

Why most DEI training programs don't work



On the surface, organizational challenges take many forms: lack of accountability, low employee engagement, miscommunications, conflict or resistance, [to name a few](#). But really, these seemingly distinct issues are interconnected symptoms of one central challenge: how individuals see themselves and others in the workplace.

Often, [DEI training programs](#) fail because they prioritize directing employee behaviors instead of addressing the root of unhelpful biases—how people see.

In order to create meaningful behavior change, it is critical that we address and change how people see. This is a fundamentally different approach to DEI from the behaviorally focused approaches that too often leverage guilt as a primary motivator.

As Arbinge's Desmond Lomax has said, "People don't change because they feel guilty. Your culture won't change unless you focus on changing the dehumanizing beliefs and behaviors that are holding your people back."

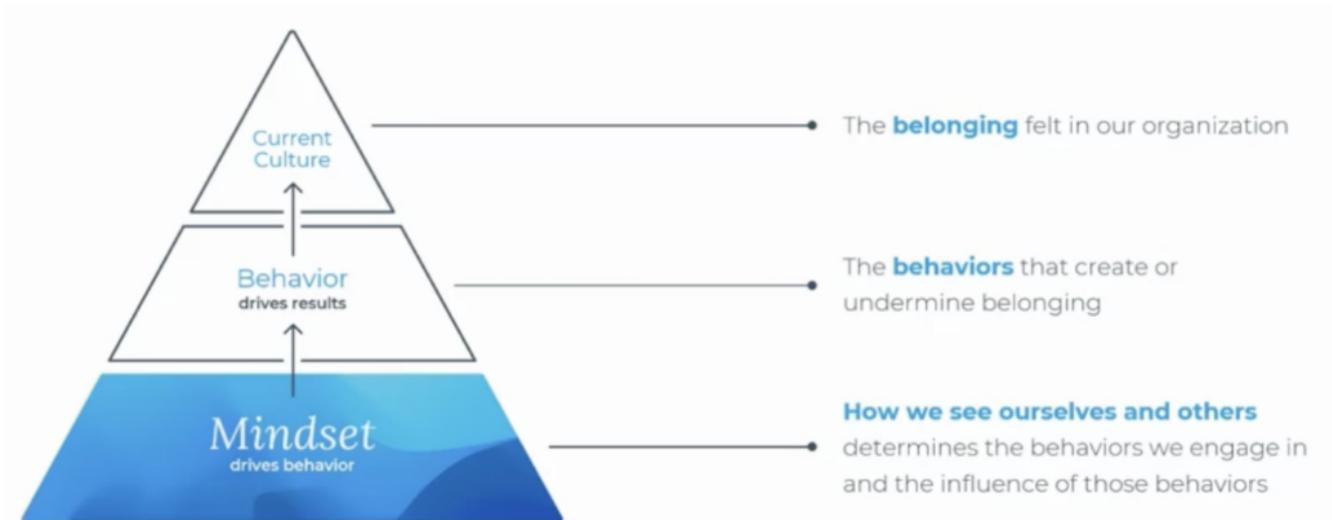
“People don’t change because they feel guilty. Your culture won’t change unless you focus on changing the dehumanizing beliefs and behaviors that are holding your people back.”

Desmond Lomax, The Arbinger Institute

Where most DEI programs fall short

In most cases, DEI programs lean toward two approaches: compliance and behavior prescription. Compliance initiatives often fixate on meeting percentages and ratios to portray diversity and equity, while behavior-prescribing methods dictate right and wrong actions to avoid legal repercussions.

The issue is, neither approach fosters genuine inclusion. Even though behavior change might seem like it’s driving the results you’re looking for, the reality is that it’s just creating tolerance. No one wants to be tolerated—toleration doesn’t create belonging. *Mindset* is what determines how we see ourselves and how we see others, which ultimately leads to the behaviors we engage in. Take a look at the image below to see how mindset sets the foundation for behavior and ultimately, organizational culture.



Without creating an environment of [inclusion and belonging](#), compliance and policy enforcement prove insufficient, leading people to cling to their existing biases, getting in the way of actual organizational change.

