



How leaders can
unlock the power
of **inclusive culture**

How leaders can unlock the power of inclusive culture

Stronger together

Companies with inclusive cultures report:

3x

higher employee engagement¹

2x

higher intent to stay¹



Companies with inclusive cultures are also:

6x

more likely to be innovative and agile²

2x

as likely to meet or exceed financial targets²

↑
19%

Have 19% higher revenue due to innovation from diverse teams³

There's no question that inclusive and diverse cultures bring with them tremendous benefit to individuals, organizations, and society. But in order to create a powerfully inclusive and diverse culture at your workplace, you need to first understand the many ways that people are different, and what's required to build an environment in which everyone feels they belong.



01



What does inclusion mean?

02



How does diversity show up in the workplace?

03



How can leadership create an inclusive culture?

How leaders can unlock the power of inclusive culture

What does inclusion mean?


The fact is, if your organization isn't intentionally including people, it's accidentally excluding people. While the term "diversity and inclusion" is often used to describe inclusion initiatives, there are two different ideas here:

Diversity is a state of having differences. These differences can be visible or invisible, things we have no control over, or things we choose. For example, a person with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) has a unique viewpoint based on an experience she didn't choose, and the impact of her PTSD is largely invisible to her teammates.

Inclusion is the act of encouraging belonging. Most of the time we encourage belonging without being fully aware of our behavior. We ask someone their opinion on a project, or we tell a co-worker their new jacket is stylish. Other times we forget there are limitations others have that make it difficult for them to participate and feel included. For example, an important meeting scheduled on a religious holiday excludes the people who will observe that holiday and must miss the meeting.

