

# Intercultural Competence

## KEY TOPICS

agent identity  
 assimilation  
 bridging  
 capacity  
 culture  
 design justice  
 discrimination  
 dominant culture  
 explicit bias  
 implicit bias  
 intercultural development  
 intersectionality  
 justice  
 mindset  
 nondominant culture  
 norms  
 only  
 stereotype threat  
 stereotypes  
 target identity

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To increase the value of diversity in our profession, we must develop inclusive, equitable workplaces in which unbiased, culturally aware thoughts and actions guide our practice.

This guide outlines the importance of increasing intercultural competence and actively reducing bias in the U.S. architecture workplace against people with nondominant identities—such as people who are women, immigrants, people with disabilities, single, LGBTQIA+, young and old, less educated, or of certain races, ethnicities, religions, or socioeconomic classes—and recommends actions for doing so.



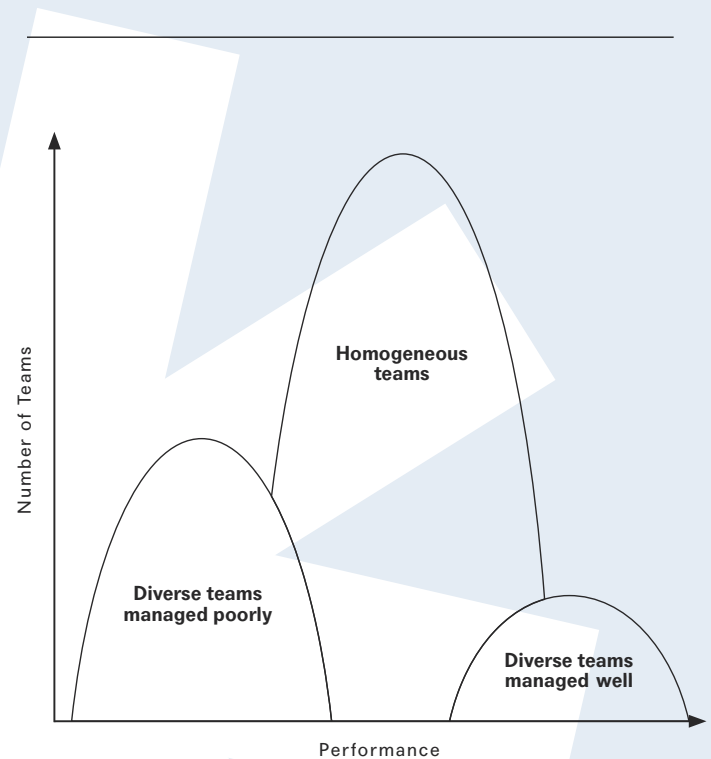
The University of Washington for the American Institute of Architects Equity and the Future of Architecture Committee

# What is intercultural competence?

Increasingly, organizations are seeing the value of workplaces in which differences are recognized as strengths that contribute to reaching common goals. Actively developing inclusiveness is important to support people individually and collectively within the firm, and it also matters for how the firm and its employees connect with individuals and groups outside the firm.

Diversity in architecture—varying the identity mix of employees and leaders—is being encouraged to improve the profession by bringing different perspectives and ways of thinking into our work and by better reflecting clients and end users. Yet diversity on its own is only the presence of difference. Even when groups are diverse, the dominant culture still holds power (for example, a firm with half men and half women leaders does not guarantee that women’s input is equally considered or influential). We do a disservice to our profession to call for diversity alone: the value of diversity comes in what is done with it. For differences to have a positive impact, people must have the skills to work across and gain from heterogeneity.

Mixed groups are more productive, creative, and innovative than homogeneous groups if they have developed the capacity to leverage what everyone has to offer. Without this ability, diversity in some situations may even be detrimental—mixed teams can clash, leading to the perception that they make things “harder” or “not



## TEAM PERFORMANCE AND DIVERSITY

Research has shown that well-managed homogeneous teams outperform poorly managed diverse teams, while well-managed diverse teams outstrip all others.<sup>1</sup>

worth it.” The important question in this context is: how can we best support diverse teams to work well together and thus improve results?

How do we build an equitable and inclusive environment where differences have a positive impact? And how might a homogeneous firm practice inclusiveness and equity? Developing intercultural competence—an individual’s or group’s ability to function effectively across cultures—is one way to address this need.<sup>2</sup> Intercultural competence is the capacity to shift perspective and behavior so as to bridge cultural differences in order to reach identified goals. Intercultural competence is not an innate ability

or a strength of certain personality types or group makeup, it is a developmental capacity. Just like learning a language, it is a skill that is developed over time with practice, by anyone who chooses to make the effort.

Because the ability to function across cultures is not generally taught and personal experience varies widely, people differ in their abilities to recognize and respond effectively to cultural differences and commonalities. According to a leading assessment tool for intercultural competence, the Intercultural Development Inventory, the developmental continuum spans mindsets from monocultural to intercultural. Each person's level of competence for engaging differences and commonalities can be improved through active practice.<sup>3</sup> Competence orientations (and what to practice) are divided into five stages:

- denial - one fails to see the presence of difference (practice noticing difference)
- polarization - one judges difference (find commonalities or pride)
- minimization - one de-emphasizes difference (practice self-awareness)
- acceptance - one deeply comprehends difference (practice action)
- adaptation - one has the capacity to effectively bridge differences (practice defining role, goal, core values)

Currently, a majority of people (about 60%) are in a transitional "minimization" mindset in which they can recognize differences but focus instead on commonalities to maintain their own or the dominant group's comfort or to survive as a nondominant group member within a dominant group. To learn to acknowledge, appreciate, and analyze differences, as well as commonalities, and to use them effectively toward identified goals—rather than shy away from differences—one needs to first develop self-awareness about their own culturally learned thoughts and behaviors. Then, one can begin to more deeply recognize and appreciate cultural differences with others in perceptions and practices and, with practice, be able to shift perspective and behavior in authentic and culturally appropriate ways according to context and goals.

Individuals who have lifelong experience as members of nondominant groups are usually already aware of, steeped in, and adept at adapting to the culture of others (i.e., dominant culture). Readers with dominant culture identities are the most likely to find the topics in this guide to be challenging. For these readers, it may be

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“At its core it’s really about making sure people are having conversations with people who are different from them. You can teach tools, but unless people are actually meeting people and building those relationships, a tool is just a tool.”

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Licensure Candidate and Recent Graduate,  
South Asian, Male, 26

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difficult or uncomfortable to be asked to become more self-aware and build the ability to navigate difference. Facing this discomfort may mean acknowledging active or passive ways that dominant culture has benefited those who share the dominant culture identity.

### CULTURE

To build individual and group capacity to work effectively across people's differences, it is essential to understand culture. Culture is the shared patterns in a social group that determine appropriate behavior and help us make meaning of our environment. We work within and negotiate culture all the time, whether or not we are aware of it. Every group or organization has a dominant culture and subcultures. In white, middle-class, dominant culture in the U.S., certain patterns are the norm—either/or thinking over both/and thinking, individual leadership over groups, expedient decision-making over deliberation. For example, the dominant culture favors perfectionism and taking personal responsibility to avoid mistakes rather than seeing them as opportunities for growth or for celebrating what went well and what was learned.<sup>4</sup>

A common way of understanding culture is with the model of the "cultural iceberg." Cultural aspects that are visible or explicit are represented by the part of the iceberg above water. Elements of explicit culture are things that are commonly easy to perceive, such as how people dress, the language they use, types of spaces they create, and types of food they eat. The unseen or implicit aspects of culture exist below the water line; they are what can sink the ship of a relationship or endeavor if they are not understood and can affect the ability to communicate and work toward shared goals.<sup>5</sup> Examples of implicit culture are subconscious and unconscious attitudes toward work roles (Are people of color and white women expected to be responsible for a firm's

work in equity, diversity, and inclusion? Are Black people really more suited to government and community work?), gender roles (Is it more appropriate for a man or woman to be a stay-at-home parent?), and work ethic (Is someone more committed if they work more hours?). (For more on the cultural iceberg and how to see culture in your team, group, or organization, refer to the *Workplace Culture* guide.)

## IDENTITY

In addition to culture, it is also important to understand identity and how it works. Everyone's identity—race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, citizenship status, social class, religion, age, abilities, and family roles—has multiple facets, both inherent and chosen. Identities can be clearly expressed or discerned (such as an obvious physical disability, perhaps, or conforming gender) or can be more internalized and difficult to see (such as sexual orientation or a hidden disability). Each person's multifaceted identities create complex variations and intersections. Intersectionality means that one identity facet does not stand alone. Identities intersect, so that, for example, Black is not a monolithic category; the experiences and perspectives of individual Black people are infused with all of their other identities and vice versa.

It is a natural tendency of the human brain to categorize experiences to make meaning of ourselves and our surroundings. Even though identities are social constructions, they are very real, given the value and meaning ascribed to the presence or absence of certain identity markers.

