

A background image showing several hands of different skin tones clasped together in a circle, symbolizing teamwork and unity. The image is overlaid with a semi-transparent red filter.

# The Key to Motivating a Diverse Workforce

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**D**iversity initiatives are generally positive for the work environment. They recognize and celebrate the diversity of the workforce, and they often outwardly promote efforts toward creating a more beneficial workplace because of the demographically dissimilar makeup of the people within it. An organization's success and competitiveness depends upon its ability to embrace diversity and realize the benefits.

However, while diversity initiatives and inclusionary efforts provide a necessary means of recognizing biases that exist in the workplace, they may also unintentionally foster those same biases.

Without understanding a deeper level of what makes a workforce diverse and unique, pitfalls may emerge that are more common than you might think.

## People Within Groups Are Unique



**Some diversity initiatives make assumptions based on biases, thus further reinforcing such biases. And while this result is unintentional, it proves to be damaging to the individuals within the groups and to the mission of each group as a whole.**

For example, a group that's comprised of a team of women seeking help with leadership skills might falsely assume that all women within the group have skillsets that mesh with stereotypically female characteristics (being empathetic and team-oriented, for example).

This commonality within the group may not be the case. Some women may have a more assertive leadership style. Others may prefer working on their own, as opposed to working

on teams. However, the organization's own biases toward what characteristics women have as a group, even if they are positive, end up missing the mark for individual women who do not adhere to these stereotypes.

So while diversity and inclusion efforts are powerful because they allow groups to organize and draw attention to common biases at work, they may also suffer from the same set of biases that they were attempting to avoid, by focusing on "what women want" and thus viewing "women" as a monolithic group as a result.

The bottom line is that groups that are "diverse" within their work context also contain many unique aspects of diversity within them.



◀ **The analogy of an iceberg comes to mind in the face of a multitude of potential dimensions of individuals. The obvious characteristics of race, ethnicity, gender, age, and disability relate to the small, visible portion of the iceberg.<sup>1</sup> Yet there is so much more beneath the surface.**

While surface-level diversity may serve as a means of initiating diversity groups and inclusionary efforts, it's the deeper-level understanding that helps drive meaningful action toward improving the motivation of each individual in the workplace.

Members of all groups, although they share some demographic similarities, are often motivated in differing ways and require an individualized approach to help find fulfillment and opportunities to thrive.

# Engaging Groups Requires Engaging Individuals



**Many organizations struggle with employee engagement and driving organizational performance, retention and job satisfaction. As a result, they may look toward affinity groups in order to launch engagement initiatives targeted at motivating individuals within these groups.**

The organization may know that a one-size-fits-all approach isn't best for engaging individual employees, so it looks toward a sub-segment of the workforce for addressing motivation in a more targeted way.

Yet, assumptions may prohibit them from truly connecting with individuals and prescribing engagement programs that will improve engagement results, despite a more finite approach.

**These assumptions may include:**

- The goals that members of the group have for their career
- The preferred work environment of each individual in the group
- What motivates the members of the group to perform their best

Instead, the ability to engage employees starts with knowing how each unique employee is motivated. While targeting groups with engagement initiatives may seem better than addressing the organization as a whole, it's merely a smaller segment of the population.

**How the organization assumes individuals are motivated and the truth of what really motivates each person may be totally different.**

## Connect Commonalities That Exist Within Diverse Groups



**Perhaps the most interesting aspect of understanding a deeper level of diversity comes in the form of uniting commonalities.**

Affinity groups serve as a positive means of recognizing biases, and, when executed properly, provide members of the group with initial solutions for overcoming biases. But when organizational leaders dig deeper and understand how each individual within a group is motivated, a uniting factor is uncovered.

Peeling back the layers of the organization down to the individual level uncovers that employees across diverse groups are motivated in the same ways.

For example, a member of the women's leadership group mentioned earlier may be

motivated in the same way as some individuals from the African American men's management group that meets down the hall. An individual's membership in different demographic groups may have little to no impact on how they're motivated to perform their best in the workplace, what's going to retain them, or how they prefer to work within their teams.

Therefore, the diversity of the workforce at a surface level as it relates to race, ethnicity, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation and disability can be greatly enhanced with a focus on understanding a person's inherent motivators.

When an organization understands the unique motivations of individuals, its leaders are able to drive the motivation, performance and engagement of a diverse workforce.



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