

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 systemic 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, genders, responsibilities, level of participation, salaries, etc.
- Account for body types and genders when designing a personal protective equipment program. Consider individualized personal protective equipment (PPE) by assessing individuals' unique needs and preferences, and have flexible policies to allow individuals to choose PPE that aligns with their comfort. For more information, please see our OSH Answer [Personal Protective Equipment - Body Type and Gender Considerations](#).
- 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, equity, 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:

- Improving 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.
- Enhancing informed and inclusive decision-making: Multiple perspectives help reduce biases and unseen barriers, leading to more thorough analysis and better decision outcomes.
- Becoming better equipped to adapt: A diverse workforce is more able to adapt to trends, customer needs, and changing situations when different perspectives and experiences are included.
- Expanding the candidate pool when hiring: Organizations can access a broader range of skills, knowledge, and expertise.
- Increasing engagement and retention: When individuals feel valued and included, they are more likely to be engaged, motivated, and committed to the work.
- Reducing barriers and disparities: Greater inclusion leads to increased access to opportunities for everyone.

Challenges may include:

- Overcoming preconceived biases and stereotypes that can lead to discriminatory practices, exclusionary behaviour, and a lack of opportunities.

- Lacking representation from marginalized groups, especially when developing initiatives.
 - Requiring significant time for initiatives to take effect. Some changes can be slow and complex.
 - Facing resistance to change. Some individuals may feel threatened, or the initiatives may be perceived as preferential treatment.
 - Addressing the multiple identities and lived experiences of individuals adequately.
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Is diversity, equity, and inclusion a workplace safety issue?

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

A culture that values diversity, ensures equity, and fosters inclusion contributes to a psychologically safe environment where workers feel respected and valued. A psychologically safe and healthy workplace can lead to fewer incidents of workplace harassment, bullying, and discrimination.

Feeling secure at work without fear of negative consequences to their self-image, status, or career can influence safety. When workers feel safe to learn, contribute, and seek clarification without fear of being embarrassed, marginalized, or punished, they can more fully contribute to identifying and controlling workplace hazards and risks.

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](#), including [gender-based violence](#).
 - Addressing [stigma](#).
 - Offering [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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