

Can't We All Just Get Along? Time for Inclusion & Diversity

Why we struggle to learn from each other, and new approaches to change

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By Janet B. Reid, Ph.D., and Vincent R. Brown

Part One of a Five-Part Series on Inclusion & Diversity

We are biologically wired to reach out and connect with others. Even when we're resting between cognitive tasks, our brains are oriented to socializing; we fall into a state researchers call the default mode. Scientists have developed a picture of what this mode looks like neurologically, and it's remarkably similar to imaging of our brain when we're using it for social thinking, trying to figure other people out.

But in our field of inclusion and diversity, we've noticed that while people seem to easily connect with those who are like them, relating to those who are different comes less naturally. Why?

The need to connect through differences: our changing society

One reason is that we also create some of our brain's wiring. In one study, infants as young as nine months exhibited what researchers call the other race effect, where people have a hard time distinguishing between faces of those from different racial backgrounds. Other studies show that very small children can display a preference for people who are members of an "in group"—those who are similar to them—over members of an "out group."

And us-them classifications continue to divide us as we grow. Much of our social discourse encourages us to feel threatened by and defensive towards those who are different. At the same time, our society is becoming more diverse than ever. Fifty years ago non-Hispanic whites in the U.S. outnumbered all other minorities combined two to one. But half of the babies born here last year were from racial or ethnic minorities, and according to the U.S. Census Bureau, by 2044 whites will cease to be the majority group in our country.

There has never been a more important time to tap into the benefits created by our increasingly diverse society. In our decades of work with organizations to increase inclusion and diversity, we've learned some interesting things about this subject.

Why inclusion and diversity matter

Some think diversity is only about differences. But as the term is applied in workplaces and social contexts, diversity refers to both the differences that help us see each other as distinct individuals and the similarities that help to connect us. These differences and similarities can be characteristics such as age, race, religion, [sexual orientation](#), ethnic background and physical ability. But diversity also encompasses other aspects of our [identity](#)—[gender](#) identity and expression, core values, cultural norms and the ways we process information and approach problems.

The goal of increasing diversity in our workplaces has been around for a long time—significant historical milestones include women entering the workforce in large numbers during World Wars I and II, the integration of the U.S. military in 1948 and the Civil Rights Act of 1964. Over time, these events, laws and rulings have contributed to an increased awareness and acceptance of differences.

Of course, organizations quickly discover that it's not enough to simply put disparate people together. That's why the concept of inclusion, or creating an atmosphere that values, respects and intentionally engages differences, is so essential. An inclusive culture is one in which people feel comfortable, connected and supported with individuals who are similar, and also with those who are different. They are free to express their opinions and disagree because there's a high level of trust among all group members.

The Potential of Intrinsic Inclusion

Learning more about our biases and how to transcend them.

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By Janet B. Reid, Ph.D. and Vincent R. Brown

Part Two of a Five-Part Series on Inclusion & Diversity

When we first meet people, we immediately develop ideas about them. Without our consciously realizing it, we use these initial impressions to develop preferences towards those who are most like us. These preferences can form our beliefs and ultimately shape our behaviors.

In a [previous article](#), we discussed how in our field of inclusion and diversity, we've noticed that while people often connect easily with those who are similar to them, relating to those who are different comes less naturally. We mentioned that scientific research in [neuroscience](#) and other fields shows that "hardwiring" in our brains programs us to be drawn to and to trust people with whom we share characteristics (these might include race or ethnic background, religion, [gender](#) orientation and expression, values, etc.). We noted that some studies show very young babies preferring faces of an "in-group" who resemble them, versus an "out group" of people who look different.

We're often unaware of these instinctive preferences on a conscious level, yet they have far-reaching consequences for our society. For example, biases have likely been a major contributor to the homogeneity we see in the top executive ranks of corporate America, where women and people of color are barely represented.

The Influence of Implicit [Bias](#)

As we're using the term here, a bias is simply a preference for, or aversion to, a person or group. Biases can be conscious—in other words, we can become aware of them through introspection, or if they are triggered by an event or [memory](#)—or [unconscious](#). Unconscious biases may activate automatically when we first meet people and have developed from our own experiences and background.

