

# BIAS in the BRIEF

Asking better questions to build inclusion into the research, briefing and creative process.

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FORWARD

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# FORWARD

Thank you so much for your interest in this topic. The simple act of reading this is a great first step toward ushering in more diversity, equity and inclusion in both your work and personal life. Props to you for that.

While we acknowledge this information won't solve all the problems, it is a move in the right direction. In collaboration with Say-Space — a company that reveals biases within organizations to enhance teamwork, elevate productivity and increase profitability — we created this resource to provide you with some tools for asking questions that will lead to more empathy and inclusive briefs, research and creative work in the world of marketing.

Thanks & Happy Reading,

The Current Forward Team

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# WHAT KIND OF PROBLEM ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

Diversity & Inclusion can be viewed through multiple levels, spanning across surface level “symptoms” to deeper system “root causes”. The Racial Equity Institute uses the Groundwater Analogy to illustrate this. We can use it to consider which level we are addressing & whether a short-term or long-term solution is best.



# THE GROUNDWATER ANALOGY

*Imagine you're a groundskeeper responsible for a small, majestic (perhaps enchanted) pond and its mystical ecosystem.*

**One day, you notice a dead fish floating in the pond, and you think, “What’s wrong with the fish? Was it sick? Old?”**

You're focusing on surface-level diagnoses of that individual fish. This is equivalent to watching a woman of color leave your organization and placing the responsibility on that individual.

**Two days later, you see three more dead fish floating in the water. Now you start to think, “Is there something in the pond? Are the fish not getting enough food?”** Your focus has expanded beyond the fish and into the surrounding environment. This is equivalent to exploring the issues within a company or industry that impact surface-level symptoms, i.e. what is within our culture that caused the woman of color to leave?

**Four days later, you see that all of the fish in the pond have died. As you're removing them from the water, you wonder, “Is there something in the water source that feeds this pond killing all of the fish?”** Your focus shifts again, looking for the hidden root cause. To continue the analogy, we're now looking at the systemic issue of racism. What systems impact women of color across all industries?

# WHAT DOES INCLUSION & EXCLUSION LOOK LIKE?

Part of our human survival instinct is to scan for signs of exclusion. When we're unclear about someone's intentions, we tend to favor rejection. Our brains interpret feelings of rejection the same as physical pain. We need to be aware of our exclusion triggers and the impact they have. We may need to go out of our way to promote inclusion. The SCARF Model on the next page can be used as a guide for promoting inclusivity in our workplace and lives.

# THE SCARF MODEL



## **STATUS**

*Am I respected and valued?*

Looking for acknowledgement. Eye contact. Calling us by our name  
Recognizing the work that we did. Listening & reflecting back.



## **CERTAINTY**

*Am I in the loop?*

Want to be kept informed; getting context and rationale behind decisions and feedback. Without this — we are trying to make sense of the unknown and are left to assumptions.



## **AUTONOMY**

*Am I given choices or control?*

Requires trust to be in place. Do others trust us to make decisions, own projects? Are we being micromanaged?



## **RELATEDNESS**

*Do I belong?*

(Most commonly associated with “inclusion / exclusion”.) Desire to be “one of us”, part of the group. Comes out through warmth, curiosity that we send through others. Looking for common ground, shared values.



## **FARINESS**

*Do I get credit & opportunities that others do?*

Scanning to see if others are getting special treatment or favoritism.

# THREE WAYS TO BE MORE INCLUSIVE

- ① Ask open-ended questions
- ② Check your environment
- ③ Build your communication skills



# ASK OPEN-ENDED QUESTIONS

Discover someone else's reality by asking questions that help them discover the answer.

## HOW

How would you get there?

How did you make that happen?

How do you feel about that?

## WHAT

What makes it important to you?

What do you need?

What does success look like?

## WHO

Who inspires you?

Who can help you with that?

Who would bring another perspective?

## WHERE

Where do you see yourself in 5 years?

Where do you see an opportunity?

Where could you try something differently?

## THINGS TO AVOID

Asking "why?": This can come off as challenging / polarizing

Leading questions: Bringing someone to the answer that you are looking for

Closed questions: These create a "yes" or "no" responses

# CHECK YOUR ENVIRONMENT

Invite multiple perspectives into the conversation with a willingness to believe that their input could make the work better.

## LOOK AROUND AND ASK

- What perspectives are missing?
- Who has a voice?
- Who has a vote?
- What current processes and assumptions need to be challenged in order to allow other perspectives in?

## ADOPT A GROWTH MINDSET

A “fixed” mindset is all or nothing: win/lose, black/white, right/wrong. A growth mindset welcomes in multiple perspectives and realities by:

- Using “yes, and” language.
- Using open ended questions to get curious about other perspectives.
- Ensuring that you are hearing them using inclusive communication skills to the right.

## CONSIDER THE COMPLEXITIES

Intersectionality is a branch of feminism (coined by Kimberle Crenshaw) that identifies how different aspects of social and political discrimination overlap with gender. Examples of this include race, gender, class, ability, and ethnicity.

## PRIORITIZE & ACKNOWLEDGE IMPACT

Does the company or culture favor time & results, over discussion & debate? What is the impact of that? Are we rewarding and welcoming different perspectives or are we dismissive and punish those who speak up?

Uncover priorities and acknowledge their impact by:

- Having an honest conversation with your teams to understand the current spoken and unspoken priorities.
- Acknowledging the impact of these priorities and invest in making changes if and where necessary.

# BUILD YOUR COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Incorporate language and tactics that create an environment that embraces diversity and inclusivity.

## REFLECT BACK

“I heard you say” .... using their own words

Listening for emotional peaks as a sign of where to go deeper

Emotions can include: anger, frustration, hurt, fear, etc.

## GO DEEPER

“Tell me more about” ... to go deeper with what was said

“What do you see in this?”

“What is familiar about that?”

“What does this remind you of?”

“What is important to you about this?”

## GET TO THE ROOT OF THE EMOTION

“How does that make you feel?”

“What angered you / hurt you / frustrated you about that?”

You want to use their own words with this (vs. projecting an emotion on them)

## VALIDATE

“That must have been difficult”

“I can’t imagine what that is like for you”

Using others to validate: “who can reflect back what they heard from \_\_\_\_?”

## ACKNOWLEDGE THE IMPACT

“How does that affect you now?”

## PROMOTE RESOLUTION

“What do you need?”

# CHANGE TAKES PLACE IN THE FORM OF COMMITTED, ACTIONABLE STEPS.

① What is at least one thing you are taking away from this resource?

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② What is one action to support this takeaway?

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③ Who are you going to share that with or bring on to your team of support?

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④ By when will you do this?

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# EVERYONE CAN ...

- ① Bring this conversation back to your workplace.
- ② Share what you took from this resource and engage with others.
- ③ Continue to build on this conversation with each other.

# THANK YOU

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Current Forward is a strategy collective hellbent on making marketing human.

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(Say)**

[say-space.com](https://say-space.com)

Say Space reveals biases within your organization to enhance teamwork, elevate productivity, & increase profitability.