Context determines how we judge—make meaning—of identity markers. Identity markers, such as the color of someone's skin or their apparent gender, have been assigned different meanings and values in different cultural contexts. For example, some cultures consistently defer to the knowledge of elders, while others applaud youth and dismiss the contributions of those over a certain age. Whichever identity is the "norm" is considered the dominant identity of that culture; whichever is the minority, or "different," is considered the nondominant identity. Whether or not an aspect of our identity is dominant depends on our specific cultural situation. For example, if you are a thirty-year-old architect in a firm led by thirty-six-year-old partners, being young is a dominant identity. But if you are a thirty-year-old architect in a firm led by partners mostly over fifty, being young is a nondominant identity.

In addition to situationally impacted identity (dominant and nondominant), there are the concepts of target and agent identities. A *target identity* is a social-identity group that is discriminated against, marginalized, oppressed, or exploited by someone of the dominant culture or dominant culture's system of institutions. An *agent*

*identity* is an identity that has advantages by birth or acquisition and knowingly or unknowingly receives unfair benefit or privileges over members of target groups.<sup>6</sup> Target and agent identities are determined by large-scale contexts, such as history or nation, and therefore remain more constant across daily situations than dominant and nondominant ones. In broad cultural contexts, like the United States as a whole, systemic outcomes illustrate the preference for certain identities over others. For example, white men have preferred/agent identity, and women and Black, Indigenous, and people of color have target identities. A variety of examples show preference for cisgender white men (those who were designated as male at birth)—they are more likely to have higher salaries, more likely to have a job in the C-suite, are less likely to be sexually harassed—reflecting the myriad ways in which they are valued as "more than" others.

In terms of how target/agent and dominant/nondominant identity relate, first consider that in the United States, being African American is a target identity and in most architecture firms, it is also a nondominant identity. In a firm that is predominantly African American or led by African American leaders, being African American is the dominant identity group. Even so, because the firm practices in a white-dominated profession and society, being African American would remain a target identity both within and outside of the firm.

In the United States (and therefore in the U.S. architecture profession), target groups include women, Black, Indigenous, and other people of color, poor or working-class people, LGBTQIA+ people, people with disabilities, people without a college degree, and immigrants. Agent groups include men, white people, owning-class (having enough assets to pay basic bills without having to work),

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"I'm still white but I gave up that male privilege. I thought I was pretty open-minded, but sitting here on the other side watching, I missed all the cues. Not only transgender but any marginalized groups or nonwhite, middle-class groups and your female architects, really listen to them.

Don't play lip service."

Firm Owner, White,  
Transgender Female, 60s

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heterosexual individuals, people without disabilities, people with a college degree, and U.S.-born citizens. Most people possess both target and agent identities. The combination of different identities creates what is called intersectionality. For example, a Black woman shares one aspect of her identity with white women and a different aspect with Black men, and both are target identities; however, Black women will not have all the same experiences or perspectives as Black men or white women. It is crucial to understand that most architects are white men who have an agent identity, whether or not they want it. Having agent identities does not necessarily mean that you knowingly or purposefully use our identity unfairly over members of target groups; nonetheless, you benefit from this privilege whether or not you are aware of it. Awareness of advantages that stem from agent identities is the first step in learning how to use one's identity to contribute to racial and social justice.

### BIAS

In the process of increasing intercultural capacity through expanded awareness and skills, culturally learned biases can be recognized, understood, addressed, and minimized. Bias can be explicit or implicit, and both occur at the level of the individual, group, and institution.

*Explicit bias* occurs when one is conscious of their prejudices and attitudes toward a certain group. For example, explicit negative bias could take the form of hate speech toward someone for their sexual orientation or could be overt institutional racism such as race-based housing discrimination.<sup>7</sup> People are more likely to express explicit bias when they perceive a threat to their well-being and may justify unfair treatment toward individuals of that group when they believe their bias to be valid. Social norms against prejudice help people consciously control behavior that expresses their explicit biases, but their biases may remain. In the case of explicit bias, emphasizing commonalities between groups or recognizing a common group identity that includes the target group can help reduce initial tension, and connecting with people from the judged group can begin to build trust. Yet it is important to then go beyond highlighting commonalities to see and appreciate differences between the groups.

*Implicit biases* are the attitudes or stereotypes that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner, are activated involuntarily without awareness or intent, and can be either positive or negative.<sup>8</sup> Nonetheless, it is important to take responsibility for our implicit biases—once we know we may have them, they are no longer always unconscious. For example, imagine Frank, who explicitly believes that women and men are equally suited for careers outside the home. Despite his egalitarian belief, Frank might nevertheless implicitly associate women with the home

more than the workplace (due to dominant-culture messages, such as advertisements or women being paid less than men for their work), and this implicit association might result in biased behavior, such as trusting feedback from female coworkers less, hiring men over equally qualified women, or assigning more career-advancing projects to men.<sup>9</sup> Once Frank learns about bias, he is responsible for recognizing and interrupting it in his own decisions, but in the workplace, he should not need to manage it completely on his own—policies, protocols, and practices should provide him with support to help prevent biased decisions, check his decisions for bias, and provide an opportunity to make corrections.

Biases are conveyed to us by culture, politics, social settings, laws, major events, and mass media. The cumulative effect of these messages is the perpetuation of unchallenged inequalities, such as institutional racism, sexism, or ableism. Even those who are disadvantaged by these biases may perpetuate them because they are socially ingrained via the dominant culture. It can be easy to deny unintentional bias precisely because it is often invisible or goes unaddressed. However, when we acknowledge that we are all receiving messages about who is and is not “acceptable” or “competent,” we can begin to notice, name, pause, and reprogram how we receive that information. Going further, we can investigate our instincts to uncover where we learned certain values, thoughts, and behavior, and monitor, adjust, and improve how we share new messages that do not inadvertently reinforce dominant-culture frameworks. For instance, silence when issues of race come up in conversation can be seen as tacit support for the status quo and as an impediment to actively combating bias.

Many types of implicit bias are common in the workplace.<sup>10</sup> Some of them include:

- anchoring bias (the tendency to rely on the first observation or piece of information available)
- affinity bias (favoring people like ourselves)
- attribution bias (bias in evaluating reasons for your own and others' behaviors)
- blind spot (identifying biases in others but not in oneself)
- confirmation bias (seeking information that confirms pre-existing beliefs or assumptions)
- conformity bias (bias caused by peer pressure)
- halo effect (thinking everything about a person is good because you like that person)

- in-group bias (perceiving positively people who are similar to those in the group)
- out-group bias (perceiving negatively people who are different from those in the group)
- perception bias (inability to objectively judge members of certain groups because of stereotyping)

Bias can affect how we perceive all facets of identity: race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, physical traits and ability, religion, geography, immigration status, family and marital status, education, socioeconomic class, accent and vocabulary, and introversion/extroversion. The impact of implicit bias can lead to inequity in almost every aspect of a business, from recruiting, hiring, onboarding, assignment opportunities, evaluation, promotion, compensation, and leadership composition to everyday behaviors and group culture.

To avoid biased outcomes, simply trying to be fair has limited effectiveness compared to first learning concrete, effective strategies to reduce the influence of bias and then adapting them to your work in the practice of architecture.<sup>11</sup> The likelihood that bias may influence thoughts and actions increases under several conditions:

- during heightened emotional states
- where and when there is ambiguity
- if social categories are easily recognizable
- when the effort put into thinking is low
- under pressured circumstances
- when there is a lack of feedback<sup>12</sup>

Feeling angry, for example, will increase one's biased judgments against stigmatized individuals, even if the emotion is not related to the situation.<sup>13</sup> On the other hand, thoughtful, multifaceted strategies to address conscious and unconscious biases and build intercultural capacity create an environment in which individual and group attitudes and behaviors and institutionalized practices can be queried and improved.

Although everyone holds biases, the advantages experienced by people with agent identities mean that the bulk of responsibility for overcoming bias falls on them. When people with agent identities point out and correct the negative effects of bias, they lighten the mental and emotional load for people with target identities who regularly experience those effects.

People in dominant groups can learn about bias by reading, watching films and videos, actively noticing, and listening to others' experiences and perspectives. These are powerful tools that help those with agent identities to question and examine their assumptions about people or situations. Because bias is deeply embedded in and reinforced by culture, establishing new habits is key to making change. Those who habitually seek ways to see things through the eyes of others can build intercultural fluency that leads to change at many scales.

The following section, "Experiences and Perspectives in Architecture," offers opportunities to practice listening, questioning, and seeing from different perspectives. Even if it is uncomfortable, consider judiciously and respectfully asking questions of others who do not share your identity about their experiences working in the profession and what is important to them about those experiences. While listening, develop your skills in finding both the commonalities with and differences from your own experiences and identities. As your intercultural fluency improves, it will become clearer what actions you can take to be an ally to those with whom you do not share an identity and be a bridge for them to people who do. Established allies and partners can take action for positive change.

