

AN OVERVIEW

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Learn. Act. Celebrate

Practical Framework for Embedding and Bolstering
Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging in
Organisations



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Introduction

Whether motivated by social responsibility or bottom-line benefits, most organisations are striving to build diverse and inclusive cultures where everyone feels they belong. Research shows that diversity and inclusion are not achieved through isolated projects or programmes; they require a fundamental shift in organisational culture. Like any cultural transformation, this is challenging. Many organisations are built upon historically biased systems, and are staffed and led by individuals shaped by those systems. As a result, employees and leaders often struggle to fully appreciate the lived experiences of Black, Brown, LGBTQ+, disabled, ethnic minority, global majority, or other underrepresented groups. This gap in understanding makes it difficult to turn diversity, inclusion, and belonging initiatives into meaningful and lasting change. The LACE framework is a practical, participatory tool that helps drive change within organisations or teams by connecting and involving everyone in learning about, taking meaningful action on, and celebrating diversity, inclusion, and belonging.

This framework is the result of many years of experience and frustrations with the unreliable nature of commitment and investment in inclusion work during my previous roles as a senior leader responsible for building inclusive cultures in large organisations.

I hope you find practical insights here that you can apply to your own work.



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The LACE Framework

In an organisation, embedding diversity, inclusion, and belonging should be everyone's responsibility. The LACE Framework, along with the more detailed Five-Grid Matrix that expands on it, maximises participation by including everyone in the organisation. The framework is built upon three fundamental elements of diversity and inclusion work: Learning, Action, and Celebration. The Five-Grid Matrix further divides these elements into five actionable categories.



Core Elements

The three fundamental elements – **Learning**, **Action**, and **Celebration** – form the bedrock foundation on which Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging must be built for a thriving organisation. The fundamentals must form a complete feedback loop, with each element informing and feeding the others iteratively.

