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The bias barrier
Allyships, inclusion, and everyday behaviors

2019 STATE OF INCLUSION SURVEY

How frequently have you heard the phrase "...and allies?" Inclusion initiatives and groups often add this to encourage those with different backgrounds and experiences to connect and learn from others. But, the notion of allyship as a standalone concept is often not given much thought. Yet allyship, supporting individuals or groups that one does not directly identify with, can be an essential component of an inclusive culture. Allyship promotes empathy, authenticity, and courage. It also promotes embracing people for the multiple dimensions and identities that they bring to the table. A culture that values allyship expects individuals both to recognize their own identities and advance inclusion by helping to drive real change.

In our 2017 research study, *Unleashing the power of inclusion*, we discovered that many in the workforce feel that having programs focused on inclusion is important, but having colleagues and leaders who demonstrate inclusive behaviors[1]—daily actions that people can take to encourage others to bring their true selves to work— is paramount.

Yet, it can sometimes be difficult for organizations to impact personal and daily interactions to encourage more inclusive behaviors. Allies may serve as a missing link for organizations to take the next step in truly embedding inclusion into the everyday experiences of their people.

For our 2019 research, we wanted to understand the role and potential of allyship in organizations today. Is this an untapped path in which organizations might engage their workforce? Could this continue to advance inclusion? We surveyed 3,000 individuals working in organizations of more than 1,000 employees about their experience in the workplace, their perceptions of the prevalence and manifestation of bias, and whether they identified with the concept of being an ally. We also wanted to understand how today's workforce responded when they felt that they witnessed or experienced perceived bias in the workplace to explore how people are embodying inclusion on an individual level. How could these interactions inform the ways organizations might bolster allyship and advance inclusion?

Allies may serve as a missing link for organizations to take the next step in truly embedding inclusion into the everyday experiences of their people.

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1. *Unleashing the power of inclusion.*
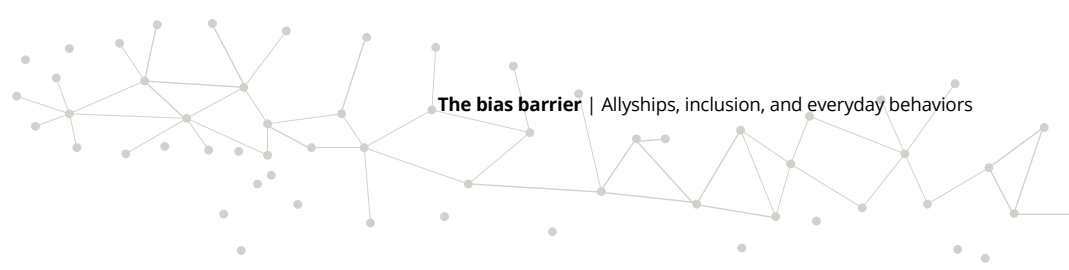
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Progress has been made,
but bias remains

Before we could discover the role allyship could play in today's workforce, we had to establish the baseline: How do workers perceive the current state of inclusion?

Respondents recognized the progress that organizations are reportedly making: 77 percent believed that their company fostered an inclusive workplace and 81 percent of respondents also agreed with the statement that their workplace provided opportunities to connect with and learn about others who have different backgrounds, identities and experiences. These results show that organizations are making efforts to cultivate inclusion—and that employees are taking notice.

We also asked respondents about their personal experiences in the workplace, and 86 percent said they could be themselves all of the time or most

of the time at work. In research we conducted six years ago[2], we discovered that the majority of respondents felt they had to hide (or "cover") at least one aspect of who they are. Our more recent findings seemingly indicate a positive shift in organizational culture.

