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Discourses, Methods and Practices of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging: Towards a Global Shared Framework

Discorsi, metodi e pratiche di diversità, equità, inclusione e senso di appartenenza: verso un quadro condiviso globale

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and the Global DEIB Discourse:
A Reflection and a Call to Action

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1. A NEW IMPERATIVE

The global applications of Diversity, Equity, Inclusion and Belonging (DEIB) hold different meanings and subsequently result in diverse frameworks, policies and implementations as they flow through varied transnational spaces. DEIB is in constant evolution and the meaning and applications take on the histories, traditions and needs of different geopolitical contexts to mirror, challenge, innovate and build positive and inclusive social futures. Over the last couple of decades, the concepts of DEIB have become increasingly central in both business and society in fostering a fairer and more inclusive society. They have also been subjects of attacks from conservative politicians and media globally. It is therefore crucial that they be safeguarded in the face of such attacks – both with regard to the values that are promoted and in respect of the goals of implementation for more inclusive outcomes. In particular, DEIB should be protected from ideological manipulation and financial exploitation, as well as from partisan hijacking.

The contextual complexities of DEIB as terminologies have resulted in a halo of indeterminacy surrounding the construct. This is not uncommon in concepts with a strong idealistic character, such as, for instance, 'sustainability', and can be attributed to the fact that DEIB, like sustainability, is complex, multifaceted and context-sensitive. The flexibility of

these constructs makes them highly adaptable to different settings and circumstances, which is a clear asset for concepts that have the potential to be applicable broadly. However, due to the inherent multiplicities of these concepts and terminologies, it is important to guide their definition and implementations, backing them with ethical and inclusive data and histories that illuminate their origins and scope.

To give an example, DEIB as constructs have gained fever pitch in countries like the United States of America, where the future of organizational, media and state policies and programs are linked to the evolution and application of DEIB as discourses that inform the creation of legal, educational, industry, social policies and government programs. While DEIB work is most evident in the US in multi sectors of the economy, this is a common trend in many other parts of the world, in both the global north and global south, with its relevance rapidly spreading globally.

The widespread appeal of DEIB is hardly surprising. Ellen Berrey, a University of Toronto sociologist, states that DEIB was created to be "code for *everybody*. It emphasized cultural difference and inclusion and having different perspectives" (Lawrence 2024). Berrey further emphasized the long history of DEIB principles, which can be dated back "to the original supreme court decision on affirmative action" (*ibid.*); for example, in the US, to Executive Order 11246, better known as Affirmative Action (1965), which was born out of the civil rights movement (Jenkins and Moses 2014). The response of the global private sector to Affirmative Action and the legal and government evolution of DEIB have been accelerated by rapid "globalization, changing demographic trends and discourses around the role of corporations in society and in societal governance, all of which have contributed to pushing organizations to put both CSR [corporate social responsibility] and diversity management (DM) onto the agenda" (Hansen and Seierstad 2017, 2).

This is in sharp contrast to long-held assumptions about the role of business in society. Milton Friedman's model of economic capitalism in liberal society in his iconic book *Capitalism and Freedom* (1962) emphasizes the idea that business and society are disconnected, and that business outcomes should only be tied to the bottom line. The inclusion of DEIB in business structures challenges this perspective, and works towards building a necessary bridge between business and society. This approach of developing a more inclusive and socially oriented business identity is also accompanied by a rise in stakeholder demands to create transparency in organizations, where ethics cannot only be a legal and

reputational defense mechanism (Taylor 2024). Businesses need to foundationally create methods of operation and output that take into account the environment and DEIB (*ibid.*). The increasing recognition of the need for adopting such an approach implies that the discourse of DEIB has reached a stage where innovative, sustainable solutions are required so that the principles underpinning it can to all effects become part and parcel of widely shared, and increasingly vocally expressed, societal expectations.

