

GUIDE

# **How a Broader View of Inclusion Builds Stronger Cultures**

The Business Case for Expanding Inclusion

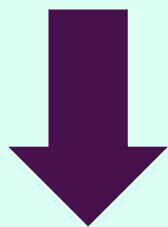
# Why Expanding Inclusion Matters

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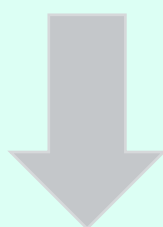
Inclusion is what makes people feel they belong at work. But if our view of inclusion is too narrow, many employees never experience its benefits.

It's no surprise we're seeing troubling declines.

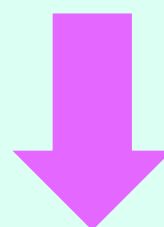
## From 2024 to 2025:



**12%** decrease  
in employees who feel  
like they can be  
themselves at work



**13%** decrease  
in employees who feel  
included on their team



**13%** decrease  
in employees who feel  
psychologically safe at  
work

*Data from Seramount's 2025 report, [DEI Backlash Revisited](#)*

The cause? If employees don't recognize their own experiences in inclusion efforts, they are less likely to feel the benefit and more likely to disengage.

But when employees do feel like they can be themselves, the payoff is powerful: They are [5.7 times more likely](#) to be engaged and [70 percent more likely](#) to stay with their organization.

By broadening the scope of inclusion—acknowledging the many dimensions that shape how people experience work—leaders can cast a wider net. The result: More employees feel seen, culture grows stronger, and the employee experience improves.

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***Employees who feel included are far  
more likely to stay and engage.***

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# Broader Dimensions of Inclusion

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Employees' experiences of inclusion are shaped by multiple dimensions: some visible, some invisible, some inherent, and some shaped by circumstance. Any one of these dimensions can influence whether an employee feels like they belong.

A helpful way to think about these dimensions is across three categories:

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## Internal Dimensions

*Inherent traits and lived identity*

- ▶ **Age/Generation:** [90 percent of older workers](#) report experiencing age discrimination. At the same time, younger generations—especially Gen Z—are often targets of bias, creating intergenerational tension.
- ▶ **Neurodiversity:** Conditions such as ADHD, autism, and dyslexia bring distinct strengths in creativity, focus, and pattern recognition. Without awareness or support, however, those same differences can become sources of misunderstanding and exclusion.
- ▶ **Disabilities:** From mobility to vision to hearing, visible and invisible disabilities shape how employees experience work. Small factors—such as accessible design, flexible policies, or microaggressions—can have an outsized impact on inclusion.

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## External Dimensions

*Shaped by environment or experiences*

- ▶ **Socioeconomic Status:** Class background influences confidence, access to networks, and comfort in professional settings. Bias against accents, clothing, or credentials can inadvertently exclude employees with valuable perspectives.
- ▶ **Religion:** Faith-based ERGs are among the fastest-growing affinity groups, a trend echoed in rising requests Searamount receives on the topic. Still, religious expression can be stigmatized, and scheduling norms often ignore key observances, creating friction for employees.
- ▶ **Family Status:** Being single, married, a caregiver, or a parent shapes availability and stress in different ways. Workplace cultures that assume one “standard” family model risk alienating large portions of their workforce.

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## Organizational Dimensions

*How we work together*

- ▶ **Seniority or Tenure:** New hires may feel excluded from decision-making, while long-tenured employees risk being overlooked as “stuck in their ways.” Inclusion means creating space for both fresh and seasoned voices.
- ▶ **Department:** Sales, IT, HR, and operations often operate with different cultures and languages. Silos can reinforce exclusion, while cross-functional collaboration unlocks innovation.

These categories represent just some of the many ways employees experience inclusion and exclusion. Most employees embody multiple overlapping identities and experiences, which means no one dimension tells the full story.

