



CINGA

# Inclusive Culture Playbook

V2 | May 2024



# Land Acknowledgement:

We acknowledge that we are privileged to live, work and play on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the Coast Salish People.

## Introduction

### **Inclusive leadership is simply GOOD leadership.**

But to get there, we need to cultivate a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion. We must empower individuals to contribute their unique perspectives, values, and skills. We must also foster a collaborative and innovative environment where everyone feels valued and heard. Inclusive leadership means increasing our awareness and implementing practices to overcome unconscious biases.

We also need to take a good hard look at the things we THINK are working well but may actually have a negative impact.

This guide is an overview of our approach to inclusive leadership.

It's our contribution to the dream of a world where everyone belongs, feels valued, and can excel.

**Kathy Andrews, Founder and Managing Director at Cinga  
with Tracy Nazereth, Molly McGuire, and the rest of the Cinga Team.**

## The business case for inclusive leadership

People make businesses successful. Without people, there is no business.

### Developing an inclusive culture is the key to:

- Attracting and retaining talent by developing a reputation for being a good company to work for.
- Improving engagement and productivity. People who feel safe, feel like they belong, and feel like their contributions are valued do better work.
- Empowering your team, benefitting from their perspectives, ideas, and contributions.
- Tapping into a talent pools that have been overlooked. This is especially valuable in the face of labour shortages.

Nurturing an inclusive culture is no longer a nice-to-have, it's a must-have. The world is changing rapidly, and you'll get left behind if you don't invest the time to implement inclusive leadership practices now.



## The 3 pillars of inclusive leadership.

### SELF AWARENESS

Inclusive leadership begins with understanding ourselves. We can't influence our organizations or teams around us if we haven't looked at our own blind spots.

### ONGOING LEARNING

Ongoing learning is more than just taking a course or attending a workshop; it's about adopting a mindset. Inclusive leaders approach each day with an open heart and mind - ready to absorb, adapt, and apply new skills and concepts.

### MINDFUL COLLABORATION

To put it simply, "mindful collaboration" is about being present and thoughtful in how we lead and interact. It's critical for creating workplaces where everyone feels seen, heard, and valued.

In this e-book, we will unpack each of these, sharing our best insights and tips. Let's begin with Self-Awareness.

## Pillar 1: Self-Awareness

Improving self-awareness is the first step towards fostering an inclusive and productive work environment. By recognizing our unconscious biases and understanding the nuances of power and privilege, we're better equipped to guide our teams with empathy and fairness.

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*We don't see the world as it is, we see it as we are.*

ANAÏS NIN

There are 2 key areas where inclusive leaders need to develop self-awareness:

- 1. Uncovering Unconscious Bias:** We all have biases, many of which we don't even realize. By developing self-awareness, we can spot these biases and address them. This isn't about blame; it's about recognizing that we all have blind spots - and working to "see what we don't see" more clearly.
- 2. Unpacking Power and Privilege:** The world of work, like the wider world, is full of power dynamics. Some of us have privileges that others don't, based on our backgrounds, roles, or experiences. By becoming more self-aware, we can understand these dynamics better. This clarity helps inclusive leaders make fairer decisions and create more inclusive workplaces.

## Unconscious Bias

Unconscious bias refers to automatic judgments or preferences a person has towards certain groups or individuals, which they are unaware of, and which are shaped by their experiences, culture, background, and societal influences.

## Power and Privilege

People often bristle when they hear someone say privilege because of the meaning they attach to the word.

Most associate the word "privilege" with wealth and having been given something you didn't work for.

