



Common Terminology

A diverse, equitable and inclusive workplace refers to a workplace in which all individuals feel seen, valued, respected and engaged not regardless of – but with consideration and appreciation for differences.

Companies that have strong Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) practices recognize and value differences such as gender, gender-identity, race, ethnicity, nationality, age, faith, sexual orientation, ability, and class and also respect personal traits such as life experience, career choices, educational background and communication style that are influenced by their identities and experiences.

DEI should be seen as an active process of integration, adaptation and ongoing change and be responsive to the needs of all employees, staff and external stakeholders. A good place to start is ensuring your team has basic understanding of **common DEI terminology** that affects/ effects your workplace culture. While this is not an all-encompassing list, a shared framework for terms used will help your team(s) better-understand your DEI learning & development and - prioritize strategic goals & objectives.

8-isms: AFASHCAR

Ableism: The belief that differently-abled individuals are inferior to non-disabled individuals, leading to discrimination toward and oppression of individuals with disabilities and physical differences.

Faithism: Discrimination towards a person or group of people solely dependent on their faith, beliefs, religion or lack thereof.

Ageism: Prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions based on differences in age; usually that of younger persons against older.

Sexism: Prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions based on a difference in sex/gender; usually by men against women.

Heterosexism: The presumption that everyone is, and should be, heterosexual.

Classism: Prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions based on a difference in socioeconomic status, income, class; usually by upper classes against lower.

Appearanceism: Discrimination or prejudice based upon an individual's appearance.

Racism: Prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions based on a difference in race/ethnicity; usually by white/European descent groups against persons of color. Racism is racial prejudice plus power. It is the intentional or unintentional use of power to isolate, separate and exploit others. The use of power is based on a belief in superior origin, the identity of supposed racial characteristics. Racism confers certain privileges on and defends the dominant group, which in turn, sustains and perpetuates racism.



Common DEI Terminology

Access/Accessibility | The extent to which a facility, position, or benefit is readily available and usable by individuals with marginalized populations without limit and/or identity-related barriers

Advocate | Someone who speaks up for themselves and members of their identity group; e.g. a person who lobbies for equal pay for a specific group.

Ally | A person of one social identity group who stands up in support of members of another group. Typically, member of dominant group standing beside member(s) of targeted group; e.g., a male arguing for equal pay for women.

Assimilation | A process by which outsiders (*persons who are others by virtue of cultural heritage, gender, age, religious background, and so forth*) are brought into, or made to take on the existing identity of the group into which they are being assimilated. The term has had a negative connotation in recent educational literature, imposing coercion and a failure to recognize and value diversity. It is also understood as a survival technique for individuals or groups.

Bias | Prejudice; an inclination or preference, especially one that interferes with impartial judgment.

Bigotry | An unreasonable or irrational attachment to negative stereotypes and prejudices.

Brave Space | Honors and invites full engagement from folks who are vulnerable while also setting the expectation that there could be an oppressive moment that the facilitator and allies have a responsibility to address.

Categorization | The natural cognitive process of grouping and labeling people, things, etc. based on their similarities. Categorization becomes problematic when the groupings become oversimplified and rigid (*e.g. stereotypes*).

Cisgender | A term used to describe people whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth. Often abbreviated to cis.

Corporate Social Responsibility | Practicing good corporate citizenship by going beyond profit maximization to make a positive impact on communities and societies.

Collusion | Willing participation in the discrimination against and/or oppression of one's own group (*e.g., a woman who enforces dominant body ideals through her comments and actions*).

Color Blind | The belief in treating everyone "equally" by treating everyone the same; based on the presumption that differences are by definition bad or problematic, and therefore best ignored (*i.e., "I don't see race, gender, etc."*).

Conscious Bias (Explicit Bias) | Refers to the attitudes and beliefs we have about a person or group on a conscious level. Much of the time, these biases and their expression arise as the direct result of a perceived threat. When people feel threatened, they are more likely to draw group boundaries to distinguish themselves from others.