We also asked respondents about their personal experiences in the workplace
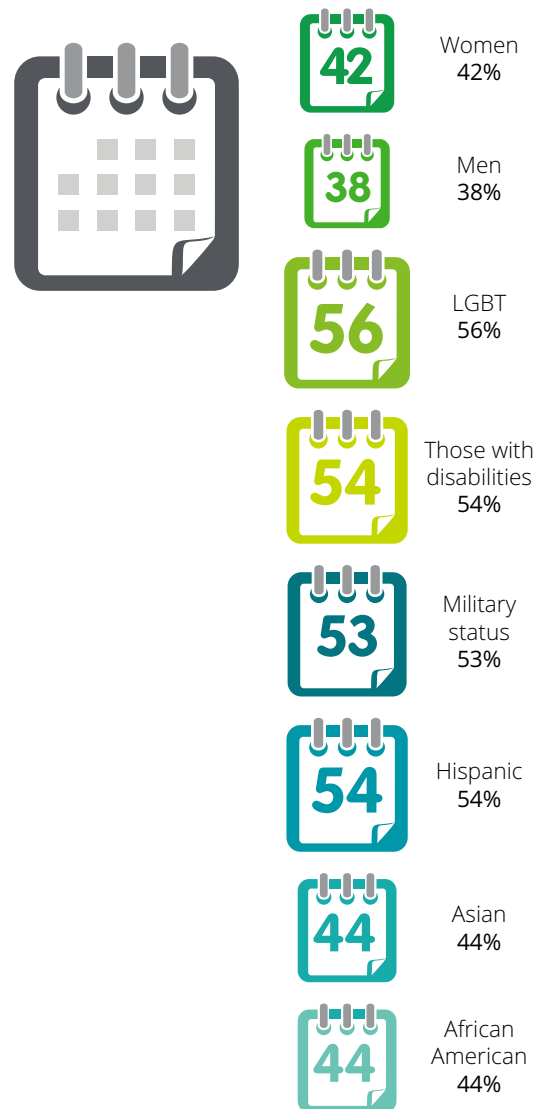

Military status
88%

Hispanic
87%

Asian
87%

African American
86%

Those with a disability
80%

LGBT
87%

Men
86%

Women
85%

86%
said they could be themselves all of the time or most of the time at work

2. *Uncovering Talent.*

Yet when we asked today's workforce if they felt they had experienced and/or witnessed bias[3], we received a more nuanced response.

Nearly two-thirds—64 percent—felt they had experienced bias in their workplaces during the last year and of those, 61 percent felt they experienced bias in the workplace at least once a month. The same number, 64 percent, also felt they had witnessed bias at work in the last year. Of those, 63 percent felt they witnessed bias at least once a month. While the majority of respondents recognized the progress workplaces have made in fostering inclusion, they felt that bias still remained. These findings indicate that while organizations may be making progress in certain areas, there may be a continuing need to understand and address bias in the workplace.

Do you feel that you've experienced bias at least once a month?

42 — Women 42%

38 — Men 38%

56 — LGBT 56%

54 — Those with disabilities 54%

53 — Military status 53%

54 — Hispanic 54%

44 — Asian 44%

44 — African American 44%

3. Bias was defined as an unfair prejudice or judgement in favor or against a person or group based on preconceived opinions.

Perceived bias today

To better understand the type of bias that people are experiencing in workplaces today, we asked respondents to categorize the bias that they perceived. Of the majority who felt that they witnessed or experienced bias in the past year, 83 percent categorized it as indirect and subtle, what could be termed a "microaggression." This is compared to 32 percent who categorized bias they felt they either witnessed or experienced was blatant and obvious. This outlines a challenge for organizations: while policies and programs to address blatant biases have made headway, other approaches may be needed to eradicate subtler expressions of bias, the microaggressions.