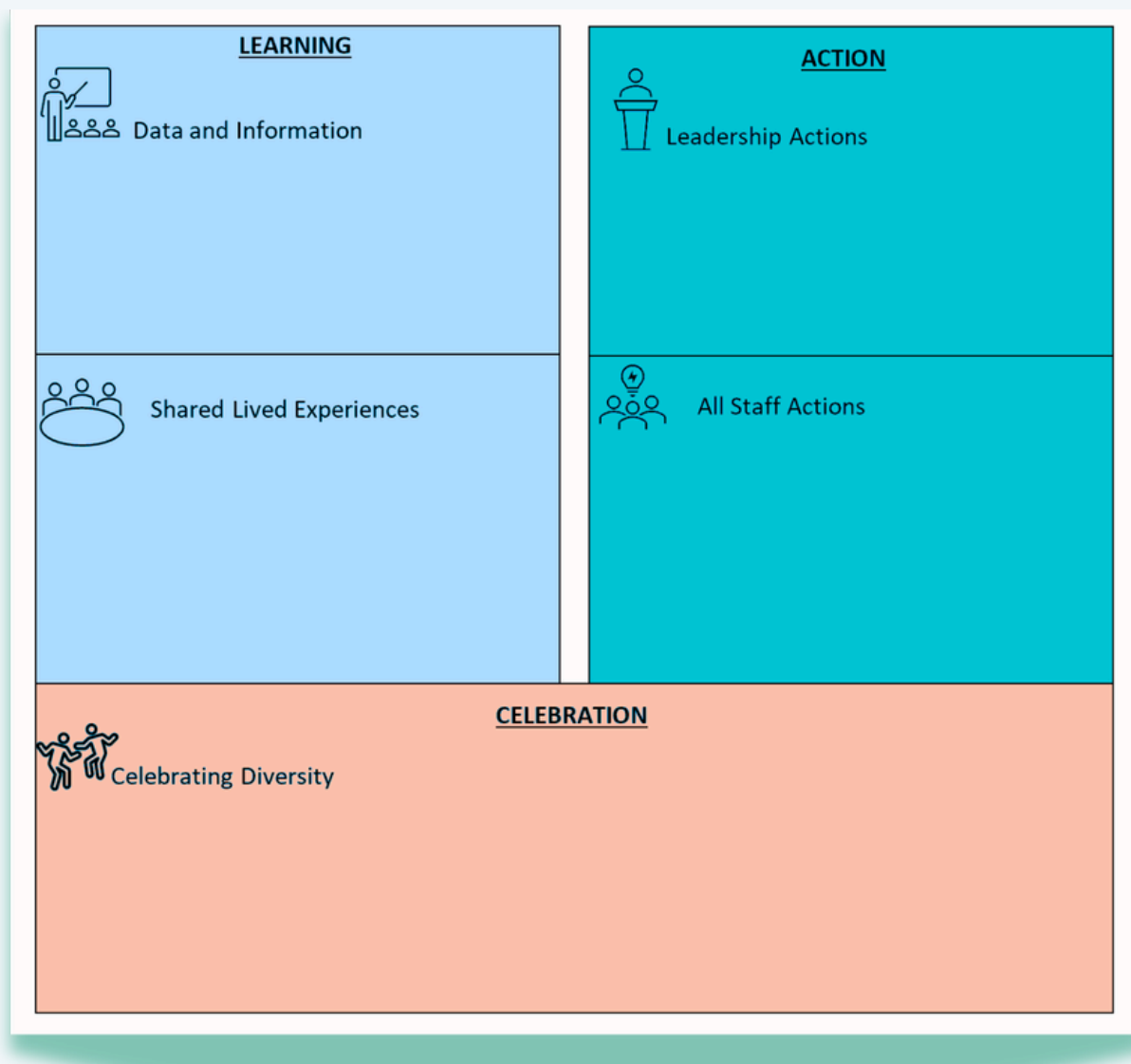
Linearity

The LACE framework is not strictly linear or chronological. Depending on the organisation's or team's maturity regarding diversity, inclusion, and belonging, all elements of the framework can be implemented simultaneously. However, for organisations at the start of their diversity and inclusion journey, it may be more effective to implement the elements in sequence: beginning with learning, then action, and finally, celebration.

Adopting a linear approach does not mean addressing only one element at a time. During planning and brainstorming sessions, it is important to consider all potential actions under each element or category in the grid. Subsequently, you can place greater emphasis on the most relevant element. For instance, in the early stages, focusing on learning activities—such as analysing data, gathering information, and sharing lived experiences—can help build momentum for the work ahead.

The Five-Grid Matrix

The Five-Grid Matrix offers a deeper understanding of the actions required for each element within the framework. Specifically, it divides the Learning and Action components into four distinct sub-categories—two for each—providing a clear and structured path for implementation. These sub-categories are vital for the successful application of the LACE Framework. In essence, the Matrix serves as the recommended blueprint for putting the LACE Framework into practice.





Learning is the foundational element of the framework, as it drives action and shapes celebration. The goal of learning activities is to educate the entire workforce—including underrepresented groups—about diversity, inclusion, and belonging. Traditionally, literature and discourse on diversity and inclusion, particularly regarding race, have emphasised the need for white employees and leaders to educate themselves on these issues. However, simply reading about racism and bias is not sufficient to effect meaningful cultural change. Achieving a comprehensive transformation requires everyone—regardless of background—to actively participate in learning and self-education on diversity, inclusion, and belonging. The Learning element can be divided into two categories: Data & Information and Lived Experiences.



Data and Information



Shared Lived Experiences

Data and Information

Data and Information is the bedrock for understanding diversity and inclusion dynamics in any organisation and driving measurable change. Data and information shine a light on and exposes the truth about diversity and inclusion. This is important because more often, the truth is hidden by our unconscious biases and in-built cognitive biases that lead most employees and leaders in less diverse organisations to only see and perceive a "subjective reality" from their perception of what is "normal" to them. That is why whenever there is a comprehensive survey or assessment on diversity and inclusion, employees and leadership are often "shocked" by the data that comes out. It is important that the organisation collects and shares as much data on diversity and inclusion as is possible. Collect and widely share diversity and inclusion data on:

- Recruitment, Remuneration
- Performance, Promotion
- Leadership, other direct or indirect measures of employee satisfaction



Additionally, seek out and share industry or sector data to provide meaningful benchmarks for comparison.