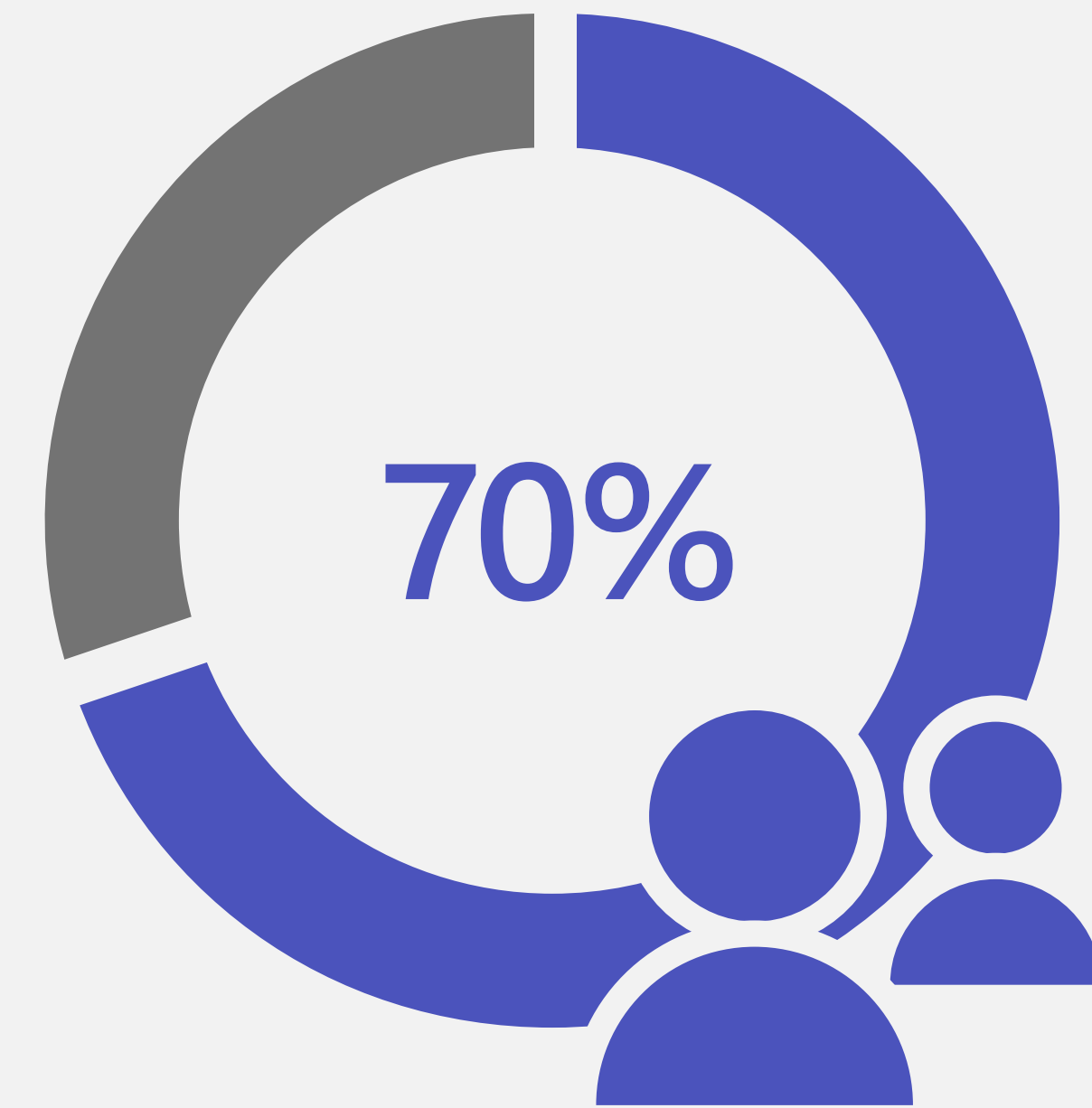
01



A woman with a prosthetic left leg and glasses is sitting on a couch, gesturing with her right hand while talking to two men. One man is looking at a laptop, and the other is looking at a smartphone. The scene is set in a modern office environment with vertical blinds in the background.

An inclusive culture is one that encourages everyone to belong, recognizes there are reasons some may feel unable to, and actively works to identify what those reasons are so the barriers can be removed.

It can be hard to be mindful of the differences that people carry with them, and harder still to take concrete steps to ensure everyone feels included. But this is the way forward for the modern workplace, as more companies discover that success and innovation are increasingly tied to diverse and inclusive cultures.



of disabilities are invisible⁴



How does diversity show up in the workplace?

We can think about the wide range of human differences according to the following categories:

- Inherent
- Cultural
- Behavioral

02

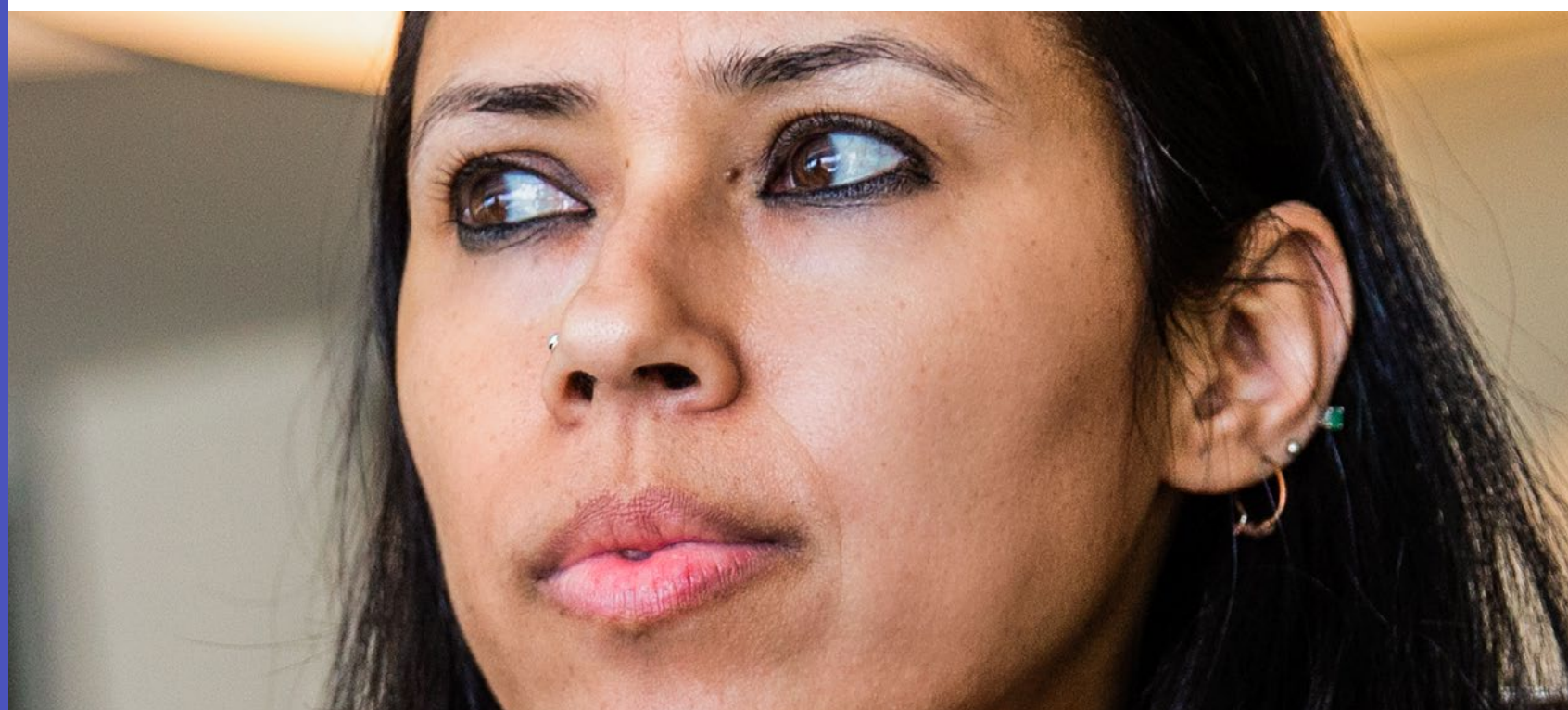


Inherent

- Race
- Gender
- Ethnicity
- Age/generation
- Sexual orientation/gender identity
- Physical/mental ability

- Appearance
- Language/accent
- Socio economic status
- Marital status/partner
- Parental status
- Military/veteran status
- Work experience
- Educational
- Nationality
- Geographic location
- Mental health status
- Religion
- Health status

Cultural



Behavioral

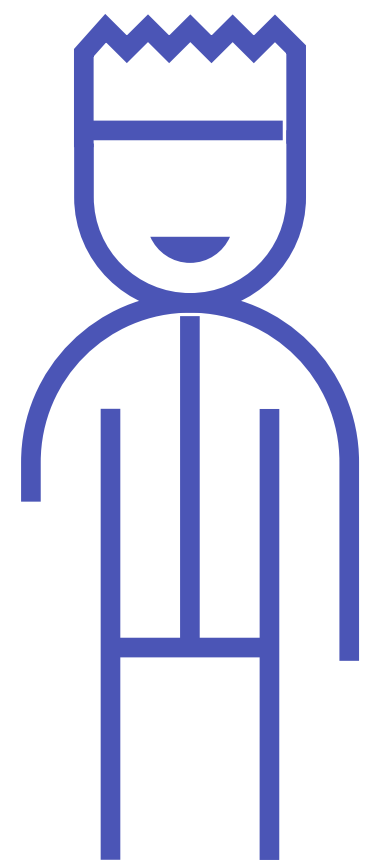
- How we communicate
- How we see ourselves (group/individual)
- What we focus on (tasks/relationships)
- How we process information
- How we give explanations
- The mental model we use
- How we make conclusions
- How much we try to control
- How we engage people
- How we organize power
- How we see time

And these examples are just a sampling, of course; there are as many ways to be diverse as there are stars in the sky.