Another consideration for organizations is how different identities or characteristics impact an individual's perception of bias. The top three types of bias people felt they witnessed and/or experienced of those presented in the survey were age, gender, and race or ethnicity.
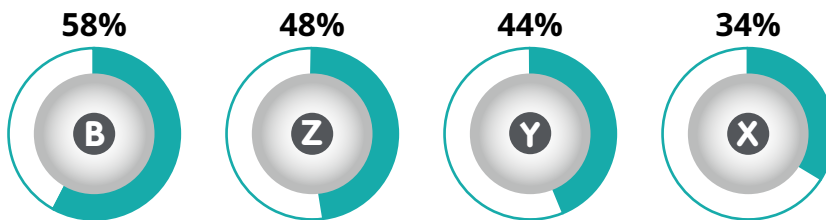
Bias deep dive: age

Age topped the list for respondents on bias they felt they witnessed and/or experienced.

Do you feel that you have experienced bias based on age?

43%
of respondents
answered yes
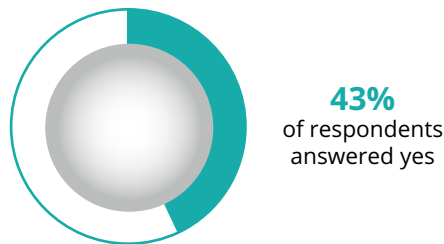
Perceived age bias based on generation

58%	48%	44%	34%
B	Z	Y	X

Baby boomers and Gen Z reported the highest perceived levels of age-based bias.

Generational key

| B	X	Y	Z
Baby boomers	Generation X	Millennials	Generation Z

These results could indicate potential tensions in the multigenerational workforce, particularly at the extremes. Organizations should remain focused on cultivating an environment where everyone feels welcomed and valued for the unique combination of skills, knowledge, passion, and experience they bring to the table. A multigenerational workforce offers organizations new ways to collaborate on ideas and execute projects as the nature of work continues to evolve. But first, organizations need to get teams to capitalize on the various forms of knowledge their members bring. One way organizations can encourage this is through a culture of mentorship and sponsorship, where those more senior employees provide guidance and support to more junior employees, as well as reverse mentorship, where junior employees provide different perspectives and exposure to senior employees. This can provide a cross-generational dialogue that could foster appreciation and empathy.
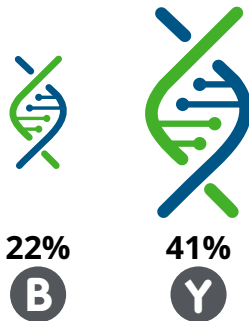
Bias deep dive: gender

The second most prevalent form of bias respondents felt they had experienced and/or witnessed was related to gender.

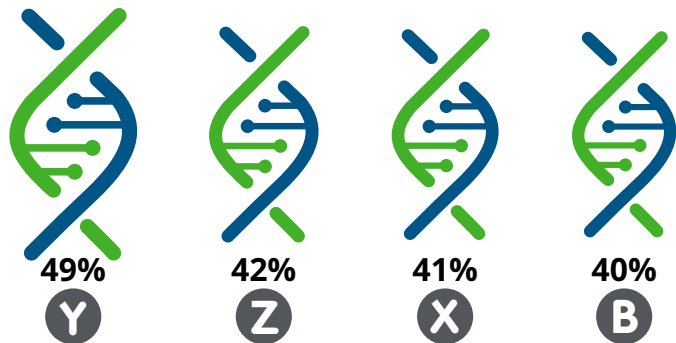**Do you feel that you have experienced bias based on gender?**

46% of women

22% of men
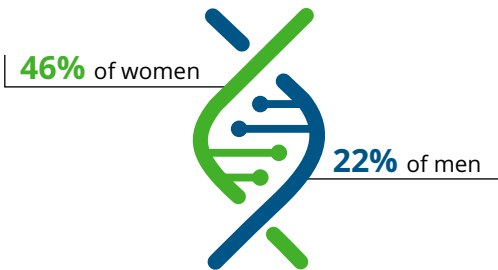
There was also a generational divide in perceiving bias related to gender

Experiencing gender bias

22%	41%
B	Y

Millennials felt they experienced a higher level of gender bias whereas Baby Boomer reported the lowest.