Wealth and societal class are not the only ways that people can have privilege.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines privilege in this way:

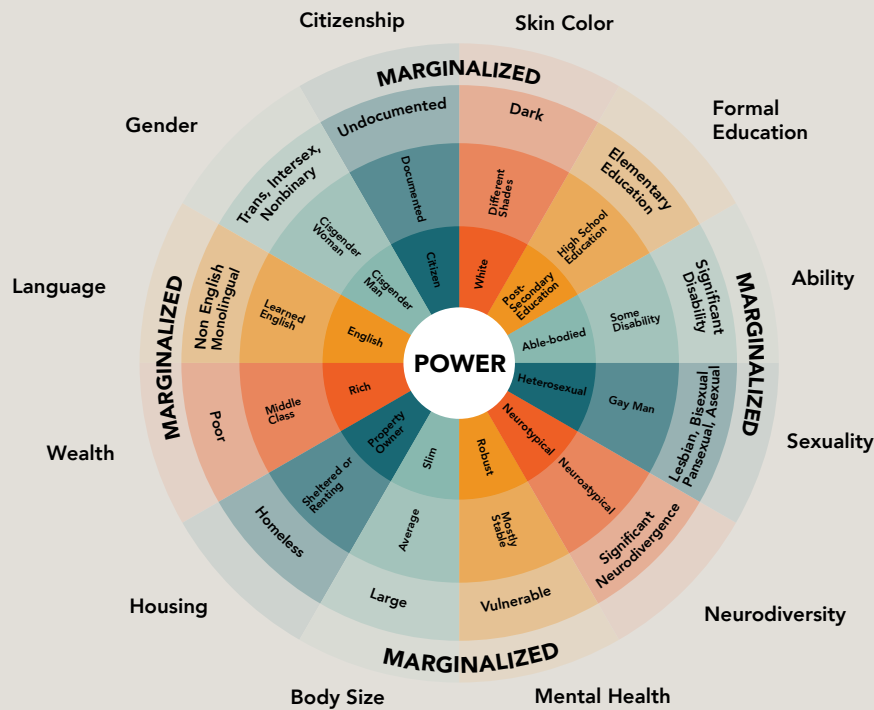
*A special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group.*

In our DEI work, privilege refers to unearned advantages conferred upon individuals due to attributes like race, gender, socio-economic status, ability, and sexual orientation. These advantages are systemic and often go unnoticed by beneficiaries.

Privilege isn't about merit or effort. It's about the circumstances of one's birth or societal context. It's also relative: a person might be privileged in one context and marginalized in another.

The wheel on the following page presents a good illustration of the many forms privilege can take.





Adapted from James R Vanderwoerd ("Web of Oppression"), and Sylvia Duckworth ("Wheel of Power/Privilege")

For example, someone might have the privilege of wealth in one setting, but experience discrimination based on race in another.

Different aspects of a person's identity, such as race, gender, class, and sexuality, intersect and interact to shape their experiences and access to opportunities. As a result people may face multiple forms of discrimination simultaneously.

## Why is it important?

Those in privileged positions often mistakenly believe opportunities are uniformly available since they see others like them in power. Discrimination or disadvantages might be invisible to them because they haven't personally faced them.

Empathy is the ability to see the world from someone else's perspective.

The guidance to "check your privilege" is simply a reminder to consider if your actions or words are influenced by your societal standing.

Knowing how people stand in relation to other people is a foundational piece of inclusive leadership. It helps you identify who might be excluded or overlooked or have

a disadvantage in a situation – giving you a chance to level the playing field.

Although we believe we are making objective assessments of merit and treating people fairly, hidden preferences for people like ourselves can cause us to support the development and career progression of some people over others without us even knowing we are doing so.

This unconscious affinity bias can result in a tendency for leaders, people managers, or recruiting managers to

- Hire and promote those who mirror attributes or qualities that align with their own.
- Actively solicit, pay greater attention to, and favour the contributions of in-group members compared to others.

When leaders assign responsibility for a high-profile piece of work, to whom do they entrust that responsibility?

Typically, it will go to the individuals they trust the most. Those people, it turns out, are similar to themselves.

**Though not intentional, people who are not like us get overlooked and left behind.**

## How do we uncover unconscious bias?

One simple activity that we do in our workshops can help you notice where you may have some unconscious biases or potential to have developed them.

