

A diverse group of people in a meeting. In the foreground, a woman with short grey hair and glasses, wearing a yellow sweater, is seated in a wheelchair and clapping her hands. To her left, a man in a pink shirt is standing and clapping. To her right, a woman with long blonde hair is smiling. In the bottom right foreground, the back of a person with curly hair is visible, also clapping. The background is a bright, modern office space with a whiteboard and a security camera.

# What Does Workplace Diversity Even Mean Anymore?



Lauran Star, PhD, is a DE&I strategist, psychologist and speaker who understands the inclusion, diversity and equity challenges your organization may be facing and has evidence-based solutions. Known for uncovering blind spots to achieve optimal performance and enhanced retention, she dives in where others tread lightly yet is insightful, warm and approachable. Check her out at [DrLauranStar.com](http://DrLauranStar.com) or email her at [Lauran@DrLauranStar.com](mailto:Lauran@DrLauranStar.com)

**By Lauran Star, PhD**

If you were to do a web search on the term “workplace diversity,” you would find several very different results. Some combine diversity with inclusion, others with equity, and then again, some that make no business sense whatsoever. With all the different definitions and interpretations, it’s no wonder the platform of diversity is broken, as we are continually redefining it – it’s a moving target.

So, what does workplace diversity mean today? Workforce diversity refers to an employee’s affinities that make them unique to the organization. The characteristics of these affinities can include gender, race, ethnicity, religion, age, sexual orientation, sexual identification, veteran status, disabilities, physical abilities, socioeconomic status, education level and ideologies.

Diversity is an affinity that can be measured in the workplace. Increasing the number of people of color, for example, is a metric. However, can you set workplace outcomes based on that affinity metric? No, because it is a measurement metric.

There is no correlation between affinities and business outcomes. How is having an organization with a staff that’s 38% women “better” than an organization with only 10% women? How can you prove it? How do you remove the variable of culture? In a nutshell, you really can’t do that, and you cannot place the affinity in a vacuum.

The goal of workplace diversity is to have a diversity of perspective of thought, and that, combined with an inclusive organizational culture, leads to innovation, problem solving, job satisfaction and so much more. Today, workplace diversity must have a foundation in inclusion. Inclusion is what allows your diversity of thought to stay.

Workplace inclusion refers to creating a work environment where all people are truly welcomed, valued and respected, for all of who they are, regardless of differences. The feeling of acceptance, understanding and being valued in a group or team of individuals in the workplace; being valuable based on other factors than diversity. Diversity and inclusion are NOT the same thing.

So, this leaves me to ask, does your practice have an inclusive culture? Do your employees feel valued? Do they openly share their thoughts? How about the practice innovation — is it thriving or just surviving? ■



Dr. Star presents a keynote message at the 2022 ADAM Annual Meeting in Boston.



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