2. DEIB WARS

The growth of DEIB discourse and of DEIB work and applications in society has not been without controversies, pushback and sabotage by a rising globally divisive, aggressive, populist and conservative agenda, especially in the US (Bennett and Norris 2024; Kessler 2024; Lawrence 2024). DEIB has been a major topic of polarizing debate in global politics, fuelled by misinformation, bigotry, fear of losing control and the general defense of the old guard to hold onto *how things have always been done*. In the United States of America, for instance, in the current political climate, the two major political parties, Democrats (liberals) and Republicans (conservatives) hold dramatically polarizing views, vision and strategies on the meaning, use and future of DEIB. The Republicans view DEIB work as threatening, divisive and unpatriotic, and the US Republican Presidential Candidate 2024, former president Donald Trump, and his allies have invested significant resources across states and industries to wipe out and demolish the flourishing of this important work that binds the multiculturalism and plurality of the American identity and experience (Mercieca 2020; Telford 2024).

On the other hand, the US Democratic Party and Presidential Candidate 2024, vice president (at the time of writing this article) Kamala Harris, has championed this work and programming as a foundational goal of the kaleidoscope that makes the fabric of the United States of America. The themes of DEIB have become one of the most charged topics in US recent history, and due to her multi-ethnic background, in her vice-presidential run in 2020 and presidential run in 2024, Kamala Harris has often been called by her opponents a "DEI" candidate with racist and misogynistic aims, falsely equating DEIB work as pejorative and non-American. As Lawrence (2024) writes in a recent article in

The Guardian, "The decades-old term is about egalitarianism – but conservatives have turned it into profanity". To add, Quinn (2024) writes: "They've called Harris – who is simultaneously the nation's first Black, first Asian American and first female vice president – a 'DEI hire'".

Intentional, targeted, pejorative (mis)-uses of the meaning and rhetoric of DEIB like the example above are being promoted in sections of global media and the public sphere. DEIB in its controversies and polarizations is influenced by the (mis)-understanding of the self/other and us/them and built on the divisive tactics of orientalist thinking that informs global discourses and policies even today (Said 2003 [1978]). As Said wrote so accurately in his iconic book *Orientalism*, "Rather than the manufactured clash of civilizations, we need to concentrate on the slow working together of cultures that overlap, borrow from each other, and live together in far more interesting ways than any abridged or inauthentic mode of understanding can allow" (*ibid.*, xxii). We need to build on the complexities and nuances that bind us – one where differences do not have to be in opposition to unity. The ways of building unity through developing a shared language of difference have always been one of the central aims of DEIB discourses, frameworks and policies.

DEIB terminologies, discourses and policies are being decried by aggressive, conservative, populist forces as being divisive and unpatriotic, despite the goals of such frameworks being primarily to unite communities and people through a lens of difference and integration rather than homogeneity and assimilation. Investing in clarifying and understanding the intended meanings and purpose of these concepts holds the key to bringing dignity and unity in a polarized, fractured world. DEIB concepts are based on exploring and bringing into light the ways that we are all different and how that difference can be beautiful, constructive and powerful to build unity. The goal of DEIB work is not divisive work; in fact, it is the opposite – to aid in overcoming the fear and chaos around difference and aid in creating structures to help them invest in and build on their differences.

One thing is for certain: the need to clarify, understand and build on the meaning and potentials of DEIB as a constructive, positive social force is urgent in the age of AI, fake-news, social media, self-professed gurus and deep-fakes. Equally important is to recognize the pitfalls that may beset the construct, its operationalization, and its discursive circulations. In this issue of *Languages Cultures Mediations*, as co-editors from two national contexts, USA and Italy, we bring forth multi-method, data-backed, global research on DEIB that touches upon multiple indus-

tries, contexts and applications of the concepts. Through this global collaboration we hope to contribute to a deeper, research-backed understanding of DEIB that can foster more collaborations and unity, rather than spreading misinformation and sensational, divisive propaganda, while at the same time highlighting the need to look at DEIB through a critical lens so that its principles and aims are safeguarded.

