

# Rethinking Diversity – Importance of Inclusion, Equity and Empathy

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## Introduction

Diversity is a fact of life; it brings out the variety, beauty, and creativity of all human endeavours. Diversity is also understood as recognising our differences regardless of our backgrounds ([Diversity Council Australia](#) 2021). Naturally, the world is already diverse by gender, race, ethnicity, creed, colour, cultures, languages, disability, sexual orientation, etc. Organisations are made up of a heterogeneous workforce, and markets with heterogeneous consumers. Organisations themselves are heterogeneous, including the closely competing ones. Workforces are diverse by default.

However, looking at the omnipresent underrepresentation of women in professional and managerial ranks, the enduring male-female pay gap, deteriorating socio-economic conditions of the Aboriginal population, or the continuing suffering of people of colour, it appears that something is missing in the concept of diversity. Are we wasting time in calling a spade a spade? People are not always included and seldom treated equitably. The missing links, therefore, are often inclusion and equity. Inclusion and equity are missing because of missing a fourth element, empathy. Accordingly, the aim of this article is to further elaborate the alternative terms including the concepts of inclusion, equity and empathy, which are more meaningful than diversity in understanding what we should do to speed up an inclusive society.

## Diversity is a Natural Consequence, Inclusion Warrants Right Strategies

Inclusion is defined as “the degree to which individuals feel a part of critical organizational processes such as access to information and resources, involvement in work groups, and ability to influence the decision-making process” ([Mor-Barak and Cherin 1998](#), p. 48). In other words, a workplace can be diverse but not inclusive. In a diverse organization, to promote inclusion, the following should happen ([Diversity Council Australia](#) 2021; [Saska 2021](#)):

- People should feel valued and respected (irrespective of their gender, age, cultural backgrounds, sexual orientation, etc.)
- Fair access to resources and opportunities for all
- Consistent encouragement for sharing their experiences and perspectives to improve organizational outcomes.

A simple example of a diverse and inclusive workplace is one that acknowledges that some employees prefer vegetarian, vegan and halal foods. Accordingly, their dietary requirements are respected in office-sponsored events. Another example could be providing people from different faiths with spaces to pray during office hours ([Saska 2021](#)). In summary, diversity may happen even without a plan, but inclusion needs appropriate choices and strategies.

## Equity is a Necessity

Equity is “the absence of systematic disparities ... between groups with different levels of underlying social advantage/disadvantage—that is, wealth, power, or prestige” ([Chin and Chien 2006](#), p. 79). Equity entails action and proactive efforts to:

- embrace the diversity and cultural richness of individuals or groups (in terms of demographic characteristics, socioeconomic status, or cultural backgrounds);
- identify the blockades that deprive people from the full participation stemming from their differences; and
- reverse the disadvantages faced by vulnerable and marginalized people by creating opportunities and providing the necessary resources to be able to achieve the full potential.

Some examples of equity in the workplace include: fair compensation (ensuring transparency regarding rate of pay, wages and performance incentives); equitable workforce education programs (targeting those who have been deprived of necessary education and skills due to systematic discrimination); and equitable parental leave for women and men as well as same-sex couples.

## Empathy is the Only Way

“[Empathy](#), from the Greek term *empathia* meaning *em-* or *‘in’* and *pathos* or *‘feeling’*, describes the ability to understand and share the feelings of another.”

Humans may empathise with the natural environment and other living beings, employers may empathise with the employee, the marketers may empathise with the customer. Empathy is important in leadership as it helps leaders to perceive the thoughts, emotions, interests, experiences needs, hopes and perspectives of others and communicate with them accordingly. Given that empathy has a transformative power to turn the fortunes of a business, organizations should promote empathy in the workplace through encouraging the following:

- Embedding ‘caring for others’ deeper into the organizational culture (it needs expanding one’s circle of care and concern)
- Showing genuine interest in perspectives, goals, and ambitions of colleagues (this needs good listening skills)
- Setting high ethical standards and expectations
- Emphasis on work-life balance

## The Bonding Function of Empathy in Different Contexts

Pandemic management would have been more effective had the system being more inclusive and equitable. The affected people should have been active participants in the policy development and implementation of pandemic management and vaccination rollouts. The poor and disadvantaged people would have saved more of their lives had the systems be more equitable and inclusive. The missing link again is a lack of empathy.

## Marketing

The world will be a much better place if all customers are treated equitably and inclusive in the marketing decision-making process. Wasteful over-consumption, panic buying, indulgence buying, and deceptive marketing practices would be reduced if not eradicated with marketers’ empathetic attitudes.

## Leadership

Everything being diverse, the leadership should always strive for equity and inclusion. Only a leader with empathy can foster inclusive and equal workplaces that excel in building strong organisations that create stakeholder value.

## Climate Change

Pollution, littering, over-consumption, and over-production are primarily because of inequitable and non-inclusive attitudes towards the natural environment. Lack of empathy for nature and future generations is the cause of this unequal and non-inclusive attitude that leads to climate change issues.

## Conclusion

The world is diverse, but it should not be divided. The world is not equal, but it can be equitable. People are different, but they can be included and empathized with.



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