Building a Foundation for Belonging

Creating a Culture Where Everyone Feels Valued

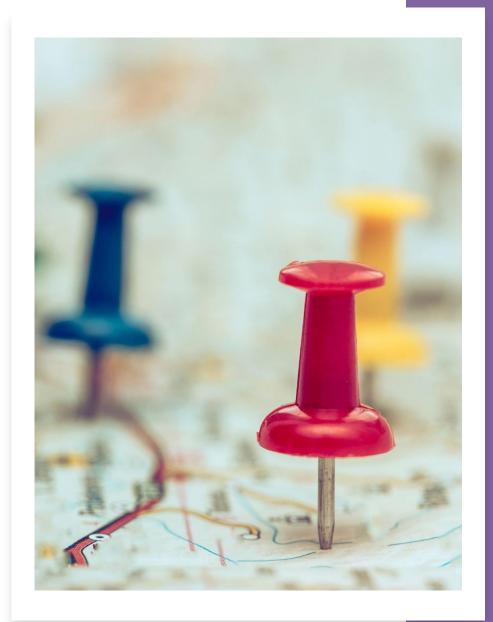Presented by Jose Johnson

Lancaster Area Sewer Authority (LASA)

Opening Thought

"Diversity is a fact. Inclusion is a choice. Belonging is the goal."

Session Roadmap

1. Common Language

2. The Many Dimensions of Diversity

3. Why Diversity Matters

4. Challenges & Considerations

5. Creating Comfort & Belonging
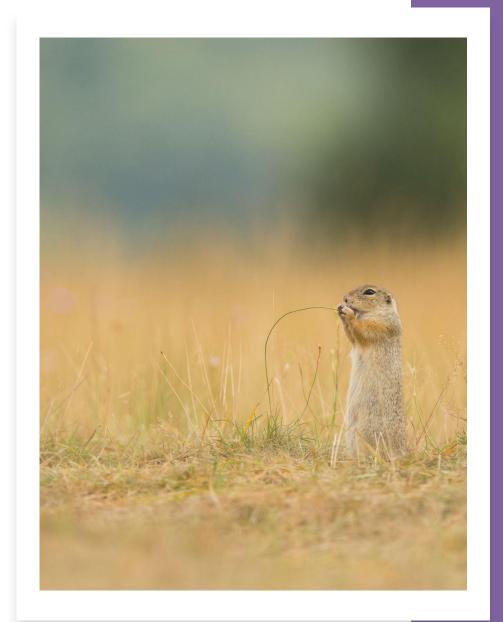
6. From Awareness to Action

Icebreaker: Common Ground

Activity: Find 3 things you share with a partner — unrelated to work.

Icebreaker: Common Ground

Connection starts with curiosity.