Take a piece of paper and draw a table with 6 columns and 11 rows – allowing for the most space in the first column.

Now, think about your inner circle - the people you really trust the most who are NOT family members. Whose counsel do you seek in making decisions? Who would you trust to give you advice at work or personally?

Write their names down in column 1. You want to list exactly 10 people – no more and no less. If you have fewer than 10 names, then think about people you trust a lot that are not quite in your inner circle.

After you list your 10 names, label the remaining 5 columns:

1. Gender
2. Race/Ethnicity
3. Education Level
4. Age
5. Nationality

Place a tick beside those members of their trusted circle who are similar in that dimension to you.

Now look at your list. What do you notice? What patterns do you see?

## Reflection questions

- What is a recent example in your own life that you can identify unconscious biases having influenced a decision you've made?
- Can you think of stereotypes or examples of bias that have been directed towards you? What impact have those had on you?
- What ways can you take ownership of mitigating bias in people decisions you are involved with as a leader? (e.g., Discussing a potential decision with a diverse group of colleagues, taking a pause, then analyzing your decision-making process and testing it for the influence of biases or blindspots.)

- What are some privileges you have? How might those privileges influence relationships you have with others at work?
- What are actions you can take to make space for those with different circumstances to support inclusive, empathetic, and equitable workplace interactions?

## Pillar 2: Ongoing Learning

Ongoing learning is more than just taking a course or attending a workshop; it's about adopting a mindset of cultural humility. Inclusive leaders approach each day with an open mind - ready to absorb, adapt, and apply new skills and concepts.

Cultural humility begins by acknowledging that we are all products of our environments, with our own biases and limited perspectives.

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*A well-educated mind will always have more questions than answers.*

HELEN KELLER

Traditional approaches view cultural sensitivity or awareness as an academic exercise, studying other cultures in isolation like a history lesson or as if they were in a fishbowl.

Practicing cultural humility means recognizing that we have limited knowledge about others' cultures and lived experiences. It gives us permission to not have to know everything. Instead, we can get curious and immerse ourselves in other perspectives.

## Why is it important?

When leaders recognize that every individual's experiences and perspectives are shaped by their cultural background (including their own) they can mitigate the harmful effects of "othering" and hierarchical thinking that permeate the workplace.

From this baseline, they can create an environment of psychological safety where every team member can contribute, and the company benefits from diversity.



## How to Develop Cultural Humility

To embody cultural humility, leaders can take several practical steps.

### 1. COMMIT TO LEARNING

First and foremost, an honest commitment to learning and actively seeking knowledge about cultures different from their own is essential. This includes reading about people's stories, particularly those from marginalized communities, to gain insight into their experiences and challenges.

### 2. APPROACH SITUATIONS WITH CURIOSITY

Secondly, leaders must approach cultural humility with curiosity and a genuine desire to understand others, while refraining from judgment.

Recognizing that one's own values and beliefs shape personal identity and influence interactions with others is a critical aspect of cultural humility. By engaging in open and respectful dialogue, leaders can build meaningful connections and bridge cultural gaps.

### 3. STAND SHOULDER-TO-SHOULDER

Cultural humility encourages leaders to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with marginalized individuals, offering support and solidarity rather than sympathy or pity. No one culture is superior to others. Embracing a non-hierarchical approach helps establish inclusive relationships where individuals feel valued for their unique perspectives.

## Reflection questions

- Reflect on your own cultural identity. How has it shaped your worldview, values, and interactions with others?
- Think about past experiences where you encountered cultural differences or misunderstandings. How did you react? Did you approach the situation with openness and curiosity, or did you feel defensive or judgmental?
- What resources can you use or seek out to learn about the lived experiences and cultures of others?
- What impacts have you observed because of other leaders being vulnerable?

## Pillar 3: Mindful Collaboration

To put it simply, "mindful collaboration" is about being present and thoughtful in how we lead and interact.

It's critical for creating workplaces where everyone feels seen, heard, and valued.

