

# People Excellence®

Diversity Equity Inclusion | June-August 2024

- 14 DEI Implementation
- 33 Who is in Action for DEI?
- 56 Inclusive Leadership
- 66 Gender Diversity on Board



## & Women Empowerment Male Allyship

# ARE YOU MISSING THE “D” IN DEI?



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By now, you're likely quite familiar with the idea of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. Talk of DEI has proliferated our workplaces and has become a hot topic in the news in many parts of the world. Companies pride themselves on fostering diverse teams, ensuring equitable opportunities, and cultivating inclusive environments because the benefits are clear.

Yet, many organizations are overlooking another “D” in the DEI acronym: disability.

People with disabilities are the world's largest and fastest-growing minority group. Anyone can join this group at any time - through accident, illness, or simply by aging. Globally, over 1 billion people live with disabilities, representing a significant percentage of the population - over 25% in some countries. Despite these numbers, disability remains a neglected dimension in the broader DEI conversation. This exclusion creates a distorted picture of inclusion, leaving a large segment of the population feeling marginalized and hindering progress towards a truly equitable society.

The concept of intersectionality reminds us that identities are not siloed. When disability intersects with other aspects of DEI, such as race, gender, socioeconomic status, or sexual orientation, it creates a unique set of challenges that individuals may face.

## **The Landscape of Exclusion**

The exclusion of disability manifests in several ways. Firstly, events promoting DEI initiatives often lack physical and digital accessibility.

Inaccessible venues, a lack of sign language interpreters, and the absence of closed captioning on presentations effectively shut out individuals with mobility or sensory impairments. Furthermore, the voices of disabled people are rarely represented in DEI discussions. Panels and workshops often lack diversity in terms of disability, leading to a one-sided conversation about inclusion.

The focus on physical disabilities further exacerbates the problem. While ensuring physical accessibility is essential, a comprehensive approach is needed. Neurodiversity and mental health conditions, which also fall under the umbrella of disability, often get sidelined. This overlooks a significant portion of the disability spectrum and fails to address the unique challenges faced by individuals with these conditions.

## **Consequences of Exclusion**

The exclusion of disability in DEI efforts has far-reaching consequences. Firstly, it creates feelings of isolation and marginalization within the disabled community. When their voices and experiences are not included, disabled individuals feel left out of the conversation about creating a more inclusive environment.

Secondly, it hinders the career advancement and overall well-being of disabled employees. Inaccessible workplaces, a lack of awareness about disability etiquette, and unconscious bias toward disabled individuals can create significant barriers to their success.



Finally, this exclusion represents a missed opportunity. The diverse perspectives and experiences of people with disabilities can be invaluable assets to any team or organization. By neglecting to include them, we lose out on the potential for innovation, creativity, and a richer understanding of the world.

### **Moving Forward: Inclusion in Action**

The path towards truly inclusive DEI initiatives requires tangible action. Here are some steps organizations can take:

- Ensure physical and digital accessibility. This includes accessible event venues, sign language interpretation, closed captioning, and user-friendly technology platforms.
- Actively seek out and include disabled voices in DEI discussions. Organize workshops and panels that actively feature perspectives from the disabled community.
- Provide training on disability awareness and unconscious bias. Educating employees about different types of disabilities and challenging preconceived notions is crucial for fostering a truly inclusive environment.
- Broaden the definition of disability to encompass neurodiversity and mental health. A comprehensive approach to disability recognizes the full spectrum of experiences and challenges.

### **Conclusion**

It's important to recognize that disability does not exist in a vacuum. By understanding how it intersects with other aspects of DEI, we can create more comprehensive and effective inclusion strategies. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion are essential for building a just and thriving society. Integrating disability into the heart of DEI initiatives is not just a matter of political correctness, it's a matter of ensuring that everyone has the chance to participate and contribute. By actively including disability in DEI conversations and actions, we unlock the full potential of a diverse and inclusive society.

### **Call to Action**

Let's not leave the "D" out of DEI. Advocate for disability inclusion in your workplace and community. Educate yourself and others about the diverse experiences of disabled individuals. Together, we can create a world where everyone has the opportunity to thrive.



# Making Work Accessible Handbook



Making Online Learning Accessible: A Making Work Accessible Handbook” (the #A11yBook!) is the first in a series of practical handbooks for applying accessibility best practices to the world of work.

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