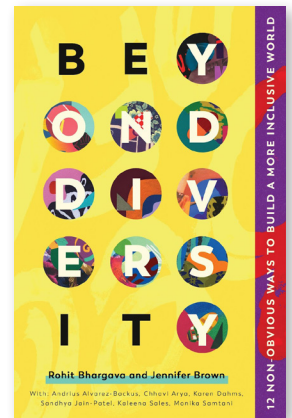


Beyond Diversity

12 Non-Obvious Ways to Build a More Inclusive World

by **Rohit Bhargava and Jennifer Brown**



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THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

What if we could go beyond the conversation about diversity and take real action? In early 2021, more than 200 widely respected experts gathered virtually for the world's most ambitious conversation about diversity. The aim was to do more than spotlight injustice. They challenged themselves to imagine how to fix it.

The dialogue brought together casting directors, bookstore owners, disabled leaders, healthcare professionals, students, VCs, standup comedians, chief diversity officers, pro gamers, archaeologists, government insiders, startup founders, and even a master puppeteer. Now for the first time, these solutions are compiled into one groundbreaking volume, *Beyond Diversity*, organized into 12 powerful themes.

Each chapter paints a revealing picture of the world, how it is, how it could be, and what needs to happen for us to get there. For newcomers to the topic of diversity, and DEI experts alike, *Beyond Diversity* offers a much-needed, actionable blueprint for creating a more inclusive world for us all.

IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- To move beyond typical diversity conversations and break down barriers.
- Seven of the 12 themes covered in *Beyond Diversity*.
- The importance of storytelling in shaping perception.
- Concrete, actionable strategies for developing cultural fluency and effecting real change in the workplace, in entrepreneurship, and in leadership.

Introduction

It is a rarely spotlighted irony that so much of the dialogue about diversity ends up emphasizing what sets us apart, instead.

You can see this splintered approach in the structure of many live and virtual events aimed at exploring the theme of diversity. There are conferences dedicated to racial justice, reducing gender discrimination at work, advocating for LGBTQ+ legislation, eliminating ageism at work, creating more accessible digital content for people with disabilities, making corporate boards more inclusive, and much more.

These conferences host important conversations—and they offer a safe space for people who have been excluded and marginalized to share their experiences freely and have their points of view heard and discussed. They play an essential role in our evolving conversation about diversity and equity.

And yet, they are not enough. Focusing on only one aspect of our identities prevents the opportunity to better understand ourselves and others outside that one label.

The Non-Obvious Beyond Diversity Summit

The term “intersectionality,” first coined by American lawyer and civil rights advocate Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, refers to the idea that none of us can be defined by a single label but only through a combination of social identities. Embracing the idea of intersectionality requires us to switch to a wide-angle lens.

What if we had conferences, TV shows, or corporate recruiting programs dedicated to bringing people and perspectives together that might never otherwise share the same space? How would someone fighting to end gender pay gaps relate to a disabled gamer demanding more accessible experiences?

What would an advocate for racial literacy in schools say to a researcher studying how to end age-related biases at work? What might a local business fighting to expand broadband internet access for those living on Native American reservations ask a community organizer imagining how to transform a neglected local park into a vibrant urban garden?

To truly create a more inclusive world, we need to move beyond the usual diversity conversations and break down the barriers between these topics. In January 2021, Rohit Bhargava and colleagues hosted the Non-Obvious Beyond Diversity Summit, which included over 200 speakers who participated in more than 50 sessions. Over 75 percent described

themselves as belonging to an underrepresented group.

It was Non-Obvious because of the types of conversations they hoped to curate. And it went Beyond Diversity, because they knew that if they were truly going to have an impact, they needed to focus every conversation on tangible actions we could all take to build a more inclusive world.

To share the insights with a wider audience, this book presents 12 themes that cut across all the sessions. Seven of those themes are covered here. The goal is to launch you into a journey to understand people unlike yourself.

It all starts by reimagining the stories we tell and share with the world. Our lives, ultimately, are lived through our stories. So let’s get started in crafting a better and more inclusive one together.