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*In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.*

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR

Mindful collaboration is built on these components.

- **Inclusive language:** The words we use, how we say them, and even our body language can create a picture of inclusion or exclusion. It's more than just dodging phrases that might upset someone. It's about choosing words that make everyone feel involved and respected.
- **Understanding Intent vs. Impact:** Sometimes, even with the best intentions, things don't land the way we hope. Being mindful means checking in to see if our good intentions matched the outcome. And if they don't, we learn and adjust.
- **Building a Safe Space at Work:** Everyone wants to work in a place where they feel they belong and can speak their mind. That's where psychological safety comes in. When people feel safe, they share more, innovate more, and aren't afraid to be themselves. As leaders, creating this kind of environment lets everyone do their best work.

Let's take a closer look at each of these.

## Choosing Our Words

Inclusive language refers to the conscious use of words and phrases that promote a sense of belonging and respect for diversity. It involves selecting language that avoids stereotypes, biases, and exclusionary terms, and instead emphasizes inclusivity and equity. Here are some easy substitutions you can use when writing any communication or policy for your organization, giving a speech or address, or just everyday conversation with your team:

- Use gender neutral titles, such as “chairperson” or “chair”, rather than gender-specific titles like “chairman.”
- Use generic nouns like “servers” rather than “waiters” and “waitresses.”
- Avoid gender specific pronouns (his, her) by:
  - Addressing the reader as “you.”
  - Repeating the noun (e.g., “when the manager decides such-and-thus, the manager will...”)
  - Dropping the pronoun completely.
  - Making the noun plural and using “they” or “them.”
- Avoid phrases that make gender assumptions, such as “managers and their wives.”

- Alternate the order of gender terms in phrases like “men and women”, “girls and boys” and “his and hers”, so that men don’t always appear first.
- Avoid stereotypical phrases such as “ladylike”, “women’s work”, or “like a man.”

## Intent vs Impact

One of the places we get in trouble when building an inclusive culture is discerning intent from impact.

- **Intent** – is what you intend to convey through your words and actions.
- **Impact** – is how your words and actions make others feel.

In an ideal world, our intent and impact would line up perfectly. What we mean to say or do would be interpreted exactly as we intended.

We would take actions and say words intended to communicate that everyone belongs and is appreciated and respected. And the people on the receiving end of these words and actions would feel like they are appreciated, respected, and belong.

Unfortunately, in real life things don’t always work out that way.