Witnessing gender bias

49%	42%	41%	40%
Y	Z	X	B

Millennials also reported the highest levels of perceived gender bias across generations.

Given the increased conversation and attention around gender in the workplace, it's understandable why gender bias would be at or near the top for both experiencing and witnessing. Many Millennials seem to be more likely to perceive gender bias in the workplace. Organizations need to recognize the impact that evolving discussions on gender at large are having on their workforce, and monitor how training, policies, and language can mitigate the gender bias.

Generational key

B	X	Y	Z
Baby boomers	Generation X	Millennials	Generation Z

Bias deep dive: race/ethnicity

The third-highest ranked identity that respondents felt they had witnessed and/or experienced bias around was race and ethnicity.
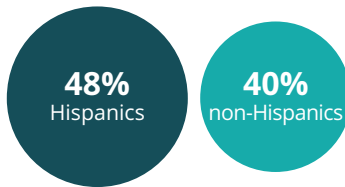
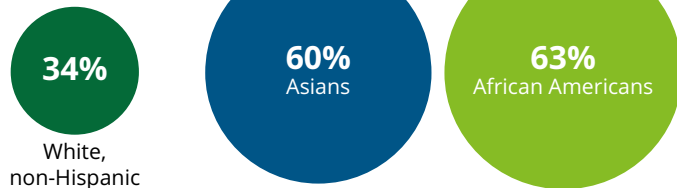**Do you feel like you have experienced bias based on race or ethnicity?**

31% of respondents

Bias perceived based on race and ethnicity

Ethnicity

48%
Hispanics

40%
non-Hispanics

34%
White,
non-Hispanic

More Hispanics felt they had witnessed racial and ethnic bias compared to non-Hispanics.

Race

60%
Asians

63%
African Americans

African Americans and Asians felt that they had witnessed higher incidents of racial bias compared to Whites.

There is a gap in perception of racial or ethnic bias. To continue to bolster knowledge and empathy, organizations can provide opportunities for individuals from different backgrounds or experiences to connect authentically and form genuine relationships. They can also foster environments of humility and curiosity, where individuals acknowledge their own unconscious biases or blind spots and are encouraged to learn about the experiences of others.

Deep dive: LGBT, people with a disability, and military status

This gap of perception between those who identified with a community and those outside of a community also manifested itself around sexuality, disability, and military status.
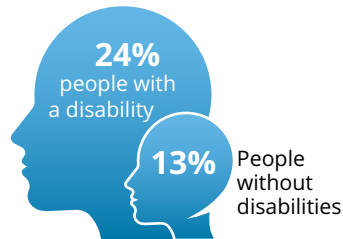
Rates of witnessing bias depend on whether the respondent identified with that community

Do you feel that you have witnessed bias based on sexuality?

40%
LGBT

23%
Straight

Respondents who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender felt they had witnessed bias around sexual orientation compared to straight respondents who reported the same observation.

Do you feel that you have witnessed bias biased on disability?

24%
people with a disability

13%
People without disabilities

Respondents with a disability felt they had witnessed bias based on disability compared to respondents who do not identify as having a disability.

Do you feel that you have witnessed bias based on military status?

20%
Military

3%
Non military
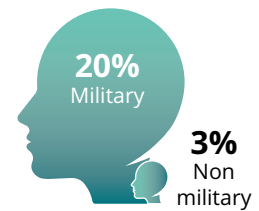
Respondents who have military status witnessed military-based bias at a significantly higher rate than those without military status.

