



# Take the focus off difference:

## A science-based approach to workplace inclusion

Diversity training is a \$8 billion a year industry —yet it's largely ineffective:

Data on **829** firms over **31** years found little effect from trainings



In fact, when people are taught how to respond correctly to a questionnaire assessing bias, **they forget the "right answers" in just a few days**

**That presents a big question:**

**Since so many organizations have invested in diversity and inclusion, why are social barriers still so prevalent?**



### The conventional approach to inclusion:

Initiatives aimed at addressing the assumed challenges women and minorities face, without an effort to involve majority groups

When initiatives *do* attempt to address social biases among in-group members, they tend to do so with blunt instruments that inspire backlash and exacerbate social divides.



### What the science says:

Inclusive organizational policies account for the firm's overall population, rather than creating special allowances that isolate, highlight, and assume the needs of minorities and threaten fairness needs for everybody.

The most effective inclusivity work may be that which engages everyone and shifts focus away from differences between people — thus creating **a culture of inclusion**.





## The science of collective framing

### Integrated approaches:

- Avoid feelings of unfairness that separate programs and allowances for women and minorities may inspire among other coworkers.
- Avoid threats to personal autonomy that arise with mandatory trainings for employers while maintaining incentives for engagement in D&I initiatives.
- Avoid placing “the burden of change” on the members of an out group.
- Improve organizational relatedness by reinforcing team identity and tapping into the power of superordinate goals.

### Crafting an environment that fits everyone



#### Picture this:

- A firm becomes aware that it has a problem with wheelchair accessibility in its cafeteria.
- It could build a separate eating area for people who use a wheelchair, but that would isolate them, restrict their access, and call attention to a supposed special allowance given to them.
- The company instead could simply build a ramp and ensure benches are not cemented to tables so wheelchairs fit at any table.



By creating an inclusive environment rather than framing adjustments as “special allowances,” companies can create one big in-group rather than aggravate perceived out-group differences.

**Because if you’re not actively including, you’re accidentally excluding.**



### Further reading

For a more comprehensive understanding of the scientific case for asking for feedback, see the NeuroLeadership Journal paper, **Take the focus off difference: A science-based approach to workplace inclusion.**