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**"People have to get comfortable with the uncomfortable and have the right facilitation approach, acknowledging where there is tension in the room. Set the stage at bias trainings, so people know they may hear things they don't like but are there to learn."**

**Principal and Owner,  
White, Female, 60**

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### EXPERIENCES AND PERSPECTIVES IN ARCHITECTURE

The following perspectives are responses to the questions: What stereotypes, bias, or discrimination do you anticipate, worry about, or have experienced in the architecture workplace and based on which of your identities? How does this expectation or experience affect you or cause you to alter your thinking or behavior?

“I have been very fortunate to have enjoyed and experienced firsthand all of the advantages bestowed on an educated, professional, white male. My workplace experience has been positive and always associated with my ability and experience, never tied to any other identifiers. It allows me to assume that those who meet me are evaluating me, my firm, and our work and are not considering any other factors in selecting or working with us.”

Firm Founder and Principal, White, Male, 60

“I am most concerned about being typecast by my race and gender in a way that diminishes my voice and experience as an individual with her own opinions. I wish that others (such as white males) would speak up more about issues related to gender and racial equity. I feel a responsibility to champion this cause, but I also care deeply about other things. If more white men would add their voices to equity issues, it would provide more space for minorities and women to spend time on other issues that are often more highly regarded by the academy, practice, and society at large.”

Professor, Administrator, and Architect,  
Black, Female, 40s

“The most significant biases toward me are for being female and Asian, and then sometimes looking young. When I sense that someone is engaging with me as if I were in my twenties, I mention that my son is in seventh grade. Or if I feel like they are reacting differently to me because I’m a woman, I might try to be less assertive—or more assertive. And then sometimes I just say, ‘Screw it. I’ll be whomever I want to be and you can take it or leave it.’”

Firm Owner, Asian, Female, 45

“I have not experienced any bias that I can remember. This causes me to go out of my way to be clear, open-minded, and generous to those who I work with, teach, or serve.”

Firm Owner and Principal, White, Female, 53

“I worry about white fragility and having the uncomfortable conversations. A quote from Dr. Robin DiAngelo: ‘Our socialization renders us racially illiterate.’ When you add a lack of humility to that illiteracy (because we don’t know what we don’t know), you get the breakdown we so often see when trying to engage white people in meaningful conversations about race.”

Principal and Owner, White, Female, 60

“I have experienced gender bias. It encourages me to empower others regardless of their demographic.”

CEO and Owner,  
White, Female, 59

“I have experienced racial and gender bias. I do more than needed (overcompensate) in terms of performance and limit social interactions to what is absolutely necessary.”

Educator, South Asian, Female, 50s

“I see an increase in bias against older generations, both male and female, and because of it, we are losing experienced individuals and the firm’s important legacy.”

Principal and Owner,  
White, Male, 45–50

“I am acutely aware that I have to excel at all times. I cannot have a bad day publicly.”

Managing Partner and Firm Owner,  
Black, Male, 46

“As a woman, I worry that when I speak up in meetings, it can be construed as being too mouthy. I am frequently interrupted, and my ideas are often wrongly attributed to the men in the room. When men speak up, they are seen as powerful contributors and leaders. Some of the ways this affects me is that I may hold back from sharing ideas/thoughts, and I have decided not to coauthor works with others (studies show women receive less credit for coauthored work than males), risking not seeming like a team player. I also worry that 1) as a wife/mother, it is assumed that I am not the primary breadwinner and thus do not need raises/promotions, 2) since my partner earns more than me, my career trajectory/earned income/impact potential is less important, and 3) I am judged on my accomplishments, whereas men are evaluated for their potential. The way this affects me is I tend to underestimate the value of my contributions, both in terms of appropriate earned income and effective execution of shared vision/objective.”

Business Owner, Sole Practitioner, and Educator,  
White, Female, Gen X

“I can’t think of any obvious incidents of bias or discrimination. For me, the incidents are more like microaggressions. After years and years, these add up along with my experiences outside the profession (which are much more obviously discriminatory).”

Architect, White, Male, Gay, 38

“I am concerned about bias based on my race, religion, and appearance (I have long locks). With low numbers for African American professionals, there are fewer opportunities for me and my peers. It makes me work from a position of disadvantage. I have to be very proactive and very hopeful that I am provided opportunities. It is an undue pressure and only through the intervention of allies can this be overcome. Navigating basic office politics devoid of racial bias is difficult enough, let alone having to self-advocate for chances to contribute and perform new roles. It makes me have to master my flaws and sharpen my skills above and beyond what is required of my peers in order to achieve a level playing ground.”

Senior Project Manager, Black, Male, 41

“Every day I worry about not being ‘good enough’ and being seen as inferior to my fellow male coworkers. It’s not so much a fear as it is a worry because I have experienced being seen as such. It’s usually about tone and choice of phrasing, for instance, ‘I need you to get this done by the end of the day, do you think you can handle it?’ And if not the choice of phrasing, it is definitely the tone that triggers these thoughts. Because I think that way, I have been known as the overachiever in many different settings due to trying to be the best and not be seen as inferior or less than.”

Architectural Designer,  
African American, Female, 25

“Being Native American, I experience the stereotypes that we all live in teepees, are not educated, live off the government, and don’t pay for health care and taxes. We need to educate others about who we are and that we can be traditional and live in an urban environment.”

Owner, Principal-in-Charge, and CEO,  
Native American, Female, 35–40

“Worrying about how you will be seen or treated can be detrimental to someone’s career development as it could lead to less participation or involvement if a workplace is perceived as noninclusive or apathetic. For example, I worry about gender stereotypes in situations if I’m not considered for a particular project or task or invited to meetings. I always try and consider if I am letting my own fear of discrimination impede me from stepping up.”

Architectural Associate, American Indian,  
Hispanic/Latina, Female, 27

“Even though English has always been my primary language, sometimes people struggle to understand my accent or (occasionally) assume that I am not fluent. While this doesn’t really stop me from achieving, sometimes people misunderstand what I say and I have to elaborate. I find myself having to restate or reword what I say. Sometimes, I spend a lot of energy thinking about how I should pronounce something or phrase something so that I can get my meaning across.”

Licensure Candidate and Recent Graduate,  
South Asian, Male, 26



# Why is intercultural competence important?

Bias—explicit or implicit—creates circumstances that impede working relationships, lead to exclusion, systemically contribute to perpetuating unfair advantages of certain groups, and limit the benefits of equity, diversity, and inclusion. As the architecture profession and its clientele become more diverse and design processes engage more stakeholders, individuals and firms will work in an array of contexts with different cultural patterns. Cultural awareness, or a lack of it, is shown to affect psychological, behavioral, and performance outcomes at all organizational levels.<sup>14</sup>

Dominant culture in the U.S. intersects with the architectural profession, reinforcing many aspects of the profession and making them particularly difficult to change. For example, the trope of the hero-architect is amplified by the white middle-class cultural preference for individuals over groups and emphasis on individual credentials and achievements. And criticism as an expected part of the discipline reinforces dominant cultural norms of skepticism and perfectionism over more supportive, collaborative styles that are often the norm in nondominant cultures. All of this is at odds with today's collaborative practices, desire for work-life balance, and the increasingly diverse backgrounds of practitioners.

## INDIVIDUALS

**Behavior** · Assumptions and biases of all kinds, both overt and subtle, affect the behavior of individuals and those around them. Bias-driven behaviors left unchecked will undermine other behaviors that are meant to be guided by decisions that are intentional, goal-directed, and values-aligned.

**Decisions** · Bias and cultural norms shape how groups determine what is appropriate, including defining the “right” decisions. Project teams who desire conformity or harmony may succumb to groupthink, with members less inclined to question one another or explore innovative alternatives.

**Power** · Bias reinforces inequitable power structures and dynamics between dominant and nondominant groups and contributes to an uneven playing field where gaps are created, reinforced, and amplified over time.

**Health** · The stresses of communication difficulties, misconceptions, and uncertainty negatively affect mental and physical health, with a disproportionate impact on nondominant members. Increasing intercultural competence can spread the discomfort fairly, help decrease emotional and physical exhaustion and burnout, and increase psychological well-being by lowering anxiety.

**Performance** · Building intercultural capacity supports optimism and the ability to regulate emotions (e.g., lower anxiety, frustration, contempt) when working across lines of differences, resulting in clearer communication, increased trust, and strong relationships for creative problem solving.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, a firm climate in which diversity is valued cues individuals to improve their performance in intercultural contexts.

**Networks** · Intercultural competence enhances the ability to connect more effectively with a broad range of colleagues, clients, and stakeholders and develop genuine friendships, authentic working relationships, and innovative cohorts. (See the *Advancing Careers* guide).

## FIRMS

**Recruitment and retention** · Intercultural competence is shown to increase effectiveness in meeting diversity and inclusion goals in recruiting and staffing.<sup>16</sup> When a firm's stated values of equity, diversity, and inclusion are consistent with workplace culture and behaviors, individuals are more likely to be attracted, stay, and recommend it to others. In addition to discrimination, harassment, or even violence, the accumulation of even small slights (termed microaggressions or subtle acts of exclusion, often resulting from implicit bias) contributes to talent leaving firms and the profession. (See the *Recruitment and Retention* guide).

