

Gender Diversity & Inclusion



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Introduction

At DILAN Consulting Group, we believe business is human. Our unique people-centered approaches and strategies focus on nurturing, cultivating, and integrating cultural differences in an organization.

This eBook will provide you with our general insight into fostering inclusion across gender identities in the workplace. This eBook begins with fundamental concepts related to gender identity, followed by an examination of a case study, and finally ends with tips on actionable steps you can take to create a welcoming and inclusive culture.



01 — Gender Inclusivity & Pronouns in the Workplace

For those who don't have to worry about being misgendered, pronouns may not seem especially important. But for those that have diverse gender identities, constant misgendering can be exhausting and invalidating.

Misgendering, unfortunately, happens often, and it can affect someone's feelings of safety in the workplace. Considering that more than 12% of U.S. millennials identify as transgender or gender non-conforming¹, and 56% know someone who uses a gender-neutral pronoun², it is highly likely that your organization includes people with diverse gender backgrounds. How can we create a more inclusive environment that makes people of all gender identities feel safe and welcome?

First, it's important to acknowledge and respect diverse gender identities. Traditional gender language privileges people who identify as binary, and until very recently, it has not successfully included those who identify otherwise.

Below are some key terms around gender to become familiar with. This list of terms is not comprehensive, but it's a starting point to begin understanding different experiences of gender and how they may be expressed in the workplace.



Fundamental Concepts

Gender Identity: Who someone feels they are regardless of biological sex/sexual anatomy.

Gender Expression: How someone demonstrates who they are in terms of gender.

Gender Expansive: Someone whose experience and expression do not match up with expected societal norms. They may feel both a man and a woman, neither a man nor a woman, or somewhere in between and this may or may not be fixed.

Cisgender: Someone whose gender identity is the same as their sex assigned at birth.

Transgender: Someone whose gender identity does not correspond with their sex assigned at birth.

Non-binary: People who describe themselves as not fitting into a binary category of either male or female.

Pronouns & Their Rules

Pronouns are words that people use when referring to the gender of others—she/her, he/him, and/or they/them. Some people use a combination like he/they or she/they which may mean that they identify both ways, or it may be driven by context related to safety. If feeling unsafe, they may choose to use the binary pronoun he or she.

The rules around pronouns may feel like they are constantly changing as we all learn more, and this is okay! If we are continuously educating ourselves, being mindful of our speech, and intentionally affirming others' gender identities, we are progressing.

Why Do Pronouns Matter in the Workplace?

Pronouns are used to reflect someone's gender identity— they are a fundamental aspect of who a person is. Using a person's name and their pronouns correctly is a form of respect and validation that should always be expressed in the workplace.

It's important that, at work, we learn to talk about gender and use pronouns in a way that creates a sense of safety for all employees. Getting misgendered can feel like one's identity is being compromised, and if this happens over and over, it can take a huge emotional toll. At work, all levels of leadership should set examples for becoming allies to shift the culture toward inclusivity.

So, what actions can you take to be more inclusive?

First, make it easy for people to communicate their pronouns. It's key to discover other's pronouns so you can use them correctly. You can find out a person's pronouns by introducing yourself with your own: "Hi, I'm Sam and my pronouns are she/her, what are yours?"

Now, this may be awkward at first, but once this becomes a natural part of your greetings and introductions, it will become less awkward. When asking for pronouns in a group setting, be careful not to single anyone out. Consider making this action voluntary as well, as some employees may not feel entirely comfortable sharing at first. Still, remember that as a manager, your willingness to share sets the tone for all.



Remember: how a person appears on the outside, does not necessarily reflect how they experience their gender. For those who use multi-pronouns like he/they, she/they: ask which pronoun the person would prefer you use to create a sense of safety for them.

Tip: You can also make it easier for people to share their pronouns by placing your pronouns in your email signature. The more people who follow, the more routine it becomes, and the more opportunity it creates for people to share their pronouns easily and comfortably.

Handle mistakes gracefully. It's important to realize that you will likely make mistakes when using other people's pronouns, and that's okay as long as there is a commitment to improving.

Tip: When you make a mistake, apologize briefly, and correct yourself, making a mental note about that person for the future. Be careful not to over apologize—when you do this, it puts extra spotlight on the person that may be uncomfortable. The key is to always be respectful and commit to learning and getting better together.

Be curious without being intrusive. Curiosity can show you care about someone enough to get their pronouns right, but there is a distinction between being curious to learn and being intrusive or inappropriate at work.

Tip: If you're unsure about someone's pronouns, you can ask sensitively and let them take the lead in the conversation. If it seems like they don't want to elaborate on their answer, don't pry. If they begin to explain more about their pronouns, listen with humility and be willing to learn.

03



Case Study: Gender Transition in the Workplace

Below is an example of how DILAN partners with organizations to assess the need, present insights, align DEI priorities, and develop an action plan to support their efforts in building an inclusive company culture.

Challenge

A senior-level person employee at a global biotech enterprise was going through a gender-transitioning process. This organization did not feel equipped with the knowledge to support them or even how to create a welcoming environment.

While the organization was clear in their desire to take their commitment to diversity and inclusion to the next level, they were wrestling with how best to engage the enterprise in a conversation that could evolve their understanding of gender identity beyond the binary.

Approach

DILAN's solution to this challenge was delivered in two phases. The first addressed the immediate need to work directly with the team and senior leadership of the individual who was transitioning. As part of this phase, DILAN provided two in-person workshops, one for the individual team and the other for the senior leadership. The focus of these two workshops included increasing literacy around gender diversity and identifying strategies on how to support individuals who are going through the transitioning process day to day.

In these workshops, we reviewed new and familiar terminology related to gender identity and discussed the small changes in company culture that make for a more inclusive and welcoming environment, including transparency around pronouns and cultural sensitivity.

In the second phase, DILAN was tasked with creating content that could be scalable to the entire enterprise. As part of this phase, DILAN engaged in a deep research and design process to identify key areas to focus on to meet the needs of the entire global enterprise. Through a series of meetings, literature reviews, data analysis, and feedback from this enterprise's LGBTQIA community, DILAN's team developed three dynamic modules of asynchronous curricula. These modules included introductory terminology on gender identity, the science behind gender identity development, and why pronoun use matters when cultivating an inclusive culture.

Outcome

With the successful development and rollout of the workshops and curricula, this global enterprise was able to meet its commitment to evolving the framework of gender identity beyond the binary and creating a welcoming environment for all its employees.

Our people centered strategies offered this organization the tools to build a better business where inclusivity drives success. In their feedback, they said, "We really enjoyed working with the DILAN team. They were professional, creative, flexible, and a great thought partner." We are very proud to say our work was well received accross a culturally-diverse, international workforce.



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Conclusion

No matter your starting point along this journey, working toward greater inclusivity will take a collective effort from your organization to make the workplace a welcoming, safe place that dignifies each person. The more we look to respect, validate, and include our colleagues, specifically those with diverse gender identities, the more inclusive our organizations become.

If your organization is looking for support in creating an inclusive culture, please contact us at office@dilanconsulting.com, or by visiting our website at dilanconsulting.com to find out about our suite of offerings.

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