Common Language

Common Language

Diversity

Equity

Inclusion

Belonging

Common Language

Diversity – The presence of differences

Equity

Inclusion

Belonging

Common Language

Diversity – The presence of differences

Equity – Fairness in access and opportunity

Inclusion

Belonging

Common Language

Diversity – The presence of differences

Equity – Fairness in access and opportunity

Inclusion – Intentional involvement of all voices

Belonging

Common Language

Diversity – The presence of differences

Equity – Fairness in access and opportunity

Inclusion – Intentional involvement of all voices

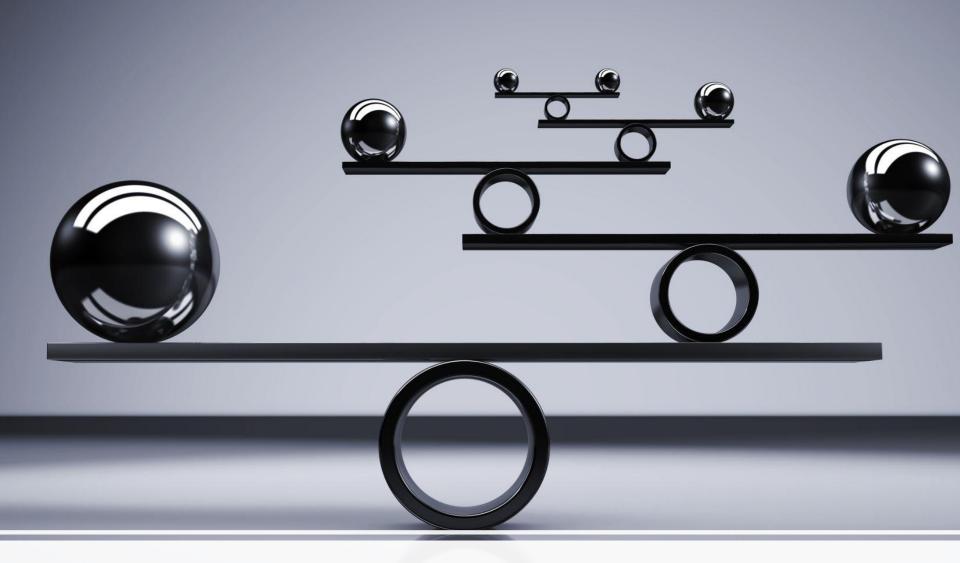Belonging – Feeling safe, valued, and accepted

Reflection

WHAT AREAS IS LASA STRONG IN?

WHAT AREAS NEED MORE ATTENTION?

Biases

What Are Biases?

Bias is an **"inclination or predisposition for or against something"**, representing a tendency or preference that can influence responses, perceptions, or actions .

APA Dictionary of Psychology

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Cognitive Bias** – A systematic error in thinking that affects the judgments and decisions we make.

- **Implicit Bias** – Unconscious attitudes or stereotypes that influence our understanding, actions, and decisions.

- **Explicit Bias** – Attitudes or beliefs we consciously endorse about a group or individual.

- **Social Identity** – The aspects of a person's identity derived from belonging to social groups (e.g., race, gender, generation, religion).

- **Stereotype** – A generalized belief about a group that may not accurately reflect reality.

- **Prejudice** – A preconceived opinion not based on reason or experience.

- **Microaggression** – Subtle, often unintentional, behaviors or comments that can convey bias or exclusion.

Common Workplace Biases

1. **Confirmation Bias**
   Seeking or remembering information that confirms existing beliefs while ignoring evidence that contradicts them.

Reflection: How do I check for assumptions before making a judgment?

Common Workplace Biases

2. Affinity/Similarity Bias

Favoring people who are similar to us in background, interests, or experiences.

Reflection: Do I give equal opportunity for input to everyone on my team?

Common Workplace Biases

3. Attribution Bias (Fundamental Attribution Error)

Judging others' actions as character flaws but excusing our own as situational.

Reflection: Do I ask "what happened" before deciding "who's at fault"?

Common Workplace Biases

4. Halo/Horns Effect

Letting one positive or negative trait overshadow all others.

Reflection: Do I evaluate people based on one moment or on their overall performance?

Common Workplace Biases

5. Conformity Bias
Changing opinions or behavior to match a group, even when it conflicts with personal values.

Reflection: When have I gone along with the group to avoid standing out?

Common Workplace Biases

6. Perception Bias
Forming assumptions or stereotypes about groups that affect how individuals are seen or treated.

Reflection: How can I challenge assumptions I make about certain roles or demographics?

Common Workplace Biases

7. Anchoring Bias
Relying too heavily on the first piece of information encountered when making decisions.

Reflection: Do I let first impressions outweigh later evidence?

Common Workplace Biases

8. Status Quo Bias

Preferring things to stay the same, resisting change even when improvement is possible.

Reflection: What routines keep us comfortable but hold our team back from growth?

Common Workplace Biases

9. Groupthink
Prioritizing harmony or consensus over honest discussion or diverse perspectives.

Reflection: Do I make it safe for others to disagree or offer alternative ideas?