Beyond Diversity in Storytelling

In the final days of December each year, thousands of competitors gather in Saudi Arabia for the King Abdulaziz Falconry Festival. Known as the “sport of kings,” the ancient art of falconry uses trained raptors to hunt and return prey to captivity. It is a millennia-old sport practiced by cultures across the globe ... and usually by men.

But in 2020, there was one participant among the many falconers at the event who made international headlines—Athari Alkhaldi, the first woman to ever qualify. Alkhaldi herself recognized the significance of her entry: “With my participation ... I proved I am here, that women can join this field, that it’s not only restricted to men,” she shared with global media while standing with her falcon, Ma’aned.

These types of barrier-breaking stories, once a rarity, now seem to be shared regularly. A scan of worldwide media on any given day offers plenty of examples. A hip-hop musical from Puerto Rican musician Lin-Manuel Miranda passes \$1B in revenue.

African American poet Amanda Gorman is selected to speak at the 2020 U.S. Presidential inauguration. Fifteen-year-old Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg rises to international prominence, while referring to her diagnosis of Asperger syndrome as her “superpower.”

But what about the thousands of stories like these that remain untold? If stories shape our perceptions, then perhaps the stories we never hear shape our biases through the lack of awareness they perpetuate.

Companies that once focused on selling products and services by making us feel like less have now started to profit by making us feel like we can belong, exactly as we are.

Stories which have been buried for so long (and those who tell them) are finding new homes, audiences, and fans, both inside and outside of the demographic groups they represent. What needs to happen to keep this momentum going?

- Systemic financial barriers that exclude diverse storytellers must be exposed and removed.
- Entrenched biases in media must be consciously acknowledged and addressed.
- Talent pipelines need to be restructured with equity as a priority.

What You Can Do

The stories we choose to consume—and believe—shift our worldviews. Our support can have a material impact on which stories get told in the future and which storytellers get funded to share their gifts. With that in mind, here are three actionable steps that you can take either as a storyteller yourself or as a consumer of stories produced by others.

Action #1: Seek out unfamiliar stories and expand your media diet. We live in a time of target audiences, where every story seems told for a predetermined audience. When stories are dismissed as only for some people, they fail to realize their true potential. One specific tactic Rohit has long suggested is buying and reading magazines not meant for you. Two of his favorites—*Teen Vogue* and *Modern Farmer*—both illustrate the point.

Action #2: Be more intentional about the stories you share and consume. Beyond shifting what stories you choose to consume, it is also important for you to consider what stories you are promoting to others. Instead of quickly reposting an article based on its headline, stop for a moment and consider the bigger picture of what you are sharing.

Action #3: Share your non-obvious story with the world, when you are ready. Perhaps you have a story of your own that you've kept hidden out of fear or shame. Maybe it hasn't felt like the right time, or it was simply too difficult to share. One of the biggest ambitions for this book is to offer a reminder that every individual story holds the

power to change the world and inspire other people. Your story could do the same when you are ready to share it.

Beyond Diversity in Identity

Identity is race, gender, abilities, and sexuality. It is ethnicity and religion, marital status and political affiliation. Identity is how we wear our hair and the accents with which we speak. It is where our parents came from, how we view the world, the work we do, and the spaces we seek to occupy.

Studies have shown that the experience of having one's identity questioned or attacked, whether through sexism, racism, or other forms of discrimination, activates the same regions of the brain that respond to life-or-death survival situations. In other words, having your identity threatened literally feels like your life is in danger.

The business of identity has started to intersect with the desire for authenticity. Companies that once focused on selling products and services by making us feel like less have now started to profit by making us feel like we can belong, exactly as we are.

Fashion brands are a prime example of this. Today it is not uncommon to see plus-size models, models with Down syndrome, or models with skin conditions like vitiligo all featured on the covers of magazines or used in fashion advertising.

Here are some thoughts on how we can create a world that's better—and more inclusive—than the one we're living in now.

