

Building an Inclusive Workplace



What is Diversity?

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) defines diversity as “the collective mixture of differences and similarities that include, for example, individual and organizational characteristics, values, beliefs, experiences, backgrounds, preferences, and behaviors.”

Diversity can be at the surface level as well as at a deeper level. Examples of the former include, diversity in relation to gender, race, age, physical disabilities, body-type, etc. Examples of the latter are our values, attitudes and beliefs.

What is Inclusion?

SHRM defines inclusion as “the achievement of a work environment in which all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully, have equal access to opportunities and resources, and can contribute fully to the organization’s success

Simply introducing programs aimed at hiring more minorities, more women, more transgender persons, or persons with disabilities, etc., does not, however, address issues of diversity and inclusion in the workplace. For an organization to become a truly inclusive workplace, it is important for everyone in the organization to be educated on how unconscious bias impacts our ability to be truly inclusive.

Unconscious Bias

Our values, attitudes and beliefs and the way we view the world, are shaped by many factors including our culture and upbringing. While we like to think of ourselves as being unbiased, we are all susceptible to stereotypical biases about gender, sexual orientation, race, religion, etc. These biases are reinforced subconsciously because it is natural for us to spend most of our time with people who look like us, think like us and act like us.

Overcoming unconscious bias

In order for us to overcome these “unconscious” biases, we need to become more thoughtful and aware of the biases we hold as well as how we unconsciously communicate these biases through our speech and actions. One example would be the words we use and the tone of voice we adopt when we speak to someone we perceive as being different from us, as well as non-verbal gestures such as eye-rolling, sighing and looking away when someone is speaking to us, excluding people when we are in a

group setting, etc.

If we make an effort to be more mindful of the biases we hold, then we can be more fair, more thoughtful and more respectful in dealing with our co-workers.

Practical tips for employers

- Educate leaders and employees about unconscious bias
- Build diversity and inclusion initiatives into the organization's leadership programs
- Develop a diversity and inclusion scorecard
- Hold managers and leaders accountable for creating a workplace in which all individuals are treated fairly and respectfully
- Ensure that everyone in the organization has equal access to organizational resources
- Provide opportunities for everyone in the organization, to grow and contribute fully to the organization's success.

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Heather is a lawyer, investigator and mediator, with a unique combination of legal expertise and extensive hands-on human resources management and labour relations experience. Prior to being called to the British Columbia Bar, she was a Human Resources Manager at the University of British Columbia and Labour Relations Advisor to Vancouver Community College.

Heather provides legal advice on all aspects of employment and labour issues arising in the union and non-union context through her law firm, Integritas Workplace Law. Heather also provides workplace mediation services, general human resources support to employers, and workplace investigation services. Heather is a frequent speaker and webinar presenter and regularly contributes articles on workplace issues.