



# **Increasing diversity and inclusion in the workplace**



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# Introduction

Diversity and inclusion (D&I) initiatives often aren't a priority in most organizations, despite studies that show [ethnic diversity and gender equality positively correlate with profitability](#) and companies with above-average diversity show a [19% increase in profits due to innovation](#).

What's more, emerging Gen Z talent strongly value diversity and inclusion. A [recent study](#) by Deloitte found that: "Inclusion and diversity are critical factors Gen Z considers when deciding whether or not to join an employer."

A [2014 study](#) by Glassdoor found that 67% of jobseekers consider "a diverse workforce [to be] an important factor when evaluating companies and job offers". The study also found that 57% of employees want their current company to do more to increase workplace diversity.

At its broadest definition, diversity refers to the traits found in an organization's workforce as a whole. A diverse workforce is made up of individuals of different genders, ages, orientation and ethnicity/background. The distribution should be fairly proportionate, meaning senior roles should show as much diversity as entry-level roles.

Inclusion is the degree of how much employees feel accepted, valued and respected at work. This is sometimes described as psychological safety, the feeling that an employee (no matter at what level) can contribute ideas and criticism without fear of ostracization or career repercussions.

Introducing or expanding your D&I initiatives requires planning for employee buy-in, navigating roadblocks and understanding how your workforce views diversity and inclusion.

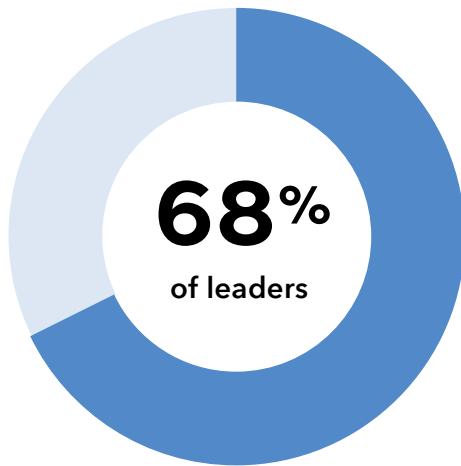
Read on for a few thoughtful tactics to help you promote D&I in your workplace.

# Why a top-down approach to D&I will fail

The Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion, in collaboration with Dalhousie University, recently published a benchmark study on [the current state of D&I in Canadian businesses](#).

The study found that 95% of senior leaders “**believe that diversity is a business strategy that positively contributes to innovation, creativity and problem solving.**” However, only 73% of senior leaders emphasize D&I as part of their business strategy and only 68% “**frequently communicate about D&I to their employees.**”

While senior leadership support is critical to your workplace D&I strategy, equally important is the support of your employees. [A recent D&I study by Accenture](#) found that while 68% of leaders feel they “create empowering environments”, only 36% of employees agree.



As is the case with company culture, a D&I strategy needs to be a top-to-bottom strategy, where all of your workforce embodies and promotes diversity and inclusion at all levels of the organization, from managers who openly value contributions made by their direct reports to choosing a restaurant that provides meal options for all lifestyle choices (e.g. keto, vegan, dairy-free) to acknowledging someone's input on a project, no matter how small.

Particularly when it comes to inclusion, everyone in your organization plays an essential role. Psychologist Mary Rowe coined the term 'micro-behaviours' to describe a person's often-unconscious gestures, facial expressions, words, tone of voice and posture—all of which add up to include (or exclude) the recipient.

Employee education, therefore, has to be a part of your D&I strategy. Schedule seminars on unconscious bias, micro-behaviours, sensitivity training and other topics as required to help employees genuinely commit to D&I.

# Roadblocks to diversity and inclusion: Workplace Harassment

The end result of your D&I initiatives can be summed up in one word: belonging.