- There must be more safe spaces where people of different identities can meet and engage.
- We must support the institutions and programs that help people explore and embrace their identities.
- Ensure legislation and corporate policy is supportive of all types of identities.

What You Can Do

Identity is deeply personal, as is our response to it. As a result, there are many things that any of us can do in-

dividually to help create a more inclusive world—and it starts with seeing your own identity as something that transcends any label.

The other, complementary side of this process is choosing to be more accepting of the unfamiliar identities of others. Here are several steps we can all take to accomplish both things.

Action #1: Welcome conversations about identity with less judgment and more patience. Any conversation about your identity is an opportunity for you to foster more understanding in the world. But it will never happen if your first instinct is to react with outrage and judge someone instantly for asking the wrong question or for unintentionally offending you.

Action #2: Use less labeling language and be more aware of how you describe or stereotype people. Labels can easily become shorthand for how we describe people. Each of us must resist the tendency to categorize people in this limiting way. It harms their potential and creates an environment where others may feel forced to live inside a single, outside perception of who they are.

Action #3: Lean into the intersections of your own identity and become a role model. When each of us becomes comfortable with the numerous layers of our own identities, we not only find fulfillment for ourselves, but we can also serve as an example for the people around us.

In 2007 Waylon Pahona Jr. was close to rock bottom, contemplating suicide. A Hopi and Tewa/Maricopa who grew up on the Hopi reservation, Waylon had been abused at age 9, saved his mother from attempted suicide at the age of 16 and struggled with weight his entire life.

It was fitness that transformed Pahona's life, and today he is the founder of a group called Healthy Active Natives (HANs) that has helped more than 75,000 fellow Natives get healthier. As a rare Native American voice in the world of fitness, Pahona feels a deep sense of responsibility as a role model not only for his community but for his two sons, who will grow up with a far different relationship with their father than he had with his.

Beyond Diversity in Culture

Our culture is not only based on the language we speak or the region we live in or the food we eat or the way we describe our identity. It is not only the place we work or the

faith we choose or the stories we believe. Culture is all these things together, and an inclusive world is one where all of us are free to belong to the cultures we choose without being judged for our choices.

The truth is, for much of human history different cultures have not always happily co-existed. Instead, dominant cultures have consistently destroyed other cultures along their way to becoming dominant.

In response, people have developed unique coping mechanisms to blend their own cultures with the one they often see represented in films and television. And they have started subcultures to rebel against the mainstream and redefine themselves and shift culture around them in the process.

This is the paradox at the heart of our modern culture. There are simultaneous forces that subsume other cultures, traditions, and languages, and emerging culture wars between people with differing worldviews, even as there are global movements rising up to keep those same unique cultures and beliefs alive.

What will it take for us to build a more inclusive culture that allows for these different experiences to not just co-exist but be truly valued, celebrated, and transformed through a mixing of cultures into something unprecedented and unique?

- We must celebrate examples of a global view of citizenship that honors humanity above nationality.
- Institutions must embrace culturally inclusive conversations instead of avoiding difficult questions.
- Media companies, news outlets, and creators of content must work to reflect a more accurate portrayal of culture.

What You Can Do

It's important to listen to the perspective of those from inside of a particular culture. Let's consider some ways to do this that we might all individually practice.

Action #1: Reassess your cultural fluency in the workplace. Cultural fluency—or the ability to understand people from different cultural backgrounds—is a critical skill for every one of us. Not only is it essential for building trust and empathy in multicultural workplaces, but it has been repeatedly linked to enhanced financial performance.

Leaders can start by trying to practice more cultural humility by stepping out of their own experiences to identify their knowledge gaps about other cultures. Then leaders must take

the next step to broaden their knowledge through seeking exposure to different media, content, and diversifying their personal networks. Eventually, they must evolve to become a champion for more complete cultural representation.

Ironically, the retail economy also has a habit of excluding the one group of consumers who have the most money: seniors.

Action #2. Be willing to learn about other cultural traditions and support ambitious alliances. Food is perhaps the most accessible way to experience another culture. It does not require you to have a friend or colleague from another culture, and you don't even need to travel outside your hometown. In tasting food from other cultures, we are reminded that there are different lives that exist outside of our own.