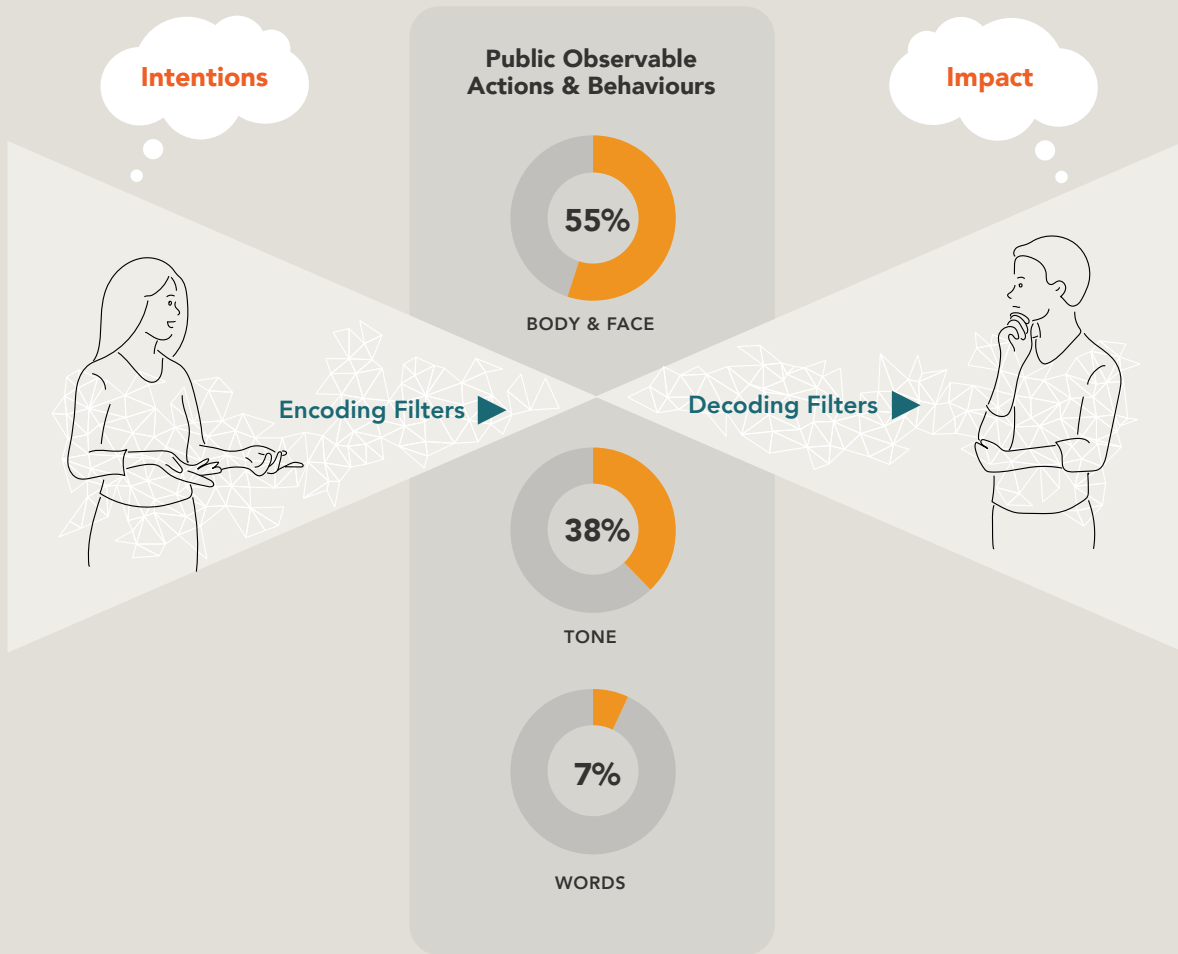
One party may do or say something with a positive intent – only to have the receiver feel hurt or offended.





## Intent does not equal impact. Here's why.

We each see the world through our own filters.



The sender communicates their message through the lens of their culture, assumptions, histories, preferences, past experiences, and physical state.

The receiver filters the message through THEIR lens – which may be very different.

This creates an interpersonal gap.

Our role as leaders in these situations is to be aware of these situations, notice when they are happening, and then take action.

## Psychological Safety

Psychological safety is the shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking.

It is an environment where individuals can be their authentic selves, express their opinions, ask questions, and admit mistakes without fear of humiliation or punishment.

When teams have psychological safety, members feel accepted and respected.

They are free to innovate, collaborate, and take constructive risks because they trust they won't be penalized for doing so.

## The Four Stages of Psychological Safety

At Cinga, we follow the 4 stages of Psychological Safety from Timothy Clark's book, [The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety: Defining the Path to Inclusion and Innovation.](#)

### 1. INCLUSION SAFETY

Inclusion is the foundational stage and is a prerequisite for everything else. It's where every individual feels included in the team and believes that they belong.

This begins by fostering a culture based on the premise that everyone deserves respect and deserves to be included, simply because they are human.

### 2. LEARNER SAFETY

In this second stage of psychological safety, individuals feel safe to engage in the learning process, ask questions, and even admit when they don't know something.

If you want to provide learner safety, create an environment where failure isn't just accepted, it's rewarded.

### 3. CONTRIBUTOR SAFETY

When you have contributor safety, individuals feel safe to contribute to the team, take on responsibilities, and offer ideas.