3. Defining DEIB

As a first step in this discussion, it is apt to introduce the definitions of diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging provided by Grant (2022) in a discussion of belongingness in the field of higher education. Based on accessible terms, these definitions read as follows:

> *Diversity* refers to having people of different backgrounds occupying the same space
> *Equity* if all people have the same opportunities to grow and develop
> *Inclusion* demands that people are celebrated for their uniqueness so everyone can be empowered to contribute
> *Belonging* refers to the degree to which people feel safe and free to express their authentic selves in a particular environment. (Grant 2022, 5)

If diversity is the starting point in the DEIB paradigm, belonging is the goal. For example, in an organization, *diverse* voices need to be *included* in the decision-making to create *equitable* policies and programs to meet the needs of such a workplace to create sustainable *belonging*. Arguments to bolster the case for why organizations can benefit from a DEIB approach abound. There is ample evidence that higher organizational innovations, low attrition rates, increased stability, higher employee wellness are all linked to inclusive culture and strong DEIB policies (Woetzel *et al.* 2015; Lorenzo *et al.* 2018; Lorenzo and Reeves 2018). In addition, Millennials and Generation Z account for about 50% of the global professional workforce and data shows the preference of these demographics to work in institutions that have sound DEIB policies and programs (Parmelee 2023).

Despite their growing recognition as key values and increasing evidence of their positive impact, DEIB principles remain underdetermined in both organizational theory and practice, often with starts and stops due to political challenges, leadership changes, and budget cuts

(Alfonseca and Zahn 2023), but also because of intrinsic under-determinacy and transnational, contextual differences. Indeed, one of the ways of encouraging the use of more DEIB frameworks is to invest in learning about the diverse histories and contexts of what each of the words in the acronym of DEIB implies, both theoretically and in practice; there is also a need to build a shared vocabulary on these terminologies, so that the meanings can be translated and adapted for transnational contexts.

This is even more relevant if we think of the huge variability that characterizes DEIB actions. If DEIB's interpretation is far from being universal, its operationalization is even less uniform. This is partly due to the fact that contextual factors can play a considerable role in constraining, as well as enabling, both interpretation and operationalization. Thus, while there is global consensus about the need to promote inclusive and sustainable change in the workplace and, more generally society, in actual fact "diversity, inclusion, and belonging on an individual basis take on different meanings depending on demographics, environment, and agenda" (Adejumo 2021, 62), with different constituencies having markedly different perspectives on what DEIB policies and actions should entail. As a result, despite the widespread institutionalization of DEIB through a diffuse process of isomorphic adoption and progressive institutional entrenchment (Zeitz *et al.* 1999), a unified framework for its conceptualization and implementation is still missing.

The articles in this issue contribute to the ongoing discussion about DEIB outlined above by looking at it through the lens of discourse. Our assumption is that the analysis of the discourses mobilized around DEIB and DEIB-informed policies, initiatives and communication can help us shed light on the way DEIB is understood and operationalized across different sectors. It should be pointed out, however, that the lack of conceptual formalization of the broadly shared, albeit underdetermined, common ground underpinning DEIB practices can hardly be attributed to a lack of scholarly interest in the topic. As the DEIB paradigm has become more established both in society and the corporate world, academic interest in it has grown, fueled not only by the societal relevance of the issues involved, but also by the nuanced complexities they display, which make the unified framework mentioned above all the more elusive.

And yet, for all this elusiveness, discourses of DEIB have crossed academic boundaries, and abound in the "real world" of businesses and organizations. The progressive affirmation of DEIB in organizational practice can be seen as a prime example of 'discourse in the making':

while the principles it rests on are not new, the recognition of their importance in organizational contexts is. It is this emerging awareness of the relevance of social fairness issues in institutional discourse that has given rise to an influential, multifaceted discourse of DEIB. This discourse can be seen as the outcome of the mainstreaming of once marginal discourse formations that in time have come to challenge and replace outdated organizational paradigms such as that of Friedman (1962), which seeks to separate business and society, when they are inextricably linked, calling for changes in corporate practices to make them more aligned with changing social aspirations and expectations (Alyson 2024).