### Additional factors associated with perceiving higher levels of bias

In cities

College graduate

Under **40**

Parents

Higher income
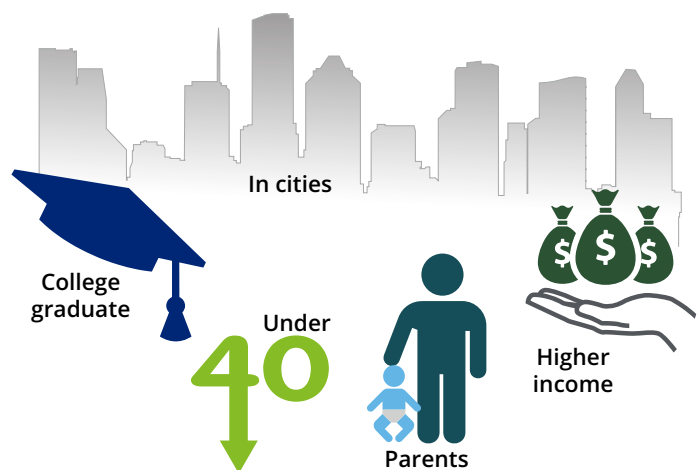
These groups also reported to perceiving frequent bias in the workplace

Do you feel that you have experienced bias at least once a week?

29%
People with a disability

35%
LGBT

37%
Military status

Do you feel that you have witnessed bias at least once a week?

28%
People with a disability

34%
LGBT

36%
Military status
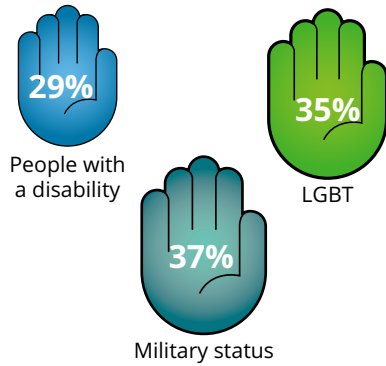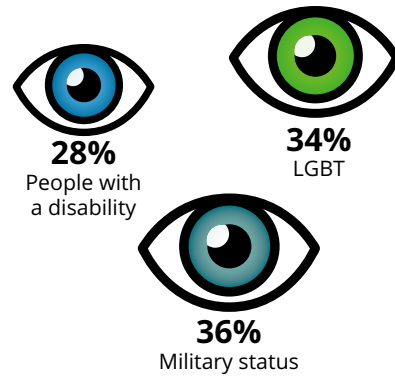
Compared to 10% of respondents overall who witnessed and/or experience bias at least once a week

Biases based on age, gender, and race and ethnicity may be more common—and the people subject to those biases may compose a larger cross-section of society. But people with military status, members of the LGBT community, and people with disabilities report feeling that they have experienced or witnessed bias frequently. A number of things could account for this. These communities tend to have smaller populations, particularly within the workplace, so those outside of those communities may be less aware of the issues and potential biases that they may face.

The elevated role of allyship

Allies may be the missing link: they're part of the team meetings, the casual conversations by the coffee machine, the decisions on whom to staff or promote.
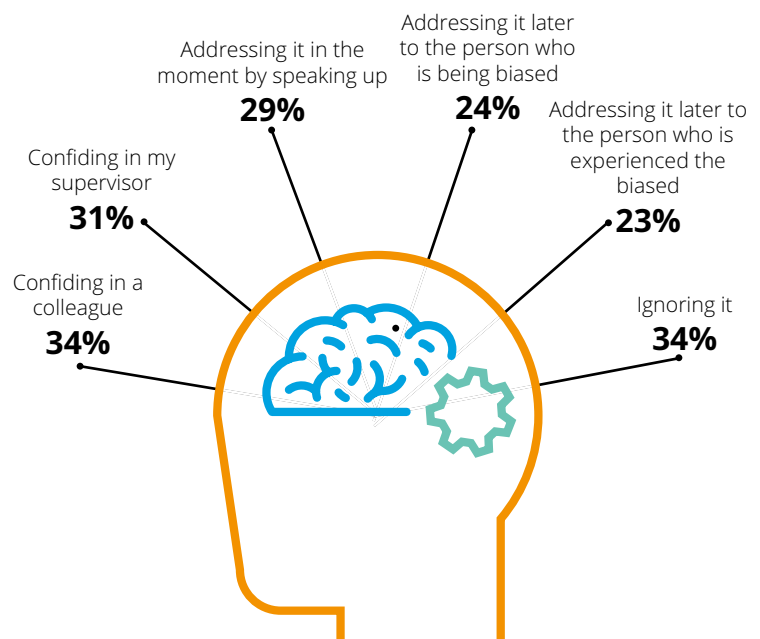
Fostering an inclusive culture is one way that organizations can try to reduce instances of bias in the workplace. Organizations have allotted time and resources to developing inclusion programs, as well as showcasing organizational values. But impacting the daily behaviors of the people in their workforce can be much more complex, yet necessary to address the type and prevalence of bias that the workforce is perceiving. To truly foster an inclusive culture, everyone should recognize the value of inclusion, their personal role in contributing to it and the benefits they accrue from it. This work remains one of the most difficult parts of fostering and sustaining inclusion in an organization.

