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# The Three A's of Inclusion: Awareness, Authenticity, and Accountability

BY ELLEN BAILEY, ANDREA LIPTON, JANICE MILLER, AND SUSAN MOLL

**A DIVERSE AND INCLUSIVE** culture creates the conditions for people to be their best selves. It unlocks potential and possibilities. And it differentiates an organization.

The process of cultivating inclusion can help create a competitive advantage for your organization. When leaders across an organization consistently practice and promote behaviors that support inclusivity, it pays off in long-term business performance and talent measures.

## The Business Impact of Diversity and Inclusion

Focusing on diversity and inclusion helps your employees thrive and ultimately has a positive impact on your bottom line. A 2018 McKinsey & Company study of 1,000 companies from 12 countries showed a correlation of diversity and inclusion with financial performance, specifically profitability. (“Delivering through Diversity,” January 2018)

A diverse set of experiences, perspectives, and backgrounds is crucial for innovation and the development of new ideas—especially for companies competing on a global scale. The McKinsey & Company study revealed that employees are 30% more likely to feel that their innovative potential is unblocked at an inclusive organization.

Organizations that welcome a diverse set of perspectives into their teams and processes tend to make better decisions. Teams with inclusive leaders are 20% more likely to say they make high-quality decisions and 29% more likely to report behaving collaboratively. (“Survey: What Diversity and Inclusion Policies Do Employees Actually Want?” *Harvard Business Review*, February 2019)

We also know that in today’s competitive job market, a diverse and inclusive workforce can be a differentiator for talent acquisition and retention. A 2019 study by ZipRecruiter found that among Millennials and Generation X respondents combined, 86% say that a company’s concrete commitment to workplace diversity affects their decision to work there. Increasingly workers, especially those in younger generations, expect diversity and seek out evidence that the organizations they are joining are inclusive. And once they’re on board, employees who can

“Inclusion creates a work environment in which all employees feel valued because of the different attributes they bring. Therefore, they are motivated and have opportunities to contribute their fullest toward business goals. Focusing on both diversity and inclusion will help Hyatt have a business advantage.”

**TYRONNE STOUDEMIRE,**  
VICE PRESIDENT, GLOBAL DIVERSITY  
AND INCLUSION, HYATT

“Diversity and Inclusion: Making the Mix Work,”  
Savoy Network, 2019

## Diversity

Anything that sets one individual apart from another, including the full spectrum of human demographic differences as well as the different ideas, backgrounds, and opinions people bring.

## Inclusion

A cultural and environmental feeling of belonging and sense of uniqueness. The extent to which employees feel valued, respected, encouraged to fully participate, and able to be their authentic selves.

bring their whole selves to work are 42% less likely to leave their job within a year. (“Delivering through Diversity,” McKinsey & Company, January 2018)

### Moving beyond Metrics

Building a truly inclusive culture requires serious attention and reflection. It’s entirely possible that companies can meet metrics for diversity and still not be inclusive.

According to Gallup, “Inclusion has to be understood as very different from diversity because simply having a wide roster of demographic characteristics won’t make a difference to an organization’s bottom line unless the people who fall into any one demographic feel welcomed. Inclusion refers to a cultural and environmental feeling of belonging.” (“3 Requirements for a Diverse and Inclusive Culture,” Gallup)

Organizations and their leaders need to have a fundamental awareness and practices for making all individuals feel they have a place and value in the organization. This is hard to achieve and even more challenging to measure. But it’s critical if organizations are going to stay relevant, competitive, and strong.

### Building a More Inclusive Culture

The cultures, policies, and practices at most organizations typically benefit insiders. So, someone new to the organization or different from a “typical hire” may find that their talents are not used to their full potential or their unique perspectives are not being heard. If this is the case, the benefit of having diversity in the organization is not realized.

According to a Boston Consulting Group study, three-quarters of employees in underrepresented groups—women, racial and ethnic minorities, and LGBTQ employees—do not feel they’ve personally benefited from their companies’

diversity and inclusion programs. (“Survey: What Diversity and Inclusion Policies Do Employees Actually Want?” *Harvard Business Review*, 2019)

Inclusion requires an active process that includes an awakening and then a mindset you need to continuously cultivate. It can be difficult to shift from long-established habits to more inclusive behaviors, especially when people aren’t even conscious that they are being exclusionary.

