

Member Communication Experience

What is Intersectionality in the Workplace? Why it Matters and its Role in DEIB.

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What is Intersectionality?

Intersectionality is a concept coined by author, professor, scholar, and civil rights advocate [Kimberlé Crenshaw](#) in 1989, which describes how various characteristics such as race, ethnicity, gender, class, religion, sexual orientation, age, and disability intersect and impact the experiences of marginalized people and groups.

For example, as a Black woman, I have some disadvantages because I'm a woman, and I have other disadvantages because I'm Black. However, I also have some disadvantages specifically because I am a Black woman, which neither Black men nor white women experience. That's intersectionality: race, gender, and every other way to be disadvantaged interacting with each other.

Why is Understanding Intersectionality Important?

Leaders with an understanding and awareness of intersectionality are better equipped to create a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive workplace culture where everyone feels seen, valued, and respected. It can also help to identify barriers and existing systems of inequality that prevent employees in marginalized groups from thriving at work. Ultimately, we become more effective in building a truly equitable culture by approaching diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEI&B) through the lens of intersectionality.



Without an intersectional approach, efforts to address the marginalization of one group may end up perpetuating systems of inequities toward other groups.

Creating a more inclusive and equitable workplace has many benefits, including:

- » **Increased productivity:** [Studies](#) have shown that inclusive workplaces are more productive than those that are not.
- » **Improved employee engagement:** Employees who feel a sense of belonging and acceptance are likelier to be engaged, impacting retention and the bottom line.
- » **Enhanced innovation:** Inclusive workplaces are more likely to be innovative, as they benefit from their employees' diverse perspectives and lived experiences.

- » **Improved client relations:** Clients are more likely to do business with organizations they perceive as inclusive.

What are Examples of Intersectionality in the Workplace?

Intersectionality in the workplace centers on understanding how the interplay of identities impacts individuals and groups within a work environment by incorporating this understanding into processes and procedures, from recruitment strategy to professional development and leadership opportunities.

A lack of awareness of intersectionality in the workplace can manifest in many ways, including lack of representation and microaggressions.

- » **Lack of representation:** People of color, women, and those in the LGBTQ+ community are underrepresented in leadership positions.
- » **Microaggressions:** Microaggressions are subtle, everyday forms of discrimination that can have a significant impact on people's experiences in the workplace. For example, a male colleague may infantilize his female, disabled coworker by saying, "Let me help you with that," and taking over the task, even if she didn't ask for or need help.

These are just a few examples of how intersectionality can impact people in the workplace, so it's important to remember that everyone's experiences are unique; no two people will experience intersectionality in the same way because no two people share the same lived experience.

What Can Leaders Do to Create an Intersectional Workplace?


By creating more inclusive workplaces, businesses can reap many benefits for their employees and their bottom line. While not easy work, companies that consider intersectionality can create workplaces where everyone feels welcome, safe, and valued. Leaders can create an intersectional workplace by:

- » **Insisting on leadership accountability:** Leaders must be accountable for creating inclusive workplaces,

which means developing policies and procedures that promote DEI&B and taking action to address any instances of discrimination.

- » **Adopting an intersectional approach to DEI&B:** Leaders must recognize that their team members have multiple identities that can intersect in complex ways.
- » **Supporting and promoting DEI&B initiatives:** Leaders can accomplish this by supporting, promoting, and attending companywide events, training, and other DEI&B initiatives.
- » **Nurturing a culture of inclusion:** Leaders should foster an environment where everyone feels protected and respected, regardless of their background.
- » **Adopting policies and practices that support employees from marginalized groups:** Businesses can adopt policies and practices that support employees from marginalized groups.
- » **Collecting data on employee demographics:** Businesses can collect data on employees' experiences from marginalized groups to identify areas where there is room for improvement and where their workforce may lack diversity.
- » **Conducting employee surveys:** Anonymous employee surveys allow employees to be honest about their feelings regarding the workplace climate. Gannett Fleming conducts pulse surveys to gather employee feedback and a third-party employee engagement survey every three years.
- » **Creating employee resource groups:** Employee resource groups (ERGs) provide a safe space for employees to connect with others who share their experiences.
- » **Providing safe spaces:** Businesses can create safe spaces for employees to discuss their experiences and get support.
- » **Providing training:** Training on unconscious bias, microaggressions, and other forms of discrimination can help employees to become more aware of how their actions and words can impact others.
- » **Holding employees accountable:** Leaders need to hold their employees accountable for their actions

by creating a culture where everyone feels comfortable reporting microaggressions and other forms of discrimination.

Intersectionality is a complex concept, but by understanding how intersectionality can impact your employees' experiences you can take intentional action to create a more inclusive workplace. 



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About the Article

This article was written for the online [Gannett Fleming INSIGHTS Blog page](#). Founded in 1915, [Gannett Fleming](#) has been a driving force in shaping infrastructure and improving communities in more than 65 countries, specializing in natural resources, transportation, water, power, and facility-related projects. The company embraces sustainability and innovation in projects and internal activities and achieves results while being responsible stewards of the environment. A results-driven firm, Gannett Fleming is consistently ranked in the top one percent of engineering firms worldwide.

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