



## Designing workplaces for diversity, equity & inclusion

Savvy business leaders know that diversity, equity and inclusion (DE&I) are essential for a happy, healthy and productive place to work. Does your office tick the box?

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### DE&I makes business sense

According to 2022 research by Gartner, a diverse mix of perspectives, styles and approaches reflects our wider society and fosters better performance.<sup>1</sup>

*75% of organisations whose frontline decision-making teams reflect a diverse and inclusive culture will exceed their financial targets<sup>1</sup>*

*Gender-diverse and inclusive teams outperform gender-homogeneous and less inclusive teams by an average of **50%**<sup>1</sup>*

### An evolving landscape

While most people are familiar with the term 'diversity and inclusion', 'equity' is an addition that addresses fair treatment, equal opportunity and access to information and resources for all.

As well as traditional DE&I factors, such as gender and physical ability, companies should consider newer developments, like neurodiversity and an ageing workforce.

*75% of colourblind people say it slows them down at work<sup>2</sup>*

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.gartner.com/smarterwithgartner/diversity-and-inclusion-build-high-performance-teams>

<sup>2</sup> <https://enchroma.app.box.com/s/edqysublnpo25joj5qilo412ablvzghw>



### **Accessibility**

By law, your workspace must be suitable for people with physical disabilities. This means everything from wheelchair access, adjustable desks and ergonomic equipment to safety and wayfinding signage for the sight and hearing impaired, as well as facilities for service animals.

### **Gender and sexual orientation**

Consider how your office experience impacts different genders, including those who identify as a gender other than the one assigned at birth. For example, you might eliminate transparent staircases, provide milk-expressing rooms and ensure that no signage uses gendered language or symbols. You may also let people share their preferred pronouns through labelled desks and lockers.

*Audio-visual smoke alarms may save a team member's life*

### **Age**

Be mindful of misconceptions about what people need at different stages of life. Older workers may want to use the pingpong table as much as their younger colleagues, while millennials and boomers need good back support alike.

### **Medical needs**

You might account for common health conditions, such as diabetes, asthma and allergies, in the workplace. Does a team member require somewhere to take insulin? Talk to your people to find out specifically what they need.

*42% of the UK workforce is aged over 50<sup>3</sup>*

### **Neurodiversity**

Chances are you have people in your building with neurodiverse needs, whether you know it or not. The term refers to the brain functioning in an atypical way and it can present in many forms, from autism to anxiety. Some may experience over- or under-stimulation by lighting, sound, temperature, texture or smell; some may need to work in a calm, uncrowded space.

### **Faith and culture**

Can you dedicate a room for people to observe religious or cultural customs? If you have an area where you celebrate Christmas, for example, make sure you adapt it for other holidays, such as Eid or Rosh Hashanah. Ensure the language or imagery you use around the workplace is inclusive and sensitive and reflects the diversity of your teams.

*15-20% of the global population are neurodivergent*

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<sup>3</sup> [https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/age-inclusive-recruitment-guide\\_tcm18-101623.pdf](https://www.cipd.co.uk/Images/age-inclusive-recruitment-guide_tcm18-101623.pdf)



## **Your DE&I strategy requires a detailed and multi-faceted approach – with your people at the centre**

### **Workstreams**

Create a team that focuses solely on DE&I from conception to execution. It's their job to apply learnings along the way.

### **Team input**

Ask employees for their thoughts and concerns and the nuances they need. A design rooted in evidence is more likely to deliver a better workplace and encourage self-advocacy.

### **Familiarisation days**

Invite people with specific needs to visit the fit-out as soon as it's safe to do so. Let them test the environment and give feedback. This allows you to refine things before final installation and helps them settle more quickly when the workplace formally opens.

### **Neighbourhoods**

Designate areas for different activities and preferences. For example, quiet zones and playful zones, client zones and collaborative zones – each with the appropriate furnishing and equipment.

### **Futureproofing**

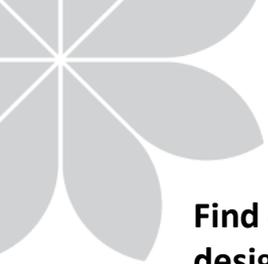
Prepare for your people to age with you. Consider the likelihood of team members developing a degenerative disease or mobility issue. You should ensure that your building – and your medical room – is equipped for a cohort of older workers.

## **Three UK: a case study**

Three UK wanted their people to feel individually valued, so we helped them create a workplace that embraced everyone's diverse needs.

First, we split the office into neighbourhoods: a 'living quarter' with chill room and yoga studio; a high-energy 'play quarter' with games and neon lighting; a 'social quarter' for meet-ups over food and drink; and a 'quiet quarter' with a library, booths and phone pods for individual working.

We installed gender-neutral and disabled-access bathrooms, as well as features for sight- and hearing-impaired workers, such as Braille room-booking panels, audio-visual fire alarms and 3D icons at every tea point. For people with sensory issues, we installed custom controls that adjust lighting through a smart app. And, for everyone who wanted them, we held familiarisation days as an opportunity to walk the floors ahead of opening.



**Find out more about  
designing workplaces for DE&I**

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