Culture | Culture is the pattern of daily life learned consciously and unconsciously by a group of people. These patterns can be seen in language, governing practices, arts, customs, holiday celebrations, food, religion, dating rituals, and clothing.



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Cultural Appropriation | The adoption or theft of icons, rituals, aesthetic standards, and behavior from one culture or subculture by another. It is generally applied when the subject culture is a minority culture or somehow subordinate in social, political, economic, or military status to appropriating culture. This “appropriation” often occurs without any real understanding of why the original culture took part in these activities, often converting culturally significant artifacts, practices, and beliefs into “meaningless” pop-culture or giving them a significance that is completely different/less nuanced than they would originally have had.

Dialogue | “Communication that creates and recreates multiple understandings” (Wink, 1997). It is bi-directional, not zero-sum and may or may not end in agreement. It can be emotional and uncomfortable, but is safe, respectful and has greater understanding as its goal.

Discrimination | The denial of justice and fair treatment by both individuals and institutions in many areas, including employment, education, housing, banking, and political rights. Discrimination is an action that can follow prejudiced thinking.

Diversity | The wide variety of shared and different personal and group characteristics among human beings.

Dominant Culture | The cultural values, beliefs, and practices that are assumed to be the most common and influential within a given society.

Emotional Tax | The combination of being on guard to protect against bias, feeling different at work because of gender, race, and/or ethnicity, and the associated effects on health, well-being, and ability to thrive at work.

Ethnicity | A social construct which divides individuals into smaller social groups based on characteristics such as a shared sense of group membership, values, behavioral patterns, language, political and economic interests, history and ancestral geographical base.

Equality | A state of affairs in which all people within a specific society or isolated group have the same status in certain respects, including civil rights, freedom of speech, property rights and equal access to certain social goods and services.

Equity | Takes into consideration the fact that the social identifiers (*race, gender, socioeconomic status, etc.*) do, in fact, affect equality. In an equitable environment, an individual or a group would be given what was needed to give them equal advantage. This would not necessarily be equal to what others were receiving. It could be more or different. Equity is an ideal and a goal, not a process. It insures that everyone has the resources they need to succeed.

Fundamental Attribution Error | A common cognitive action in which one attributes their own success and positive actions to their own innate characteristics (*‘I’m a good person’*) and failure to external influences (*‘I lost it in the sun’*), while attributing others’ success to external influences (*‘He had help and got lucky’*) and failure to others’ innate characteristics (*‘They’re bad people’*). This operates on group levels as well, with the in-group giving itself favorable attributions, while giving the out-group unfavorable attributions, as a way of maintaining a feeling of superiority, i.e. “double standard.”

Gender Expression | External manifestations of gender, expressed through a person’s name, pronouns, clothing, haircut, behavior, voice, and/or body characteristics.



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Inclusion | Authentically bringing traditionally excluded individuals and/or groups into processes, activities, and decision/policy making in a way that shares power.

Inclusive Language | Refers to non-sexist language or language that “includes” all persons in its references. For example, “a writer needs to proofread his work” excludes females due to the masculine reference of the pronoun. Likewise, “a nurse must disinfect her hands” is exclusive of males and stereotypes nurses as females.

In-Group Bias (Favoritism) | The tendency for groups to “favor” themselves by rewarding group members economically, socially, psychologically, and emotionally in order to uplift one group over another.

Institutional Racism | It is widely accepted that racism is, by definition, institutional. Institutions have greater power to reward and penalize. They reward by providing career opportunities for some people and foreclosing them for others. They reward as well by the way social goods are distributed, by deciding who receives institutional benefits.

Intercultural Competency | A process of learning about and becoming allies with people from other cultures, thereby broadening our own understanding and ability to participate in a multicultural process. The key element to becoming more culturally competent is respect for the ways that others live in and organize the world and an openness to learn from them.

Inter-Group Conflict | Tension and conflict which exists between social groups and which may be enacted by individual members of these groups.