Action #3. Participate in subcultures that you love and do what it takes to make them more inclusive. In 2020, University of Illinois Professor Kishonna Gray, a researcher who had long studied “race, gender, and deviance” in the gaming industry, published a book about multiple cultures coming together. The new book was called *Intersectional Tech* and explored the experience of Black gamers. It spotlighted a part of the gaming community that was used to being ignored and sometimes harassed.

Kate Sánchez, creator of the popular gaming news platform *But Why Tho?* echoed this same experience, sharing the importance of telling the stories of the subculture of gamers in a more inclusive way because often gaming and gamers themselves are stereotypically described in a way that doesn't usually include women, non-binary gamers, or people of color.

The efforts of these pioneers in gaming illustrate the perfect model for creating an inclusive culture. If all these groups can work together, appreciate one another, and support the thing they all love, there is hope that we might all accomplish this same result with other aspects of our global culture.

Beyond Diversity in Retail

Whether it's apparel retailers, grocery stores, restaurants, beauty salons, or even online shopping platforms, the world of retail commerce is by and large designed for consumers of specific backgrounds or body types. For those who fall outside the accepted parameters, shopping can be an excluding or even hostile experience.

More than 60 percent of Black Americans say they have experienced racial discrimination inside a retail store. Nearly three-quarters of disabled customers say they feel forced to shop online due to limited accessibility at physical stores. Ironically, the retail economy also has a habit of excluding the one group of consumers who have the most money to spend: seniors.

If the products we buy and the services we use (as well as the advertising that promotes them) became more inclusive, the entire retail landscape could follow suit. It would not only affect what we buy and consume but also where we buy it and who is involved in the design, production, and distribution of making and selling it.

To see a world where both the “IRL” (in real life) and “URL” (online) marketplaces are tailored for all types of customers, both sellers and buyers will need to make more intentional decisions and put their money where their mouth is.

- Teams designing products and crafting in-store experiences must cater to a broader customer identity base.
- Marketers must trade tokenism in advertising for authentic representation.
- Organizations must go beyond “feel-good metrics” and match actions to words.

What You Can Do

Let's look at three steps we can all take to support greater equity and diversity in retail.

Action #1: When you see bias in retail, call it out and demand for it to change. There are many ways that retail experiences can feel hostile to those customer identities who've been neglected. Many of them are not the product of intentional bias but are, rather, due to ignorance or maintaining a longstanding status quo.

Approach every retail experience with more awareness of these biases, and choose not to ignore them by voicing your concerns. Retailers react to consumer complaints—particularly if they hear the same concern from multiple people.

When you see something, say something.

Action #2: Wield your consumer power responsibly by doing your homework. Johanna Zeilstra is the CEO of Gender Fair, an independent platform that makes it easy for consumers to shop their values. The Gender Fair app rates companies on various diversity-based criteria and offers real-time ratings of more than 800 companies, representing 2,500 brands to help consumers make purchasing decisions at all points of sale. Johanna says that supporting purpose-driven and mission-oriented brands may be the strongest tool at the customer's disposal.

Action #3: Buy from more diverse suppliers for yourself and on behalf of organizations. Every purchase you make is a chance for you to support more diversity in retail. Are you indiscriminately buying everything you need from Amazon, or will you support local businesses like independent bookstores, even if it means paying an extra dollar or two?

Most of us have moments when we have a chance to spend other people's money as well. There are many examples of moments when you can act on an individual level the same way a supplier or diversity manager might act on behalf of an organization. And if you are working in an organization that doesn't have someone in charge of selecting suppliers, you can start a supplier diversity program yourself to source your materials and products from new, more diverse vendors.

Beyond Diversity in the Workplace

For years, Crayola labeled its peach-colored crayon "flesh," which provided a constant reminder to children of color that their skin was not viewed as "the norm" in society. Band-Aid only produced bandages in one color—meant to match the skin of White people—until very recently. Fashion brands to this day continue to promote shoes and pantyhose in one "nude" color, which only matches lighter skin tones.