So how can organizations help their people embody inclusion in their daily interactions? Allies may be the missing link: they're part of the team meetings, the casual conversations by the coffee machine, and the decisions on whom to staff or promote. They also can be informal models and positively influence other professionals who may not yet view themselves as allies. But many organizations have yet to make a concerted effort to recognize or energize allies.

Today's workforce seems ready to take on the mantle of allyship. The vast majority of respondents, 92 percent, already see themselves as allies in the workplace, agreeing with the statement "I feel dedicated to supporting individuals or groups who are different from me." Allies acknowledge the importance of inclusion and diversity and claim to have a personal commitment to that work. They stand ready to advance inclusion.

Nearly three out of four respondents, 73 percent, reported that they felt comfortable talking to others about bias in the workplace, yet, when faced with bias, nearly one in three—said they ignored bias that they witnessed or experienced. One way that people can feel

There are a variety of ways that the workforce reports to responding to bias today

Confiding in my supervisor **31%**

Addressing it in the moment by speaking up **29%**

Addressing it later to the person who is being biased **24%**

Addressing it later to the person who is experienced the biased **23%**

Confiding in a colleague **34%**

Ignoring it **34%**

more empowered to address bias is through fostering inclusion. Organizations can arm their people with inclusive behaviors, setting the standard for an expectation for inclusion to be embedded in everyday interactions from the top down.

Given the continued prevalence of perceived bias, particularly microaggressions, the importance of everyday behaviors, and the identification as an ally, the workforce today can play a critical role in advancing inclusion in their organizations. Despite the variety of programs, messaging, and standard practices, the daily behaviors and therefore the daily experiences of people on teams may still be unaffected. Yet, by indicating that they want to support their colleagues from different backgrounds and experiences, the majority of today's workforce demonstrates that they want to be involved in advancing inclusion—they just don't know how.

Five ways to foster inclusion

Building an inclusive culture can help to reduce bias that may emerge in daily interactions, so here are some things you can do to build an inclusive environment and inspire allies:

1 Showcase INCLUSIVE BEHAVIORS. In a previous study, Deloitte identified SIX INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP TRAITS[4]. These can empower people with ACTIONABLE STEPS on how they can personalize, identify, model, and advance inclusion

Commitment: Treat everyone with fairness and respect, and foster environments where team members can be themselves by modelling authenticity and empowering each other's well-being.

Courage: Engage in respectful, but tough conversations when necessary. Identify opportunities to be more inclusive, take ownership and engage others.

Cognizance of bias: Be aware of unconscious biases so decisions can be made in a transparent, consistent, and informed manner.

Curiosity: Listen attentively and value the viewpoints of others.

Cultural intelligence: Seek out opportunities to experience and learn about different cultures and be aware of other cultural contexts.
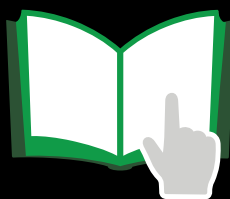
Collaboration: Create teams that are diverse in thinking.

