

2.1: Why It Matters: Diversity in the Workplace

Why learn about anti-discriminatory laws and methods to develop and support a diverse workforce?

We are a nation founded on principles of equality. However, the promise of “liberty and justice for all” in our constitution wasn’t initially the egalitarian commitment that it has been interpreted to be over time—it was initially written about all white men. In order to understand the present, we need to understand our history and, in particular, to look beyond stated intent to observe the practical impact of legislation, policy, and practices.

We’ve come a long way in our quest for a diverse workforce. And yet, we still have a long way to go. As we’ve evolved as humans we’ve developed a mental shorthand to help us make decisions. Based on our experience and social conditioning, we make assumptions that codify into beliefs that drive our behaviors—often unconsciously. These collective assumptions and beliefs have over time become entrenched in business practices and policies.

LEARN MORE

For perspective on how this happens—and the need for change—watch Helen Turnbull’s TED Talk titled “Inclusion, Exclusion, Illusion and Collusion.”

A YouTube element has been excluded from this version of the text. You can view it online here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zdV8OpXhl2g>.

You can also [download a transcript for the video “Inclusion, Exclusion, Illusion and Collusion.”](#)

Key quote from this talk: “The unchallenged brain is not worth trusting.”

The problem with these default behaviors and associated practices is that they no longer serve as well (if, indeed, they ever did). In fact, there is a business penalty and human cost to maintaining these practices. With demographic trends, increased employee advocacy, and global interconnectedness, a failure to embrace diversity will constitute not only a competitive risk, but a risk of sustainability.

Diversity isn’t just a women’s or minority issue. Educational technology company Instructure senior vice president Jeff Weber observes that “more and more, when we’re interviewing, candidates are asking what we’re doing about diversity and inclusion. And it’s not just diverse talent themselves, and it’s not just millennials or Generation Z—we’re hearing this from white, straight men in the Midwestern United States.” Organizational transformation consultants SYPartners associate principal Sabrina Clark notes that “companies that lack diversity are being called out publicly, and may even be losing business, not to mention falling behind when it comes to recruiting.” She observes that companies that make diversity and inclusion a business priority understand the brand implications, noting that “they’re thinking . . . about what kind of company they are, who they want to be and what their legacy will be.” Diversity and inclusion isn’t just an HR initiative, it’s a strategic imperative. In this module, we’ll discuss diversity and inclusion—what it is, the business case, challenges, best practices, and emerging trends.

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