Today we most often use the term implicit bias, which means to have a particular attitude toward people or groups or to associate them with stereotypes, without being aware of making such a judgment. Neuroscience teaches us that thinking the same thoughts over and over causes our brains to form neural pathways that become habitual. This tendency reinforces our biases and can make them even stronger.

Inclusion and diversity training programs have long sought to develop effective strategies for mitigating our implicit biases. Although studies overwhelmingly support the many advantages of encouraging diversity and inclusion—which include greater employee engagement, more innovative business practices and better financial performance—current training methods have yielded mixed results.

We believe that's because the main idea of many training programs has been to externally incentivize people to act in a way that may be unfamiliar to them. Typically these programs either provide rewards or level penalties to make our workplaces more diverse and our teams more inclusive. The effects of this external pressure are limited. As we mentioned, we've failed to substantially increase diversity at the C-Suite level. And when incentives are withdrawn due to changes in [leadership](#), funding restrictions, etc., progress often stalls even in the ranks of workers and mid-level management.

Our Motivation to Connect

Fortunately, we have other resources to harness as we seek to understand and better relate to each other. First, it's important to recognize that our human drive to connect is at least as strong as our biases. Here's one example: when we meet someone, we'll often ask questions to learn more about them, trying to establish commonalities (“Oh, you're an avid reader/went to college upstate/met your spouse at work, too!”). We search for things we can relate to, so that we can see someone as part of our “in group.” The fluid nature of “in” and “out” group designations is an important tool we use to relate to those who, on the surface, seem unlike us.

A New Approach to Diversity and Inclusion

How to think and behave like inclusive people

Posted Sep 06, 2018

By Janet B. Reid, Ph.D. and Vincent R. Brown

Part Three of a Five-Part Series on Inclusion & Diversity

In our field of inclusion and diversity, we're always learning more about how people make connections. As we discussed in [part 1](#) and [part 2](#) of this series, we've noticed that people are often most comfortable with those who are similar to them. Feeling a connection to those who are different comes less naturally. This may have to do with social conditioning as well as the way we're wired—and in addition, research reveals that we have preferences for those who are most like us. (In a previous article, we cited this study in which infants as young as nine months exhibited what is called the [other race effect](#).)

But certain people we've met seem to be exceptions, and they have much to teach us. Some of us seem to naturally be motivated to build relationships with people who are alike and different. We call these people "intrinsically inclusive." Intrinsically inclusive people are naturally curious about others and want to learn more about them. They are not without biases—we all have them—but they are significantly less likely to make stereotypical judgments and more open to interacting with those who are different.

We believe intrinsically inclusive people have the power to deliver to their organizations and communities all of the advantages of diversity and inclusion. Bringing more people with these qualities into [leadership](#) positions has the potential to transform our workplaces and our society.

Intrinsically inclusive people are motivated from within

So, what do we know about intrinsically inclusive people? One of the most striking things we've observed is that they are internally motivated to connect. To provide some history, many of the strategies organizations have adopted to increase diversity are essentially external mandates. They provide numbers to meet, employ logical arguments about the benefits of diversity, or use techniques such as blind hiring (for example, removing identifying information from resumes before they are screened). All of these ideas may

increase the percentage of individuals who happen to be in the minority in a particular workplace (these might include women, people of color, or those with different religions, thinking styles, etc.) but do not address our tendency to have challenges relating to those who are different.

In contrast, intrinsically inclusive people do not have to be convinced of the value of greater diversity and of inclusive practices. They are driven from within to experience new things and learn from them. They act for their own satisfaction, rather than to please others or [conform](#) to an external standard. At work, they often build highly effective diverse and inclusive teams—without being told to do so.

Intrinsically inclusive people are drawn to what is new and different

With the help of researchers in [neuroscience](#) and social psychology, we're making real progress in understanding how intrinsically inclusive people think. In [our last article](#), we mentioned the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) of [Intrinsic Motivation](#) developed by University of Rochester researchers Edward Deci, Ph.D., and Richard Ryan, Ph.D. Deci and Ryan say we are born with the drive to explore the new and different. Intrinsically inclusive people seem to retain that tendency throughout their lives.

But SDT posits that most of us have the capacity to reawaken our [attraction](#) to experiences and people who are different. We need to have three needs met in order to be intrinsically motivated: the need for autonomy, the need for competence and the need for relatedness.