Internalized Oppression | The process whereby individuals in the target group make oppression internal and personal by coming to believe that the lies, prejudices, and stereotypes about them are true. Members of target groups exhibit internalized oppression when they alter their attitudes, behaviors, speech, and self-confidence to reflect the stereotypes and norms of the dominant group. Internalized oppression can create low self-esteem, self-doubt, and even self-loathing. It can also be projected outward as fear, criticism, and distrust of members of one’s target group.

Internalized Racism | When individuals from targeted racial groups internalize racist beliefs about themselves or members of their racial group. Examples include using creams to lighten one’s skin, believing that white leaders are inherently more competent, asserting that individuals of color are not as intelligent as white individuals, believing that racial inequality is the result of individuals of color not raising themselves up “by their bootstraps”. (*Jackson & Hardiman, 1997*)

Intersectionality | An approach largely advanced by women of color, arguing that classifications such as gender, race, class, and others cannot be examined in isolation from one another; they interact and intersect in individuals’ lives, in society, in social systems, and are mutually constitutive. Exposing [one’s] multiple identities can help clarify the ways in which a person can simultaneously experience privilege and oppression. For example, a Black woman in America does not experience gender inequalities in exactly the same way as a white woman, nor racial oppression identical to that experienced by a Black man. Each race and gender intersection produces a qualitatively distinct life.

ISM | A social phenomenon and psychological state where prejudice is accompanied by the power to systemically enact it.



Marginalized | Excluded, ignored, or relegated to the outer edge of a group/society/community.

Micro-Aggressions | Commonplace daily verbal, behavioral, or environmental indignities, whether intentional or unintentional, that communicate hostile, derogatory racial slights. These messages may be sent verbally, ("*You speak good English*"), non-verbally (*clutching one's purse more tightly around people from certain race/ethnicity*) or environmentally (*symbols like the confederate flag or using Native American mascots*). Such communications are usually outside the level of conscious awareness of perpetrators.

Micro-Insults | Verbal and nonverbal communications that subtly convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person's racial heritage or identity. An example is an employee who asks a colleague of color how she got her job, implying she may have landed it through an affirmative action or quota system.

Micro-Invalidation | Communications that subtly exclude, negate or nullify the thoughts, feelings or experiential reality of a person of color. For instance, white individuals often ask Asian-Americans where they were born, conveying the message that they are perpetual foreigners in their own land.

Model Minority | Refers to a minority ethnic, racial, or religious group whose members achieve a higher degree of success than the population average. This success is typically measured in income, education, and related factors such as low crime rate and high family stability.

Naming | When one articulates a thought that traditionally has not been discussed.

Non-White | Used at times to reference all persons or groups outside of the white culture, often in the clear consciousness that white culture should be seen as an alternative to various non-white cultures and not as normative.

Oppression | Results from the use of institutional power and privilege where one person or group benefits at the expense of another. Oppression is the use of power and the effects of domination.

Persons of Color | A collective term for men and women of Asian, African, Latin and Native American backgrounds; as opposed to the collective "White" for those of European ancestry.

Prejudice | A prejudgment or preconceived opinion, feeling, or belief, usually negative, often based on stereotypes, that includes feelings such as dislike or contempt and is often enacted as discrimination or other negative behavior; OR, a set of negative personal beliefs about a social group that leads individuals to prejudge individuals from that group or the group in general, regardless of individual differences among members of that group.

Privilege | Freedom from consideration; Unearned access to resources (social power) typically readily available to some individuals as a result of their social group.

Race | A social construct that artificially divides individuals into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly skin color), ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation or history, ethnic classification, and/or the social, economic, and political needs of a society at a given period of time. Scientists agree that there is no biological or genetic basis for racial categories.



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Racial Equity | Racial equity is the condition that would be achieved if one's racial identity is no longer predicted, in a statistical sense, how one fares. When this term is used, the term may imply that racial equity is one part of racial justice, and thus also includes work to address the root causes of inequities, not just their manifestations. This includes the elimination of policies, practices, attitudes and cultural messages that reinforce differential outcomes by race or fail to eliminate them.

