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Mindsets

The power of “I” in equity

A guide on how we as individuals can practice advancing equity

From boardroom tables to kitchen tables, many are having conversations about equity and what needs to change. In the workplace, we often look to leaders to fix systems and address systemic biases. We hope these “top-down” changes result in a more equitable landscape for all individuals of an organization and its vendors, customers, and clients. But many of us wonder what does working toward the ultimate goal of a more equitable organization and society mean for those of us who aren’t in the C-suite and/or don’t have “diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging” in our job title? Do we also play a role?

Deloitte defines equity as the outcome of diversity, inclusion, and anti-bias actions wherein all people have fair access, opportunity, resources, and power to thrive, with consideration for, and/or elimination of, historical and systemic barriers that have existed in society.

Deloitte’s DEI Institute™ proposes that everyone, across all levels of an organization, can play a role in advancing equity.

In 2021, Deloitte published *The Equity Imperative*¹, a bold perspective that defines equity as an outcome and explores the power of organizations to advance equitable outcomes across the workforce, marketplace, and society. With this guide, “The power of ‘I’ in equity,” we explore how each of us, as individuals, can identify and recognize the importance of our role, responsibility, and the power to advance equity. After all, the workforce, marketplace, and society are all made up of all of us, individuals who can and do influence each other.

While “The Equity Imperative” focused on equity for Black individuals in America, the call to action was to address inequities for all identities. “The power of ‘I’ in equity” guide is meant to further advance our thinking on how we can play a role in driving more equitable outcomes for all identities, such as gender, race, ethnicity, LGBTQ status, disability, and age.

The power of the “I” refers to the power all individuals have, across all levels of the organization, from C-suite executives and middle managers to frontline workers, to make a difference. Whether through lending your access and influence on existing efforts, active support of new initiatives, or visibly sponsoring actions, you can make a difference. Understanding your role means acting within your capacity and joining others to drive equitable outcomes.

¹ The Equity Imperative. (2021). Deloitte United States. <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/pages/about-deloitte/articles/the-equity-imperative.html>

How can I make a greater impact? Where do I start?

Seven practices to advance equity

These seven practices that the DEI Institute established help to develop a holistic approach to awareness and action, across all encounters, whether professional or personal. They serve as a helpful guide to use and revisit when seeking to understand how to engage in new circumstances or contexts. We make suggestions on how to engage in these practices and have provided a few self-reflective questions to keep in mind as you engage and learn. Continuous self-reflection can be challenging, so, frequently revisiting these ideas may be helpful. The goal is to make a practice of this work, leading to an overall mindset shift that will guide the habits you develop, the choices you make, and the impact you have on those around you.



Observe: Take notice

Identify patterns in outcomes

Take time to notice how things work for individuals with different identities. As you make a practice of noticing patterns through this new lens, strengthen this awareness by listening to others with experiences different to your own, demonstrating empathy, and asking questions to build an understanding of all the small, seemingly innocuous things that can and do make the difference. Understand that your own experiences may not be typical, and that those of others are worth exploring to understand how things *really* work—especially where the connection between everyday individual behaviors and systemic outcomes may not be clearly apparent to you. Notice whether systems and social structures may assign disadvantage to individuals with some identities and not others. If the practices, policies, protocols, and processes *seem* fine, yet do not result in fair outcomes for everyone, ask yourself *why*.

An example question to consider as you practice:

What perspective or input might I be missing, when considering everyday work decisions and the impact of those decisions on others?

Acknowledge: Make it plain

Reflect on your journey

As you are noticing what is happening around you, be vulnerable and honest with yourself about all the support and resources that were available for you. While we understand hard work and fortuitous connections, we should also understand how differing circumstances can sometimes lead to very different outcomes, and how systemic privilege may prescribe outcomes for individuals. Practice by continuously seeking to understand, learn, and make connections to the potential root causes of these. Your own history often sets the context for how you got to where you are, how your experiences influence your perspective, and how that context and experience inform what you believe is possible. Embark on a genuine exploration of your influence to make change. Keep an open mind and be flexible as you clarify for yourself what you are willing to watch happen, and what you are willing to challenge.

An example question to consider as you practice:

How have I benefited from the status quo? How have I lost? Do the rules work the same way for everyone? Why might I need or want to challenge the status quo?

Question: Find your why

Follow your curiosity

Let curiosity be your north star. Make a deeper and personal connection with *why* challenging the status quo at this moment is important to you. Begin by understanding that equitable outcomes for yourself are often connected to equitable outcomes for others. Humility and honesty with yourself about what you do and do not know, can help you identify where you may have more to learn, and seek new and different experiences to expand your understanding.