# The Opportunity of a Broader Scope

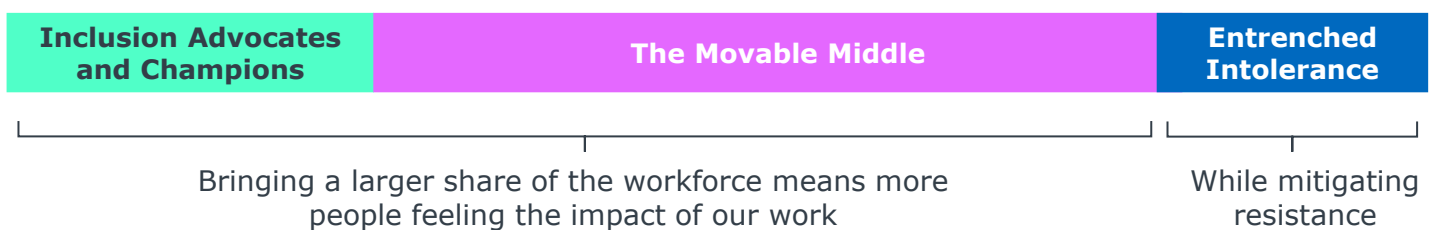
Broadening the definition of inclusion creates new energy for this work.

For too long, DEI has relied on two groups:

- The champions who are already committed
- The detractors who will likely never be persuaded

Neither group offers much room for growth.

Instead, the real opportunity lies with the **movable middle**—employees who aren't opposed to inclusion but haven't yet seen how it connects to their own experience.



## Engaging the Movable Middle

When leaders expand the conversation to include dimensions such as caregiving, faith, socioeconomic background, or age, those employees start to recognize themselves in the work. An abstract value becomes a personal connection.

And once inclusion efforts start to reach more employees, they are more likely to feel connected to the organization and more motivated to contribute and stay.

This shift matters because it:



### **Builds understanding**

Employees see that colleagues also carry multiple layers of identity and experience, fostering empathy and connection.



### **Strengthens culture**

As more people feel included, belonging and psychological safety increase.



### **Drives results**

Higher engagement translates into stronger performance, collaboration, and retention.

Yet most organizations haven't fully tapped this potential. Only [31 percent of HR leaders](#) say they've increased investment in belonging efforts.

Broadening the scope of inclusion offers a practical way to close that gap, engaging more employees without requiring entirely new initiatives.

# Securing the Future of Inclusion

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Right now, inclusion is under sharper scrutiny. In early 2025, executive orders targeted “[race- and sex-based preferences](#)” as dangerous, demeaning, and immoral. That kind of rhetoric has made inclusion harder to defend in some organizations.

But broadening the scope changes the conversation. It makes inclusion safer, more sustainable, and more appealing to executives because it highlights dimensions that resonate with every employee.

When leaders see inclusion as a culture-building strategy that benefits the many, not a compliance program for the few, they are more likely to invest in it. And when employees see themselves in this work, belonging grows stronger, turnover falls, and performance improves. Expanding the definition doesn’t dilute inclusion; it secures it.

## How to Talk to Executives About Expanding Inclusion

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### Reframe the Value

“Inclusion is about building a culture where every employee feels like they belong, not just about compliance or checking boxes.”



### Highlight the Breadth

“Employees connect to inclusion through many dimensions, not just the categories that dominate the headlines.”



### Tie to Risk

“Nearly half of turnover is tied to culture. If employees don’t feel included, they leave; that costs us.”



### Signal Resilience

“By broadening our approach, inclusion becomes less vulnerable to political headwinds and more clearly tied to business outcomes.”

# How to Build High-Performing Cultures

The next phase of inclusion and culture work will look very different from the last. The challenges leaders face today demand a more expansive, proactive strategy.

Through our research and work with more than 600 partners, Seramount has identified six pillars that define the path forward. Together, these form a roadmap that helps organizations move from reactive responses to external pressures toward a proactive approach that builds resilient, high-performing cultures.



▶ Ready to explore how these six pillars can future-proof your strategy for 2026 and beyond? [Contact us](#) to start the conversation.

## Explore More Resources



### Watch the Webinar

[How to Make the Case for Inclusion in 2025](#)



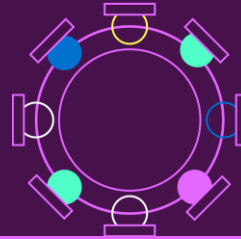
### Get the Tool

[Communicating About Inclusion in a New Legal Landscape](#)



### Read the Blog

[5 Business-Critical Risks of Scaling Back Inclusion](#)



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