# BEYOND DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION:
# Lead Meaningful Change in Your Organization

In the past, organizations looking to counter discrimination focused primarily on recruitment or on having sound policies to protect all employees. While these are crucial first steps, organizations need to go beyond check-the-box policies.

Diversity is a **management strategy**, not an HR program.

*"While many CDOs are buried in HR, the essential topic of fairness and diversity is part of the management culture."*　— Josh Bersin

Organizations looking to make their workplace truly welcoming to all need to go beyond diversity and inclusion toward a culture of belonging.

## MORE THAN THREE QUARTERS OF THE WORKFORCE REPORT SEEING BIAS AT WORK

More and more organizations are proactively instituting diversity and inclusion (D&I) efforts, and yet discrimination persists. Consider the fact that 72% of workers in a recent survey by American Management Association (AMA) report they are guilty of unconscious bias and 83% report seeing coworkers engaging in it.

Worse, nearly 40% report experiencing more overt discrimination firsthand, and 55% report witnessing discriminatory acts in the workplace. So, while 66% of the more than 700 survey participants had an official D&I policy in place, only 40% felt that it was being properly implemented, and clearly bias and discriminatory thoughts linger.

Having a policy is not enough and many organizations are struggling with how to move beyond D&I toward belonging.

"AMA has been working with clients since the mid-90s around D&I practices. We help clients assess skills, pinpoint gaps, and identify opportunities to enhance the effectiveness of existing initiatives they may have," says KC Blonski, Vice President, Corporate Learning Solutions at AMA. "With other clients, we establish and build new initiatives completely from the ground up. What we've seen is that diversity and inclusion initiatives work best when leadership views D&I not as an HR function, but embraces it within the culture as a management strategy."

"It cannot just be something that is framed on the wall or buried in your policies and procedures. It, in fact, has to live and breathe inside of an organization," agrees Jeff Becker, Director of Corporate Learning Solutions at AMA. "This is what differentiates organizations who are just checking-the-box by

In another poll of more than 800 HR and D&I leaders, AMA found:

**29-31%**
feel their initiative is doing well or great.

**20%**
report they don't have an initiative at all.

**42%**
say they make some efforts, but don't do enough to bring their policies to life.

## Make diversity and inclusion something that lives within the culture of your organization, rather than a one-time event.

having a policy and those who really go further to build and support a truly diverse, collaborative and inclusive workforce. That extra step is not only the right thing to do, it pays dividends."

In other words, to bring D&I initiatives to life, the policies have to be brought down to the employee level. They have to be reflected in the day-to-day decisions being made and the way employees collaborate and interact.

### D&I EFFORTS CREATE A MORE PROFITABLE WORK ENVIRONMENT, BUT ARE ONLY THE BEGINNING

True D&I creates a more productive, innovative and profitable organization. After all, diversity of experience makes for a much richer quality of thought. Organizations that embrace diversity see increased innovation and improved critical thinking and problem solving. In addition, organizations that make employees feel respected and valued often experience better engagement, and in fact, increased revenue.

Research shows that employees who feel their voice is heard are 4.6 times more likely to perform their best work.[i] Plus, organizations that are diverse are 70% more likely to capture new markets,[ii] and diverse teams have been shown to make better decisions 87% of the time.[iii]

Organizations that achieve a higher level of diversity and inclusion don't view it as only an internal exercise. They extend inclusion efforts into the brand, into their marketing and external communications. This redefines how your organization is viewed externally and often leads to better client and customer relationships, because there's a better internal–external connection.
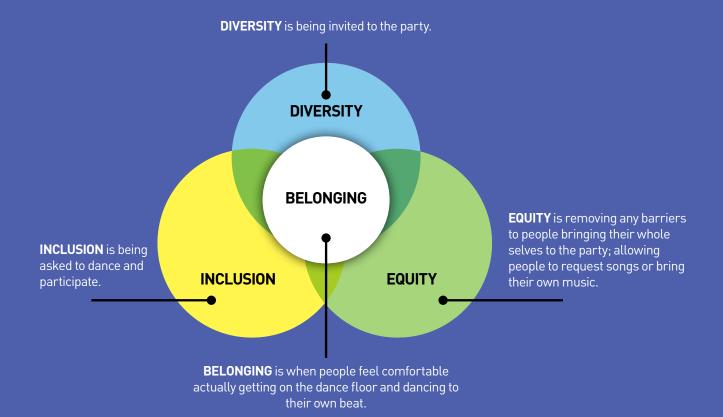
For companies working on D&I, the top three areas of focus are usually around race, gender and sexual orientation. Yet to really leverage your efforts, consider thinking more broadly about diversity.