An example question to consider as you practice:

How do I feel when I allow myself the freedom to reimagine what is possible? How does this connect to me and everyone around me?

Challenge: Shift your perspectives

Reassess your beliefs

It can often be difficult to change our minds, especially when we have been taught to view the world in particular ways. Our beliefs shape our experiences and behavior. Practice by proactively challenging beliefs—your own, and those that underpin the values and behaviors that support the status quo. This is often uncomfortable, and our inner critic naturally resists. If you are willing to sit in the discomfort long enough to challenge your beliefs, you may find other underlying values that are contradictory with your goals and intentions. You will be preparing to change behaviors and move beyond dealing with surface issues to examine and address root causes.

An example question to consider as you practice:

What can I learn from people with different identities, and how can I use these diverse experiences, opinions, and insights to inform or change my perspectives?

Accept: Own your role

Embrace your responsibility

Identifying your responsibility on the equity journey takes ownership and accountability for what is within your spheres of influence. Be intentional in the actions you take and clarify how those actions can address root causes that result in equitable outcomes. Driving toward equity can be a long and sometimes arduous process. Remain committed to what you can do in this moment, while aiming for long-term impact. Owning your role means understanding and accepting your personal responsibility, capacity, and power to make change.

An example question to consider as you practice:

How do I make a practice of starting with the objective of equity as an outcome in every decision and interaction?

Act: Take small steps to bold actions

Build momentum for sustainability

To make meaningful change, start with what and whom you know. As you push yourself from your comfort zone to your challenge zone, explore the difference between actions that are comfortable, and those that have real impact. Being bold may mean facing challenges. What's more, those bold actions will build momentum and have the power to transform. As you allow different perspectives and experiences inform your actions, be intentional in how you address root causes. Focus on the long-term impact and remind yourself that today's action can be one of many building blocks for realizing transformational and sustainable change.

An example question to consider as you practice:

How do I take (and facilitate) actions bold enough to address “upstream” activities and practices to help drive more equitable outcomes?

Connect: Champion together

Commit to collective success

There are likely other individuals who have similar ideas. Recognize and engage those who have been involved in and committed to change. Connect and join with people of different identities, perspectives, strengths, and talents to envision, strategize, and execute bold actions. To address seemingly unsolvable problems may require creativity and innovation, where diversity is only the first step to making the most tangible and impactful difference. Consider how you can amplify other efforts and how your ideas are amplified through different influential channels. Consider where you can listen and leverage your social capital. Make the connections between these efforts and learn how active allyship can support mutually reinforcing efforts and goals.

An example question to consider as you practice:

How can I multiply my individual impact by working in collaboration with others towards equitable outcomes? How can I support the efforts and success of others, as if they are my own?

Advancing equity is both an organizational imperative and a personal, life-long journey. No matter your role, making real, sustainable change requires a commitment and willingness to learn, adjust, and grow. Just as a musician practices their instrument to the best of their ability and joins other musicians to create a choral, band, or orchestral performance, we can work together to make something bigger and better than any one of us could do alone. Harnessing the power of "I" in equity can be rewarding for you, empowering for others, and beneficial to your organization. Practicing together can increase your collective impact as you take bold actions to advance toward equitable outcomes.

Look for additional research to be published later this year.

Connect with us

Joanne Stephane

Executive Director, DEI Institute™
Principal, Deloitte Consulting LLP
+1 617 437 2061
jstephane@deloitte.com

Heather McBride Leef

Managing Director, DEI Institute™
Deloitte Services LP
+1 973 602 6034
hmcbrideleef@deloitte.com

Kashima Atwood

Leader, DEI Institute™
Deloitte Services LP
+1 513 723 4151
katwood@deloitte.com

Dr. Dhanushki Samaranayake

Research Manager, DEI Institute™
Deloitte Services LP
+1 212 492 3504
dsamaranayake@deloitte.com

Special thanks to our contributors

Christina Brodzik

National Leader – Diversity, Equity,
and Inclusion Client Service Practice
Principal / Deloitte Consulting LLP

Devon Dickau

Senior Manager
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
Client Service Practice
Deloitte Consulting LLP

Sameen Affaf

Research Manager, DEI Institute™
Deloitte Services LP

George Hardy

Senior Consultant, Human Capital
Deloitte Consulting LLP

Dr. Julian Sanders

Market Research Lead, DEI Institute™
Deloitte Services LP



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