Reflection

Which of these biases do I recognize in my daily decision-making?
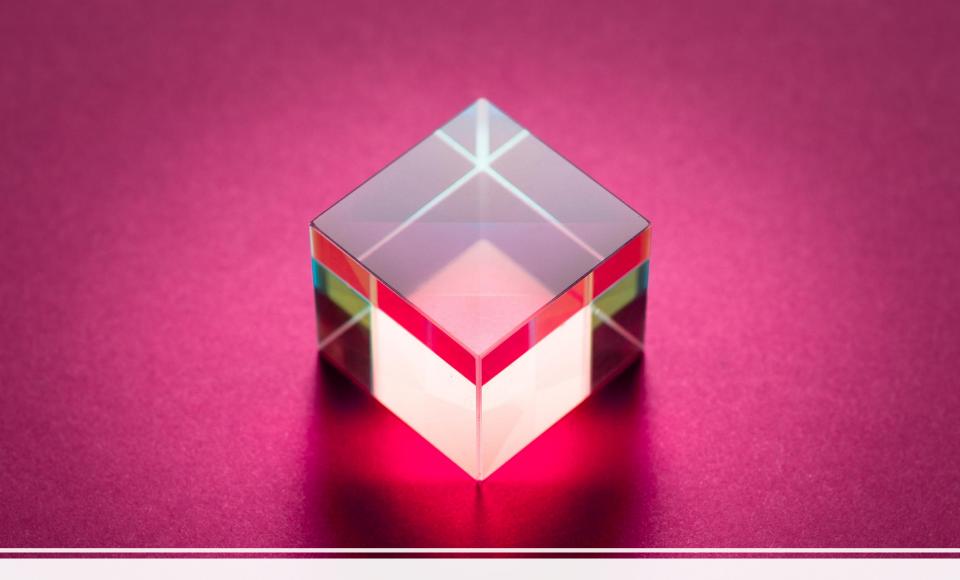
How can I interrupt bias before it affects my behavior or choices?

What systems or habits could my organization strengthen to reduce bias and increase fairness?

The Many Dimensions of Diversity

The Many Dimensions of Diversity

Diversity includes:

- Race and Ethnicity
- Gender and Identity
- Age and Generation
- Communication Style
- Culture
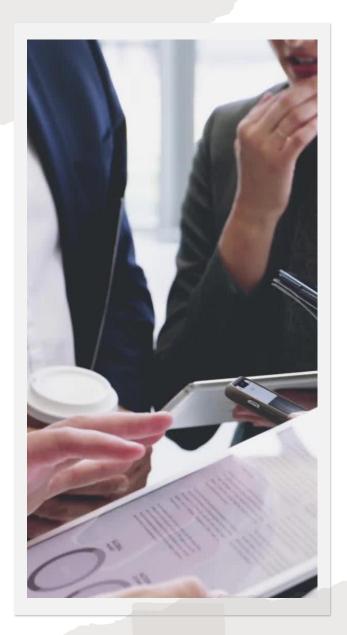- Thinking and Learning Styles
- Abilities and Experiences
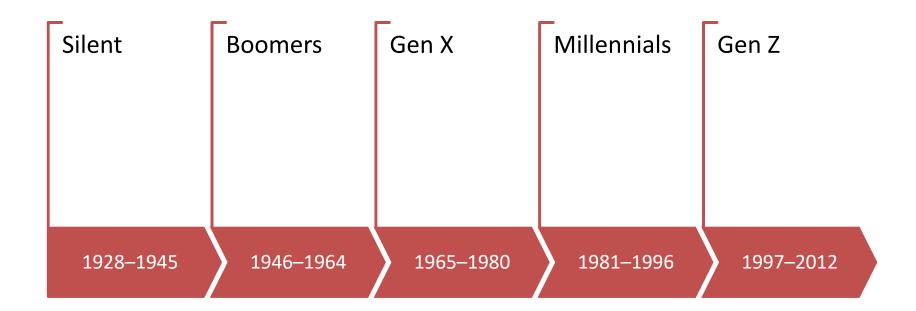
Why Diversity Matters

Business Case:

- +33% profitability (McKinsey)

- Faster problem solving (HBR)

Human Case:

- Belonging → higher engagement & innovation

Intergenerational Diversity

Silent	Boomers	Gen X	Millennials	Gen Z
1928–1945	1946–1964	1965–1980	1981–1996	1997–2012

Silent (Traditionalists)

Strengths / Advantages

- Deep loyalty and strong work ethic
- Value discipline, duty, and reliability
- Respect for hierarchy and clear structure
- Experienced mentors with institutional knowledge

Weaknesses / Limitations

- May resist rapid change or new technology
- Prefer formal communication styles
- Can struggle in informal or flexible work environments