Autonomy occurs when we choose our own actions regardless of outside influences, and feel that we are making our own decisions. Competence means we believe our skills equip us to handle a task—for example, we might feel we have the ability to relate well to a wide variety of people. And relatedness is about our wanting to do something without having to be convinced; intrinsically inclusive people, for instance, want to learn from others and experience new ways of thinking. Furthermore, Deci and Ryan note that intrinsic motivation thrives in conditions of "...choice, acknowledgement of feelings, and opportunities for self-direction"—all elements that characterize more inclusive settings.

Intrinsically inclusive people seek to learn from experiences

Russell Fazio, Ph.D., a professor of social psychology at The Ohio State University, and his colleagues conducted a study designed to measure how culturally transmitted prejudices (those handed down through generations) impact the attitudes we form. Study participants were given positive or negative reviews of foods and researchers observed their behavior. For the most part, the people who saw positive reviews indicated that they were willing to try the product, and people who read negative reviews weren't—no big surprise. But some people said they were willing to try all of the items, regardless of the reviews.

The study finding most relevant to intrinsic inclusion is this: researchers noted that the people who said they would be willing to sample the food, whether because it had positive reviews or because they had more curiosity to explore all the samples, learned something from the experience. Their knowledge was enhanced because they could make independent judgments about whether the reviews they read were valid. Dr. Fazio observes, “When you approach or interact with something (or someone) new, you are in a learning state. Avoidance has real consequences. [Prejudice](#) limits you. Beyond the fairness issues of diversity and inclusion, it can be very serious for companies learning to innovate.”

Using the inclusive mindset to create new attitudes and environments

Our next challenge is to figure out how we can best use this information: the power of internal motivation, the benefits we derive from the unfamiliar and the value of [experiential](#) learning. Along with other research, these factors can help us encourage diversity and inclusion. In our next article, we’ll be discussing ways to provide motive and opportunity to “push pause” on our biases and work with our brains’ wiring to become more open to change. We’ll also discuss some strategies that might help others understand and tap into an inclusive way of thinking.

Katharine Graham was a pioneer as the first female publisher of a major American newspaper, the Washington Post, in an era when women holding positions in top management was even more rare than it is today. In her autobiography she discusses her and her late husband Philip Graham’s philosophies of being “curious about people, not to assume things about them and their motives without getting to know them” and “not believing in stereotypes, not only because they don’t hold true to form but because you miss so much if you allow them to dominate your responses.”

That is the mindset of intrinsic inclusion. And practicing ways to operate from that mindset is the next step on a journey to formulate strategies, policies and trainings that support a different way of doing things.

Next in this series: How we can rewire our brains to become more inclusive

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<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/the-social-brain/201809/new-approach-diversity-and-inclusion>

A New Path to Diversity and Inclusion

We can rewire our brains to eliminate biases

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By Janet B. Reid, Ph.D. and Vincent R. Brown



Part Four of a Five-Part Series on Inclusion & Diversity

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Henry David Thoreau said, “It is never too late to give up your prejudices.” We emphatically agree, but from our many years in the field of diversity and inclusion, we know

that choosing to lose our feelings of bias and [prejudice](#) can be challenging. We have observed that people are often most comfortable with those who are similar to them and that feeling a connection to those who are different comes less naturally.

Sometimes we may judge others and behave differently towards them without even realizing it, due to the implicit biases—or preconceived attitudes—that we all have. But we have also noticed that some people seem naturally motivated to build relationships with people who are alike and different. These people, whom we call “intrinsically inclusive™,” are significantly less likely to be influenced by implicit biases.

In previous articles in this series (parts [1](#), [2](#), & [3](#)), we have talked about how information gleaned from social psychology and [neuroscience](#) is giving us a new understanding of diversity and inclusion. We believe that research can show us how to work with our brains’ wiring to move forward. In this article, we’ll discuss some ways we can transcend our preconceived ideas and become more open to change.

The MODE Model

In our last article, we discussed the work of psychologist Russell Fazio, Ph.D., based at The Ohio State University, and his colleagues. Among other areas, Dr. Fazio has studied how culturally transmitted prejudices impact the attitudes we form. A theory, known as the MODE

model, he says, can be harnessed to “push pause” on our automatically activated attitudes and open up our thought processes.