4. A discourse approach to DEIB

In turning to discourse to gain a better understanding of DEIB, we adhere to a classic definition of discourse analysis that sees discourse as social practice. In particular, the link between discourse and social change – of which DEIB is purported to be an example – is a firmly established one in discourse analysis, and more specifically in Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). Fairclough's possibly most widely quoted book bears exactly this title (Fairclough 1992), and while the social constructionism upon which the conceptualization of discourse put forth by Fairclough reaches well beyond CDA, a CDA perspective is eminently suitable for investigating discourses of DEIB.

The reason for this is, first and foremost, that such discourses aim to challenge and reject institutional – but first of all, societal – practices that fail to recognize diversity, are based on inequality, and are exclusionary in nature, thus *de facto* hindering the possibility of a feeling of belonging for historically marginalized people. Because of this, these discourses naturally fall within the purview of a CDA approach, which focuses, as is well known, on examining the relationship between language and power in power-imbalanced social contexts with the aim of uncovering the underlying ideologies and power structures reflected and reproduced in discourse. At the same time, CDA's commitment to exposing social injustices also has a deeply (albeit seldom fully realized; Montini 2020) transformative potential: by highlighting how discourse can resist and counter, as well as reproduce, inequality, it shows how it can contribute to social change. Thus – regardless of whether we adopt

an explicit CDA approach – investigating how DEIB discourses are deployed, relied on, or even only tokenistically invoked in organizational discourse can help us identify at least some of the core features of such discourses, as well as the criticalities that beset them.

A critical lens on DEIB is indeed crucial if we want to even only approximate an in-depth understanding of its meaning and implications. Discourse can play a key role in fostering social change; however, it can also be instrumental in maintaining a power-imbalanced, and fundamentally unjust, *status quo*. This is especially relevant in the case of DEIB. While its mainstreaming is undoubtedly welcome, and whereas DEIB and more generally Corporate Social Responsibility principles have definitely contributed to creating the pre-conditions for more equitable and welcoming practices in organizations, the increasing popularity of DEIB has met with a good share of criticism.

In a recent essay, Jimenez-Luque and Hubbard (2023) have pointed that, despite the spike in organizational initiatives aimed at addressing diversity, equity, inclusion and belonging over the last three decades or so, disadvantages among minoritized social groups continue to persist. Indeed, it is a fact that both actions and overall goals of DEIB policies are often the results of decisions taken at the management level by a leadership that continues to be characterized by very limited internal diversity, and whose perspectives are therefore often – inevitably – constrained. A focus on including diverse voices in the implementation of equitable policies grounded in difference, integration, belonging and retention is the key to solving the critique of the weakness of some DEIB programming.

In their review of 40 DEIB-focused graduate programs in the United States, Jimenez-Luque and Hubbard found that "the majority of them view diversity training and the work of DEIB leadership as 'managing diversity' to keep the *status quo* and for economic profit contributing to the commoditization and tokenism of people", further adding that in such programs "there was no mention of power in terms of asymmetries but rather a legitimizing of the accumulation of power with the leader at the top"; they also lamented that, with very few exceptions, "there was little attention given to DEIB as a transformative project committed to social justice" (Jimenez-Luque and Hubbard 2023, 87).

Jimenez-Luque and Hubbard's findings, damning as they appear to be at first sight, can hardly be said to represent the final word on the state of DEIB in the US, or, indeed, the world. For one, they reflect the state of DEIB leadership in a given place at a given point in time; by definition,

they are contingent upon their time-place coordinates and structural limitations such as budget, expertise, marketing, etc. Secondly, they should not be interpreted as an indication that no meaningful change is possible using DEIB frameworks and programs. To argue this would mean to discount the possibility of change altogether, and to succumb to the rather disheartening idea that inequity and inequality will prevail no matter what. Critical appraisal is crucial, as is critical questioning of DEIB principles and of their implementation.

