EDI Basics

A guide from the CIPR's Diversity and Inclusion Network

Foreword

A core pillar of the Chartered Institute of Public Relations' (CIPR) strategy is to champion lifelong learning, and as public relations (PR) professionals we understand that continuous professional development (CPD) is essential to keep our skills sharp and apace as the practice of PR evolves.

That same commitment to continuous learning is required within the area of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), because like PR practice, this is also a landscape which isn't static – it shifts as cultures evolve and as a society we better understand perspectives which are different to our own lived experiences.

As we live our lives, whether in a professional context or in our day to day living, our views, choices and decisions are hugely influenced by our own unconscious bias. To respond to this challenge, first we need to recognise that unconscious bias plays a factor in our decision making and, secondly we need to commit to understanding the perspectives of people outside our own sphere of experience. Committing to this approach will ensure the actions we take broaden inclusion and lead to better solutions. Significant data demonstrates that diverse teams perform better, so we all benefit if we work harder to ensure everyone's included and we've removed the barriers that may have prevented participation in the past.

Personally, I'm grateful to the many people, particularly within the CIPR community who have shared their experiences of walking through life in different shoes to my own. I've learnt an awful lot in recent years and I've also appreciated the time given by people to be better informed about my perspective as someone identifying as being within the LGBTQ+ community.

I don't consider myself to be an expert in EDI, but I'm committed to my own continuous personal understanding and being an ally for communities outside my lived experience. I'm privileged to Chair the CIPR's newly created Equity, Diversity & Inclusion Committee, formed with the purpose of ensuring the CIPR is accessible and welcoming to new members, that ours is a culture that is inclusive and that we demonstrate our own good faith and standing when commenting on D&I issues.

The CIPR's own EDI journey has been hugely shaped by the many volunteers who have contributed to our Diversity & Inclusion Network (CIPR DIN). This group seeks to develop an inclusive culture within the public relations industry by raising general awareness of diversity issues, by pursuing an inclusive approach which can improve communications and by increasing the numbers of public relations practitioners from diverse backgrounds.

This guide has been produced by the CIPR DIN and is one of the many resources available to support CIPR members to be better informed around many aspects of EDI. We are extremely grateful to those who have given their time to create this resource and I wish to thank Sara Thornhurst and Vickie Cox in particular for leading this work, together with CIPR DIN Chair, Avril Lee and Vice-Chair Cornelius Alexander.

Rachel Roberts
CIPR 2023 Vice-President and Chair of the CIPR's Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Committee

Introduction

For most PR and communication organisations and teams, improving diversity, both internally and in client work, is deemed a priority but often falls down the list as other daily pressures take hold. This can result in mounting pressure and a feeling of being stuck when it comes to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI), leaving organisations unsure where to start. This first in a series of guides from the CIPR is a toolkit to inspire action and progress wherever you are in your EDI journey. Each guide focuses on a different area of inclusive communications and together they form a versatile and practical resource suitable for people at any level within an organisation.

These guides align with and are written from the perspective of the Social Model of Disability, a model designed and created by and for disabled people. The Social Model takes the view that people are disabled by barriers in society, not by their impairment or disability. Further reading on the Social Model can be found on the Scope website.

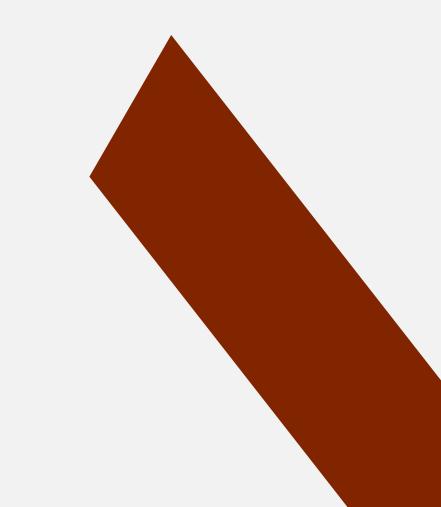Each guide is worth five CPD points.

