

A guide to intersectionality in the workplace

a quick-reference resource

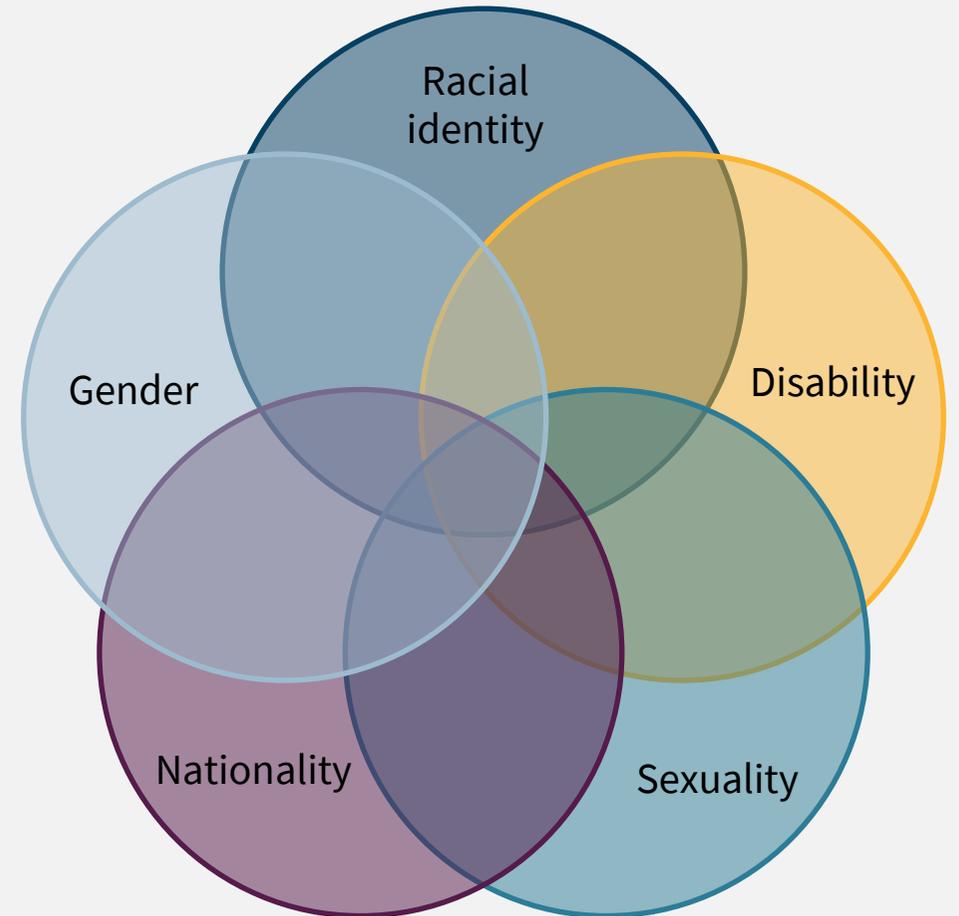
What is intersectionality?

Intersectionality in the workplace involves recognising and addressing how different aspects of employees' identities—such as race, gender, sexuality, class, and ability—intersect and affect their experiences at work. This approach acknowledges that discrimination or privilege is not experienced uniformly by all members of a given group but varies based on the interplay of multiple identities.

Being neurodivergent can help form identity, as well as how people perceive themselves in the world. Neurodivergent people perceive, interact with, and interpret the world in different ways. While this can lead to difficulties at times, it regularly results in innovative problem-solving and new ideas, which are beneficial to everyone in the workplace.

Intersectionality is a framework that considers the social and political identity of an individual. When the two are combined, it creates the potential for extreme advantage or disadvantage for the individual.

Neurodivergence is not limited to individuals of a specific gender, colour, age, or ethnicity, instead, it is commonly intersectional in nature.



Benefits

1. **Enhanced Employee Well-being:** Creating a supportive environment where all employees feel valued and understood improves morale and mental health.
2. **Increased Productivity:** Employees who feel included and respected are more likely to be engaged and productive.
3. **Diverse Perspectives:** A workforce that values intersectionality can draw on a wide range of perspectives, fostering innovation and better decision-making.



Challenges and barriers

1. **Unconscious Bias:** Unconscious attitudes or stereotypes that affect understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner.
2. **Resistance to Change:** Organisational culture and established practices can be resistant to the changes required to fully embrace intersectionality.
3. **Lack of Awareness:** Not all employees or leaders may understand intersectionality or its importance, leading to a lack of support for initiatives.