5. This issue

Starting from the recognition that DEIB discourse is polyphonic and intersectional in nature, and that such polyphony may involve competing assumptions and require extensive meaning negotiation, as well as engaging dialectically with existing – or persisting – paradigms, this special issue explores the ways in which DEIB discourse manifests in divergent spaces, places and contexts, and interrogates the possibilities of a global shared framework on these intersectional concepts. While all of these dimensions can and must be addressed in their own right, they more often than not overlap with each other, and are best understood in terms of intersectionality (Crenshaw 1989; 1991). Based on Crenshaw's coining of the term, *Merriam-Webster Dictionary* has added a definition of intersectionality as a concept to create a shared understanding of the concept. It is defined as "the complex, cumulative way in which the effects of multiple forms of discrimination (such as racism, sexism, and classism) combine, overlap, or intersect especially in the experiences of marginalized individuals or groups" (*ibid.*, *ad vocem*). A focus on discourses and policies that address such intersectional needs of people and communities will be the pathway to building robust and sustainable DEIB standards, goals and policy implementations.

The six articles in this special issue of DEIB critically address different aspects of the construct, using a diverse array of analytical methods. As editors, we picked varied applications of DEIB in the context of global transnational realities in multiple global industries with a focus on discourse, meaning-making and praxis. Through our selection, we want to bring forth the myriad of ways in which this work for inclusive futures is flourishing globally. We are conscious of the heavy-lifting we have undertaken to represent the mushrooming global work that is being

done in DEIB, leading a special issue on this topic that covers unusual and interesting applications of this work. In doing this, we have not turned the other way when the research submitted exposed shortcomings or potential misuses of DEIB, either in principle or in practice. Throughout, we have endeavored to balance critical and what we are not shy to call militant perspectives, signaling pitfalls, shortcomings and potential contradictions, but with the ultimate aim of highlighting DEIB's potential and need.

The first article, by Federico Zaupa, follows a line of investigation into the discursive construction and representation of equity in DEIB. Methodologically grounded in corpus linguistics, Zaupa's study explores the occurrences of the deceivingly similar terms *equity* and *equality* in a corpus of CSR/ESG reports, comparing their usage in it with that found in a corpus of general English. Zaupa's starting point is the often observed equivalence of the terms in much CSR discourse, which, however, obfuscates significant differences: "Although they may sound similar, *equality* and *equity* differ significantly in their meanings". As he observes, "the distinction between *equality* and *equity* remains subtle, and their conceptualization is often 'fluid' (Lanfranconi *et al.* 2020, 885)", with "a tendency to promote equity (rather than equality), and complain about inequalities (Klassen 2006, 70)" (p. 24). Zaupa's findings confirm that in CSR/ESG reports, compared to general English, *equity* occurs more frequently and in more specialized contexts than *equality*; moreover, it is more clearly linked to policy design and implementation, whereas *equality* is confined to more abstract, vague contexts. In other words, the reports analyzed appear to highlight the compensatory nature of equity-based interventions, while rarely addressing issues of structured inequalities, which remain unchallenged.

The second article, by Jessica Jane Nocella, focuses on the intersections of inclusion, identity and marketing in the DEIB spectrum. It investigates the strategic use of inclusion discourses in the marketing of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics) toys by a US company called GoldiBlox that targets young girls as customers, a population that is historically marginalized in the STEM field in the global north. GoldieBlox is a company that specifically addresses girls with a view to raising their interest in STEM subjects for career pathways. Using qualitative analysis of the company's website, the paper explores the links between consumerism, gender, belonging, and promotional language. The paper delves into the tension at the intersection of

inclusion and business goals, which is a growth area for many businesses doing DEIB work.