"In our research, we've discovered many people feel it should encompass more than these three areas including cultural diversity, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, age, religion, ideologies, physical attributes and political beliefs, just to name a few. Yet many organizations aren't adequately addressing these types of diversity," says Blonski. Expanding your definition helps you connect with employees and clients, and helps you reach equity.

### EQUITY: MOVING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION TO THE NEXT LEVEL

Equity is not equality. Equity is the fair and just treatment of all, including employees, potential employees, clients, customers and membership. Equity involves creating opportunities to address historic and current disadvantages for under-represented populations. By proactively removing barriers for under-represented groups, an organization can address any participation or representation gaps.

**One analogy that helps bring these concepts to life is that of a party.**

**DIVERSITY** is being invited to the party.



**DIVERSITY**

**BELONGING**

**INCLUSION** is being asked to dance and participate.

**INCLUSION**

**EQUITY**

**EQUITY** is removing any barriers to people bringing their whole selves to the party; allowing people to request songs or bring their own music.

**BELONGING** is when people feel comfortable actually getting on the dance floor and dancing to their own beat.

**The party isn't really a success until everyone is on the dance floor expressing themselves without feeling self-conscious or forced.**

Inclusion goes a step further to create a welcoming environment for all groups. It accepts and celebrates differences, and embraces them as strengths. Inclusion encourages involvement and engagement of all. You can't achieve inclusion until diversity and equity have been achieved.

You'll know your initiative has been successful when all groups have a sense of belonging. When they feel secure, supported, accepted and included.

Belonging isn't only a noun, it's an emotion, and that's our goal. People want to stay with your organization and perform well, and they are more likely to do that when they feel like they belong there."

Belonging can be elusive when unconscious bias persists.

## UNCONSCIOUS BIAS: THE ELEPHANT IN THE ROOM

Research shows that within 7 seconds of meeting someone, we form on average 11 impressions[iv]. Many of them are not conscious thoughts, but impressions based on past experiences we've had. We do this intuitively, in part as a survival skill. We are constantly assessing our situation to see if we need to be on alert. Because these impressions are instantaneous and unconscious, it's difficult to sift through them and understand exactly how they affect our behavior–but they do. When we internalize impressions about groups of people, it can lead to unconscious discrimination, as is witnessed by more than 80% of the workforce.

Unconscious bias and implicit bias are often used interchangeably to describe internalized conclusions we have about groups. These internalized beliefs affect your behavior and emotions, but aren't part of your active reasoning so you may not even be aware you have them. In fact, sometimes your unconscious bias causes conflict with your stated or intended beliefs.

How do you make people aware of their unconscious thoughts and behaviors? How do you counter something you're not even aware of?

> *"Culture eats strategy for breakfast."*
>
> — Peter Drucker

## 13 STEPS TO BRINGING YOUR DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION EFFORTS TO LIFE

AMA has helped organizations enhance the effectiveness of their present D&I programs as well as design and implement an initiative from inception. Here are 13 strategies for making your initiatives resonate and stick.

**1. Build self-awareness.** Where are you in this process? How do you come across to others? Begin by developing your own self-awareness of the climate and changing definitions of diversity.