**Teamwork** · Interculturally competent teams exhibit high levels of cooperation within and beyond their group and are more likely to frequently share ideas with those who are culturally different.<sup>17</sup>

**Leveraging diverse teams** · Cultural differences have the potential to either hinder or help effective teamwork, team creativity, and performance. Diverse teams might take longer to arrive at solutions, especially initially, but their solutions may be more relevant and valuable when they build cultural patterns that incorporate a greater range of perspectives and ideas.<sup>18</sup> "Slow down to go fast."

**Leadership potential and effectiveness** · Intercultural competencies include many of the most valued leadership skills, such as providing a sense of safety and belonging, openness, encouraging learning and individual growth, empowering others, and maintaining high ethical standards.<sup>19</sup> A manager's cultural awareness can lead to more fruitful client and partner relationships.

**Markets** · Performance in working with diverse partners and clients improves when cultural awareness is higher firm-wide, and especially across management. Intercultural capacities and skills allow firms to work successfully with multiple types of clients in a variety of locations. Firms that take a stance on equity and social issues that is supported by specific, concrete actions are more credible than those that make broad philosophical statements of values that are only loosely reflected in their practices.

**Capacity for change** · Intercultural competence builds the capacity of individuals and groups to consistently, effectively, and authentically adapt, including the ability to shift perspectives and behaviors in order to drive toward shared goals.

## PROFESSION

**Community engagement** · For individuals with sufficient cultural self-awareness, a key method for increasing intercultural competence is to learn about diverse groups through sustained, interactive civic engagement. Not only can diverse local groups benefit from working with firms that are interculturally effective, but the firms, in turn, build capacity for tackling challenges with a broader scope of clients. (See the *Engaging Community* guide.)

**Quality of built environment** · The ability of our profession to reflect the cultural needs, values, and traditions of diverse groups in the practice of architecture is a key factor in improving the built environment for people across race, gender, class, and abilities. Increasingly, architects are positioned to call attention to differences in the quality of the built environments accessible to communities of color.

**Design justice** · Firms that are diverse and culturally competent and that engage in design justice can contribute to environmental, racial, and social justice and to the alleviation or elimination of, for example, homelessness, substandard housing, and health disparities.

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"Whenever I speak to women, what I tell them is that they don't have to act like a man, think like a man, behave like a man, design like a man to be in the profession. In fact, it's important they do not. The profession needs their perspectives because their perspectives are different. And for African Americans, Latinos, young people, it's important for the profession at large to embrace and capture their thinking to become more relevant and more needed by society."

Architect as Association Manager,  
White, Female, 60-ish

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# Our workplace improves intercultural competence when...

## AWARENESS

firm leaders model responsibility for recognizing and improving their attitudes and biases

individuals actively listen to each other

firm leaders and managers embrace individual differences, perspectives, and communication styles

people know and honor preferred names and pronouns

identity groups openly communicate how they are misunderstood or made to feel they do not belong

statements on social inequities are specifically tied to actions and practices

## DEVELOPMENT

firm leaders set the standards and expectations for noticing, addressing, and mitigating biases

the firm supports inclusive and balanced dialogue

diverse teams and their leaders receive support for holding complex conversations

employees set goals for increasing their capacity to navigate cross-culturally

the firm offers intercultural learning opportunities

marginalized employees and groups are appropriately reconnected to the organization

## COMPLIANCE

unlawful discrimination of any kind is not tolerated

business practices are analyzed for discrimination

firm leaders and members realize what constitutes microaggressions or subtle acts of exclusion, understand their damage, and commit to eliminating them

## INFLUENCE

communication patterns and discussions reflect multiple cultural perspectives

challenges are resolved using a variety of approaches

cultural differences are bridged by adapting strategies

individuals with different levels of intercultural competence cross-mentor

allies deeply understand the views of the people with identities different than their own

groups form to discuss and advocate for specific equity, diversity, and inclusion strategies

# Compliance

This section is intended to introduce you to important legal information regarding discrimination and suggestions for maintaining a discrimination-free workplace but is not a substitute for legal advice. For such advice, we strongly urge you to consult an attorney.

## DISCRIMINATION

Interactions that take place in the practice of architecture may be unethical or unlawful if they reflect intentional or unintentional discrimination. Reducing bias and increasing intercultural awareness and opportunities for open communication in the workplace can help prevent discrimination. All forms of discrimination—whether or not they meet legal standards of discrimination—have serious negative consequences for individuals and firms and undermine the ethical standards and ideals of our profession.

### UNDERSTAND THE LAW AND PROFESSIONAL ETHICS

In the United States, federal law prohibits discrimination in certain contexts against someone on the basis of sex (including gender identity, sexual orientation, and pregnancy), race, ethnicity, religion, nation of origin, age, disability, genetic information, or military service.

In the employment arena, both disparate treatment (intentional and generally directed at a specific individual or individuals) and disparate impact (unintentional) employment discrimination against these protected groups are prohibited.<sup>20</sup> Most states have additional laws prohibiting discrimination, which often include protected classes beyond those recognized at the federal level. Educational institutions are governed by Title IX, which prohibits discrimination in education based on gender and ensures equal opportunity on the basis of sex. Furthermore, all discrimination laws prohibit retaliation against employees who have engaged in “protected activity,” meaning that they have complained of actions they believe in good faith to be discriminatory, or they have supported another employee in pursuit of such a claim.

The following are some key details regarding employment discrimination and claims:

- When an employment policy or practice that appears to be neutral has a disproportionately negative effect on a protected group, it is said to have disparate or adverse impact.
- Disparate impact can result from systemic discrimination (patterns of behavior, policies, or practices that are parts of structures of an organization that create or perpetuate disadvantages).
- The majority of individual employment-discrimination claims are brought under the disparate-treatment theory, which states that an adverse employment action (for example, a failure to hire, demotion, denial of promotion, or termination) is alleged to have been based, at least in part, on the employee’s membership in a protected class.
- Employee-selection procedures—especially testing, education requirements, physical requirements, and evaluations of work samples, as well as pay and promotion policies and practices—are typical topics for disparate-impact claims.
- At the federal level, an employee asserting a claim of discrimination must first “exhaust administrative remedies” before they can file a claim in court. This requires that the employee first file a charge of discrimination with the U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission and obtain a right-to-sue letter. Some state discrimination laws have a similar exhaustion-of-remedies procedure, but many do not require this administrative step.
- Claims are usually decided based on the statistical analysis of data.
- If a policy or practice in question causes a disparate impact, the employer must show that it is both job related and consistent with business necessity.

- Retaliation claims are asserted in a large percentage of discrimination cases. Retaliation claims can be challenging for employers to defend—there is often an issue of whether the employee’s prior complaint played some role in the employer’s ultimate adverse employment decision.
- For the reason above, employers are strongly advised to carefully document their employment decisions and to take seriously all internal complaints by employees, thoroughly investigating and documenting the outcome of the investigation.

The AIA Code of Ethics and Professional Conduct (2018) is explicit about discrimination:

- Canon I, Rule 1.401 states: “Members shall not engage in harassment or discrimination in their professional activities on the basis of race, religion, national origin, age, disability, caregiver status, gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation.”
- Canon V, Ethical Standard 5.1 states: “Professional Environment: Members should provide their associates and employees with a fair and equitable working environment, compensate them fairly, and facilitate their professional development.”
- Canon V, Rule 5.101 states: “Members shall treat their colleagues and employees with mutual respect, and provide an equitable working environment.”<sup>21</sup>

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“I was interested in a leadership position at a firm that was opening a new office. The only reason they could give me for not being selected was they couldn’t see me fitting in the back room, which was all men. (All the women on staff were administrative.) They were concerned they ‘wouldn’t be able to cuss,’ and it would change the dynamic if a woman were there. The partner called and was super-apologetic but said he couldn’t change the mindset of the leadership.”

Workplace Strategist,  
Asian, Female, 39

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# Assess

## AWARENESS

**Where is each person starting from with respect to bias and cultural self-awareness?** · Are employees willing to devote the time and resources to learn about bias and become aware of their own biases? · How are implicit and explicit attitudes affecting performance? · What psychometric tests and guidance are offered for employees geared toward individual development and team building? (See the *Measuring Progress* guide.)

**What biases and intercultural tendencies are dominant in your organization?** · What actions have you taken to highlight or correct them? · How do they demonstrate your firm's position on social issues? · Has your firm done an assessment of all employees' experiences of intercultural competence and bias in the organization? · How do implicit attitudes and common patterns of behavior affect the workplace? · Do allies deeply understand the point of view of those they seek to support?