The third article, authored by Raffaele Pizzo, also addresses the use of DEIB discourse for marketing purposes with an exploration of the concept of belonging in LGBTQIA+ communities. He analyzes the strategic communication deployed by the organizers of the New York City DragCon 2019, a major drag queen event, on both their online platforms, as well as the semiotic design of the event itself. The study highlights how the deliberate creation of bonding icons can indeed foster belonging, but consistently subordinates it to commercial logics. Pizzo writes, "DragCon resorted to a two-fold strategy to combine its two main interests: creating a community of belonging and turning a profit" (p. 79). This results in the commodification of identity, inclusion and belonging, which are turned into yet another example of capitalistic appropriation that pits the goals of business against the goals of belonging. He examines "the extent to which the rallying and bonding is money-driven", highlighting "the ties between consumerism and the concept of 'icons selling icons'" (p. 67).

The fourth article, written by Andrea Cifalinò and Erica Cutuli, investigates the discursive articulation of the notion of diversity in two distinct corpora of corporate communication, one composed of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) reports and another of X (formerly Twitter) posts. Using corpus linguistics methods, the authors identify the nuanced articulation of diversity-related topics across the two corpora, finding that CSR reports are characterized by a diffuse vagueness, whereas messages posted on X appear to be "more focused on representation, telling stories and raising awareness, moving beyond merely listing categories to actively engaging with specific issues" (p. 110). This suggests that the less formal/institutionalized, more communicative/flexible environment of social media may be more suitable to the effective communication of DEIB policies and principles. These findings chime with the recommendations recently offered by Confetto *et al.* (2023), suggesting that a key aspect to attend to in DEIB discourse and policies is nuanced concreteness, which can be obtained "abandon[ing] the generic use of D&I messages and instead characterize posts with explicit references to the specific D&I dimensions (and thus initiatives)". For example, instead of using generic statements like "We value diversity and inclusion", organizations can mention specific actions they are taking to promote gender equality, support LGBTQIA + rights, accommodate employees with disabilities, or foster cultural diversity (Confetto *et al.* 2023, 133).

The fifth article, by Agnes Bamford, provides insights into the understanding of the intersectional role of men in their workplace and their families. The study explores the re-conceptualization of paternity leave – both at organizational and at individual level. The article provides a comparative investigation of Global Paternity Leave (GPL) programs launched in 2017 and 2019 in four early mover multinational corporations (MNCs) in the UK and Norway. Bamford's study explores the fathers' sensemaking discourse upon taking parental leave, finding in it a persisting struggle with entrenched self-representations that risk inhibiting change. The study suggests that a re-framing of parental leave, leadership support and proactive organizational intervention are needed for this practice to become trusted amongst male employees and organizational culture. The paper's goal is to extend Diversity Management research towards a corporate measure advocating the inclusion of fathers, thus extending the DEIB discourse to go beyond typical minority groups.

The sixth article, written by Gary Fraser and Fadia Nordtveit, takes a prescriptive, multi-industry approach to summarize the challenges, obstacles, failures and potentials around the visioning of DEIB programs and policies in private and public organizations in the United States of America in the advent of AI. It looks at the ways in which DEIB and AI can inform and impact each other in positive and negative ways if they are not examined jointly in a global workplace context. The article comes full circle, giving structural recommendations on how organizations can incorporate DEIB principles more effectively and holistically in their strategies, policies, programs and overall operations and management at a time of heightened technological flux in the workplace, highlighting the role of discourse in making a real paradigm shift possible.

