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# FOSTERING WORKPLACE CIVILITY THROUGH A DEI LENS

## SUMMARY

In a world where incivility seems to dominate headlines and social media feeds, the workplace stands as a crucial venue to foster respectful dialogue and inclusive behavior.

While National Civility Month shines a spotlight on these issues, the challenge of creating civil workplaces persists year-round. This article delves into how we can transform our approach to workplace civility by viewing it through the powerful lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

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## Fostering Workplace Civility Through a DEI Lens

In an era of heightened polarization and divisiveness, it's crucial to address the importance of workplace civility. However, to ensure civility benefits all employees, let's examine it through the lens of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

### The Science of Civility

We react more strongly to threats than to rewards. For example, we respond more quickly to threats to our way of life or values than to promises of social stability or unity. This is why divisive issues grab our attention more than efforts to find common ground.

The NeuroLeadership Institute's SCARF® Model (status, certainty, autonomy, relatedness, and fairness) can help us shift our perspective and use civility to send reward signals to others. For example, respectfully addressing a co-worker's concerns in a meeting (fairness) or consistently including diverse voices in discussions (relatedness) are acts of civility that create positive experiences.

The SCARF® Model not only helps us regulate our emotions but also fosters a sense of belonging and shared vision, leading to more collaborative and civil communication.



# The Intersection of Civility and DEI

The challenge lies in ensuring that civility doesn't become a substitute for meaningful DEI work. Let's examine how civility intersects with each element of DEI.

## Diversity

Civility must acknowledge and respect diverse backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives within an organization. What's considered civil behavior can vary across cultures, regions, and even departments. For instance, making eye contact and engaging in small talk might be seen as friendly in some cultures but intrusive in others. A truly civil workplace recognizes these differences and adapts accordingly rather than enforcing a one-size-fits-all approach to politeness.

## Equity

Civility without equity can perpetuate existing power imbalances. Consider the common practice of asking the most junior team member to take notes in a meeting. While this might seem like a polite delegation of tasks, it can effectively silence their contributions and devalue their perspectives. True civility in an equitable workplace ensures that all voices are heard and valued, regardless of position or seniority.

## Inclusion

An inclusive approach to civility goes beyond surface-level politeness to create an environment where everyone feels they belong and can contribute fully. This means not just tolerating differences but actively seeking out and valuing diverse perspectives. Inclusive civility might involve adapting communication styles, ensuring accessibility in all interactions, and creating spaces where all employees feel comfortable expressing their ideas and concerns.

## Civility vs. Respect: A Crucial Distinction

As we strive to create a more civil workplace, it's essential to recognize the distinction between civility and respect.

Civility involves acting politely and adhering to social norms, while respect acknowledges the inherent worth and dignity of individuals, fostering positive relationships. We can be civil without being respectful, and it's crucial to move beyond superficial politeness to create a truly respectful and inclusive environment. This means not just being nice but also working intentionally to understand and value the perspectives of others.

## A Holistic Approach to Workplace Civility

To truly foster a civil workplace, organizations must prioritize DEI alongside their efforts to promote respectful behavior. This means not only establishing clear expectations and guidelines for civility but also ensuring that these expectations are inclusive, equitable, and respectful of diversity. It's crucial to advocate for a holistic approach that recognizes the unique needs and experiences of all employees.

By integrating civility and DEI, we can create a work environment that celebrates diversity, encourages open dialogue, and empowers everyone to contribute meaningfully. This not only benefits individual employees but also strengthens the overall organizational culture and performance.

As we reflect on National Civility Month, let's challenge ourselves to move beyond superficial acts of politeness and instead embrace a comprehensive, DEI-informed approach to workplace civility. Only then can we cultivate a truly inclusive and thriving work environment where civility and DEI work hand in hand to create a respectful, equitable, and inclusive workplace for all.

Organizations interested in implementing brain-based DEI solutions can partner with the NeuroLeadership Institute to **interrupt bias, integrate inclusion, and invoke systems.**

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## About Our Organization

The NeuroLeadership Institute (NLI) is a global cognitive science consulting firm that was the first to apply neuroscience to leadership. Our purpose is to make organizations better for humans through science. Our mission is to be the world leader in science-based, data-driven behavior change at scale.

Since its inception over 25 years ago, the Institute has united the world's foremost neuroscientists, leadership researchers, and organizational practitioners with the purpose of transforming how we think, develop, and perform. With operations throughout North America, Europe, and the Asia Pacific, NLI is a strategic advisor to hundreds of leading global organizations, including over 65% of Fortune 100 companies.

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