Data and information serve multiple purposes for leaders, employees, and all:

For leaders

Data equips leaders with insight into the scope and nature of diversity and inclusion challenges. It enables them to prioritise and allocate resources effectively to areas most in need of improvement.

For employees

Access to data ensures that everyone operates from a shared understanding of where challenges exist. This transparency helps launch open, objective conversations about diversity and inclusion, reducing the risk that such discussions are dismissed as personal or anecdotal. For example, a Black employee might share challenges related to promotion or performance ratings. Without data, colleagues who lack similar experiences may dismiss these accounts as exaggerated or unfounded. However, when supported by clear data, these conversations become more productive and credible.

For all

When leaders and employees monitor the same data over time, it establishes a culture of accountability. Leaders are expected to drive change, while employees are empowered to request and expect progress. In this sense, ongoing data collection and sharing acts as a mirror for the organisation—prompting reflection and motivating action to address shortcomings.

Shared Lived Experiences

Behind every data point are the real lived experiences of individuals within the organisation. It is essential for all members to engage in meaningful conversations, especially with colleagues from different backgrounds, to directly share and listen to lived experiences. This practice is crucial because statistics and books about diversity, inclusion, or racism alone cannot provide a full, personal understanding. Data may be perceived as impersonal numbers, lacking the emotional resonance needed for genuine empathy. Similarly, reading about these topics can feel abstract, disconnected from one's own reality.

Creating spaces where underrepresented staff can share their authentic stories allows others to grasp what it truly means—and feels like—to belong to a marginalised group. These exchanges open the door to challenging yet necessary discussions about:

- Unconscious bias
- Microaggressions
- Other subtle forms of discrimination, racism, exclusion etc

It is essential that everyone in the organisation actively participates in these dialogues. Well-represented employees should also contribute by sharing their lived experiences. For instance, white colleagues can, in a safe and respectful environment, discuss the stereotypes they have encountered or internalised about Black people, LGBTQ+ individuals, or other groups. Such open dialogue helps individuals to surface and confront biases shaped by upbringing, environment, or broader culture. These honest conversations lay the groundwork for genuine understanding and empathy among all staff.

For those from minority or underrepresented groups, hearing others' perceptions and helping colleagues understand their realities is fundamental to building mutual respect and common values. When employees openly reflect, challenge assumptions, and share their stories, it fosters a workplace where people are seen as individuals rather than archetypes.

Leaders play a crucial role in cultivating these safe spaces. They must not only facilitate but also actively and sincerely participate in these conversations.





The action element of the framework focuses on taking deliberate steps to advance diversity, inclusion, and belonging within the organisation—moving beyond learning and celebration alone. Crucially, responsibility for action should not rest solely with leaders, DEI professionals, diversity champions, or advocates; every member of the organisation must contribute, and this commitment must be ongoing.

For cultural change to be meaningful and lasting, actions cannot be isolated, one-off initiatives, or limited to projects, programmes, or special events. Instead, action should be woven into the daily fabric of organisational life.

All employees should engage in the activities outlined in the other framework grids. This includes participating in collecting, analysing, sharing, and discussing data, as well as following up on resulting insights. Team members should actively engage with colleagues' lived experiences and participate in recognising and celebrating diversity. These collective actions create momentum, but real transformation requires even more sustained and intentional effort. The following outlines what leaders and all employees must do to drive lasting change.

