



# Vitality

An EFAP Newsletter for Human Resource and Occupational Health Professionals, Program Administrators, Supervisors, and Key Personnel



## Workplace Equity

Workplace equity is the fair treatment for employees in every facet of life regardless of their gender expression, race, disability, religion, nationality, sexual orientation, or age.

Equity ensures removing any chances of discrimination in the workplace, and it doesn't necessarily translate to equal treatment for all, though it does promote an individual's right to be different. Equity in the workplace makes sure people are given equal opportunities, equal pay and are accepted and respected for their differences. Equity is about creating an inclusive and conducive work environment where employees feel secure and happy. The two primary aims of equity are diversity and inclusion.

When diversity and inclusion blend well in the workplace, we get an equitable workplace, which this article is all about.

### What does inequality mean in today's corporate world?

Diversity values the differences between people, including those of different races, ethnicities, genders, ages, religions, disabilities, and sexual orientations. It also includes people with cognitive and neural differences, educational backgrounds and knowledge bases. In comparison, inclusion is when every person in society is valued, heard, supported, and respected, and people feel a sense of belongingness.

Establishing equality is a top challenge that all human society is facing now, and that's not surprising. Equity requires making adjustments in the system to meet the needs of different people. Growing pains are natural when implementing internal hiring and HR systems that support equity in the workplace.



Businesses need to direct resources toward ensuring equality is being addressed at all levels of the company, sometimes hiring at least one team member to implement and maintain diversity standards.

### **Equal opportunity employers, and what it means**

Equal opportunity is a state of fairness in which individuals are unhampered by artificial barriers, “gate-keeping,” or prejudices or preferences.

Gatekeeping is the counter-productive activity of controlling and inevitably limiting a person’s or group’s access to something beneficial. This could range from hiring to salary practices, and it can seep into a company’s extracurricular activities. *When coworkers get together socially, is everyone invite?* Gatekeeping can be wrongfully used in business to control who gets a position, who gets promoted and how bonuses and perks are awarded.

A genuinely equitable workplace is one in which all employees have the right to be treated equally in all aspects of their jobs. A fair company will provide equal employment opportunities to all employees, not a selective few. It prohibits discrimination and harassment of any type without regard to race, colour, religion, age, sex, national origin, disability status, genetics, protected veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity.

Some examples of equitable workplace offerings include training, guidance, skill development, and mentoring on a nondiscriminatory basis.

### **How to achieve workplace equality—reviewing and implementing solutions**

#### **Offer diversity and inclusion training.**

One way to create a more equitable workplace is to implement training programs focusing on the two things that make equity: diversity and inclusion. According to a study that examined 40 years of research on diversity training and its outcomes, diversity and inclusion training can help diminish biases and prejudice within organizations.<sup>1</sup>

#### **Identify and prevent unconscious biases.**

Unconscious biases (also known as implicit biases) are the snap judgments based on social stereotypes that ultimately aren’t real. Unconscious biases are made and processed by our brains within a fraction of a second, and we’re not usually aware they’re happening. We are conditioned by all kinds of factors, from childhood to adulthood, to form

opinions and judgements about certain groups of people that live outside of our conscious awareness. They originate from beliefs, social norms, past interactions, and other factors.

The dangerous thing about unconscious bias is that it happens rapidly, internally, and we act on them automatically. To counter this automatic process we must learn how to slow down the processing where we are most likely to hold implicit biases, to identify these biases within ourselves so that they are conscious, and then try to dismantle them so that we can make more conscious decision, rather than continuing to make unfair decisions based on these biases.

Remember, we all hold unconscious beliefs about various social and identity groups, and these biases stem from our inherent cognitive tendency to organize and categorize our social worlds.<sup>2</sup> Unconscious bias arises out of this otherwise useful sorting part of our thinking patterns. Still, when they influence our hiring habits and workplace behaviours to affect others negatively, unconscious bias has very unfair consequences. For example, unconscious biases may be more prevalent when multi-tasking or working under time pressure when decisions occur on-the-fly.

Here are a few workplace equity learnings from a study of nursing schools that nearly any organization can learn from and implement.

#### **1. Form a purpose-built team.**

The study of nurses states that “a coalition of the willing is essential” for fostering a culture of inclusion. This group should include formal leaders, non-formal leaders, and representatives of all faculty and staff levels.

#### **2. Set a reasonable timeline.**

Systematic changes take time and periods of discomfort within the organization and its stakeholders. The study of nurses acknowledges this and encourages viewing these shifts as long-term commitments. Sustainable changes within an organization take time, planning, and consistent action.

#### **3. Connect your equity goals to the organization’s culture and values.**

Showing why your organization’s efforts to establish and maintain practices that champion equity support the workplace’s culture and values helps to fill individuals with a greater purpose.