The acronym MODE refers to how “[motivation](#) and opportunity can be deterrents to spontaneous behavior.” In the model, “motivation” is defined as incentives that might cause us to stop and think about outcomes. These incentives might include concerns for our safety, ways to avoid [embarrassment](#) or new and striking information. “Opportunity” means that we are in a place where we can think clearly and consciously—in other words, we’re not in a [stressed](#), rushed or exhausted state. If motivation is strong enough and opportunity is right, we have the ability to interrupt an automatic thought process such as a bias and choose to think and act differently.

Researchers have identified several effective motivators that we believe can influence us to be more open to diverse and inclusive ways of thinking. They include significant emotional events, frequent exposure combined with significant relationships, and neuromotor syncing. One interesting thing that connects these motivators is that their power derives not from a rational argument or some kind of a reward, but from the way they tap into our powerful emotional responses.

Life-altering experience: significant emotional event

Personal events that touch us deeply can upend patterned thinking. Here’s one example: imagine that your young child has an accident and hits her head. When you rush into the emergency room holding a cold compress to the bump, a young female doctor with a foreign accent immediately shepherds you into a treatment room. Her manner is so calm and kind that your child, who has been screaming inconsolably, quiets down almost immediately. And you are relieved and [grateful](#) to learn after examination that she will be fine.

After the adrenaline rush caused by an incident like this, it’s likely that any biases you might have had towards young, female, foreign doctors have been replaced by positive associations. In fact, your brain is much more likely to begin associating all such physicians with characteristics such as competence and trustworthiness.

Changing your mind: Frequent exposure and significant relationships

Some of us have seen the influence of frequent exposure when we move to a new place. Let’s imagine you’ve lived in a relatively rural area in the Pacific Northwest, and a job assignment sends you to a southern city. You’re used to weather that is cloudy and misty most days, and in your new home, it’s hot and muggy. You’re accustomed to the town closing down at nine and now the city never sleeps. Popular foods, local customs, even your neighbors’ regional accents are very different. It is all disconcerting, and you may be homesick and compare what is around you with what you are familiar with.

But over the months, you begin to visit local attractions and attend social events with colleagues and neighbors. You meet new friends and they become important to you. When you receive the news that your grandmother has passed away, your neighbor gives you a lift to the airport and keeps an eye on your apartment in your absence.

When your work in the South ends after a year, you leave with a new attitude towards people from other locales and their customs. Opening our minds to different experiences in this way combats bias and encourages inclusion.

Fostering [empathy](#): neuromotor syncing

It is interesting to view examples of how people move in unison. Sports fans cheer together and pump their fists. Concertgoers sway together to the music. Marching bands and soldiers step in time. What's going on?

According to researchers like Dr. Andrea Serino, they may be encouraging empathy through synchronized movement. Dr. Serino, professor at the Center for Neuroprosthetics of École Polytechnique Federale de Lausanne (Swiss Federal Institute of Technology), and his research team examine how our brains create our experience of our physical bodies. Often using virtual reality techniques, they study how we use our sense of our bodies to interact with others.

When we move with another person, says Dr. Serino, we may actually begin to feel something similar to what they are feeling. This sense of belonging and trust from coordinate movement may have originated very early in our lives: when we were rocked as babies, we learned to associate rhythmic, synchronized movement with connection.

Dr. Serino's research posits that neuromotor syncing has the potential to help people form bonds, which may provide motivation to pause and examine biases. Findings to date have caused him to ask how we might use this information to manipulate social attitudes and help us better relate to others who are unlike us.

Pause and consider new possibilities

We all have biases. [Recent research](#) conducted at the University of York found evidence that we can form a [first impression](#) in as little as 33 to 100 milliseconds. The 126 university students in the study made judgments about the status, trustworthiness and [attractiveness](#) of people in photographs after a single glance.

We may not be able to stop ourselves from experiencing these automatic reactions in the workplace and social situations. But through greater awareness of our biases and techniques such as the three we have discussed here, we may be on the way to

experiencing a new reality and new possibilities. Neuroscience tells us that novel events and ways of thinking cause neural connections and pathways to form in our brains, which makes the possibility of our reacting differently in the future even more likely.

The next time a stimulus causes us to activate an old attitude or an old judgment, we can pause and consider. It's within all of us to choose the path of intrinsic inclusion, to embrace new attitudes and new information. And that is our opportunity to think, and act, differently in our workplaces and in our lives.

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