How to use this guide

Equity, Diversity and Inclusion is a broad subject covering a lot of areas and the conversation on and around EDI is always evolving. This guide goes back to basics to simplify and define EDI and explain how each applies in organisations.

You can use this guide:

- as an onboarding tool for new employees
- as a foundation to build inclusive processes and systems
- as part of an exit interview
- as a guide to make sure that your organisation's inclusion work aligns with the core values of EDI within the CIPR.

Defining Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

Back to EDI basics

In the public relations sector the conversation around EDI continues to develop and mature. Wherever you are in your journey a solid understanding of the fundamentals of diversity, equality/equity, and inclusion is vital to producing inclusive communications which are accessible by everyone.

Diversity

Diversity represents different things to different people, but broadly it is the representation present within an organisation. It is a catch-all term which can be split into three primary areas; Demographic, Cultural/Cognitive and Experiential. Each plays an important role in how we think about and enact EDI activities and systems. It is important to understand the different facets of diversity and how they intersect in order to bring about greater inclusion and belonging.

Demographic diversity

This is perhaps the area with which we are most familiar. Demographic diversity relates to characteristics such as disability, race, age, social-economic status, gender, religion, and sexual orientation.

In the workplace, greater demographic diversity is often the primary EDI goal for organisations, however it does not automatically equate to inclusive practices or communications. On its own, greater demographic diversity can lead to tokenism and poor employee experiences.

Additionally, some areas of demographic diversity intersect with cultural diversity.

Cultural diversity

Our backgrounds, upbringing and social status all affect how we view and interact with the world around us. Cultural diversity includes factors such as:

- Education e.g. state schools versus private schools, university degrees versus vocational or professional training.
- Generational difference e.g. Boomers versus Gen Z, Millennials versus Gen Alpha.
- Religion and belief systems.
- Disability e.g those who are born with a disability can have a different cultural experience to those who acquire a disability during their life.

Additionally you may hear the term 'cognitive diversity'. This is where the phrase 'diversity of thought' originates. Cognitive diversity is loosely defined as those who have different perspectives because of how they engage with and process information and scenarios and situations. In short, how people learn and understand the world around them. It is increasingly used to describe people who are neurodivergent, however, cultural background also plays a significant role in how people understand the world so both cultural and cognitive diversity are important.

In the workplace, cultural or cognitive diversity is centred around avoiding 'groupthink'. It's favoured for its role in improving creativity and innovation and providing fresh perspectives. However, cultural diversity can only flourish if it's correctly supported by organisational culture. We cover this more in the section on Belonging, below.

Experiential diversity

This element of diversity focuses entirely on our experiences of and interaction with the world around us. Our experiences are shaped by factors including family and friends, our online communities, hobbies and interests, our personal experiences, what we read, watch, and the media we consume.

The experiences of others are generally unknown to us. Because they are, for the most part, not visible, this can cause us to, consciously or otherwise, seek out and align ourselves with people who think and act like us leading to behaviours and actions which are exclusionary.

In the workplace experiential diversity can shape our views on campaigns, projects, and affect decision making. It can lead to certain diverse groups being left out, unable to participate, or being put in uncomfortable and discriminatory positions.

Inclusion

Inclusion supports the development and retention of diverse workforces. It is the practice of identifying and removing barriers to participation for diverse employees and putting in place processes and frameworks which enable everyone to thrive, be supported, and work in a safe environment. Inclusion is a continuous process which can and should evolve over time, remaining flexible to the changing needs of an organisation and its people.

What does inclusion look like in practice?

Below are some examples of inclusion and what an inclusive workplace represents for employees.

- All employees feel valued and respected.
- All employees have the opportunity to progress and succeed in their chosen career path.
- All employees have access to training and professional development courses.
- All employees are able to participate in social workplace activities.
- All employees feel able to speak up and contribute ideas, perspectives and concerns.