## DEVELOPMENT

**How are you interrupting bias and building intercultural capacity?** · How does your firm determine what needs to be addressed and who gets to contribute? · What are your equity, diversity, and inclusion goals? · What metrics and benchmarks are used for evaluating change? · Do you form diverse project teams that accurately represent current and prospective client, user, and community perspectives? How do you communicate your commitment to these stakeholders?

**Is intercultural thinking developed as a framework?** · In addition to fostering an individual's awareness of the organizational culture (procedures, policies, norms, systems), is the firm supporting employees in increasing knowledge of the values, social-interaction norms, and patterns of different cultures? · Is everyone taught cultural perspective-taking skills (determining relevance of situational cues within cultural context) so that they can detect, analyze, value, and consider others' points of view? · Do people with agent identities understand the extra burden borne by those with target identities and actively assume responsibility?

## INFLUENCE

**Can employees shift their perspective and behavior in a variety of cultural contexts?** · What intercultural communication skills (imparting and receiving information cross-culturally) and culturally aware interpersonal skills (in showing respect and tact, negotiating with people, building relationships and rapport) are exhibited? · Does the workplace benefit from employees who can culturally adapt (maintaining positive relationships by modifying their own behavior to respect others' values or customs in the pursuit of clear goals)?

**How are you preparing team and firm leaders to respond to comments critical of an individual's or the firm's intercultural competence?** · Are firm leaders and employees sensitive to perceptions about equity, diversity, and inclusion in architecture and actively working to improve them? · Is increased intercultural capacity cultivated at all levels? · Are the organizational vision and core values, as well as mutual interactions and idea exchange between peers and leaders, informed by cross-cultural learning and understanding? · What measurement and adjustment cycles are in place to guide evaluation and development?

# Act

## INDIVIDUALS

Everyone can contribute to disrupting historical cultural patterns that subjugate or exclude certain groups, creating a level playing field for marginalized professionals and increasing the capacity to bridge across differences.

### NOTICE AND NAME CULTURE AND BIAS

Awareness of cultural patterns that reinforce a hierarchy of human worth is the first step toward interrupting those patterns and acting in alignment with your values.

→ **Continue increasing your cultural self-awareness.**

Considering the intersection of your different identities, what parts are you most aware of, and how did you learn the significance of your identities? Is there a difference between the stated value of your identities and the behaviors and interests you may be expected to demonstrate? What parts of your identity are within or outside the dominant culture, and how has that led to advantages or disadvantages you have experienced? If you have experienced advantages, do you take on additional responsibilities to ease the burden on those who do not share your privilege?

→ **Learn how bias works**, where it occurs in the workplace and what its damaging effects are, and what your own biases are. Build your conscious awareness by taking assessments, such as the Implicit Association Test (IAT) and the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI).<sup>22</sup>

→ **Build relationships.** Deepening relationships with those who are different from you can help counter stereotypic associations in the mind and provide new information upon which to draw. At the same time, practice noticing and unpacking the impact of regularly espoused stereotypes.

→ **Be aware of stereotype threat**, i.e., the risk of unconsciously conforming to negative stereotypes about one's own group, especially at critical moments of performance, such as during interviews and presentations.<sup>23</sup>

→ **Become aware of your organization's current cultural patterns.** What are the norms? How have particular perspectives and behaviors been assigned meaning? What has been deemed appropriate and inappropriate? Who decided and how? How are your current patterns serving or inhibiting your ability to get closer to your goals? (See the *Workplace Culture* guide.)

→ **Practice cocreating shared meaning.** The more diverse individual worldviews are, the more differences there are in values and filters, and this can make communication difficult.<sup>24</sup> For instance, if one person views the success of a project as completing a perfectly coordinated drawing set, another person as maintaining a cohesive and happy team, and yet another as achieving a certain margin of profit, agreeing on the goal of a project might be difficult. Think of communication as a process, and keep in mind that context greatly influences what the interaction means to each person, how the individual might react, and their preference for how to coordinate with others. Develop protocols with your colleagues to start a pattern of asking questions that deepen understanding and relationships.

→ **Become an attuned listener**, and attempt to understand the culturally rooted perspectives others may be using—slow down, notice, and unpack assumptions you may be making and ask questions to grasp the full picture of a situation without judgment. This takes practice!

→ **Actively consider multiple perspectives.** One method for this is D.I.V.E.: *Describe* (describe what you hear or see), *Interpret* (think of several interpretations for it), *Verify* (possibly ask others if your interpretations seem correct, but watch out for groupthink or dominant cultural perspectives that back up what you were already thinking), *Evaluate* (evaluate interpretations according to what you and others value).<sup>25</sup>

- **Seek feedback from colleagues or mentors** to gauge if your past behavior or performance has been perceived as fair, if you consistently and effectively bridge differences, and how you could improve.

### KNOW YOUR ROLE AND BE PROACTIVE

Understand your position within your group and how the role you play supports you in taking action to improve any situation. It is important to recognize your positional power (whether power over, power to, power with, or power from within,) as well as any power afforded by your identity. Both are real and have an impact on how you can be an effective agent for values and goal-driven change.

- **Learn to be effective in your communication and interactions.** Communicate thoughtfully and try to receive meaning as it was intended. On the other hand, when someone perceives a remark as racist, sexist, or offensive in any way, the speaker's intent matters far less than the impact on the receiver. Use the Platinum Rule: treat others the way they want to be treated.
- **Investigate your instincts—learn how to correct and interrupt your own biased thinking and actions.** Even our instincts were developed (often subconsciously or unconsciously) because of our experiences with cultural patterns: we have been told or shown what we are supposed to be afraid of, what to value, and what to expect. Practice changing your automatic reactions by making positive associations with nonmajority groups, negating stereotypes, and affirming counterstereotypes.<sup>26</sup> Engage with different role models, ideally through doing meaningful work together. In situations where a stereotype related to another person's identity might affect decisions, reduce negative bias by imagining or viewing images of admired people who have a similar identity.

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“Have the courage to say something if necessary. If a woman is being disrespected or not acknowledged, sometimes it just takes somebody to step up and say or do the right thing. Sometimes it's just about courage.”

Partner and Founder,  
White, Male, 48

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- **Learn when and how to interrupt bias when it is directed toward you and others** by engaging in role-playing scenarios with others. Advocates with dominant and/or agent identities can play an important role by acting as an ally. Interrupting bias, prejudice, and harassment can have a profound impact.
- **Develop conflict fluency.** Remember your goal throughout a situation, and focus on determining what it will take to manage the conflict rather than being right. When respective goals and multiple perspectives are understood, you are more likely to come up with different ways to approach both challenges and opportunities. Increase your capacity to sit with discomfort, and continually check your assumptions.
- **Learn how to frame bias interventions as constructive opportunities.** Aim to respond without embarrassing the person you are questioning and without damaging your own reputation or relationships in the group. By assuming the best intentions of everyone involved, you can act clearly, without judgment, and use the evidence available to support gentle but direct observations, questions, and suggestions.
- **Experiment with and assess bias interventions in order to improve** both individual effectiveness and team effectiveness. Observe and discuss how the intervention felt, what worked, and what you want to try differently. Develop an apology protocol to establish an agreed-upon way for receiving feedback and making amends.

### BE A GOOD MANAGER

Managers play an essential role in growing and maintaining a positive set of intercultural practices that are inclusive and fair for all employees. A myriad of different solutions and interventions can work to create an equitable workplace.

- **Cultivate protocols and patterns for staff to build practices of individually and collectively navigating discomfort** in an open and supportive atmosphere, which will allow uncomfortable but needed conversations to occur. To have courageous conversations, stay engaged, expect to experience discomfort, share your lived experience, and know that closure may not be reached.<sup>27</sup>
- **Foster multicultural teams to understand, incorporate, and leverage their differences** to perform at high levels. One method is for the team to use the framework of M.B.I.: *Map* (describe team member differences and their impacts), *Bridge* (communicate taking into account differences), *Integrate* (bring together and leverage differences).<sup>28</sup>



- **Create an open, dynamic process for making decisions** that impact others, since explicit dialogue can be more helpful than assuming shared meaning, values, and goals. Articulate your own goals and reasoning, and include other perspectives before committing to the decision, rather than after. This helps you evaluate your thought process and also provides others with a clear view on your logic and an opportunity to provide additional information. When receiving information that will be used for making decisions, take notes so that you are able to go back and review rather than rely on memory.
- **Learn to interrupt bias, especially in key situations** when bias consistently occurs and does damage to individuals and organizations. In general, do not exacerbate the impacts of bias due to stereotype threat by calling attention to demographic differences at critical moments, as doing so may adversely affect the performance of employees with nondominant identities.
- **Enforce agreed-upon meeting protocols**, since in meetings, people of color, women, and others from nondominant groups tend to be interrupted more often than cisgender white men. It is preferable to develop protocols together for what works best in your culture to foster inclusivity—consider having a no-interruption policy, sharing the agenda before the meeting, or assigning people specific parts to lead. After meetings, allow people to continue to contribute in case they were not able to do so during the meeting. Meet separately with anyone who consistently interrupts others to make them aware of the impact of their habit so they can change
- **Respect everyone’s personal lives and responsibilities when determining job assignments**, without judging based on your personal views. Do not make assumptions about hours, assignments, or the type of work they can or want to do. Make sure no one is carrying an unequal burden of work, whether or not they have a spouse or children.
- **Discuss upcoming parenthood productively.** Congratulate the person, extend support, and talk through leave policies and transition plans. Do not communicate disapproval or judgment that expresses any personal hardship or inconvenience you or the business will have.
- **Assume that workers of all genders and sexual orientations will need to take parental and other types of leave** at any stage in their career, and work with firm leadership to make full, partial, or intermittent leaves available. Remember that different

people and groups caretake, parent, heal, and grieve differently. Discuss any concerns the employee has, and upon their return from leave, continue to offer career-advancing opportunities regularly. (There is a cultural pattern in the United States of undervaluing and penalizing women who become or are parents.)