Employee Actions

Leadership Actions

Employee Actions

Every employee—regardless of background or role—shares responsibility for advancing diversity, inclusion, and belonging within the organisation or team. This collective effort includes both underrepresented and well-represented groups. Key actions for all employees include:

1. Educate yourself

While it may seem self-evident, continuous self-education is essential and applies to everyone, regardless of race, ethnicity, or other characteristics. Go beyond books and formal courses: seek out opportunities to learn through direct engagement with different cultures and communities. Attend workshops, participate in cross-cultural events, and watch films or media outside your usual preferences. These experiences foster deeper understanding than reading alone ever could. If you lack decision-making authority, proactively request opportunities for learning and inclusion. Where possible, allocate part of your personal or professional development budget to further your learning and participation in diversity, inclusion, and belonging initiatives.

2. Demand and engage with data and information

All employees have a responsibility to actively seek out and engage with data and information on diversity, inclusion, and belonging. This may involve helping to provide or gather relevant data when needed. Practical ways to support this effort include:

- Completing staff surveys honestly and thoroughly
- Providing feedback through general observations (e.g., noting instances of inappropriate language or behaviour)

To protect privacy and foster trust, management should enable anonymous reporting so the workplace does not become a “surveillance environment.”

Employees should also use appropriate channels to request ongoing access to diversity-related information and data from management. Regularly reviewing and constructively challenging this data ensures transparency and ongoing improvement.

Finally, use available data to hold leadership accountable for progress. This does not require confrontation; there are many legitimate avenues—such as trade unions, employee staff networks, employee voluntary groups, professional bodies, or communities of interest — to request regular progress updates and support accountability.



Employee Actions ...cont'd

3. Challenge unacceptable behaviours and actions

Challenging unacceptable behaviour and actions is far more effective when the organisation has created a safe environment where all employees are empowered to challenge—and be challenged—without fear of blame or victimisation. If such psychologically safe spaces are absent, advocate for their creation. When the organisational culture encourages openness, learning, and constructive feedback around race, diversity, and inclusion, employees can confidently call out behaviours that are collectively deemed inappropriate, fostering accountability and continuous improvement.

4. Form/join networks & groups dedicated to driving change

As with most organisational culture change, diversity and inclusion initiatives are unlikely to succeed if solely mandated from the top. Lasting progress requires a collective approach in which all employees—regardless of background—take ownership and drive change. Actively seek out or help form groups that champion diversity, inclusion, and belonging within your workplace. These groups are most effective when they develop organically, formed by passionate individuals rather than imposed by management, unions, or other official bodies. Such groups can take on a variety of roles, including promoting learning, organising celebrations, facilitating ongoing dialogue, and holding leadership accountable. When these groups have clear objectives and well-defined goals, they are better positioned to inspire change and garner support from both employees and management. Effective leaders will recognise the value of these collective efforts and align their strategic goals with popular, reasonable aims to ensure the success of diversity and inclusion initiatives.

5. Celebrate diversity

Celebrating diversity is something everyone can do—regardless of role or seniority. You don't need management's permission to take initiative. Seek out meaningful ways to recognise and honour the rich variety of backgrounds, identities, and perspectives within your organisation or team. Some ideas include:

- Nominating members of underrepresented groups for awards or bonuses
- Participating in or acknowledging religious and cultural events

It's important to approach these celebrations with genuine curiosity and respect, rather than as token gestures. Take the time to learn what cultural events and traditions mean to your colleagues and how these occasions affect their sense of belonging. For more ideas on celebrating diversity, refer to the Celebrating Diversity section.



Employee Actions ...cont'd

6. Extent your commitment into your personal life

Let diversity, inclusion, and belonging become a way of life—not just a workplace initiative. Reflect on how you embrace these values beyond work and consider what steps you can take to foster greater diversity in your own social circles, community, and daily habits. Genuine transformation occurs when these values are integrated into all aspects of your life, rather than compartmentalised between ‘home’ and ‘work’. Consistent, universal application is the foundation for lasting change.

