Galinsky et al., 2015)
- Focusing on equal opportunities in promotions, compensation, and decision making (Galinsky et al., 2015)
- Mentorship/Sponsorship

Designing for diversity:

- Creating a workplace that is accessible to all

Training:

- Research shows that majority groups underestimate the barriers that minority groups face. They do not realize the bias that permeates through organizational decision making and dynamics (Krentz, 2019). This shows the importance of bringing awareness to this bias through training.

- Training should be a part of onboarding activities, as well as offered throughout the employee experience. Some topics include:
 - Implicit bias training: Awareness of what human blind spots are. According to Bohnet (2016), implicit bias is undeniable. In her book, she cites several studies where our judgments about certain groups lead to “statistical discrimination,” (p. 32).
 - Leadership training: How to be an inclusive leader. Leaders have a huge impact on instilling an inclusive culture and preventing turnover (Nishii & Mayer, 2009).
- Test the effectiveness of your training initiatives by measuring perceptions of inclusivity pre and post training by surveying and interviewing your employees.

Partnerships with other community organizations to ensure the success of your people:

- Autism at work programs
- Life & work coaches

Leaders who are committed to diversity and inclusive efforts:

- Leaders must buy-in to diversity and inclusion and be a part of spearheading initiatives
- Leaders should be open to admitting mistakes as they relate to diversity and inclusion. When mistakes are acknowledged, it shows the importance of diversity and inclusion.

CONCLUSION

Diversity and inclusion initiatives are imperative for people at work to thrive. Think about what diversity and inclusion means at your organization. Once employees know how these concepts are defined, they will know why the initiatives are important. Brainstorm initiatives with the goal of recruiting people with varying experiences, thoughts, and backgrounds to ensure that everyone will feel included. This may stem from initiatives such as alternative recruiting/selection practices, inclusive design, training, and leadership buy-in.

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