The stated intention to be a more inclusive organization must be demonstrated with inclusive leadership behaviors—the foundation of a company-wide inclusive culture. Leader behavior across the organization is a key indicator of where an organization is on its journey to inclusion.

Where should organizational development focus? Here are three key areas we see as most important for building an inclusive culture: awareness, authenticity, and accountability.

#### AWARENESS:

##### Leaders need to look inward first.

Everyone brings biases into their interactions. Developing awareness requires leaders to recognize their own established patterns and biases, as well as the bias that is present within the systems of their organizations. What are my biases? What stands in the way of full inclusion across a diverse workforce?

It’s an inside-out process, in which leaders first examine their own fears and tendencies, then look to how others around them behave. Ultimately, they study how their organizations are structured and organized and to what degree the systems in place encourage inclusion.

Practices and behaviors that inhibit inclusion may be subtle or overt, and bringing awareness and recognition to them will likely cause some discomfort. Leaders need to have the

capability to work through their own discomfort and biases to honestly assess the current situation and what needs to happen to make it better. They also need to guide others through their own self-examination.

#### **AUTHENTICITY:**

##### **Leaders who show up as their real selves bring out the greatest potential in their teams.**

In many organizations, people leave what's unique about them at the door. In fact, 66% of employees in one study reported feeling pressure to mute some aspect of their identities at work—and that this significantly undermined their sense of self. (“Fear of Being Different Stifles Talent,” *Harvard Business Review*, 2014)

A group of researchers from Darden School of Business, Harvard Business School, and University of Michigan explored the practice of code-switching, which is adjusting one's style of speech, appearance, behavior, and expression to avoid association with negative stereotypes and promote similarities with the dominant group. They found that when people code-switch, they often increase other people's perception of their professionalism and can even raise their chances of promotion. (“The Costs of Code-Switching,” *Harvard Business Review*, 2019)

Yet feigning commonality with coworkers reduces authentic self-expression and contributes to burnout. It can also cause resentment and hostility. Bringing your whole self to work means revealing things that you feel might not be accepted. When leaders are true to who they are, they make it okay for the people they work with to be more open as well.

No one is perfect or always right. Authentic leaders are transparent about when they may have let a bias impact a decision. They are also open to feedback about their behavior that indicates they have an unconscious bias.

#### **DEFINITION:**

##### **microaggression (noun)**

An instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group.

Authentic leaders act with intention and model a learning mindset in which differences between people are seen and celebrated as valued contributions. This translates to actions like seeking out different people to work with or pushing ourselves to take new approaches in our work.

#### **ACCOUNTABILITY:**

##### **Leaders must hold themselves and others accountable for creating an inclusive environment.**

Many people who identify as “different” in whatever that means for them face microaggressions every day. Often the behaviors they encounter aren't intentional, but the goal for leaders should be to intentionally create the conditions where everyone feels valued and safe.

Leaders can set the tone and model what inclusion looks like. Organizations can equip them to openly acknowledge and address issues and correct behaviors in a productive way. Harmful comments or exclusionary behavior can't be ignored. Leaders need the ability to both receive feedback when someone on their team has an issue with their behavior and provide feedback to someone else who is not being inclusive.

Leaders can also embrace talent practices that support diversity and inclusion. Inclusive leaders actively use their power, privilege, and position to include employees who might otherwise be overlooked. They set their own aggressive targets for building a more diverse team and shake up traditional hiring practices. They also challenge their teams to hold each other accountable.

### **Taking Action at Your Organization**

Bringing inclusion into recruiting practices, team decision making, and coaching conversations is a first step, but inclusion also needs to be integrated with your organization's long-term strategy. Communicate how and why a more inclusive organization is the best path for long-term success. Establish metrics and accountability that can be tracked and rewarded. And share successes and best practices.

Inclusion is a journey, not a fixed destination, so organizations need to set up the systems and processes to encourage, protect, and celebrate it.

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