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Baby Boomers (1946–1964)

Strengths / Advantages

- Driven, optimistic, and achievement-oriented
- Strong sense of teamwork and organizational commitment
- Experienced leaders with long-term vision
- Value personal growth and recognition

Weaknesses / Limitations

- May prefer traditional leadership structures
- Sometimes resistant to new communication methods
- Can prioritize process over innovation

Generation X (1965–1980)

Strengths / Advantages

- Independent, adaptable, and pragmatic
- Skilled multitaskers with strong problem-solving abilities
- Comfortable with both traditional and digital workflows
- Value efficiency and results over process

Weaknesses / Limitations

- May prefer autonomy to collaboration
- Can be skeptical of authority or organizational change
- Often overlooked between Boomers and Millennials

Millennials (1981–1996)

Strengths / Advantages

- Collaborative, tech-savvy, and purpose-driven
- Emphasize work-life balance and continuous learning
- Open-minded and inclusive of diversity
- Comfortable with rapid change and innovation

Weaknesses / Limitations

- May rely heavily on feedback and recognition
- Can become disengaged in rigid environments
- Sometimes viewed as impatient or entitled by older generations

Generation Z (1997–2012)

Strengths / Advantages

- Highly adaptable and digitally fluent
- Value authenticity, diversity, and social awareness
- Innovative thinkers with global perspectives
- Fast learners who thrive in dynamic settings

Weaknesses / Limitations

- Limited workplace experience
- May struggle with attention and focus in traditional settings
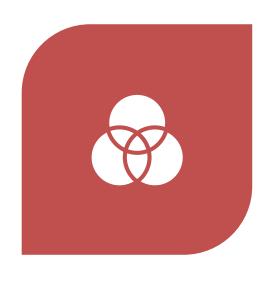- Prefer quick communication, which can reduce depth

Exercise

We have up to five generations in the workforce. Each brings unique strengths and challenges.

Discuss in groups: one strength and one challenge for each generation.

Challenges of Diversity

Challenges of Diversity

OPPORTUNITIES: BROADER PERSPECTIVES, INNOVATION, COLLABORATION

CHALLENGES: BIAS, MISCOMMUNICATION, RESISTANCE TO CHANGE

Considerations for a Diverse Culture

Creating a More Diverse Culture Requires:

- Time and trust
- Self-awareness and curiosity
- Consistency over perfection

From Awareness to Action

The 4 A's of Belonging:

1. Awareness

2. Acceptance

3. Action

4. Accountability

Role Play:
Making Space for Every Voice

Scenario: A team member feels overlooked in meetings.

Respond with empathy, invite participation, reinforce respect.

Creating Comfort & Belonging

5 Practices:

1. Lead with curiosity

2. Model psychological safety

3. Encourage every voice

4. Show daily respect
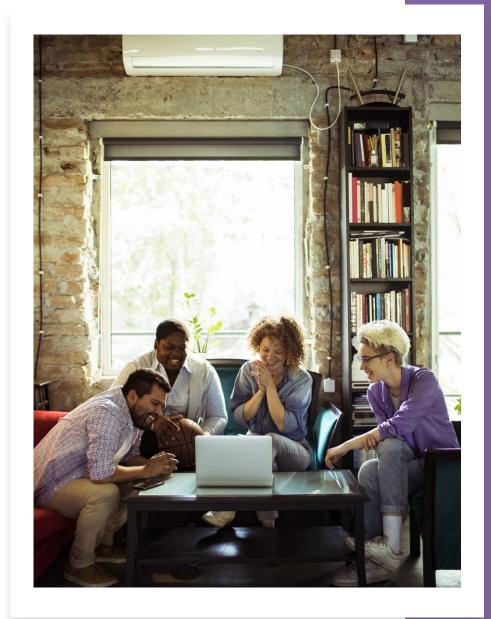
5. Flex your communication

Reflection: Your Next Step

What's one small action you can take this week to make someone feel more comfortable and included?

Closing Quote

"When we listen and celebrate what is both common and different, we become a wiser, more inclusive, and better organization." – Pat Wadors

Let's Stay In Touch!

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