2 Define what ALLYSHIP means in the context of the organization's VALUES and GOALS

Allyship:
noun [al-ahy-ship]

Being an ally means being emotionally intelligent, modelling inclusive leadership,and being aware of your own identity and the intersectional identities of others.

Allyship is not simply an add-on; it's a part of everyday behaviors and an expectation that organizations should showcase.

It's supporting others even if your personal identity is not impacted by a specific challenge or is not called upon in a specific situation.

4. *Six signature traits of inclusive leadership.*
5. *What if the road to inclusion were really an intersection?*

3 Promote ALLYSHIP to encourage CURIOSITY about and AWARENESS of others

- Recognize the importance of relationship-building. Being an effective ally typically requires individuals to gain exposure to and form relationships with others who are different from them. To encourage the development of that empathy, organizations should continue to promote networking and mentorship for individuals of different backgrounds and perspectives.

In addition to hosting events to engage members of a particular community, organizations should also consider providing opportunities for everyone to participate in inclusion-focused events, no matter their identity or background.

Organizations should continue to provide opportunities to expose their workforce to people from different cultures, experiences, and perspectives.

4 Showcase INTERSECTIONALITY[5]

- Everyone has various identities that intersect and overlap in unique ways. Some of these identities are more visible or pronounced than others, but each one composes a complete individual.
- For example, every person has a gender, race and age, as well as family status, health status, and unique hobbies and interests.
- By highlighting the intersecting nature of identities, i.e. not defining individuals by a single identity or forcing people into one box, people can connect to learn about one another discover common ground.
- This awareness and ability is essential to cultivating a culture of allyship.

5 Recognize that allyship is not simply intention; it's also a part of everyday behaviors. When allies perceive subtle or indirect bias against others, they can host courageous conversations or consider other ways to address bias.

- Allies model inclusive behaviors.

- Allies ask questions and encourage others to do the same.

- If they perceive that a statement or action is not inclusive, allies share solutions that would make the situation more inclusive.

The next phase of inclusion

nclusion should remain a priority. The good news is that the majority of today's workforce recognizes the value of efforts to advance inclusion. After decades, this focus is having an impact on the experiences of professionals across the business world. Many people feel that when they show up to work, they can be themselves.
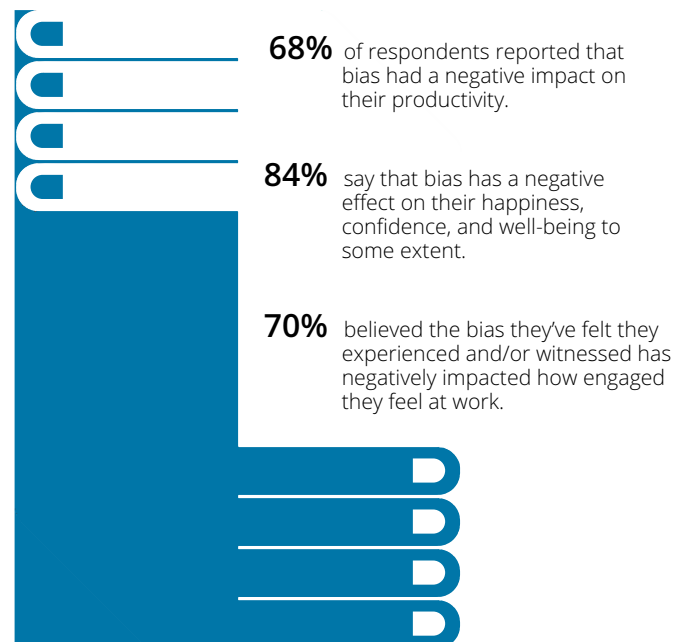
Yet, more than 60 percent of respondents feel that bias is still present in their workplace.

The stakes are high. Respondents do not view perceived bias as a negative reflection of the organization necessarily. But bias may negatively impact their experience in the workplace—it may reduce productivity, confidence, and happiness. And reductions in those measures may increase turnover.

