

Intersectionality: a new approach to human resources management challenges 1/15/25



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In recent years, intersectionality has become a hot topic in various fields, from political science to the provision of social services. The concept is also increasingly mentioned in public procurement processes to emphasise the need for comprehensive solutions that foster a more inclusive and equitable society. Intersectionality is a new and innovative look at how different identities such as gender, age, nationality, ethnicity, physical and cognitive ability affect people's experiences and opportunities. This approach helps us to understand that socio-economic challenges affect different population groups differently and how they impact people's personal and working lives, including the management of organisations.

Laws, regulations and other regulations do not require intersectionality. It is a new approach to understanding human beings, or a view of human beings that emphasises not only one identity, such as age or gender, but also focuses on other dimensions that influence our identity and experience in society, including the work environment. This means that both gender and age are only one feature of human existence. We are not just gender or age, and our performance in the working environment is not primarily determined by gender or age alone, but in practice, these dimensions of diversity are often given a categorising power over human ability.

In this article, we will look at what intersectionality and its core elements are, how an intersectional approach differs from other approaches, and whether the intersectional approach is here to stay.

The interpretative vocabulary interprets the concept of "intersectionality" as an analytical concept, which refers to the overlap of different identities that vary throughout a person's life and the interaction with existing systems of power, oppression and discrimination in society. Intersectionality is also an analytical tool to study, understand and address how these complex identities interact with the social system and shape people's social location and experiences.¹

Intersectionality, then, is an approach that allows you to understand how different aspects of identity, such as gender, age, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, disability and other characteristics, relate to people's experiences and opportunities. This approach makes it possible to better understand and address complex problems in the world of work environment and in organisations. Here are some examples of the challenges that exist in practice in the administration and business of organisations:

1. **Working environment and inclusion.** Organisations that do not pay attention to intersectionality may misjudge the experiences and growth of their employees and thus fail to create an inclusive working environment. For example, a woman from an ethnic minority can be doubly discriminated against, firstly as a woman and secondly as a representative of an ethnic minority. If this woman also has a disability, the discrimination is likely to be threefold. The opportunities and experiences of the same woman in the workplace are also likely to vary according to her nationality, citizenship and disability. A woman's abilities and opportunities in the workplace are therefore never influenced by her gender alone. Leaving aside the interactions between these identities and the power relations within society and the

organisation, companies can unintentionally discriminate and thus negatively influence the motivation, commitment and growth opportunities of their employees. Introducing an intersectional approach can improve employee motivation, reduce stress and increase employee loyalty.

2. **Pay inequality.** Pay inequality is a complex and multifaceted issue that encompasses a variety of factors that influence pay (including base salary, bonuses, premiums, other benefits, etc.). Women are often paid less for the same work as men. According to the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, the hourly wage for women in Latvia in 2023 was 16.5% lower than for men, i.e., for every euro a man earns, a woman receives only 84 cents.² Older workers, in turn, can face wage stagnation because they are often unfairly seen as less valuable or unable to adapt to new technologies compared to younger colleagues. Pay gaps can also take the form of sectors or jobs between people with similar education and experience, reflecting structural and historical aspects of occupational segregation. Pay inequality is linked to every step in the human resources lifecycle - from workforce planning to termination. By understanding the various causes of inequality through the prism of intersectionality, organisations can successfully promote responsible and equitable pay practices at all levels of the organisation.
3. **Customer diversity and market approach.** When offering products and services to different demographic groups, entrepreneurs often neglect the impact of different identity characteristics on customers' needs and preferences. It is worth remembering that a person is never described by gender or age alone. If the company ignores various culture-specific needs and preferences, it may miss opportunities in potential market segments. Through the prism of intersectionality, the organisation can better understand the diversity of its audience and tailor products and services to meet the needs of different groups. This in turn can help to attract a wider range of customers and thus increase competitiveness.
4. **Crisis management.** Regardless of their nature, crises pose unforeseen challenges for companies to make quick decisions and manage change effectively. In such times, it is particularly important to ensure that all employees are supported and able to adapt to the changing situation. In crises, such as during the economic downturn, an intersectional perspective can help to identify which groups of employees are most at risk of losing their jobs or suffering a loss of income and how these groups can be supported most effectively. For example, women-mothers are at higher risk of losing their jobs or income because they often play a greater role in childcare, while women-mothers belonging to ethnic minorities may face additional discrimination in the labour market and difficulties in accessing support services. By analysing at-risk groups through the prism of intersectionality, an organisation can develop a strategy or action plan to mitigate negative consequences and ensure equal support for all. The intersectionality approach also makes it possible to recognise and address inequalities in crisis management by emphasising that different groups of people can experience crises, unpredictability and change in different ways.

Intersectionality is not a “trend”

Based on an intersectional approach, managers can better understand the unique needs and challenges of different employee and customer groups. This not only helps to foster a more inclusive and equitable environment but can also improve the organization's performance and reputation.

The concept of intersectionality draws attention to the commonalities that unite people and the differences or how a person experiences different situations, places and times according to the different dimensions of

their identity and the mindset of the company/organisation. Employee issues would be considered in such a perspective according to gender, age, education, neurodiversity and marital status, for example. But even this perspective is not complete. The intersectionality approach requires that the challenge is also assessed from other dimensions of diversity, e.g. which specific habits have developed in a social or political system and how the respective power relationship shapes people's attitudes. This helps to understand how prevailing norms, assumptions and structural conditions influence the spread of the problem.

One of the most important aspects of intersectionality is the recognition of certain privileges. Privilege does not only mean wealth or power, but also the benefit of social norms and structures that favour certain groups, even if only in terms of environmental accessibility. Intersectionality contributes to a deeper understanding of the complex interrelationships and interactions of discrimination and prejudice. By recognising the different forms of oppression and their interactions, companies can not only actively create a more inclusive and equitable working environment, but also society as a whole. And one of the first steps in this process is to listen to and understand the people who experience different forms of inequality and discrimination.

Applying the intersectionality approach makes it possible to address and understand social inequalities and discrimination from a comprehensive, systemic and structural perspective, avoiding identifying only a potentially flawed basis for non-discrimination. However, the main problem in implementing such an approach and avoiding intersectional grounds for non-discrimination is the lack of intersectional equality data. Intersectional equality data reflects detailed information that draws attention to the nature of discrimination between different groups of people, such as the extent to which women or men are discriminated against in a particular sector depending on age, nationality, disability, marital status, etc., and the interaction between these subjects. The provision of intersectional equality data is voluntary and anonymous by data protection standards. This lack of data hurts the ability to actively and substantively monitor the situation of inequality and to address or analyse the extent of intersectional discrimination in companies, communities and across the country.³ It is also for these reasons that a psychologically safe and inclusive working environment plays an important role in organisations, as it allows employees to speak openly about their experiences and feelings when disclosing information about themselves.

To summarise, the intersectionality approach helps us to see the world from a broader perspective, to understand complex problems and causalities and to build an inclusive and just society. By understanding this approach, we can improve the working environment of organizations, foster better customer service, and create an environment where everyone feels understood and included. Intersectionality is not a “trend”, but an approach that contributes significantly to the sustainability of organisations and our shared prosperity.

¹ <https://tezaurs.lv/intersekcionalit%C4%81te>

² <https://stat.gov.lv/en/statistics-themes/indicators-well-being-and-equality/gender-equality/6300-gender-equality>

³ European Parliament resolution of 6 July 2022 on intersectional discrimination in the European Union: the socio-economic situation of women of African, Middle Eastern, Latin American and Asian origin.

Available: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-9-2022-0289_EN.html