

# The Battle for Diversity in the Workplace is Just Beginning

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Companies know that employee diversity in the workplace ultimately promotes acceptance, respect and teamwork. However, in spite of efforts to attract people of different races, age groups, genders, native languages or ethnic backgrounds, most diversity initiatives fall short.

Companies may attract a cultural cross-section of personnel, but newcomers often fail to stick around. This is largely because the pains taken to implement workplace diversity programs and outreach initiatives do not address some of the main areas where diversity fails.

Improving these workplace diversity programs may allow HR to achieve corporate goals and create “feel good” optics with men and women of different racial and ethnic backgrounds working in tandem. However, these efforts may not address three areas that can have a major effect on corporate culture and the ability of teams to succeed: diversity of thought, personality diversity and socioeconomic status.

## Diversity of thought

What is diversity of thought? Cognitive diversity (aka diversity of thought) enables groups to develop creative solutions and drive innovation. People have different ways of approaching problems and thinking styles that can lead to a wider range of answers. It is brainstorming as a way of operating versus assuming everyone has the same answers.

Embracing these differences can make for some animated or heated meetings, but diversity of thought helps guard against groupthink and a silo mentality. It also helps organizations identify the right employees for specific jobs, problems or teams by the way they tackle situations.

Everybody has the potential to bring a different perspective to their workplace. Drawing from this diversity of thought, however, is not easy. People naturally connect with people who think like them. But, if everyone sees an issue from the same perspective, it is easy to ignore facts that could have been obvious to those with a different outlook.

## How to support thought diversity

With more diversified age groups and cultural backgrounds in today's organizations, cliques and social circles typically form, making it difficult for some to express themselves. Accordingly, departments and work teams must create space for people to share their perspectives and allow the cognitive diversity that already exists to flourish.

Supporting diversity of thought can require changes in efforts for hiring, managing and promoting people:

- Hire using a process that will help identify and select people who think in diverse ways. This may involve more probing questions and using recruitment assessment and personality tests to get a better sense of the individual and other techniques to find people who are outspoken, as well as those who are a little more reticent to speak up.
- Manage by encouraging a climate that seeks consensus as an end goal rather than an old-school command-and-control approach. Fostering an environment where everyone is comfortable sharing their views involves ensuring that team members strive to see other members' perspectives.
- Think differently about performance evaluations and promotions. Moving to a team-based performance evaluation may allow for a culture of inclusion that empowers people and rewards collaboration. It is also important to develop ways to reward people who think outside the box and choose leaders who strive to ensure all team members feel included and valued.

## Personality diversity

Personality is essentially the totality of an individual's physical, emotional, mental and social characteristics. These include the typical categories made popular by the [Myers-Briggs Type Indicator](#) tests that have been popular for over 50 years (introverted or extroverted, judging or perceiving). They also include agreeableness and conscientiousness. A truly diverse organization features a healthy mix of personality types.

Different experts have created a varying list of personality types, but they all demonstrate the advantage offered by a team that is an amalgam of them. Teams usually include [six personality types](#). They are the stabilizer, driver, adventurer, perfectionist, cheerleader and energizer. This type of diverse team allows individuals to feel comfortable in their roles and in supporting co-workers.