Genuine transformation occurs when values of diversity and inclusion are integrated into all aspects of your life



Leadership Actions

Leaders play a pivotal role in cultivating a diverse and inclusive cultures in their organisations. As a leader, your responsibility goes beyond setting goals — you must take visible, concrete actions and hold yourself accountable to the organisation and employees. Effective leadership in diversity, inclusion, and belonging requires the following actions:

1. Educate yourself

Commit to ongoing personal learning by reading, attending courses, and seeking out new perspectives on race, inclusion, equality, and related topics. Move beyond books and formal training: actively engage with different cultures and communities, and expose yourself to unfamiliar experiences—such as films or events outside your usual preferences. As a leader, create opportunities and allocate resources so that all staff can learn and grow in these areas. Dedicate a portion of the learning and development budget specifically to diversity and inclusion, and lead by example to inspire others.

2. Gather information and data.

Diversity, inclusion, and belonging require leaders to seek both visible and invisible indicators of progress. Obtain data that gives an accurate, objective picture of where your organisation or team stands. Collect as much relevant data as possible, but avoid these common pitfalls:

- *Getting bogged down by the data:* Don't let analysis paralyse action. Often, the data confirms what you already know or suspect. Take action based on the minimum acceptable data—remember, improving diversity and inclusion is always worthwhile.
- *Trying to explain, justify, or challenge the data:* Resist the temptation to rationalise uncomfortable results. Accept the data as it is and act on it without doubt or hesitation. Approach the data as if it's painting a better picture than reality, spurring you to set bold, ambitious targets.
- *Making only favourable comparisons with your industry or peers:* Avoid complacency, even if the data shows you're outperforming others. If you're behind, aim to surpass—not merely catch up. If you're ahead, set new standards that inspire others to follow.

“As a leader, your responsibility goes beyond setting goals — you must take visible, concrete actions and hold yourself accountable to the organisation and employees”



Leadership Actions ...cont'd

3. Share and acknowledge data and information

Openly share diversity, inclusion, and belonging data with all stakeholders and recognise its importance in guiding your organisational goals. Use this data to set ambitious, evidence-based objectives, and invite employees, shareholders, and sponsors to hold you accountable for progress. Select meaningful metrics to track performance and evaluate success, setting realistic yet challenging targets.

Be transparent about how you will measure outcomes, report progress, and maintain high standards once goals are achieved. Acknowledge that continual improvement may not be possible on every metric, but commit to sustaining excellence and accountability across the organisation.

4. Create a safe space

This is one of the most crucial—and most challenging—actions leaders can take.

Organisations are structured around rules, codes of conduct, hierarchies, and authority, which can make it difficult to foster truly safe spaces that encourage openness and vulnerability. Many leaders attempt to create designated 'safe spaces' within their organisations—special meetings or sessions where employees are invited to speak freely. However, this approach often falls short, as it implies that other areas of the organisation are not safe, leading employees to view these spaces with suspicion or as mere formalities.

The real goal should be to make the entire organisation a safe space for everyone, at all times. Achieving this requires a shift in culture and leadership behaviour. Here are some ways to help cultivate a genuinely safe environment:

- **Vulnerability:** Share your own shortcomings or biases when discussing lived experiences. In these conversations, step down from your leadership role and engage as an equal, sharing sincerely with your team.
- **Trust:** Demonstrate trust in your employees and teams. Allow them to set agendas and drive discussions, believing in their good intentions. When people feel trusted, they are empowered to act boldly and authentically.
- **Transparency:** Be open about diversity and inclusion efforts. Invite staff to attend board meetings or listen in on discussions without needing to announce themselves. While this level of transparency is challenging, it builds trust by showing you are consistent and genuine.
- **Consistency:** Maintain a consistent stance and messaging on diversity and inclusion across all settings—not just during dedicated meetings or workshops. Let your commitment be visible in everyday interactions and decisions.



Leadership Actions ...cont'd

5. Support groups and networks

Encourage and provide space for self-organising groups and networks to address issues of diversity, inclusion, social justice, and related causes. Avoid sponsoring or orchestrating these groups from the top; true change emerges from people-driven movements, not leadership mandates.