- **Beware of tokenism**, and guard against competition between people with similar demographics for limited advancement options. Remember that changing the mix of people (diversifying) is just one part of the path toward equitable practice. It is sometimes assumed that the presence and contributions of any nondominant-culture hire will automatically fix things. However, just because someone is part of a nondominant cultural community does not mean that person is not subject to upholding dominant-culture perspectives, beliefs, and expectations, especially when they are the only member of that community present.
- **Seek to determine if bias might be involved when you perceive a stressed relationship between individuals.** An illustration: when people from underrepresented groups attain more advanced roles, they can have unfair expectations of others in the same underrepresented group. If they had to work harder and/or assimilate to dominant culture to advance, they may expect the same of those

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“I was the only woman in a coordination meeting, and when the agenda came to my scope of work, I spoke up to add information to the discussion. An older male turned to me and said, ‘When you’re fifty and a man, then you can speak.’ Everyone laughed but me. He came by my desk later and put his hand on my shoulder and said with a grin, ‘Hey, I was just joking, you know.’ He never asked me what I thought, or how I felt. In retrospect, I can see how occurrences like this have impacted my understanding of identity and career.”

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Architect and Educator,  
White, Female, 36

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working their way up. For example, women leaders or managers can sometimes be especially hard on other women, often because of their own career acculturation.<sup>29</sup>

- **Make sure that certain groups are not required to demonstrate greater loyalty** than others in order to be recognized or to advance.
- **Ensure that everyone receives the same level and quality of staff support**, since, at times, members of underrepresented groups receive less support. Give clear direction to staff and pay attention, investigate issues, and adjust any related systems as needed. (See the *Mentorship and Sponsorship* guide.)

## FIRMS

Engaged firms can effect change at a structural level. Bias is currently embedded in dominant cultural patterns, values, and frameworks, and bias will continue if the dominant culture is left unchanged. Therefore, in rebuilding new bias-minimizing structures through both individual and systemic actions, firms have the ability to put in place new cultural patterns, cocreated through equitable and inclusive practice, and significantly aid firm-wide and broader industry-wide change.

### UNDERSTAND YOUR INTERCULTURAL CAPACITY AND BIASES

Investigating all aspects of your organization for bias and identifying ways to increase intercultural capacity will reveal opportunities for change and support shared commitment toward achieving your equity, diversity, and inclusion goals. (See the *Measuring Progress* guide for details.)

- **Take a detailed inventory of your organization's patterns and practices**, coming to a shared understanding of your organization's current culture. (See the *Workplace Culture* and *Measuring Progress* guides.)
- **Conduct a review of your organization to screen for bias**, and look especially for signs of systemic bias impacting people of color and women. Include written and visual materials (such as your website, personnel policies, and benefits) in your review, since written information represents your organization's agreed-upon and stated rules, values, and practices.

- **Run regular audits of diversity, and administer climate surveys** or other tools to inventory how systemic barriers are impacting traditionally marginalized groups. (For review and audit suggestions, see the *Workplace Culture*, *Compensation*, and *Measuring Progress* guides.)
- **Hold focus groups with employees with nonmajority identities**. Ask what barriers they face at work, and gather suggestions for how to improve perceptions and behavior. Follow through with targeted actions, and adjust as you learn what works and what does not. If possible, consider hiring an expert for this work to ensure greater candidness.
- **Inquire into the impact of the firm's current decision-making processes**, and examine how they are in or out of alignment with your equity, diversity, and inclusion goals (e.g., ask who is present, who is absent, how is that determined, and if processes are used inconsistently). Look for sources of stress in decision-making processes. For example, when there is not enough time to make decisions, it is more likely that judgments will be biased because one cannot thoroughly review and process information.

### COMMUNICATE YOUR CULTURE

- **Cultivate a shared understanding of the organization's mission and core values**. Include the firm's commitment to intercultural capacity as integral to the firm's activities and decision-making.
- **Insert positive cues into your communications to reinforce an equitable culture**. Your firm's public stance on broader social and racial justice issues, if supported by genuine action, can help make internal conversations about and commitments to equity and inclusion more authentic and trustworthy. Make it clear that the organization values diversity and that it considers the capacity to bridge cultural differences to be a key leadership competency. This can help increase trust by signaling to nonmajority individuals that the firm is serious about including a myriad of voices, perspectives, and cultural practices.<sup>30</sup>
- **Increase the feeling of social belonging in the firm** by ensuring that all are welcomed and are receiving the cues they need to feel that it is genuine.<sup>31</sup>
- **Convey that nondominant groups are seen and valued** by reflecting diverse identity groups in your choice of, for example, art, food at meetings, inspirational stories, and room names.<sup>32</sup> (See the *Engaging Community* guide.)

- **Publicly recognize individuals** who, through their actions, demonstrate commitment to increasing the value of diversity and equitable practices.

### LEAD YOUR CULTURE

- **Increase the representation of nondominant groups** in your organization at all levels. Ensure that their roles and responsibilities are consequential, appropriately compensated, and not merely a token. (See the *Recruitment and Retention* guide.)
- **Consider the role of dominant-culture identities in your policies and practices.** Examine whether your firm perpetuates patterns that have historically disadvantaged some groups. For example, if events or approved days off are currently based on Christian holidays, find ways of recognizing dates that are significant to different cultural and ethnic groups to foster inclusion and engagement.
- **Actively remove barriers** for those with identities that have historically been excluded or disadvantaged. For example, create a communication path between affinity groups and firm leadership.
- **Create an inclusive workplace for transgender and gender-nonconforming employees.** Have established policies and practices relating to gender-identity and presentation-based discrimination, benefits access, record keeping, facilities access, dress codes, and self-identification. In addition to a pronoun policy, make it a norm to offer and ask for pronoun preferences rather than making assumptions based on how you perceive someone's appearance (such as in interviews and email signatures or during onboarding or introduction processes). Allow gender-inclusive pronouns, such as *they, them, theirs, ze, hir, and hirs*, as well as no pronouns for those who request you only use their name.<sup>33</sup>
- **Structure processes in which there is discretion in making decisions to flag and minimize bias** (e.g., candidate selection, hiring, role appointment, compensation, promotion, partnership). Establish and gain precommitment to criteria (to prevent them from being redefined based on desires or biases), remind people of the criteria, and hold decision-makers accountable.<sup>34</sup>
- **Provide intercultural learning opportunities** to foster respectful interactions with diverse groups of people, with time built in for individual and group reflection. Opportunities could include a lunch-time session with someone inside or outside the organization who is willing to share how their identities have impacted the way they view the world and how they are perceived and treated by others; visits to other spaces, places, and leaders with diverse identities and approaches; or a design collaboration sequence with people from different communities.
- **Offer effective training programs and coaching** in implicit bias and intercultural competence.<sup>35</sup> Have training on shared protocols in your firm for nondominant groups to bring feedback and for how your team commits to allyship across multiple lines of difference.
- **Develop the capacity of individual managers to listen and lead.** Create a peer-review process to provide feedback to managers on areas of bias related to important decision-making.
- **Appoint a person or group to check bias and champion intercultural capacity building** (including opportunities to learn, reflect, and try out new patterns of thinking and behaving). Provide protocols for how and when the firm would seek mediation or conflict-management expertise internally and externally. Be conscious of the identity of those tasked with this role and the impact on them, given the additional pressures they face. For example, people from target identity groups may be asked more often and/or find it harder to decline than others.

### PROFESSION

Increasing the inclusion and value of the diverse people and leaders in the profession requires a conscious, concerted approach. This section speaks to practitioners who are involved with architecture groups, societies, and organizations outside of their firm, such as schools and the AIA. Speaking up, making commitments, and following through on matters of social, racial, and environmental justice improves the profession and communities.

### KNOW WHAT IS HAPPENING

- **Conduct focus groups** (ideally professionally facilitated) that span across organizations and types of practitioners to discuss common issues within the practice of architecture and architecture workplaces.
- **Bring in outside experts to share their knowledge and expertise** on bias and intercultural capacity building in the workplace.
- **Visit or reach out to professional groups in other locations and other professions** to ask for and offer new perspectives and strategies on issues important to your group, and attend conferences and other events that bring your group new relationships, learning, and practice.