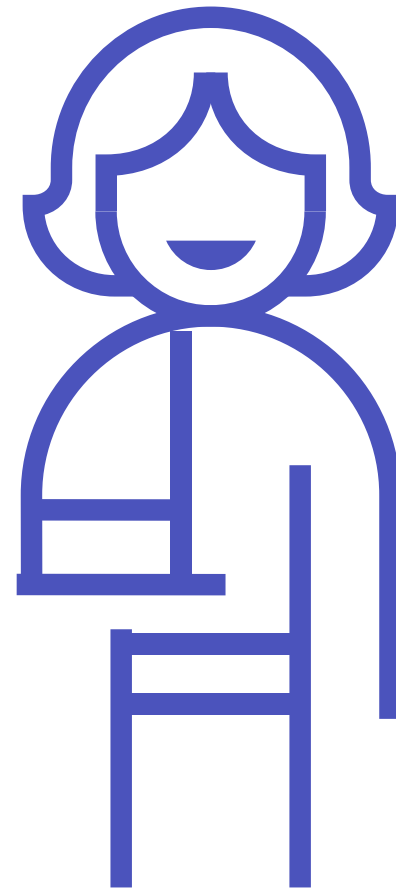
Accessibility elevates everyone

In addition to this framework for understanding the ways people can be different, we need to recognize that there are some differences that are permanent, some that are temporary, and some that are situational.