As a leader, your role is to create conditions for these groups to thrive. Offer time, resources, and official recognition so employees can dedicate part of their workday to causes they care about. Remember, not every employee will choose diversity and inclusion, but interconnected causes often advance progress in multiple areas. Supporting this organic activism helps build a culture where everyone feels safe, respected, and empowered to drive meaningful change.

Provide groups and networks with the resources necessary for their success. Actively invest in diversity and inclusion initiatives, even when they challenge you to raise your standards as a leader. Treat these groups as valued allies and sounding boards — leveraging their insights to assess progress, guide strategy, and ensure your organisation's direction remains aligned with its diversity and inclusion goals.

6. Participate in sharing lived experiences

Building a truly diverse and inclusive culture requires genuine culture change—and that transformation starts with leadership. As a leader, your willingness to share your own experiences and encourage others to do the same is essential for fostering understanding, empathy, and trust across your organisation. When employees hear and share personal stories, it builds a common understanding of values, challenges, and biases.

Employees may respond to this type of deep engagement in different ways: some will fully embrace it, some may comply reluctantly, and others may resist or challenge the process. The goal is to achieve authentic buy-in from everyone, as this is vital to long-term success in diversity and inclusion.

One effective approach is to co-create a “safe space contract” within your team or organisation. Invite employees to help define the principles and expectations of this social contract, ensuring everyone's voice is heard. Once in place and signed by all, the contract holds everyone accountable for upholding its standards and creates a shared responsibility to address breaches constructively, without personal blame. For example, the contract might explicitly discourage accusations, focusing instead on dialogue and mutual learning. For example, the contract may state that everyone is discouraged or forbidden from using phrases like:

- *You are racist/sexist/homophobic etc*
- *What you did or said is racist/sexist/homophobic etc*

Instead, people should communicate to their colleagues what they feel

- *When you said ----, it made me feel ---- because ----*
- *When you did ----, it made me feel ---- because ----*

Safe space contracts can be supported by tools like anonymous suggestion boxes or observation boxes where employees can post their ideas, thoughts, observations, experiences anonymously.

Leadership Actions ...cont'd

7. Commit resources

Demonstrate your commitment to diversity, inclusion, and belonging by visibly allocating resources—and ensuring that everyone is aware what resources are available and how to access them. Resources extend beyond a simple budget for a project or programme: they can include substantial funding, hiring or dedicating specialist staff, or setting aside your own time to champion these efforts.

Support all core areas of diversity and inclusion, such as recruitment, promotion, and retention. Appoint or empower someone to lead these initiatives with dedicated focus. Importantly, avoid framing these programs as only for underrepresented groups. True progress means involving everyone in the organisation or team, fostering a culture of shared responsibility and participation.

8. Revise your reward system to eliminate blame culture

Performance management is a critical area where systemic issues, such as bias, can undermine diversity, inclusion, and belonging. Too often, underrepresented groups—such as Black or brown or female employees—receive fewer bonuses, lower performance ratings, and miss out on promotions. Addressing this requires more than surface-level adjustments; it calls for a fundamental shift away from blame culture.

Blame culture occurs when individuals are held solely responsible for weaknesses or failures, overlooking environmental, situational, and systemic factors. This phenomenon, known as the fundamental attribution error, is widespread and affects everyone. When something goes wrong, the tendency is to blame the person rather than considering the context or contributing factors.

To foster a more equitable environment, establish a system—ideally agreed upon and signed by all employees—that refrains from assigning personal blame. Instead, encourage learning from failures, especially in social and interpersonal interactions. Apply this principle consistently: for example, a white employee who makes a misstep should not be labelled as racist, but rather seen as lacking understanding and offered guidance. Similarly, a female employee should not be deemed as underperforming without considering external factors, such as training gaps or other social and biological challenges and differences.

This approach ensures that everyone is treated with empathy and fairness, supporting a culture where growth and learning are prioritised over blame and punitive measures.