Racial Profiling | The use of race or ethnicity as grounds for suspecting someone of having committed an offense.

Racism | Prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions based on a difference in race/ethnicity; usually by white/European descent groups against persons of color. Racism is racial prejudice plus power. It is the intentional or unintentional use of power to isolate, separate and exploit others. The use of power is based on a belief in superior origin, the identity of supposed racial characteristics. Racism confers certain privileges on and defends the dominant group, which in turn, sustains and perpetuates racism.

Re-Fencing (Exception-Making) | A cognitive process for protecting stereotypes by explaining any evidence/example to the contrary as an isolated exception.

Resilience | The ability to recover from some shock or disturbance

Saliency | The quality of a group identity in which an individual is more conscious, and plays a larger role in that individual's day-to-day life; for example, a man's awareness of his "maleness" in an elevator with only women.

Scapegoating | The action of blaming an individual or group for something when, in reality, there is no one person or group responsible for the problem. It targets another person or group as responsible for problems in society because of that person's group identity.

Social Identity | Involves the ways in which one characterizes oneself, the affinities one has with other people, the ways one has learned to behave in stereotyped social settings, the things one values in oneself and in the world, and the norms that one recognizes or accepts governing everyday behavior.

Social Oppression | This condition exists when one social group, whether knowingly or unconsciously, exploits another group for its own benefit.

Social Self-Esteem | The degree of positive/negative evaluation an individual holds about their particular situation in regard to their social identities.

Stereotype | Blanket beliefs and expectations about members of certain groups that present an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment. They go beyond necessary and useful categorizations and generalizations in that they are typically negative, are based on little information and are highly generalized.

System of Oppression | Conscious and unconscious, non-random, and organized harassment, discrimination, exploitation, discrimination, prejudice and other forms of unequal treatment that impact different groups.



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Tolerance | Acceptance, and open-mindedness to different practices, attitudes, and cultures; does not necessarily mean agreement with the differences.

Token-ism | Hiring or seeking to have representation such as a few women and/or racial or ethnic minority persons so as to appear inclusive while remaining mono-cultural.

Transgressive | Challenging the accepted expectations and/or rules of the appropriateness of “polite society”.

Unconscious Bias (Implicit Bias) | Social stereotypes about certain groups of people that individuals form outside their own conscious awareness. Everyone holds unconscious beliefs about various social and identity groups, and these biases stem from one’s tendency to organize social worlds by categorizing.

Whiteness | A broad social construction that embraces the white culture, history, ideology, racialization, expressions, and economic, experiences, epistemology, and emotions and behaviors and nonetheless reaps material, political, economic, and structural benefits for those socially deemed white.

White Fragility | Discomfort and defensiveness on the part of a white person when confronted by information about racial inequality and injustice.

White Privilege | White Privilege is the spillover effect of racial prejudice and White institutional power. It means, for example, that a White person in the United States has privilege, simply because one is White. It means that as a member of the dominant group a White person has greater access or availability to resources because of being White. It means that White ways of thinking and living are seen as the norm against which all people of color are compared. Life is structured around those norms for the benefit of White people. White privilege is the ability to grow up thinking that race doesn’t matter. It is not having to daily think about skin color and the questions, looks, and hurdles that need to be overcome because of one’s color. White Privilege may be less recognizable to some White people because of gender, age, sexual orientation, economic class or physical or mental ability, but it remains a reality because of one’s membership in the White dominant group.

White Supremacy | White supremacy is a historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations and individuals of color by white individuals and nations of the European continent for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power and privilege.

Work-Life Effectiveness | A talent management strategy that focuses on doing the best work at the best time with the best talent. It helps businesses create flexibility, enhance agility, and drive mutually beneficial solutions for both employers and employees.

Workplace Inclusion | An atmosphere where all employees belong, contribute, and can thrive. Requires deliberate and intentional action.