Pay attention to your speaking time. Do you spend more time telling people what to do? Or do you listen to what they have to say?

### 4. CHALLENGER SAFETY

At this highest level, team members feel safe to challenge the status quo. They believe they can voice concerns and suggest improvements without facing negative consequences.

To create challenger safety, you need to ensure that leaders are approachable and open to being challenged. Reward people who have the courage to speak up and highlight a problem.

By understanding and implementing the four stages, leaders can cultivate an environment where individuals not only feel secure but are also empowered to innovate, collaborate, and drive the organization towards success.

## Reflection questions

- What's a recent situation you've found yourself in where someone impacted you in a way they didn't intend to with their words. How did it make you feel?

- What's a recent situation you've found yourself in where you had unintended impact on another because of how you were communicating? How could you tell? What would you do differently?
- What are ways you can close the gap between your intent and your impact in the future?
- What are ways that you try to make people feel included, valued, and heard at work?

## Conclusion & Next Steps

### Inclusive leadership is simply good leadership

If you want the individuals on your teams to contribute effectively and work well with their leader and colleagues, they need to feel psychologically safe.

Inclusive leaders recognize and accept our inherent biases as humans, and actively work to mitigate them by consulting with others, seeking diverse opinions for decision-making, and fostering a sense of inclusion in the workplace.

### Give it Time and Make the Commitment

It takes time and commitment to learn these new skills. Many people worry about getting it wrong.

The requirement to be perfect, especially when it comes to language, can be a significant barrier. It can even lead to paralysis.

Our advice is to take a lesson from ice-skating.

The very first thing we teach new skaters is how to fall.

Falling is inevitable, so it's best to practice falling – otherwise the fear of falling can keep you from trying.

We recommend adopting this strategy and mindset to inclusive leadership.

You WILL fall. You'll mess up and use the wrong word. You'll say the wrong thing. It's inevitable.

So, learn to fall. Apologize quickly, then move on.

This work isn't about never making a mistake, it's about learning and getting better.

# About Cinga

At Cinga, we're in the business of helping companies change and thrive. Here is what we know to work, based on years of experience in the field.

## **SIMPLE STRATEGIES MAKE THE BIGGEST IMPACT.**

Building an inclusive culture and society is a massive undertaking. Something we won't be able to accomplish in our lifetimes. If we look at the whole project all at once, it seems to call for a comprehensive and complicated plan. But it's been our experience that simple strategies, executed well, make the biggest difference. In this way, you can build a foundation for a strong and inclusive culture by laying one brick at a time.

## **PRACTICAL APPLICATION BEATS THEORETICAL MODELS.**

In a similar vein, there are a lot of theoretical models that sound great...in theory. But when it comes to implementation, there's a gap. At Cinga, we're biased towards practical application. Because we've all been in these roles ourselves – and we've worked with dozens of corporations – we have years of experience in the trying, failing, iterating, trying again cycle that runs in a learning and leadership environment. As a result, we only curate and promote the models that are “sticky” – the ones that work in real life.

## **REAL PRACTICES ARE BETTER THAN BEST PRACTICES.**

We need to tread lightly when we wade into the territory of Inclusivity. So many problems are caused by people who presume that they “know better” than the excluded communities they are trying to serve. The practice of developing inclusive leadership is about learning as we go along. It's about iterating. There are no “best” practices because as soon as you write down a practice, it will have changed. Progress towards the dream comes from gently introducing one real practice after another.

## **PEOPLE THRIVE IN DEVELOPMENT-ORIENTED ENVIRONMENTS.**

We all want a sense of agency, growth, and development. We witness this with our clients time and again: when the organization focuses on growth and development, engagement goes up. Productivity increases. Results show up on the bottom line. Building an inclusive culture isn't a side project that takes resources from core business activities – it IS (or should be) a core activity!

## **Interested in Working with Cinga?**

If you'd like some support implementing the ideas expressed in this e-book, we welcome you to visit our website for more information or to contact us for a free consultation.