These are the kinds of products we've come to expect from homogenous teams working in places that either lack diversity or fail to listen to the marginalized voices on their team. Changing this reality requires recruiting and hiring more diverse team members and ensuring that their unique perspectives are not silenced but respected and acted upon.

The truth is, regardless of whether someone comes from a neurodiverse background, has a physical disability, or

belongs to an underrepresented gender, ethnicity, or age group, most marginalized people describe feeling pressure at some point in their careers to assimilate into a dominant culture. As a result, many are denied the chance to truly flourish in their chosen field.

The solutions to many of these issues need to include understanding how bias impacts decisions, creating goals for increasing diversity in the workforce, and holding people accountable for their part in achieving those goals. In addition, organizations must rethink recruiting processes, ensure equitable opportunities, and in some cases, even redesign the physical environment of the workplace.

How can we shape a world where workplaces are more inclusive and welcoming to those who present themselves outside the usual employee blueprint?

- Leaders must recognize that great diversity exists within marginalized groups.
- Organizations need to listen to what people need and ensure those needs are met.
- Companies must conduct a candid assessment of current diversity and inclusion initiatives.

What You Can Do

Here are three action steps that each of us can take to foster more inclusivity and diversity in our own workplaces.

Action #1: Use your privilege to advocate for a colleague who might benefit from your support.

Moving forward, consider what more you could do at work to support those whose opinions and efforts are underappreciated or minimized. This might range from taking more opportunities during meetings to amplify a perspective from an undervalued colleague to inviting more underrepresented teammates to have a seat at the table in the first place.

Action #2: Broaden your recruiting pools and use non-obvious and innovative interviewing techniques.

Cast a wider net: Explore hiring more people with disabilities, veterans, and older workers; learn more about how to connect with and recruit formerly incarcerated talent and immigrants or refugees. There are many national, regional, and community-based professional associations that are organized around the interests of each of these underrepresented communities.

Action #3: Embrace your vulnerability at work and practice greater emotional intelligence. The

Many successful business owners tend to glorify their lifestyle of constant work, relentless positivity, and never-ending “life hacking” to optimize every slice of every day and night.

value of soft skills has been misjudged in the past, as they've been deemed “too emotional” for the office. But our world is evolving every day, and leaders need to pivot as these become skills that are not only expected but necessary. The first step in that journey is embracing vulnerability, especially as we hope to change skeptical minds. When people at all levels of leadership make this a priority, the workplace itself can become a more welcoming and open-minded atmosphere for people of all backgrounds to excel and bring their whole selves to work.

Beyond Diversity in Entrepreneurship

In the United States alone, NPR reported that Americans were starting businesses in 2021 at the fastest rate in more than a decade. While all of this activity isn't solely due to underrepresented entrepreneurs, it is tempting to see entrepreneurship as the great equalizer to long-standing workplace inequities. More than half of young entrepreneurs, for example, consider age bias to be a factor in why they became entrepreneurs.

Yet, entrepreneurship has a dark side. Many successful business owners tend to glorify their lifestyle of constant work, relentless positivity, and never-ending “life hacking” to optimize every slice of every day and night. Even “sleep hacking”—where you quantify and optimize your sleep—has become a rapidly growing industry.

This so-called “hustle culture” is simultaneously idolized and criticized—but there is relatively little discussion about how this 24/7 concept of work excludes or disadvantages certain groups of people, such as older workers, those with caregiving responsibilities toward children or aging parents, or those with physical disabilities.

Encouraging and empowering more diversity in entrepreneurship will require a combination of both public and private initiatives focused on the dual challenge of providing access to capital and building the support networks, funding groups, educational opportunities, and more that enable a steady flow of successful businesses to emerge, rather than

an occasional success story.

- The broader investment community must ensure teams making funding decisions are diverse and inclusive.
- Networks for aspiring entrepreneurs must be created to help address systemic barriers to success.
- Diversity must be reframed as a competitive advantage rather than a barrier to overcome.

