

Health Promotion / Wellness / Psychosocial

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Workplace

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What is meant by diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Diversity, equity, and inclusion promote the fair treatment and full participation of all people, especially populations that have historically been underrepresented or subject to discrimination because of their background, identity, disability, or other characteristics or circumstances.

Understanding diversity, equity, and inclusion includes acknowledging the existence of biases, prejudices, and systematic barriers that can exist. It involves actively challenging these barriers and creating policies, practices, and cultures to promote equal opportunity, respect, and fairness. Every worker should be able to go to work each day without the fear that they cannot be their true selves.

The Government of Canada provides the following [definitions](#):

Diversity: The variety of identities found within an organization, group, or society. Diversity is expressed through factors such as culture, ethnicity, religion, sex, gender, sexual orientation, age, language, education, ability, family status or socioeconomic status.

Equity: The principle of considering people's unique experiences and differing situations, and ensuring they have access to the resources and opportunities that are necessary for them to attain just outcomes. Equity aims to eliminate disparities and disproportions that are rooted in historical and contemporary injustices and oppression.

Equality: The principle of treating everyone in the same manner by ensuring they have access to the same resources and opportunities. Equality does not necessarily lead to fair outcomes since it does not consider people's unique experiences and differing situations.

Inclusion: The practice of using proactive measures to create an environment where people feel welcomed, respected, and valued, and to foster a sense of belonging and engagement. This practice involves changing the environment by removing barriers so that each person has equal access to opportunities and resources and can achieve their full potential.

Also, consider **intersectionality**, in that we all have multiple, overlapping identities that impact our experience, and therefore, multiple ways we can experience discrimination and disadvantage.

How should a workplace develop diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives?

An effective strategy is to ensure that diversity, equity, and inclusion are part of all organizational actions and decisions. It focuses on creating an environment where individuals and their contributions from all backgrounds, identities, and perspectives are welcome, respected, and valued. Any initiative must also consider [human rights in the workplace](#).

Organizations may:

- Conduct a needs assessment to determine both the organization's current state as well as where gaps exist. Consider roles, responsibilities, level of participation, salaries, etc.
- Assess existing workplace culture by reviewing internal data such as complaint reports, absenteeism and turnover rates, and resource usage rates.
- Build a shared understanding of what diversity, equity and inclusion are, and gain commitment from all levels.
- Set objectives and goals related to diversity and inclusion.
- Address biases and assumptions by increasing awareness, and providing education and training.
- Adopt processes and policies that minimize biases in decision-making, planning, etc.
- Actively seek feedback to gain insights into areas where biases or unawareness may influence decisions or behaviours.
- Encourage leaders to be inclusive in their decisions and to model appropriate behaviours to create a [psychologically safe work environment](#).
- Implement practices that increase diversity, including hiring practices, promotion considerations, opportunities for additional experiences or training, etc.

- Consider offering various programs such as benefits, compensation, flexible work arrangements or accommodations to enable a diverse workforce to participate fully.
- Use inclusive language.

Be aware that a 'one-size-fits-all' approach generally does not achieve fairness, equality, opportunity, or good outcomes for everyone. Individuals have different personal needs, values, and beliefs. Management practices need to be consistent but also flexible and inclusive to support both individual and business needs.

What are the benefits and challenges when implementing these initiatives?

Benefits may include:

- Improved creativity and innovation – people from diverse backgrounds bring diverse perspectives, experiences, and ideas. Approaching challenges from various angles can lead to unique and effective solutions.
- More informed and inclusive decision-making – multiple perspectives help reduce biases and unseen barriers, which leads to more thorough analysis and better decision outcomes.
- Better equipped to adapt – the workforce is able to adapt to trends, customer needs, and different situations when different perspectives and experiences are included.
- A wider range of candidates when hiring – organizations can approach a wider range of skills, knowledge, and expertise.
- Increased engagement and retention – when individuals feel valued and included, they are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and committed to the work.
- Fewer barriers and disparities due to increased access to opportunities.

Challenges may include:

- Lack of effort to overcome preconceived biases and stereotypes can lead to discriminatory practices, exclusionary behaviour, and lack of opportunities.
 - Lack of representation from marginalized groups, especially when developing initiatives.
 - Time required for initiatives to take effect. Some changes can be slow and complex.
 - Resistance to change. Some individuals may feel threatened, or the initiatives may be perceived as preferential treatment.
 - Addressing the multiple identities and experiences present adequately.
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Is diversity, equity, and inclusion a workplace safety issue?

Yes, it can be. The American Industrial Hygiene Association states the culture of the organization affects workers as much as the job tasks they perform. Lack of access to opportunities and training can affect a worker's safety.

Feeling secure to work without fear of negative consequences to their self-image, status, or career can influence safety. When a worker feels that it is safe to learn, safe to contribute, and safe to challenge the status quo - all without fear of being embarrassed, marginalized, or punished – they can contribute to managing workplace hazards and risks more fully.

What other steps can a workplace take?

The workplace can take various steps to address diversity, equity, and inclusion, including:

- Providing education and training to increase awareness, and inform workers how diversity, equity, and inclusion matter in their jobs and how they work with co-workers.
 - Describing or defining desirable behaviours.
 - Implementing programs to address [bullying](#), [violence and harassment](#).
 - Addressing [stigma](#).
 - Offer [employee assistance programs](#).
 - Offering variations in work arrangements, including [flexible work](#), or those that help with [work/life balance](#) or [carer responsibilities](#).
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