# Appendix:

## Words That Matter

### DEI

Stands for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion.

### Diversity

Diversity includes differences that are visible, such as race, gender, country of origin, age and disabilities, as well as invisible differences such as sexuality, academic history, culture and disabilities.

Diversity is not a spectrum or a measure. One person cannot be more diverse than another. Diversity is created when people who are different from one another come together and includes everyone in the room.

### Equity

Ensuring that all people have access to equal opportunities and fair treatment, and ensuring elimination of discriminatory practices, systems, laws, policies, social norms and cultural traditions. Equity encompasses balancing power and correcting where inequality exists.

### Inclusion

The deliberate creation of a trustworthy work environment through eliminating discriminatory practices and behaviour while also creating safe opportunities for diverse viewpoints to be expressed and valued.

### Privilege

Privilege refers to unearned advantages conferred upon individuals due to attributes like race, gender, socio-economic status, ability, and sexual orientation. These advantages are systemic and often go unnoticed by beneficiaries.

Privilege isn't about merit or effort. It's about the circumstances of one's birth or societal context. It's also relative: a person might be privileged in one context and marginalized in another.

### Micro-Aggressions

A micro-aggression is a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group.

Note: the "Micro" prefix is NOT a measurement of size. Micro-aggressions happen at "micro" level (between individuals) as opposed to "macro" level (social structures and institutions.)

### Bias

Bias is a prejudice in favour of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, and is generally considered unfair. Biases may be held by an individual, group, or institution and can result in negative or positive consequences.

Biases develop over the course of a lifetime. Starting with childhood, we are exposed to direct and indirect messages about race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation and the socio-economic status of others. These messages and learned associations directly impact our feelings, attitudes and opinions about other people.

### Unconscious Bias

Unconscious, or implicit bias is a systematic way of thinking that can cloud our judgment and impact our decision-making. It refers to attitudes based on stereotypes that we have been taught which affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. The attitudes and beliefs are often involuntarily and outside of our awareness or intentional control. Everyone holds unconscious beliefs about various social and identity groups, and these biases stem from our tendency to organize social worlds by simplistic categorization.

### Belonging

It focuses on the person's experience within a setting. It means that not only can people feel that they are welcomed, and structures exist to ensure fairness, but that each person feels that they can be their full, authentic self within that culture, group or setting. They don't have to cover who they are or downplay personal traits.

## **Allyship**

Allyship an active, consistent, and arduous practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person of privilege seeks to operate in solidarity with a marginalized group of people. Allyship is not an identity—it is a lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability with marginalized individuals and/or groups of people. Allyship is not self-defined—our work and our efforts must be recognized by the people we seek to ally ourselves with.

## **Gender Pronouns**

A pronoun is a word that refers to either the people talking (“I” or “you”) or someone or something that is being talked about (like “she”, “it”, “them”, and “this”). Gender pronouns (he/she/they/ze etc.) specifically refer to the person you are referring to. Pronouns are part of someone’s gender expression, and people can have multiple sets of pronouns for themselves (such as using he/him/his and they/them/theirs). Pronouns are not “preferred” but instead are required for respectful communication. Not only transgender or nonbinary communities use pronouns, as it is something we all use and have since we were little. (LGBTQ+ Resource Center)

## **Stereotype**

A standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment. (Merriam-Webster)

## **Discrimination**

Bad treatment based on a characteristic like race. A person discrimination under the BC Human Rights Code if:

- They treat someone badly or cause them harm in an area such as employment.
- A personal characteristic like race is a factor in the harm.
- There is no defense for the conduct.

For example, a person refuses to sell a house to someone because they are Black. This is discrimination. A person can discriminate even if they do not intend to. For example, a person cannot work on Saturday because of their religion. A store makes everyone work on Saturday. They do not mean to discriminate, but the rule has adverse effect on the person because of their religion. This is discrimination unless the store proves it could not reasonably keep the person at work. (BC Human Rights Tribunal)





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