Even the most well-intentioned DEI efforts fall short because of inherent human tendencies. People have a natural tendency to underestimate (or entirely disregard) the needs and objectives of others while prioritizing themselves. With this inward-focused mindset, people tend to forget to see other people as people who matter just as much as they do—which is what lies at the heart of true inclusion and belonging.

Recognizing the humanity in others

Our ability to change depends on our readiness to truly connect with the people around us. To effect change, you have to transcend stereotypes and biases, dismantling the walls, scripts and self-justified narratives that degrade or diminish others.

Successful [DEI training programs](#) excel in [cultivating a culture](#) that fosters open, sincere and introspective conversations. These are the types of dialogues that can amplify eagerness and motivation to collaborate—enhancing overall engagement, retention, and success.

Skimming the surface and avoiding the root issues only exacerbates problems, as this often betrays an underlying fear or desire to placate without genuine concern. Real progress demands sincere commitment and hard work.

Below, we highlight what works (and what doesn't) when it comes to fostering inclusion.



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For a lot of people, dealing with feelings and relationships can be harder than dealing with numbers or facts. Leaders and managers need to be ready to spend time and energy working on these kinds of issues, like thinking about themselves and admitting mistakes. Diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) work isn't about blaming people or making excuses for behavior. It's about creating a place where everyone can do their best work. Until organizations are willing to do this, they'll struggle to build a fair and inclusive culture.

If talking about diversity and inclusion feels challenging to

you, it's important to remember that your organization already *has* diversity. Watch this short video from our Director of Diversity and Inclusion, Desmond Lomax, in which he talks about how to celebrate diversity when it feels like an uncomfortable topic:

The impact of mindset on organizational dynamics

Employees operating with a self-focused or inward mindset lack consideration for how their actions and attitudes affect those around them. An inward mindset is a way of seeing ourselves that keeps us focused on our own needs, wants, and goals—often at the expense of others. This perspective places our personal desires above all else, limiting concern for the thoughts and emotions of others to the extent that they serve individual goals.

When it comes to DEI training programs, it's important to consider how an inward mindset not only hinders collaboration, but also perpetuates unconscious bias, leading to exclusionary practices within organizations.

By fostering an [outward mindset](#), individuals can develop a genuine appreciation for diversity and actively seek ways to dismantle systemic barriers. The key difference between an inward mindset and an outward mindset is the focus of our attention: an inward mindset is focused on ourselves and our own needs, while an outward mindset is focused on others and their needs.

Shifting our mindset is crucial for building strong relationships, fostering trust and collaboration, and achieving better outcomes for all involved. This change in perspective not only benefits the individuals themselves but also creates a [ripple effect](#), positively influencing workplace dynamics and fostering an inclusive culture that values the contributions of every employee.

It's impossible to train away behaviors themselves without examining and addressing the underlying mindset behind problematic behaviors. Recognizing the critical role of mindset is fundamental to bringing about substantial change

across companies. To establish a culture that truly embraces DEI, a fundamental shift is necessary, and it goes beyond simply adjusting behaviors.

Setting a baseline for DEI training program success

Understanding how mindset affects DEI training programs is essential to their success. What's most important to understand is how our mindset can either help or hinder our efforts to make positive changes. When we try to understand and assist others instead of blaming them or feeling defensive, we're going to see more impactful (and lasting) results. Approaching conversations with empathy, actively listening, accepting feedback, and recognizing that the success of a group depends on everyone's input, are simple actions that the success of your DEI training program hinges on.

It's also important to recognize that this goes beyond the individual level. Organizations must also prioritize creating a supportive culture that prioritizes seeing other people as people. This may include implementing mentorship programs, training on empathy and active listening, and integrating diversity and inclusion goals into performance evaluations. By integrating this way of thinking into daily practices, organizations can create a more holistic approach that addresses both individual mindsets and systemic biases.

Bringing about lasting change

Conventional DEI programs often fail because they only scratch the surface, not getting to the root of the problem: mindset. We should all be seen as valuable individuals, but too often, we view others as obstacles. To truly change your organizational culture, you need to address the harmful

beliefs and behaviors that hold people back. Organizations need to confront the implicit biases at their source. By shifting mindsets, organizations can pave the way for real change to create inclusive workplaces that embrace diverse perspectives and make everyone feel valued and included.

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