9. Align your performance — and that of your management team — with inclusion outcomes

This is the strongest signal of genuine commitment: linking personal and managerial performance evaluations to organisational progress on diversity and inclusion. By doing so, you demonstrate full accountability and ensure that these goals are not merely aspirational but actively pursued. Make these criteria transparent so everyone in the organisation understands how your performance will be assessed—using data and metrics that cannot be manipulated and that are independently verifiable by all employees.

CELEBRATION



Diversity and inclusion efforts—especially those addressing race—can sometimes feel burdensome or uncomfortable, particularly when mandated from the top. This can lead to resistance or reluctant compliance, even among underrepresented groups who may feel singled out. However, diversity and inclusion should be a collective movement toward a better, fairer, and more rewarding future. To sustain momentum and foster engagement, it's vital to celebrate progress and diversity throughout the journey.

Progress

Acknowledge and celebrate achievements in diversity and inclusion activities, projects, and programmes. Avoid framing these celebrations as leadership self-promotion; instead, empower underrepresented groups, networks, and action groups to recognise and lead these celebrations. Celebrating progress requires clear objectives and milestones, supported by continually collected, analysed, and shared data.

Celebrations don't have to be grand—recognise small wins and gestures that signal real change within your organisation or team. Small moments of progress can be just as powerful as major milestones.

Events

Hosting events is another impactful way to celebrate diversity. Organise a calendar of events that represent various cultures, religions, and movements. Ensure these celebrations are genuine, with leadership providing resources and time, and employees actively participating—individually or through groups and networks.

Show, Don't Tell

Apply the “show, don't tell” principle to diversity and inclusion. Symbols are potent tools for visibly demonstrating commitment. Use symbols authentically—such as BlackLivesMatter hashtags, LGBTQ+ flags, and other representations—to show support for underrepresented groups throughout the year, not just during designated months.



Celebration ...cont'd

Representation

Celebrate diversity and inclusion by featuring underrepresented groups across all official platforms—websites, literature, posters, brochures, and at important events. Be mindful to avoid tokenism; ensure representation is thoughtful and honest, not a misrepresentation of organisational reality.

Engagement with Diverse Cultures and Subcultures

Encourage everyone in the organisation to engage comfortably with colleagues from diverse backgrounds. For example, create groups to explore movies, documentaries, or talks with diversity and inclusion themes, followed by group discussions. Such activities foster shared experiences and facilitate open dialogue.

Celebrate in ways that resonate with your team or organisation. Try activities like:

- Agreeing on a movie, documentary, or talk to watch or listen to with a diversity and inclusion focus
- Organising themed dress days, such as “West-African Attire Day,” “Victorian Fashion Day,” “Racecourse Dress Day,” or “Sports Team Uniform Day”

The goal of these activities is to celebrate both diversity and belonging. You may discover surprising commonalities with colleagues you previously saw as “different”—from sports teams to fashion preferences—helping to break down barriers and find common spaces of belonging



CONCLUSION



The LACE Framework and Five-Grid Matrix are not exhaustive checklists—they are powerful starting points for transformative change. These tools are designed to ignite reflection, spark action, and help you reimagine what is possible on your journey toward greater diversity, inclusion, and belonging. So ask yourself:

- **How can you deepen your learning about diversity, inclusion, and belonging?**
- **What bold actions can you take, starting today, to drive real change?**
- **In what new and meaningful ways can you celebrate and elevate diversity within your sphere of influence?**

Don't let the breadth of possibilities become overwhelming. Instead, see it as a sign of how much potential for progress exists. You don't need to tackle everything at once. The most powerful change often starts with a single, intentional step. Choose one action—however small—and commit to it. Diversity, inclusion, and belonging are not destinations; they are ongoing, collective journeys. Each of us holds the power and responsibility to shape the culture of our organisations and our communities. Every action matters. Where will you begin?

Ready to take your impact further? Dive deeper into the LACE Framework and discover actionable strategies, real-world examples, and practical tools for driving lasting diversity, inclusion, and belonging.

Get your copy of the book and join the movement for transformative cultural change.

Dive Deeper

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