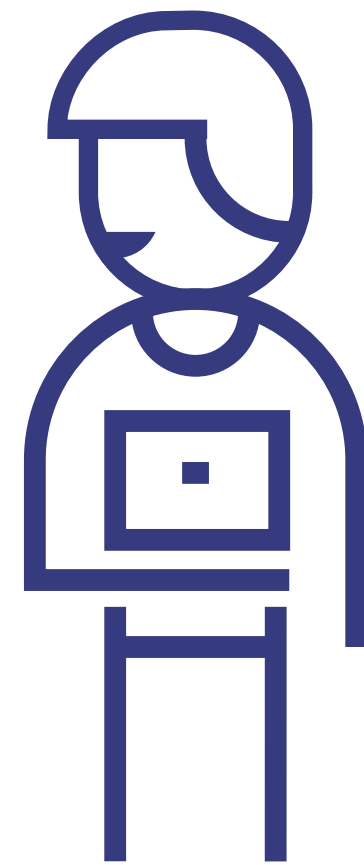
Permanent



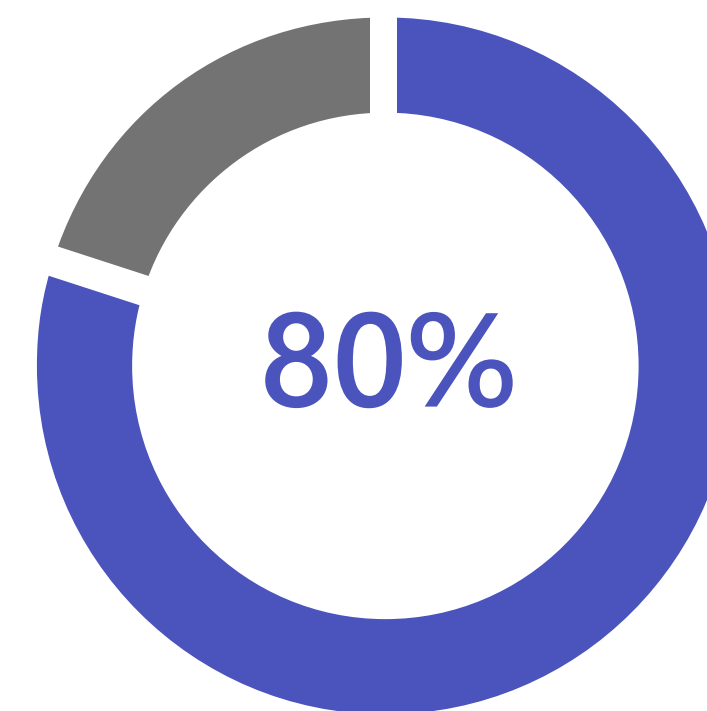
Temporary



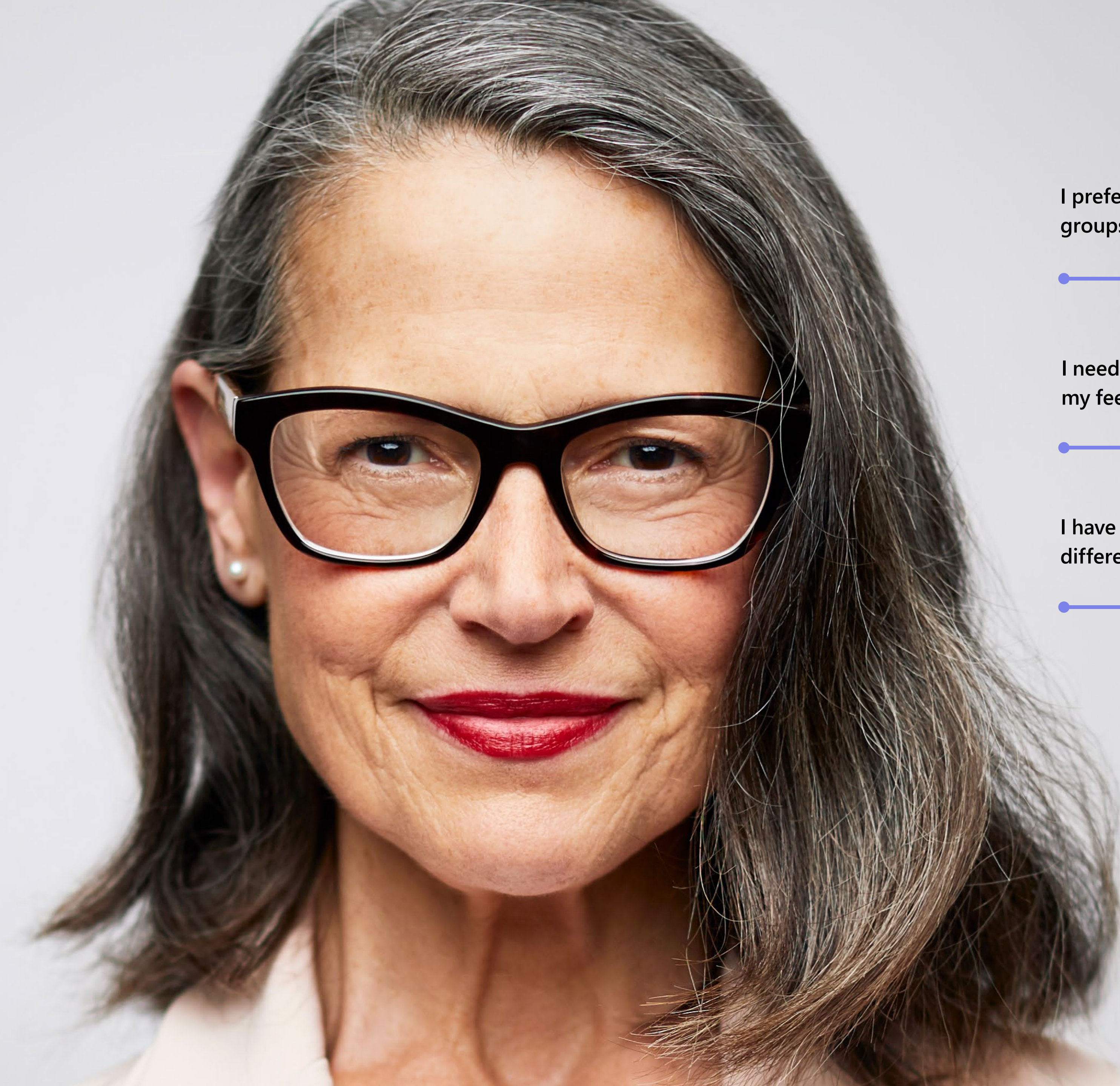
Situational



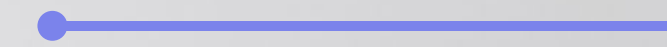
It's important to recognize that benefits of accessibility efforts are not exclusive. Accessibility efforts can improve the environment for everyone, not just for the people they were initially introduced to help. For example, audio books were created for blind and visually impaired people. Now listening to audio books is a pleasure many other people enjoy as well. Live captioning was created for people who are deaf or hard of hearing, but it is also helpful for other people, such as those who aren't fluent in the language being captioned. Designs for wheelchair access also help people with strollers or people who can't use steps because they are unable to lift their feet or legs.