What You Can Do

There is no economic equalizer that can have quite the same impact in creating a more inclusive world as granting all entrepreneurs the opportunity to achieve prosperity—for both themselves and their communities. Let's take a look at what you personally can do to help make this vision a reality.

Action #1: Spend your money and social capital on finding and supporting marginalized entrepreneurs. This might start with choosing to buy products or services from diverse businesses. If you're an entrepreneur or have decision-making power at a company, you might also do this on behalf of an organization by seeking out diverse vendors and suppliers.

Action #2: Seek out less visible and underutilized forms of support, advice, and funding. There is power in surrounding yourself with people who share your aspirations and upbringing, rather than always being the solitary voice from a different background in a room filled with people who, though often well-intentioned, are unlikely to understand your unique journey or share your values.

Action #3: Invest more of your time and engagement in cross-cultural thinking. Austrian billionaire Dietrich Mateschitz famously approached Chaleo Yoovidhya, the original creator of a Thai drink known to local truck drivers as Krating Daeng, after trying it for himself and realizing it cured his jet lag. The drink, originally promoted as a way for factory workers and truck drivers to make it through long shifts, was the inspiration for what would later be rebranded as Red Bull.

Beyond Diversity in Leadership

The growing focus on diversity and inclusion in companies, governments, and many other institutions has fueled the urgent need to bring more empathy to all levels of management. One way this is being implemented is by formalizing roles and teams dedicated to the work of creating a diverse and inclusive company culture.

The appointing of Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs), for example, is one highly visible choice meant to spearhead the push to make the organizations they work for more diverse, equitable, and inclusive on every level.

But actually achieving representation and inclusive cultures remains a daunting task. Almost 90 percent of Fortune 500 CEOs are still White men. If corporate boards symbolize the pinnacle of senior leadership, they paint a sobering picture of how far we still have left to go.

The truth is that creating a reality where leadership is more diverse and inclusive requires changes on an organizational, systemic, and individual level. And it requires commitment across the board.

- The “glass ceiling” cannot be replaced with the “glass cliff” (a phenomenon where women are more likely than men to be promoted to leadership roles during periods of crisis or downturn, when the chance of failure is strongest).
- Mentorship must be available to all, not only a select few.
- Diverse leadership cannot be treated as a “one and done” challenge.

What You Can Do

As we look ahead to the future of leadership, especially within the DEI space, here are some things we can each do individually to help make change happen.

Action #1: Demand more diverse representation within leadership teams. If you work at a company that uses 360-degree reviews, where employees at all levels are asked for feedback on peers and managers, consider if you are doing all you can to understand the perspectives of co-workers from marginalized backgrounds on whether they perceive they are getting equitable access to opportunities to succeed.

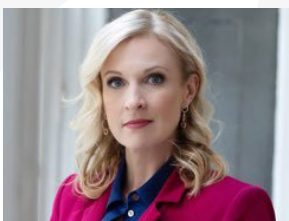
Action #2: Become an internal champion for third-party certifications and industry best practices. Dozens of DEI certifications, advocacy programs, and industry-leading best practices exist to help any team build a more equitable workplace. Any of these could benefit your organization, but in most cases there needs to be an internal advocate who manages the process. What would it take for you to become that champion?

Action #3: Recognize your bias in how you speak about leaders or portray them through imagery. Can you choose a stock image that shows a different type of leader at the front of the room? Will you call out those documents or people who regularly refer to a CEO, doctor, or boss as “him”?

An inclusive world starts with each of us choosing to respect perspectives other than our own, treating everyone with respect, and choosing to stand up for others who need our support. More than anything else, this is what going beyond diversity truly means.



Rohit Bhargava helps inspire people to see what others miss, and to be more open-minded. He is the founder of the Non-Obvious Company and Ideapress Publishing. Rohit previously spent 15 years as a marketing strategist for Ogilvy and Leo Burnett, is the WSJ best-selling author of seven books, and is an adjunct professor at Georgetown University.



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