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INCLUSIVE ALLYSHIP GUIDE

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WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE AN ALLY?



Globally, a number of equality policies and legislation often make it unlawful to discriminate against anything with a protected characteristic. But with prevention being better than cure, the role of an ally is important in helping to

reduce instances of discrimination and create an inclusive working environment. Being an ally involves actively promoting inclusion through intentional, positive and conscious effort to support marginalised diverse groups. It is

about using your power and privilege to visibly advocate inside and outside of the workplace.

This guide is not intended to be exhaustive but is designed to provide foundational understanding of the role that allyship plays in the workplace, including insights on key concepts such as bias and micro-aggressive behaviours.

The Dangers of Performative Allyship

Performative allyship, also known as ‘virtue signalling’, is when exclamations of support and

solidarity are made for a marginalised group that do not authentically reflect the internal workings of our culture. This can excuse those from making the personal sacrifices necessary to address the challenges they claim to resolve, often leading to backlash from the marginalised group they state to support. To avoid virtue signalling, we need to ensure that our words reflect our actions where we possibly can.

DRIVING INCLUSIVE ALLYSHIP

Allyship is a continuous investment of time dedicated to supporting others and holding ourselves accountable when mistakes are made. There are a number of ways that we can show support for marginalised groups. We outline a few suggestions below:

- **Understand differences in culture and backgrounds to facilitate cultural agility.** It is important that you surround yourself with difference and be open-minded & flexible to diversity of thought. Be proactive in your learning using a variety of resources, limiting a reliance on asking underrepresented colleagues to educate you.
- **Call out biased and inappropriate behaviours sensitively.** Underrepresented

groups may not be comfortable raising issues due to a fear of career-related repercussions.

- **Language is important. Use inclusive language** - for example, say ‘Chairperson’ instead of ‘Chairman’, and authentically get to know ethnically underrepresented colleagues to ensure that the way they identify is reflected in conversations where relevant.
- **Don’t be afraid to make mistakes!** Recognising our mistakes in a fair and equitable way isn’t about learning arbitrary rules. It is about restoring and maintaining dignity and respect for everyone involved.

COMMON BIASES

To be an effective ally, it is important to understand the role that biased behaviours and decision making can play in the workplace and know when and how to identify and manage them in ourselves and others. Cognitive biases are pre-conceived notions of someone or something, based on information we have, perceive to have, or lack. They are often subconscious.

These preconceptions are mental shortcuts the brain produces based on our personal frame of reference.

Below we outline some commonly experienced biases, all of which can have a damaging impact on organisational culture and business decisions if left unmanaged:

Type of Bias	Definition
Affinity Bias	When you subconsciously prefer those with whom you share qualities, or who are similar to. It occurs because we all instinctively want to be around people we relate to.
Conformity Bias	Otherwise known as 'groupthink', this occurs when views are swayed by the status quo, and there is a tendency to behave like those around you. This comes from a desire to fit in, causing some to dial down their authentic selves and opinions.
Benevolence Bias	This can occur when our efforts to be kind result in us making decisions on other people's behalf that take away their choices. This limits an individual's autonomy.
Confirmation Bias	Searching for evidence that validates pre-conceived opinions. This leads to selective observation and focusing on information that fits your view.
Halo Effect Bias	Where a single positive trait or characteristic of someone influences your positive judgement towards other, potentially unrelated factors.
Horns Effect Bias	Where a single negative trait or characteristic of someone influences your negative judgement towards other, potentially unrelated, factors.

MICROAGGRESSIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

Our natural biased instincts can often lead to what is known as 'micro-aggressive' behaviour, or 'microaggressions'. These are more than just insults or insensitive comments. They are something very specific: the kind of remarks, questions, or actions that are painful because they have to do with a person's membership to a group that's discriminated against or subject to stereotypes. Microaggressions often happen casually, frequently, and often without any harm intended. Frequent micro-aggressive behaviour can have an erosive impact on organisational culture over time.

Research shows that microaggressions, although seemingly small and sometimes innocent offenses, can take a real psychological toll on the mental health of their recipients. This toll can often lead to reduced rates of productivity at work, and increased staff turnover.



Photo Credit: Turner Consulting Group Inc.

HELPFUL RESOURCES

Learning about the experiences and history of underrepresented diverse communities is one of the most important ways to understand the issues that are affecting our underrepresented colleagues. It's not the responsibility of underrepresented colleagues to educate others. There is a vast amount of literature available on how to develop your skills as an ally. The below are just a few for you to explore:

- How to Challenge Ourselves to Grow as Allies
- How to be an Ally in the Office
- Be A Better Ally
- 8 Ways to be a Better Ally
- 7 Characteristics of Effective Workplace Allies