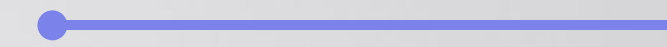
80%
of organizations increased productivity among their entire workforce after rolling out accessible technologies



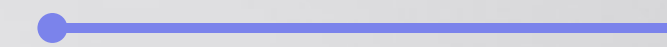
I prefer smaller groups of people.



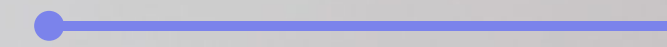
I need time to prepare my feedback.



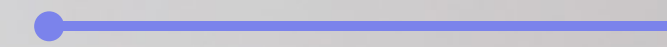
I have lived in 12 different countries.



Bright lights give me a migraine.



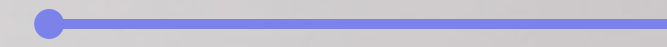
I work best in a quiet space.



I don't like to be in charge.



My son is a freshman at university.



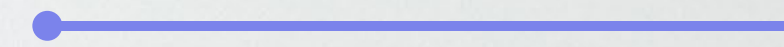


Inclusive culture starts with leadership

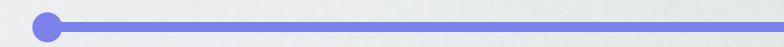
Much discrimination and bias in the working environment shows up in personal behaviors. But it's up to leadership to set a tone of inclusion and to hold the organization accountable for living up to the goal. When leaders prioritize inclusion and take explicit steps toward diversity, they send a signal to their workers and to others in their industry. A leader who invests time and energy to define and build an inclusive culture is modeling a strong sense of personal responsibility for change. This demonstrated commitment will impact how the rest of the organization responds to the efforts and is fundamental to successfully creating an inclusive culture.



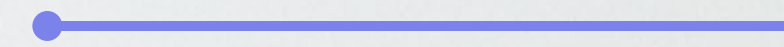
My strength is coming up with big ideas.



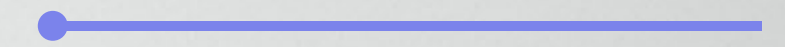
I struggle to remember spoken details. Please email me with complex information.



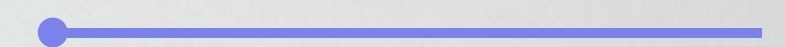
I am comfortable in chaotic environments.



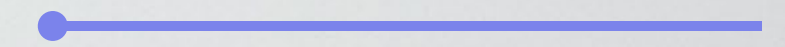
I am a veteran.



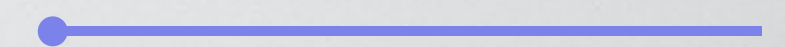
My children are ages 2 and 5.



My husband travels a lot for work.



I have a prosthetic leg.



How leaders can unlock the power of inclusive culture

How can leadership create an inclusive culture?

There are as many differences in the modern workplace as there are workers. Let's talk about how to create an inclusive culture where that diversity can thrive. Here are five inclusive behaviors that can help create an environment where everyone feels they belong:

01. Examine unconscious bias
02. Stop assuming
03. Be curious
04. Pay attention
05. Be brave, be humble

03



01. Examine unconscious bias

Research suggests that we instinctively categorize people using the things we can easily see, such as age, weight, skin color, or gender. We do this to save time and effort processing information, so we can spend more of our mental resources on other tasks. Most of us are not even aware that we have biases. But unconscious bias is the foundation for discrimination, and it's the first thing to address for an inclusive workplace. Accepting that unconscious bias does occur and becoming intentional about identifying and correcting for it can make a big difference.

02. Stop assuming

We tend to think other people share our views and preferences. When we stop assuming this, we open the door to more variety in our experiences and we leave space for people to express themselves. For example, a happy-hour meet-up is a common business networking activity. But not everybody is comfortable around alcohol. A tea tasting or other nonalcoholic event might be equally rewarding from a work perspective while allowing everyone to participate without discomfort.