Equality/Equity

Historically the E in EDI represented Equality, but as we have gained a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics and factors at play across EDI, the E now more commonly represents Equity. This is now the widely accepted terminology and the one we will be using throughout these guides.

What's the difference between Equality and Equity?

Understanding the distinction between Equality and Equity is important because it affects how we act and react to different needs and requests of support. The most common explanation is this:

Equality gives everyone the same opportunities and access to resources to reach the same outcome without taking into account how power structures and systemic imbalances affect individuals. Equality treats everyone the same way.

Equity gives people specific opportunities and resources in line with their individual circumstances to help them achieve an equal outcome. Equity recognises that everyone needs different support to succeed and puts in place the means to achieve this.

Why we need to focus on Equity

By focusing on Equity we can create fairer systems and processes which help everyone to thrive, especially those who are at risk from discrimination and systemic barriers and biases. An equitable approach works to provide the right access based on individual need and generates opportunities from this.

If we strive for equity we can remove the barriers preventing diverse individuals from being included and advancing to their chosen level.

Belonging

Belonging is a relatively recent addition to Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. In 2021, a Forbes article called belonging the "intersection of DEI and engagement". The principle of belonging is being able to bring your whole self into the workplace and have that self be valued, respected and appreciated.

Despite feeling somewhat like a buzzword, belonging is an increasingly important facet of EDI as organisations seek to increase retention and establish hybrid and flexible working systems which reduce both staff isolation and commuting pressures.

Three identifying pillars of belonging are:
- Feeling supported by peers
- Trust in the leadership and the organisation
- Feeling safe in the workplace

It's worth noting that belonging is an addition to, not a replacement of, EDI. Generally speaking, belonging is the outcome of good equity, diversity and inclusion practices and actions. You may see the acronym EDIB (Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Belonging) or DEIB (Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Belonging) being used more regularly across PR and other sectors. Each of these four pillars has an important role to play in eliminating discrimination, removing barriers and helping PR Professionals from all backgrounds advance and thrive.

Creating an equitable future in PR

Creating an equitable future in PR

Thanks for reading this guide looking at accessibility brought
to you by the CIPR D&I Network.

In this era of increasing EDI awareness, accessibility should be at the front of every communicator's agenda but can often be forgotten. It is vital that we work to ensure equitable access and understanding for all our audiences, allowing for the continuum of human ability and experience. These needs vary but often relate to living with a disability. Disability is still often overlooked and has not received the focus that some other areas of D&I have. Many fixed and outdated views of disability remain, and we must remember many disabilities are hidden including mental health challenges (globally the main cause of disability), and that with age, disability becomes more prevalent. Although we tend to think 'it won't happen to us', one in four 20-year-olds will have a disability before they retire. The reality is that many of us will find ourselves living with a disability at some point in our lives and may face accessibility challenges in the future.

Alongside our role as PR Professionals, we must also look to our own industry and how we best create fairer workplaces that are welcoming and flexible, enabling people living with disabilities, impairments, or other accessibility barriers, to work, progress and succeed.

This series of guides will address accessibility from a range of perspectives including a review of language – a powerful tool that can empower, include and acknowledge – as well as events and advocacy. The guides are practical as well as being thought provoking and aim to support skills development: critical more than ever as initiatives addressing a lack of diversity increase and society recognises the need for change. We hope they support better communications, engagement and action for better accessibility.

I would like to say a big thank you to Sara Thornhurst and Vickie Cox for all their hard work on the guides which has made this initiative possible, and to the rest of the CIPR D&I Network for their continuing focus on making our profession a more inclusive community.

Avril Lee
Chair of the CIPR Diversity and Inclusion Network

Resources

Scope
https://www.scope.org.uk/

Disability Rights UK
https://www.disabilityrightsuk.org/

The Equality Act
https://www.equalityhumanrights.com/en/advice-and-guidance/equality-act-guidance

The following guides will be published in this series in 2023:

- ❶ Inclusive Language
- ❷ Inclusive Communications
- ❸ Inclusive Events
- ❹ Advocacy and Allyship

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