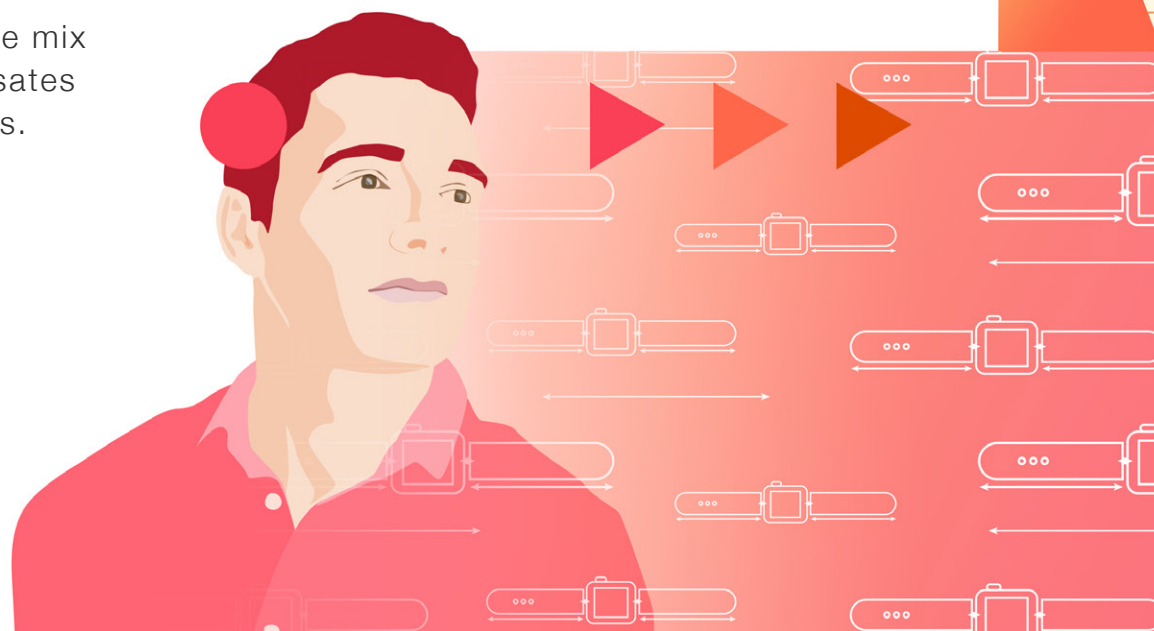
## Effects of personality diversity

Developing teams with diverse personality types allows for more dialogue and better results. True, managing a mix of personalities is not easy, since there will be the inevitable personality conflicts. However, it illustrates one key argument for diversity (other than fairness): Dealing with differences can be uncomfortable, but it can lead to better outcomes than what uniformity and conformity can achieve.

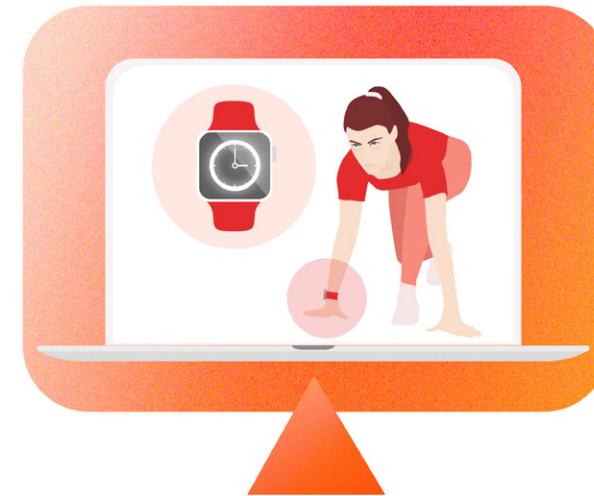
Three other positive effects are:

- Less groupthink when new voices are raised.
- More agility and resilience as members adapt to each other.
- Higher productivity as the mix of personalities compensates for individual weaknesses.

So how do you achieve personality diversity? Some personality traits show up in an interview setting. So, when it comes to hiring to ensure a workforce includes diverse personalities, some employers use online survey/personality tests. Even so, it is important to try and circumvent any biases that hiring managers may have. Using a diverse interview panel will ensure the selection of someone based on their suitability for the position.



## Socioeconomic status diversity



Socioeconomic diversity reflects the workforce's educational levels, backgrounds and financial status. While it seems like certain positions require a particular degree or pay a specific amount, class differences (even for those who seem to have escaped them) can be inevitable and one of the hardest diversity issues for a company to address.

As with other forms of diversity, socioeconomic status can be both a challenge and a benefit to a business. Every society has class divisions. The practice of hiring based on the "old boys club," school ties or being from the same area still persists but does businesses a disservice.

People from different socioeconomic backgrounds often have different outlooks, experiences and attitudes. Someone who does not have the same education or upbringing or even comes from a different part of the country will not see things the same way.



Companies' should emphasize that:

- A person's previous financial situation should not have any bearing on their performance at work. Treating all employees equally is essential for a fair workplace environment.
- Communication with employees should try to overcome language and cultural barriers by translating materials and using pictures and symbols.
- Hiring is about job fit, not what the candidate wore - unless it was inappropriate and reflected lack of judgment.
- Hiring managers should avoid making assumptions about employees from different backgrounds. Judge individual performance rather than attributing actions to their circumstances.



## Real benefits for broader diversity

For years, people have assumed workplace diversity referred to visually apparent things such as ethnicity, age and gender. However, workplace diversity is more than skin deep. Today's companies need to ensure that their employee population reflects a vast array of backgrounds bringing varying perspectives into the 21st century workplace. It is beneficial for workplaces to employ people from different backgrounds who bring different knowledge and ideas to the table.

Firms that do not embrace total diversity will struggle for talent, particularly with younger generations. Almost 50 percent of millennials consider diversity and inclusion when searching for a new job. Thoughtful approaches to diversity may bring people in the door, but an inclusive environment is needed to keep them there and foster successful workgroups.

Groups with a diversity of race, ethnicity, age and gender are more innovative than homogeneous groups. Expanding the diversity efforts to include thought, personality and socioeconomic background will add even more dimension and skills to work teams. While increased diversity can make some uncomfortable, the advantages diversity brings in terms of improving creativity and productivity are considerable.

Workplace diversity is consistently proven to be good for business in hiring, innovation within workgroups, addressing a diverse customer base and more. Cultivating more subtle diversity within the employee population truly embraces diversity in the broader setting and can make an organization thrive. This more diverse population will undoubtedly have a major impact on the business of the future.