03. Be curious

When you experience a difference that provokes a strong reaction in you, ask questions to understand. For example, you might want to walk across campus to the meeting, but your teammate says he'll take the bus. This is upsetting to you because you don't understand why someone wouldn't want to enjoy the sunshine

and fresh air, and you were looking forward to some time to get to know your teammate. You ask your teammate why he wants to take the bus and he tells you he has arthritis in his hip which makes it very painful to walk. Taking the time to learn provides you a chance to support.

04. Pay attention

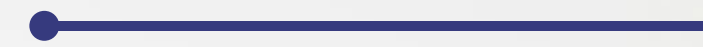
There are a lot of reasons we could miss what's going on for someone we work with. Since most disabilities are invisible, we're unaware by default. But we can always tune into someone's reaction to a discussion, follow up with questions or encouragement, and get proactive about making it safe for people to reveal reasons they might need accommodations. When people's feelings are acknowledged, they feel seen, included and respected. And when people feel respected, they deliver their best work.

05. Be brave, be humble

Admitting your biases and asking questions involves personal risk-taking. It's safer to stay inside our shell and keep doing things the way we've always done them. But inclusion doesn't work that way. Inclusion requires deliberate effort, and this itself requires bravery and courage. Humility is part of change, as we acknowledge that we've made mistakes and commit to doing better.



I am deaf in my left ear.



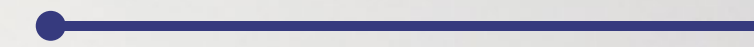
I am a practicing Muslim.



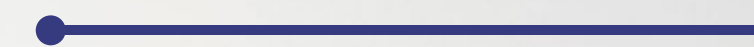
Small spaces make me anxious.



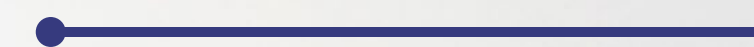
I am good at leading meetings.



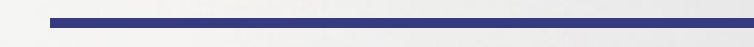
I compete in triathlons.



It's easy for me to lose track of time.



Sometimes I experience depression.



Microsoft Teams can help create an inclusive culture

In the course of building a culture of inclusion in the workplace, you can make it easier for everyone to participate in essential work activities by using technology with accessibility built in.

Microsoft Teams is the hub for teamwork in Microsoft 365 and can support your efforts to build an inclusive culture by:

Connecting everyone

Whether workers are across the world or across the street, Microsoft Teams connects people from across the organization. You can pull together your team, share pertinent information, collaborate on documents, set tasks and deadlines, or just check in to see how teammates are doing.

Empowering accessibility

With accessibility features built in, such as automatic live captions, searchable transcripts, chat, and in-line translations, Microsoft Teams is for every worker. Cloud recording and playback with Stream, and the transcription service (which makes it possible to get transcripts and captions for recorded meetings in Teams), means even if someone missed the meeting, they can watch and catch up later.

Helping people build diverse networks

Using Microsoft Teams, people can create unique communities and networks within your organization in Microsoft Teams. This enhances the sharing of diverse experience and knowledge across the organization. Microsoft data shows that when employees have big and diverse networks, employee retention increases, and employees can more easily tap into the expertise of their co-workers to come up with innovative ideas faster and easier.

How leaders can unlock the power of inclusive culture

Ready to experience how Microsoft Teams supports collaboration, team-building strategies and a culture of inclusion?



¹ Tulshyan, Ruchika. "[Racially diverse companies outperform industry norms by 35%](#)," Forbes, January 2015.

² Juliet Bourke, "[What two heads are better than one? How diverse teams create breakthrough ideas and make smarter decisions](#)," Australian Institute of Company Directors, 2016.

³ Boston Consulting Group, "[Diversity and Innovation Survey](#)," 2018.

⁴ World Health Organization, "[Assistive Technology](#)," May 18, 2018.

⁵ Adapted from Gardenswartz & Rowe Model.

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