**2. Define a goal.** What is it that you want to accomplish? What future state are you hoping to achieve? You may need to establish multi-year goals, depending on where your organization stands now. If your organization is at the beginning of the journey, and does not yet have enough diversity, your goals might be more focused on hiring, onboarding and retaining a more diverse workforce. If your organization is further along, you can focus on fostering belonging.

**3. Determine the stakeholders.** Gain support of senior leadership, but also find internal advocates to help accelerate change. How can you better equip your advocates to drive change and support healthy conversations?

**4. Lay out realistic goals.** What do you want to achieve, and by when? Because diversity and inclusion are prerequisites to belonging, you may need to take a phased approach. Consider starting with the concepts and education, then building on competencies and changing culture.

**5. Reveal inequities through education.** D&I initiatives often begin with education and awareness. Most people think they are inclusive and fair already. They may be completely unaware of unconscious bias, obstacles, micro-aggressions and inequalities. "When we design D&I initiatives with clients, we deliberately layer the learning," says Blonski. "This not only reinforces comprehension and retention, it allows employees time for self-reflection and to raise concerns and obstacles to meaningful change."

**6. Increase exposure.** The more exposure you have to people within that group, the more your impressions will be varied and the less likely you'll be to make generalizations or assumptions. It's important to also have repeated exposure to D&I concepts. Our understanding of diversity continues to evolve, and employees need to see this as an ongoing conversation—not a once-a-year event.

**7. Commit to meaningful change.** D&I should not fall on a department, like HR, or onto a group of people. It's not the responsibility of the underrepresented to educate and raise these issues. The entire organization needs to take responsibility for fostering belonging.

**8. Own your culture.** Take ownership of your culture to create an environment of respect, civility and trust. Culture is a system of shared meanings, based upon knowledge, beliefs, values, morals and customs. There are two parts to culture at work—the culture of the organization and the personal culture of the employees, but those two things go together. Culture is built up through a communal sense of history, passed down for generations. There's a lot of background and history that shapes how we behave as a group, and employees make assumptions about how things should or shouldn't be done based on the corporate culture.

**9. Take the temperature.** While culture is often a measure of the accumulated history of an organization, the climate is what's going on right now. This includes the mood internal and external to your organization. Climate can be different in different locations or even within different departments. Periodically taking the temperature of your workforce will alert you to issues before there is open conflict. It will also let you know if your D&I initiatives are effective and current.

**10. Establish the value of diversity.** When people are unaware of how diversity filters into the effectiveness and productivity of an organization they are more likely to view D&I initiatives as being "politically correct" or simply a measure to comply with the law. This attitude can undermine more authentic self-reflection and meaningful change. So, reinforce that D&I is not only the morally right thing to do, but also a way to make your organization stronger, more competitive, and more effective.

**11. Communicate openly.** "We find with some of our clients that they are a little afraid to talk about it openly, and that's part of the problem," says Becker. "You need to adapt your communications and check in with people to make sure they are receiving it in the way you intend. Don't try to sweep it under the rug, and don't be overly concerned about whether you have a leader for the initiative who represents an under-represented group. Diversity and inclusion should be an open conversation to everyone, and all parties should be involved."

**12. Lead multi-cultural, diverse teams.** This goes a step beyond creating them. You need to maintain them. Leaders need to both have the character to influence the culture positively, and the competence to influence effectively.

**13. Manage difficult conversations.** Conflict is inevitable on any team, and when it comes to D&I topics, some people are afraid to speak openly, or worse, speak without thinking. As a leader, actively develop core competencies for dealing with conflict.

Unsure about where or how to start? "Start small, and think about layering your program and rolling it out in stages," says Becker.

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[i] https://www.inc.com/melanie-curtin/employees-who-feel-heard-are-46x-more-likely-to-feel-empowered-to-do-their-best-work.html

[ii] https://hbr.org/2013/12/how-diversity-can-drive-innovation

[iii] https://www.peoplemanagement.co.uk/experts/research/diversity-drives-better-decisions

[iv] NYU study conducted by https://www.sju.edu/faculty/michael-solomon Dr. Michael Solomon.