6. Conclusion

In keeping with the spirit of this journal, which emphasizes the contribution of linguistic and semiotic representations to the circulation of discourses old and new, we will end our commentary by bringing into focus the urgent media discourses around DEIB in global multimedia platforms. Issues of DEIB have been core themes in cutting-edge multimedia content produced by global streamed platforms such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, Hulu, to name just a few (Umoh 2020). The media

discourses around DEIB have contributed to the development of complex, nuanced and global content in television and film that represents people, communities and places in more respectful and responsible ways to a captive diverse, global audience (Zafar 2024). Multimedia contents that incorporate DEIB frameworks in telling stories inclusively and responsibly are gaining widespread momentum, reaching newer audiences with record breaking ratings and high profits. An example of such a DEIB focused show is the *Bridgerton* series in Netflix, which is a genre-bending, high-budget, inclusive runaway hit that happens to also be the most watched show in the history of streaming platforms. Shows like *Bridgerton*, with diverse casts, inclusive stories and nuanced characterizations are becoming an increasing feature in global entertainment. However, that is also not without backlash from conservative, right-wing, racist gate-keepers – for example, the terrible fate of the new show from the famed sci-fi Star Wars franchise, *The Acolyte* (2024), or the new version of *The Little Mermaid* (2023), both with young black women as protagonists (Bero 2024; Morrow 2024).

Stories of failed inclusions are also present, and function like cautionary tales. A newly released, highly-ranked, TV-show featured on the American subscription streaming media service Hulu, *Under the Bridge* (2024), brings into focus the terrifying realities of pristine, picture-perfect northern societies not addressing issues of belonging in their communities. The show is based on the life story of an Indian-Canadian teenager, Reena Virk. Its main premise is that the main protagonist, Reena,

> was eager to fit in with a group of girls, and in a desperate attempt to prove herself, she went after the clique's ringleader, Josephine (Chloe Guidry). All Reena wanted was a sense of belonging. Maybe some respect, too. Instead, she was the victim of catastrophic bullying. (McNeal 2024)

In the show and in real life, Reena loses her life by being brutally murdered in her quest to find belonging in a country (Canada) she was born into and she calls home that made her feel like an outsider, stranger and unwanted for the way she looked and for the food she ate. That is dangerous and unacceptable.

Earlier in the introduction, we wrote, "if diversity is the starting point in the DEIB paradigm, belonging is the goal". Hence, we conclude, with an invitation to you to emphasize fostering belonging in our everyday lives for ourselves and for others at our home, neighborhoods, governments, communities and workplaces.

Media discourses around centering DEIB methodologies and initiatives in storytelling have resulted in overwhelmingly positive impact on communities that are historically under-represented and downright wrongly represented. Studies new and old emphasize that "a sense of belonging – the subjective feeling of deep connection with social groups, physical places, and individual and collective experiences – is a fundamental human need that predicts numerous mental, physical, social, economic, and behavioural outcomes" (Allen *et al.* 2021). Research confirms that a sense of belonging may be just as important as food, shelter, and physical safety for promoting health and survival in the long run (Maslow 1954; Baumeister and Leary 1995). The key to fostering belonging is to understand and implement the vital differences between assimilation and integration. Unlike assimilation, integration frameworks encourage people to preserve their intersectional identities. Following this line of thinking of integration rather than assimilation – organizations, societies, governments, media programs need to reflect the structural willingness to adapt to demographic change, and the belief that doing so would make them stronger and better.

Diversity is the first word in the acronym and the starting point of DEIB discourse; its recognition as something to be valued (Stanley *et al.* 2019) is a precondition for any meaningful talk about the other principles featured in the acronym. Think about it: just because one is invited to a party does not mean that they will end up staying, participating and being included in the party. It also does not mean that the same guest will resonate with the community and form a sense of belonging and commitment to it. Equity, inclusion and belonging all rest on the recognition that diversity must be acknowledged, valued and honored – something that requires a sustained commitment that cannot be taken for granted in societies, cultures and workplaces where inequalities resulting in patterns of exclusion have long been, and frequently remain, the norm. For much of the global work of DEIB, the goal is to create cohesive systems based on difference – to create a new, more inclusive normal. DEIB initiatives aim precisely at creating the conditions where we make space for what is unique, innovative and efficient about building structures and systems that are informed by truly integrating rather than assimilating peoples, cultures, nations.

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