→ **Stay aware of issues and research** in bias and intercultural competence. Follow sources such as American Association of University Women (AAUW), Catalyst, Cook Ross, Cultural Intelligence Center, Great Place to Work Institute, *Harvard Business Review*, Kirwan Institute, Lean In, Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM), and Women’s Leadership Edge (WLE). Your AIA membership may provide you with additional access to these resources.

#### CHANGE PROFESSION-WIDE CULTURE AND BIAS

→ **Call out the elephants in the room.** For every social inequity, there is a space, place, or environment that supports the perpetuation of injustice. Acknowledging the role of architecture and architects breaks the silence that makes the profession complicit. Whether the topic is gentrification or prisons, engaging in dialogue and seeking deeper understanding of the role, responsibilities, and limitations of our profession is crucial.

→ **Practice equity, diversity, and inclusion in your own organization**—have staff and leadership reflect the broad constituency that the profession is striving for. Consider what qualifications and processes you have developed that can help you recruit and retain board or committee members who span a variety of differences.

→ **Create opportunities for authentic relationship building** across a variety of identities. This is especially important for members of small firms who may feel more challenged in building a diverse staff.

→ **Hire experts to hold workshops** about the impacts of ability, class, race, gender, and sexuality on bias and cultural patterns in our field, both historic and current. Reach leaders to speed up the process of systemic change.

→ **Gather examples of proven practices for reducing bias, and develop concrete strategies** for catching and interrupting identity-driven bias, discrimination, harassment, and violence. Be explicit about the bias to be addressed and try to use profession-specific scenarios on how to do it step by step.

→ **Recognize employers and individuals** through criteria, standards, awards, and publications for building intercultural capacity and minimizing bias in practice.

→ **Publicly highlight a diverse range of types of work by practitioners with nonmajority identities**, such as architects of color, women, and those with disabilities. Organize a long-term plan to portray accurate, bias-free, nontokenizing, and equitable representations in the media.

→ **Work with college and university architecture programs to support diversity and intercultural competence in the profession**, through initiatives like secondary-school outreach and early-career mentorship. Use inclusive, equitable practices when connecting with administrators, faculty, and students, and cultivate cultural and identity awareness in interactions between the academic and practice communities.

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“People have to get comfortable with the uncomfortable and have the right facilitation approach, acknowledging where there is tension in the room. Set the stage at bias trainings, so people know they may hear things they don’t like but are there to learn.”

Principal and Owner,  
White, Female, 60

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# Consider

## I SAW IT OVER AND OVER

I worked at a number of firms of varying sizes, primarily larger, from forty to five hundred. At larger firms, in my experience, there is very, very little diversity. The people of color who were hired were generally hired for clerical, receptionist, mailroom positions—that kind of stuff. I was only one of two Black people working at any given time at any firm that I worked at. There were very few Latino/Chicano folks, if any, and very few Asian architects.

So my experience in those situations was always: you feel like an outsider. You are not generally the first person picked for promotions and for opportunities. You're usually bypassed for somebody who is white and male, with a certain look. Even though that person may not know anything or do much work, that person is generally given credit for a lot of work that the team comes up with and lands on an upward track.

That sends a message to people who don't look like that particular young white male employee that that's the hierarchy. Even though you may be doing the work or be smarter or have better ideas, it doesn't matter. There's an understanding that this is the type of person who's going to advance in the profession and that you're supposed to be a cog in the wheel and let this person take the credit for whatever ideas and productivity come out of the teams. I saw that over and over again.

It was obvious to everybody that this is how things work in this industry. I knew I was going to have to start my own practice if I was going to live up to my fullest potential, that I wasn't going to get the opportunity to really demonstrate my ability at the level that I was capable of.

— Managing Partner and Firm Owner, Black, Male, 46



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DISCUSS:

- What is being seen “over and over”? What types of bias are at play in this story?
- What protocols could lead to consistent noticing and naming of how race, gender, and other identities are affecting work and work culture?
- What are ways to ensure an employee with a nonmajority identity is recognized as and feels like an equal?
- How could the recipients of privileged treatment respond in such situations?
- What are potential strategies for more accurately determining and rewarding contributions within teamwork?
- What is the broad systemic pattern at work here, and what could change to interrupt and dismantle it?

# Consider

## WHERE'S THE ARCHITECT?


I was an intern at a firm when I was in graduate school. It was a [minority-owned] firm. We were in a meeting, and we had engineers in our meeting. At one point the engineer said we needed coffee, and everyone looked at me and said, “Are you going to make us some coffee?” and I looked at them and said, “I don’t know how to make coffee.” They were shocked that I didn’t know how to make coffee. They thought my role was to be the secretary, take minutes, and wait on them. “I don’t drink coffee. But if you’d like I’ll get someone to make coffee.”

Culturally, when people look at me, they expect women in my culture to know how to cook. When I say, “I don’t know how to make coffee,” I get the “you’re worthless” kind of look. My parents never taught me how to make coffee, but give me something to build, I can do that. Now that I’m an architect, every time I go onto construction sites, I hear, “The architect’s here, the architect’s here. Where’s the architect?” They look at me, “But you’re a woman.” I think, “What do you expect an architect to look like?” I think they expect a male in all black, in a suit walking the construction site. They’re shocked and don’t know what to say. Even with other women, when I go to meetings they’ll say, “Where’s the architect?...But you’re a woman, and you’re so young.”

— Owner, Principal in Charge, and CEO, Native American, Female, 35–40

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**DISCUSS:**

- What are the roles of bias and intercultural competence in these scenarios?
  - Who is asked and expected to do office housework (e.g., taking minutes, cleaning up after meetings, planning parties) and why? How might doing office housework affect career progression, and how could it be handled fairly?
  - How can a person who is not recognized or respected as an architect by consultants, contractors, or clients, prepare and respond to unfair behavior or expectations? What can they do if their response does not break through someone's bias or spur a change?
  - What is the responsibility of other people in these situations? In what ways could an advocate help?
- 



# Consider

## SEEING FROM THE OTHER SIDE

I don't know if it's just our training or the male perspective of things, but having spent a couple decades with that white male privilege and then shifting—I'm still white but I gave up that male privilege—I thought I was pretty open-minded. But sitting here on the other side watching, I missed so many of the cues from other team members. Please really listen to everyone, not only transgenders, but any marginalized groups that are nonwhite, or not middle-class, and your female architects. Don't pay lip service. Just take a moment and ask, "Did I really say that? Or did I really just miss that?" We would get a lot more diversity and inclusion in the profession if we really valued everyone's voice. Unfortunately, our training is all we're going to be Howard Roark or Frank Lloyd Wright. It's a team sport, but we're not trained that way in school. We've got to get past that ego and listen. Even before I transitioned, at a larger firm, you'd say, "This is a team effort," and when I'd be leading the team they'd say, "John, you're doing a great job," but when I said "The team did a great job" it was seen as a sign of weakness. We must get past that to get people of all backgrounds to join the profession.

— Firm Owner, White, Transgender Female, 60s

I can't wrap my head around the fact that we still do this—that a woman would make a point and be dismissed and a man take the credit. I know it happens, and it blows my mind that there are people who still do that. I haven't worked on any all-male teams. A big part of the fact that our teams have had women—which is not intentional—is that my wife is my partner.

So from day one, we've been 50% women. Maybe it's subconscious: I know what my wife's been through to get where she is, and I've seen the difference in how contractors or clients treat her. There are a lot of people who assume that she's an interior designer. If it's blatant [chauvinism], we'll have a conversation because it's rude. If it's not intentional, I put her out in front of me. I make it overly clear that she is the leader. She *is* the leader. I defer to her. I ask her, make it clear, I turn to her and say, "This is a question for her," and redirect them. I can't remember a time when someone's been blatantly chauvinistic, but it's very clear that even some women clients treat us differently. That's what you're trying to change.

— Partner and Founder, White, Male, 48

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DISCUSS:

- In the first story, the speaker describes how she observed and experienced bias differently before and after her transition. What types of bias might people in your workplace be experiencing? Whatever your identity, what cues or clues about implicit and explicit bias might you be missing that could be impeding inclusivity and equity in your firm?
- In the second story, the speaker empathizes with his wife's experiences of bias on the job. What events have you witnessed or participated in that have helped you to empathize with someone else's experience of bias in the workplace?
- How does your firm listen to equity, diversity, and inclusion concerns? Whose concerns are being listened to and which individuals or groups are not being listened to? How could you improve your own listening skills to better understand what biases are occurring and when they occur in the workplace?
- In the second story, the speaker feels comfortable calling out bias directly or using actions that attempt to correct the behavior, such as communicating to a client that his wife is a leader. If you witness bias in the workplace, would you feel comfortable calling it out or trying to correct it? Why or why not? How might your own identity shape your comfort level with correcting bias? What strategies could you use to help overcome bias directed at others? What strategies could your firm use to correct bias in the workplace and between employees and clients?
- How might framing project success as a team effort rather than an individual effort reduce or possibly increase bias? What are some different communication strategies that you or firm leaders could use to eliminate bias when celebrating success?