#### 4. Adopt a more evolved definition of diversity and inclusion.

Equity in the workplace is about more than just variety in race and gender. Start seeing equitable practices as a way of seeing the whole of a person and their experience, including but not limited to education, predominant language, learning style, dominant communication style, age, and beyond.

#### 5. Acknowledge local organizational culture.

Look at the various communities local to the organization you are leading. Are there societal factors that affect these communities disproportionately? Help your employees gain a better understanding of the experiences of their colleagues by allowing discussions around local culture and its impacts to happen in a safe and non-discriminatory fashion.

#### 6. Invest in experts.

Businesses need to direct resources toward ensuring equality is being addressed at all levels of the company. Sometimes hiring at least one team member to implement and maintain diversity standards is necessary.

#### 7. Reward success.

Encourage progress by finding ways to acknowledge all gain, no matter how small.

### Be aware of indirect discrimination.

Discrimination takes place in a variety of ways. It may occur directly when individuals or organizations exclude people who need housing, employment, social services, or childcare support. Discrimination is often subtle, and discriminatory remarks are not often made directly, which makes this such an insidious practice.<sup>3</sup> To understand how indirect discrimination can prevent individuals from gaining access to opportunities, we might examine the hiring process. Take, for instance, the wording of the job posting. A posting that features stereotypically masculine language, like “ambitious” and “dominate,” – may be less appealing to individual applicants.

Furthermore, some teams rely on referrals, word-of-mouth, and nepotism to fill job positions within the organization. While this may seem like an easy way to hire a like-minded individual, the practice ends up favouring inner-circle candidates rather than looking at the broader pool of qualified people.<sup>4</sup> Long-term, it creates a washed out collective consciousness that fails to see its products or services from a perspective beyond the typical. The organization setting out discriminatory conditions and the

organization or person who carries out this discrimination can be named in a human rights claim and held responsible

### There are many benefits to upholding a workplace that isn't discriminatory.<sup>5</sup>

Subtle discrimination can usually only be detected after looking at all circumstances to determine if a pattern of conduct exists. Individual acts may be ambiguous or explained away. Sometimes seemingly neutral rules, standards, policies, practices or requirements have an adverse, even if unintended, effect on people from minority groups. Many of our laws and regulations are put in place without considering the unique needs or circumstances of people from minority groups, or disabled communities and how the unintended effects impact these groups. Organizations have a responsibility to understand where their actions may have a discriminatory effect and to remove this effect where it occurs.

### Recruit an HR department well-versed in diversity and equality to implement these values into the recruitment process.

Attracting and increasing diverse talent is a significant competitive differentiator for recruiters and talent acquisition leaders to develop.

1. Attract a more diverse candidate pool by starting with your job posting language. A job posting features stereotypically masculine wording, like “ambitious” and “dominate,” maybe less appealing to applicants. Instead, write your job postings more carefully or have multiple people check-edit it to make sure the language is more universally appealing.
2. Offer workplace policies that appeal to diverse candidates. Research shows that new hires tend to place more importance on a company culture that emphasizes work-life balance. Research has also found that one of the best workplace policies to attract diverse candidates—**women, especially**—is flexibility. Offering flexibility with work from home support and work share opportunities only helps you attract more diverse candidates. It keeps productivity more stable during COVID-related lockdowns and ultimately helps prevent expensive employee turnover. Location is another important consideration. The distance between an office and the inner city correlates directly with more diverse neighbourhoods.

Longer commutes may reduce the ability to attract diverse populations from inner city locations. Commute times are often cited as a major reason for employee turnover.

3. Companies using a personality assessment instead of the usual recruiting criteria – where they have worked, where they were educated, and who they're connected with – demonstrate more diverse workforces. Beyond that, personality assessments do an excellent job of measuring candidates' personality traits, motivations, and skills. Personality assessments increase workplace diversity because personality scores do not negatively differ between majority and minority group members.
4. Use sourcing methods that offer a diverse candidate selection. One thing that creates an undiverse hiring pipeline is relying on referrals, word-of-mouth, and nepotism—favouring inner-circle candidates rather than looking at the broader pool of qualified people. Our close networks are limited, and the people within it have a higher chance of holding similar values and perspectives on issues. While that might seem preferable—who doesn't want agreeable work peers?—it creates a washed out collective conscious that fails to see its products or services from a perspective beyond the typical.

Many may have unconscious beliefs about various social and identity groups, and these biases stem from our tendency to organize and categorize our social worlds.<sup>6</sup> It's important to recognize unconscious bias as a part of our thinking patterns. Still, when they influence our hiring habits and guide behaviours that affect others negatively, unconscious bias has very unfair consequences.

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