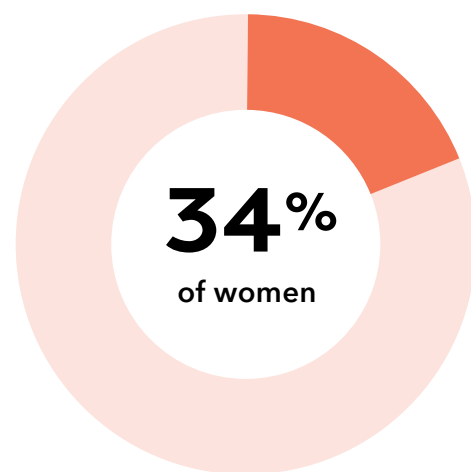
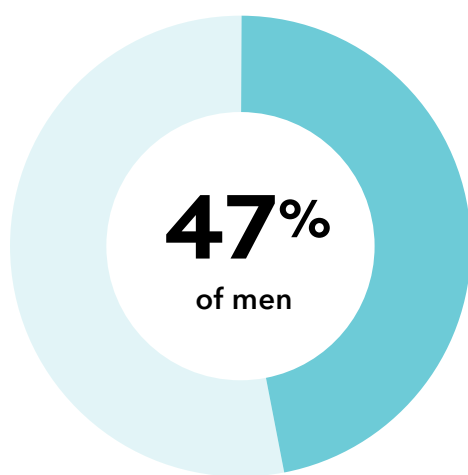
Employees who feel a strong sense of belonging within your organization are more productive and engaged—and less likely to quit. A study by LinkedIn ([Inside the Mind of Today's Candidate](#)) asked employees to rank the main factors which gave them a sense of belonging in the office.

The study found that “being recognized for accomplishments at work” was the top contributor to having a sense of belonging in the office (59%), followed closely by expressing opinions freely (51%), having contributions valued (50%) and the ability to be oneself at work (50%).

Workplace harassment (and similarly, discrimination and bullying) affects how much an employee feels they belong in your organization.

As Statistics Canada found in their 2018 General Social Survey on Canadians at Work and Home, **“19% of women and 13% of men reported that they had experienced harassment in their workplace”** with harassment including **“verbal abuse, humiliating behaviour, threats to persons, physical violence, and unwanted sexual attention or sexual harassment.”**

**The study also found that: “About 47% of men and 34% of women who had been harassed by a supervisor or manager had a weak sense of belonging to their current organization.”**



Which is why any D&I initiatives must also include sensitivity training, harassment and discrimination training and a zero tolerance policy for bullying. Training should be administered at all levels of the organization, with leaders demonstrating strong vocal support for it.

Fear of retaliation is why most workplace harassment is never reported, so it's also important to introduce a safe way to report harassment and take action immediately to investigate any report. Managers should be provided with additional training that helps them understand how to record reports of harassment and/or bullying and how to handle investigations impartially.



# Roadblocks to diversity and inclusion: Unconscious Bias

Another threat to your D&I initiatives is unconscious bias, the sum of underlying attitudes and stereotypes that someone attributes towards a specific person or group. Gut feeling is often the colloquial description of unconscious bias.

When it comes to the workplace, unconscious bias can happen at the interview stage (meaning that your hired candidates may not be as diverse) or within the organization, feeding into harassment and bullying.

As with workplace harassment, education is the solution to reducing or eliminating unconscious bias. Through training, employees can learn to identify their own biases and how to recognize when they're relying on that bias.



**Training should also explain how unconscious bias affects diversity and inclusion in the workplace, and what that means for employee engagement, innovation and profit. Having all the information can help employees feel they're contributing to the company's bottom line and to the betterment of the company's culture and work environment.**

Once biases have been identified, employees can then focus on changing habits or thought-patterns that might be causing unconscious bias, and adopting new habits that help them actively promote inclusion in the workplace. The aim is to switch from gut feelings to conscious decision-making.

Unconscious bias can also lead to a lack of diversity in hiring. Recruiters unintentionally pick up on clues about someone from their résumé, such as their name, groups they're affiliated with, where they attended university and other details—and this can influence their decision to move the candidate forward or not.

This unconscious bias then carries through to the interview stage.

# Why assessing for ‘fit’ is a bad idea

Unconscious bias is categorized into many different types. One type is affinity bias: when someone shows favour to a person that has similar tastes, interests or a similar background (ethnic, cultural or educational).

Affinity bias in the workplace most often shows itself during the interview stage, where the hiring manager and the candidate seek to find common ground. Affinity bias also frequently occurs in the workplace, where employees with similar interests outside of work may congregate more often at lunch or for happy hour.

If you assess a candidate for cultural fit, you’re likely relying on affinity bias—unconsciously, of course. Candidates deemed a good fit with the team are probably candidates who share a lot of commonalities with your current employees. In other words, they’re very similar.

Selecting a candidate on “culture fit” promotes team homogeneity, not just when it comes to physical appearance or educational background but thought homogeneity too.

An organization without diversity may also have a culture problem, namely a go-along culture where no one is willing to question current practices or suggest ideas or challenge norms.