Clearly, the bias they perceive in today's workplace is having an impact on the workforce, even for those who do not directly experience bias. This is a call to action for organizations today. Many workers are perceiving bias as frequent and widespread and this perception has a

Bias is having a negative impact on today's workforce, even for those who are not directly affected.

Of those who felt that they experienced or witnessed bias...

68% of respondents reported that bias had a negative impact on their productivity.

84% say that bias has a negative effect on their happiness, confidence, and well-being to some extent.

70% believed the bias they've felt they experienced and/or witnessed has negatively impacted how engaged they feel at work.

cost. Perceived bias can have a widespread, negative impact, for both those who experience and witness bias, on engagement, productivity, and well-being. Now is the time for organizations to take notice.

Most organizations recognize that inclusion is essential, well beyond a "nice-to-have." Leaders of organizations have long known that bias can cause turnover to rise—but the impact reported from our survey showcases how widespread this effect can be. Respondents indicated that their happiness and engagement fell even if they themselves were not the objects of the bias. Just witnessing bias—perceiving biased intent in interactions among their colleagues—can negatively impact their own performance. These individuals are allies in the making—aware of the diverse experiences of others outside of their identities or communities. Organizations that leverage these sentiments and give allies the tools to practice and model allyship intentionally may produce a groundswell of support for the behaviors they want to incentivize.

Organizations that leverage these sentiments and give allies the tools to practice and model allyship intentionally may produce a groundswell of support for the behaviors they want to incentivize.

Our results regarding allyship offer organizations an opportunity to continue to advance, and the data to back it up. Many members of today's workforce have recognized the negative impact of bias they felt they have experienced or witnessed. And the majority of our respondents see themselves as eager and willing to support their colleagues. Capitalizing on this innate tendency toward allyship may help organizations advance inclusion in daily interactions and behaviors.

Additional information

About Inclusion at Deloitte

Deloitte has been helping shape corporate America's inclusion landscape for over two and a half decades. While much has changed over the years, a few things have remained constant: leadership commitment, continuous evolution, and an innovative approach to fostering an inclusive culture. With a business built on providing clients our professionals' knowledge and unique perspectives, our inclusive culture is critical to our business: it enables us to leverage all that makes us each who we are—talents, beliefs, experiences, and backgrounds—to deliver the richest, most valuable perspectives to our clients and the most engaging experiences for our colleagues. Inclusion makes us stronger as individuals and extraordinary together.

Survey methodology

This survey gathered online responses in April 2019 of 3,000 nationally representative U.S. adults, employed fulltime at companies of 1,000 employees or more. The online questionnaire measured demographic subgroups upfront to ensure a significant sample size for statistical validity.

Survey definition

- **Bias:** An unfair prejudice or judgement in favor or against a person or group based on preconceived opinions.

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Innovative research

Uncovering Talent

Nearly half of all professionals surveyed report covering—a strategy through which individuals manage or downplay differences. Covering can prevent an individual from bringing their authentic selves to work and hinder an organization from a truly inclusive culture.

What if the road to inclusion were really an intersection?

How can leaders build inclusive cultures that leverage employee potential at work? It is time to refresh corporate efforts by taking an intersectional approach. This requires critically revisiting whether the existence of employee resource groups and targeted diversity programs are paradoxically non-inclusive.

The transformation of diversity and inclusion: The millennial influence

Millennials are unique in viewing cognitive diversity as essential for an inclusive culture that supports engagement, empowerment, and authenticity—and they value inclusion as a critical tool that enables business competitiveness and growth. As millennials flood leadership ranks, their perspectives will demand a shift in traditional diversity and inclusion models.

Unleashing the power of inclusion

Every year, organizations allocate time, resources, and budget towards efforts to foster an inclusive culture—and interest is still increasing. Yet, we discovered that there often remains a disconnect between the expectations of today's workforce and inclusion in organizations.

Discover more about our inclusion research.

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