Intersectional neurodiversity

Neurodivergent Identities

People can have intersecting neurodivergent identities/co-occurring conditions (for example autism and dyscalculia; dyspraxia; dyslexia; ADHD and/or Tourette's).

Neurodivergent people of colour

Neurodivergent people of colour experience great inequality when it comes to access to diagnosis and post diagnostic support, despite black people being 26% more likely to be diagnosed as autistic¹.

Neurodivergent people of colour are often not treated with the same level of understanding and awareness of how their lived experience may differ from their white counterparts.

Neurodivergent people of colour can face lengthy delays to get support across all aspects of their lives, including diagnosis, health, education and social care.

Age and neurodivergence

Employees can be subjected to age discrimination in the workplace. Because of this, the Equality Act protects employees from this in all aspects of employment.

Many older neurodivergent people were never diagnosed as children and did not receive the necessary support when they were young.

Younger people are more open to exposure and awareness.

It is increasingly common that individuals are diagnosed later in life, which can have significant effects on mental wellbeing at work and in their personal lives.

Intersectional neurodiversity

The relationship between disability and neurodivergence

Neurodivergence is considered a disability by some, but it is not automatically classified as such under law and policy. While it can be disabling at times, it is not always so, and this can vary greatly depending on individual experience. It's important to be mindful of the diverse ways people relate to both disability and neurodivergence.

Women and neurodivergence

Women continue to face several challenges.

Many women are diagnosed much later in life compared to men¹. One reason is that most research and assessment on autism and ADHD has concentrated on men which meant that subsequent diagnostic criteria was less sensitive to females who present with characteristics which are 'less-obvious' (p 6).²

Fortunately, increased understanding of neurodivergence has led many women to self-diagnose later in life. However, many feel that their support requirements are still not fully met and continue to face difficulties in their daily lives.

LGBTQIA+

Non-cisgender identities (gender identities that differ from biological sex) are more widespread among neurodivergent people. According to research, over 70% of autistic people report increasing homosexuality, bisexuality and asexuality.³

Intersectional neurodivergence

Relevance at work

Many people that identify as neurodivergent exhibit qualities that are as distinct as their races, sexual orientations, age, and gender. Although public awareness of true diversity is growing, many individuals only associate neurodivergence with young, white males. As highlighted, such an ideology couldn't be further from the truth.

Intersectional neurodiversity is common and should be embraced as a key component of talent management strategies.

Diversity in the workplace is an important recruitment and employee retention consideration. Prospective employees consider diversity when job hunting and it has been shown to be especially important for millennials looking for work.

Strategies to support intersectionality

1. **Training and Education:** Offer regular training sessions on diversity, equity, and inclusion with a focus on intersectionality.
2. **Policy Review:** Regularly review and update workplace policies to ensure they address the needs of employees with intersecting identities.
3. **Inclusive Hiring Practices:** Implement hiring practices that actively seek to recruit a diverse workforce, considering intersecting identities.
4. **Employee Resource Groups (ERGs):** Support the formation of ERGs that address the interests and needs of employees with various intersecting identities.
5. **Mentorship Programs:** Develop mentorship programs that connect employees from underrepresented groups with mentors who understand and can support their unique experiences.
6. **Feedback Mechanisms:** Establish anonymous feedback mechanisms for employees to report issues related to discrimination or bias.

Framework

Intersectionality is a useful framework for solving problems because it:

- Highlights how discrimination and exclusion are not simple and can't be solved by focusing on a single issue.
- Helps us understand how experiences of poverty are gendered and racialised.
- Connects human rights to multiple forms of discrimination.
- Explains the complexity of individual and group experiences shared by identities or social categories.
- Analyses and challenges social inequalities related to race, gender, sexuality, social class, nation, age, religion, and ability.

Practical tips for colleagues and managers

- **Inclusive Practices:** Policies and practices that consider the diverse needs and experiences of employees with intersecting identities.
- **Equity vs. Equality:** Equity involves providing different levels of support based on individual needs to achieve fairness, whereas equality involves treating everyone the same.
- **Microaggressions:** Be aware of everyday, subtle, and often unintentional interactions or behaviours that can marginalise individuals based on their intersecting identities.
- **Barriers:** Identify and address barriers for career progression.

Conclusion

Embracing intersectionality in the workplace is essential for creating an inclusive and equitable environment where all employees can thrive. By implementing strategies that recognise and address the unique challenges faced by individuals with intersecting identities, organisations can foster a more innovative, productive, and supportive work culture. Use the resources and strategies outlined above to begin or enhance your organisation's journey towards intersectionality in the workplace.



REFERENCES

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