



tea & toast

Including diversity

24 February 2017

DO YOU 'FIT IN' OR ARE YOU LEFT 'OUT'?

It's safer when you fit in and are included. Why? Because as humans we want to know we're safe. Anyone different from us can be perceived as a threat and we feel the need to be wary of them. It's a redundant hangover from our cave-person days, but it's still there just as much as fight or flight is.

Covering is the act of hiding aspects of yourself to help you fit in. Most of us cover something in the workplace. No-one wants to be seen as 'the other'.

There's a natural tension between being in a group that makes us feel safe and included—and the fact that this only brings homogeneity of thought and ideas. We just keep pulling ideas from the same old pool and the ideas just wash around and around like a washing machine.

It actually goes against the grain to break out of this mindset to become inclusive of the diversity out there we haven't yet explored. It's really unnatural as humans to want to include and embrace different people, ideas and mindsets.

"While diversity is personal, it's not to be taken personally. That is, your way of being doesn't have to be wrong for my way to be right—we can both be the way we are and have that the "right" way to be."

– Katherine W. Hirsh.

SO WHY IS INCLUDING AND VALUING DIVERSITY IMPORTANT?

There's plenty of evidence to show that including diversity increases financial gains to organisations.

A 2012 research report from Deloitte, was based on the experiences of 1,550 employees in three large Australian businesses. It identified an 80% improvement in business performance when levels of diversity and inclusion were high. They tell us the equation is:

Diversity + inclusion = improved business performance

An American Sociological Association study supports this, finding that for every 1% rise in the rate of gender diversity and ethnic diversity in a workforce there is a 3% and 9% rise in sales revenue, respectively.

TWO DIMENSION DIVERSITY (2D)

Inherent diversity—gender, race, age, religious background, socio-economic background, sexual orientation, disability, nationality, i.e. diversity you have versus:

Acquired diversity—cultural fluency, generational savvy, gender smarts, social media skills, cross-functional knowledge, global mindset, military experience, and language skills. This means that you're able to increase your diversity. You can deliberately become a better leader or member of diverse groups just by increasing your ability to include a wide variety of ideas, experience and viewpoints.

According to research, employees who have 2D leaders are more likely to take risks, challenge the status quo, and embrace a diverse array of inputs. They see their products make it through to market and not get prematurely halted.



WHO'S BIASED?



We know there's a strong business case for including diversity, we know it makes people feel good and we're all about making people feel good. Why is it such a challenge then to remove bias and prejudice?

We suppress the unconscious thoughts we have about people. We don't know that our brains are busy favouring people just like us, causing us to categorise people by generalisations and we don't realise that we're collecting data about people to confirm our beliefs of them.

When we accept that we all have bias and it just makes us human and not bad people we're much more able to allow ourselves to examine our bias. If you plan to do work around inclusion and diversity, you'll need to tread carefully.

If we mess with people's image of themselves (especially if they think they're a good person and wouldn't hurt anybody) by pointing out their bias, then expect a reaction. Helping people uncover their bias and 'ism's' needs to be done gently, inclusively and it helps to have a laugh while you're doing it. It can be very confronting for some people.

In terms of creating a diverse and inclusive culture, the unconscious brain is one of the biggest challenges for organisations and leaders in the 21st century

– Nielsen and Kapinski

SOME COMMON BIASES THAT BLOCK INCLUSION

Attribution error	When we overestimate how much someone's behaviour can be explained by their personality or innate traits rather than their situation or context.
Affinity/Similarity (Ingroup)	When we feel warmth toward people because they're like us. We can relate to them and feel comfortable with them—what you are, is what you like.
Availability/ Recency	When we rely on immediate examples that come to mind to help us build a picture or case about something.
Anchoring	When we have an over reliance on one piece of information or belief to help us make decisions. Often this piece of information comes early in our decision making process, making it difficult to radically change course from the base we started from.
Horns and Halos	When a person's overall impression of another person influences their opinion of all areas of the other person's behaviour. E.g. beautiful people are also good people?
Confirmation	When we only pay attention to information that supports our own preconception. This happens even when we think we're being very logical and observant.
Groupthink	While this is less a bias and more a group dysfunction—it's an important factor to look into. It's likely a group is missing enough trust in order to have healthy conflict. The desire for harmony or conformity in the group creates irrational or dysfunctional decision-making.

BIAS LEADS TO EXCLUSION AND PRIVILEGE

So if we've established that we're all biased, then what's the problem? Everybody does it? No. We need to address bias because it just encourages exclusion and privilege. The same kinds of people keep giving the same kinds of people a hand up—even when they don't mean to.

BEING AN ACTIVE BYSTANDER

If you tread carefully and respectfully, you can help people bring unconscious thought to a conscious place and address their thinking if they so desire. Sadly a lot of 'calling people out' for their bias and prejudice is done as shaming and we see it a lot in social media...check your own privilege and bias first and do something about it.

Here are some useful active bystander phrases you could try:

- That might be a bit of confirmation (or relevant) bias at work there...
- I wonder if that might make someone feel excluded if they heard you say that.
- That's probably a bit of a generalisation. It might be more useful to concentrate on what annoys you about their behaviour and not their ethnicity/gender/nationality/sexual orientation
- What are we missing here? I know this makes a lot of sense to us, but let's take a minute to look for other perspectives.
- What would someone NOT like us be thinking about this?



EXTRA RESOURCE:



Check your privilege:

- Quiz: How Privileged Are You? – BuzzFeed

Watch on YouTube:

- The BS Guys: Unconscious Bias. Articulating the intent of your point of view before you say it.

Read the Deloitte Report:

- Waiter, is that inclusion in my soup?

Watch on TED:

- Tama Iti : Mana: The power of knowing who you are
- and/or Yassmin Abdel-Magied: What does my headscarf mean to you?
- Google's Video on Unconscious Bias www.youtube.com/watch?v=NW5s_-NI3JE



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