As you’ve seen, data shows that a lack of diversity undercuts innovation too. You need a breadth of unique perspectives to find different angles, engage in creative problem-solving and ideate new concepts.

Instead of hiring for culture fit, assess the “culture add” of a candidate, whose skills and experience complement the ones you already have on your team.

# How to introduce Employee Resource Groups

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) can help you foster workplace inclusion.

ERGs help employees get support from work peers. They're especially valuable when an employee is affected by current events and chooses not to reach out to their manager or HR for fear of appearing distracted and unproductive at work.

Race, religion, gender or orientation are some examples of shared characteristics you might find in Employee Resource Groups. However, there's no definitive list. ERGs can be formed on any characteristic shared by its members.

To form an ERG at your organization, start by finding a champion. This person is ideally a senior executive with the clout to remove any roadblocks and who will strongly support Employee Resource Groups within the organization. Your HR department can also act as champion.

Once you've decided which ERG or ERGs you want to introduce into your organization, use internal resources such as company newsletters, wiki/intranet or email to "advertise" the ERGs and give employees directions on how to join.

Members of the ERG can decide when or where to meet or how often. If you use [Slack](#) or similar software in your organization, create a private channel for the ERG members to instantly connect.

Understandably, ERGs may not be possible in smaller organizations. In such situations, continue connecting your employees with local helplines and empower managers to be supportive of employees who may be affected by current events.

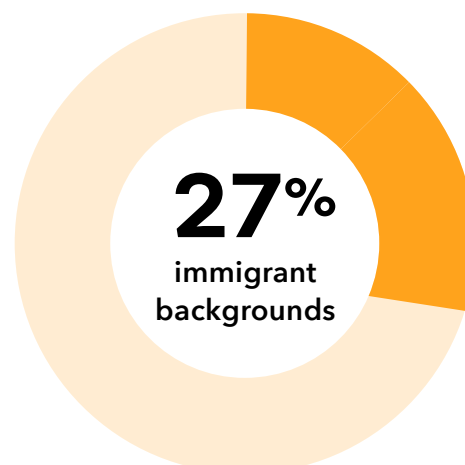
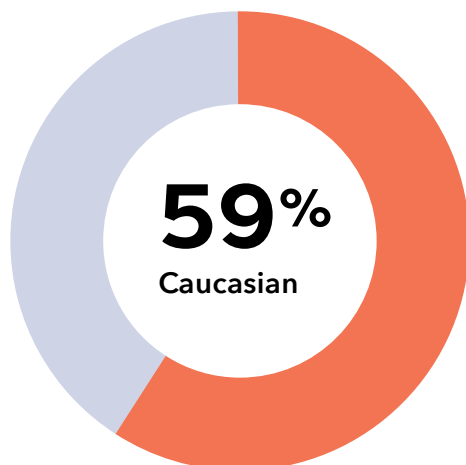
# The new perspective on D&I

A [recent study by Deloitte](#) examined generational views of diversity and inclusion, with a particular lens on how Millennials (individuals born between 1980 and 1996) define D&I.

Millennials are expected to make up 75% of the workforce by 2025, so it's important for organizations to understand the Millennial perspective on diversity and inclusion.

Some of the key findings of the Deloitte study show that Millennials tend to define diversity as a collection of unique experiences. Older generations, such as Gen X, define diversity as representation (i.e. ethnic diversity). This is mostly due to the fact that Millennials are more ethnically diverse already, with the Pew Research Center finding that "only 59% of millennials are Caucasian and 27% have immigrant backgrounds" (as reported by Deloitte).

Therefore, Millennials want and expect cognitive diversity: people who have different experiences, philosophies and creeds. As for inclusion? That comes from providing everyone the opportunity to freely—and equally—express their opinions and genuinely contribute at work.





**Another study by Deloitte** on the Gen Z generation (individuals born between 1997 and 2012) found that **“Diversity matters to them through many dimensions, and isn’t just isolated to race and gender, but also related to identity and orientation.”**

As Deloitte notes, “Gen Z will soon surpass Millennials as the most populous generation”, which means they’re your future workforce...and the war for Gen Z talent has already begun.

To attract Gen Z emerging talent, organizations must have a clear and tangible commitment to diversity, as well as provide an inclusive environment for LGBTQ+ individuals, non-binary individuals and individuals who prioritize working at companies that align with their personal values.

# About Rise People

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