# Consider

## **SPEAKING WHILE FEMALE**


I didn't feel the glass ceiling at the lower levels; people were thrilled to have me....I was the only woman leader in my local organization. They were so excited to have my help and perspective, but the higher I went, the more challenging it sometimes became. When I joined the [influential elected group of architectural leaders], I was thirty-eight, which was really young for the group.

I will never, ever forget this: I had spent the first several meetings sitting quietly because I was so nervous and intimidated. It was mostly men, fifty-two people. We were talking about the structure of the organization, and I said, "To me, it would make sense if the VPs were aligned with the main areas of responsibility in the organization." The then head of the organization said "that was the dumbest thing" he'd ever heard. Ten minutes later, another person, who was a man, said exactly the same thing, and it was accepted, voted on, and passed unanimously. It was appalling that the head of the organization would treat a group member that way. I had trained myself not to cry or show emotion; I cried for two hours in my hotel room. I was so angry and so hurt. The head of the organization called to apologize the next week, but he never really understood why it was a problem.

— Architect and Association Manager, White, Female, 60s

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**DISCUSS:**

- What biases are present in this story? Who is responsible?
  - Could this woman have advocated for herself in this situation? If so, how? What might have been the impact?
  - In what ways could other group members have intervened during or after the meeting? What could be done to help prevent a situation like this?
  - How might you intervene when you see an idea co-opted? Would you feel comfortable interrupting the situation by saying, "I've been thinking about that point ever since [name] said it; I'm glad you brought [her] idea up again"?
  - How can you better ensure that the perspectives of people with nondominant/target identities are sought, included, and valued in mixed-identity groups?
- 

# Consider

## SIMPLE-MINDED

I went to [a historically Black university], so the people who taught me architecture looked like me. Someone from your culture makes architecture a reality for you; you connect to it. It's not a foreign thing that you're never allowed to reach; it becomes attainable. A professor who joined the faculty came in with a different mindset. We were having crits, and he made a comment on a Latino guy's design that I will never forget. He said, "There's a difference between a simple idea and a simple-minded idea." We were all upset, and we complained, and the professor had to apologize to the students the next day. "Destroy to rebuild" doesn't play well in every community. People understanding cultural differences is another thing.

— Senior Project Manager, Black, Male, 41

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### DISCUSS:

- What cultural differences do you think are at play in this situation?
- How could the new professor have navigated this situation more effectively? What could he have said instead?
- What is the difference between a simple idea and a simple-minded idea? What stereotype does "simple-minded" evoke in American culture? Why would saying "simple-minded" be upsetting in this context?
- How could this group determine critique protocols and practices for what is appropriate and communicate them to new reviewers?
- What does "destroy to rebuild" refer to in this story? How does it relate to dominant U.S. and architecture culture? What might be other cultural perspectives?

# Resources

## INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE AND BIAS

### A Conversation on Race – New York Times (2017)

<https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/projects/your-stories/conversations-on-race>

Series of videos features conversations with people of many different races to demonstrate a variety of experiences of people in the United States.

### Cultural Competence: The Nuts & Bolts of Diversity & Inclusion – Mercedes Martin and Billy Vaughn – Diversity Officer Magazine (2018)

<http://diversityofficermagazine.com/cultural-competence/cultural-competence-the-nuts-bolts-of-diversity-inclusion-2/>

General overview of cultural competence and what is required for effective training, including the framework for training and levels of cultural competence.

### Everyday Bias: Further Explorations into How the Unconscious Mind Shapes Our World at Work – Howard Ross – Cook Ross (2014)

[https://cookross.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/everyday\\_bias\\_thought\\_paper\\_021615\\_FINAL.pdf](https://cookross.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/everyday_bias_thought_paper_021615_FINAL.pdf)

Overview on what unconscious bias is, why it happens, and why it is important, including research that has been done on ways unconscious bias is prevalent in the workplace. The second half of the report contains ways to recognize and address unconscious bias.

### Glossary of Terms – Human Rights Campaign

[https://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms?utm\\_source=GS&utm\\_medium=AD&utm\\_campaign=BPI-HRC-Grant&utm\\_content=276004739478&utm\\_term=gender%20RBFEiwApwLevTGFweh3IT3QNQOg7rtd2OBkowlTRUkfg\\_GsjJef00KfinStHpR-whoC-9cQAvD\\_BwE](https://www.hrc.org/resources/glossary-of-terms?utm_source=GS&utm_medium=AD&utm_campaign=BPI-HRC-Grant&utm_content=276004739478&utm_term=gender%20RBFEiwApwLevTGFweh3IT3QNQOg7rtd2OBkowlTRUkfg_GsjJef00KfinStHpR-whoC-9cQAvD_BwE)

Provides terms and definitions to help guide conversations about gender identity and sexual orientation.

### Implicit Bias Review and Annual Reports – Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity (2016)

<http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/research/understanding-implicit-bias/>

General overview of implicit bias and comprehensive annual reviews of current research across different fields. Includes research in assessment and mitigation.

### Racial and Ethnic Identity – American Psychological Association (2020)

<https://apastyle.apa.org/style-grammar-guidelines/bias-free-language/racial-ethnic-minorities>

Up-to-date guide to terms for different racial and ethnic groups.

### White Supremacy Culture – Tema Okun – dRworks

[https://collectiveliberation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/White\\_Supremacy\\_Culture\\_Okun.pdf](https://collectiveliberation.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/01/White_Supremacy_Culture_Okun.pdf)

Describes social norms of dominant, white U.S. culture and their antidotes.

## TOOLS AND TOOL KITS

### The 6-D Model of National Culture – Geert Hofstede

<https://geerthofstede.com/culture-geert-hofstede-geert-jan-hofstede/6d-model-of-national-culture/>

Six fundamental dimensions of cultural differences between nations. A useful framework for diagnosing difference and conflict and bridging gaps.

### Bias Interrupters – Center for Worklife Law

<https://biasinterrupters.org/>

Tool kits and worksheets for individuals and organizations to interrupt bias.

### Building Culturally Competent Organizations – University of Kansas

<http://ctb.ku.edu/en/table-of-contents/culture/cultural-competence/culturally-competent-organizations/main>

Part of the Community Toolbox, a set of chapters that provide actionable steps to improve community-building skills. Chapter 27 focuses on cultural competence; section 7 describes what a culturally competent organization is and lists several ways to build cultural competence.

### Catalyst Resources

<https://www.catalyst.org/topics/unconscious-bias/>

A compendium of Catalyst articles, recordings, posts, and infographics.

#### → Be Inclusive Everyday

<http://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/be-inclusive-every-day>

Series of infographics, overviews, and ways to combat unconscious bias.

#### → Flip the Script

<https://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/flip-script>

Offers alternatives to harmful language in the workplace that reinforces negative stereotypes and hampers individual authenticity. Recommended language regarding race and ethnicity, LGBTQ, women, and men.

#### → How to Combat Unconscious Bias

<https://www.catalyst.org/research/infographic-how-to-combat-unconscious-bias-as-a-leader-in-your-organization/>

<https://www.catalyst.org/research/infographic-how-to-combat-unconscious-bias-as-an-individual/>

One-page infographics for leaders and individuals.

#### → What Is Covering?

<https://www.catalyst.org/knowledge/what-covering>

How people attempt to combat and minimize the impact of negative bias on themselves.

#### → What Is Unconscious Bias?

<https://www.catalyst.org/research/infographic-what-is-unconscious-bias/>

Infographic covering basic definitions, characteristics, and survey data.

### Cognitive Bias Codex – John Manoogian III and Buster Benson (2017)

[https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/65/Cognitive\\_bias\\_codex\\_en.svg](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/6/65/Cognitive_bias_codex_en.svg)

Complete (as of 2016) list of over 180 cognitive biases with links to information on each.

### Diversity Toolkit: A Guide to Discussing Identity, Power and Privilege – University of Southern California (2017)

<https://msw.usc.edu/mswusc-blog/diversity-workshop-guide-to-discussing-identity-power-and-privilege/>

Group activities to facilitate discourse about diversity challenges: identity, power, and privilege.

### Implicit Association Tests – Project Implicit

<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/>

Numerous implicit association tests to help individuals assess their degree of implicit bias. Some categories include: race, gender, disability, sexuality.

### Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) – Mitchell Hammer

<https://idiinventory.com/>

Assessment of intercultural competence. Test evaluates mindsets on a scale from monocultural to intercultural: denial, polarization, minimization, acceptance, adaptation.

### Overcoming Workplace Bias - Society for Human Resource Management

[membership required for access]

<https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/pages/overcoming-workplace-bias.aspx>

Broad collection of resources for ensuring equal opportunity and freedom from discrimination, prejudice, and bias.

# Notes

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