

INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

***WHAT IT IS AND
WHY IT
MATTERS***



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EQUAL OPPORTUNITY, DIVERSITY & INCLUSION is not a thing

I've been working as a consultant specialising in leadership

development, inclusion, diversity and equal opportunity for more than thirty years. During that time I've come to the view that organisations would be much more effective if they understood that inclusion, diversity and equal opportunity were three different things and not 'a' thing; (see the paragraphs below) and that one of, if not the most important thing for leaders to do, is to *manage inclusion*.



EQUAL OPPORTUNITY

For institutions, Equal Opportunity is a concept underpinned by legislation and organisational codes of practice. It requires organisations to provide relevant and appropriate access for the participation, development and advancement of all individuals and groups; and individuals in organisations to conduct themselves in particular ways when interacting with others to avoid making themselves liable to disciplinary processes.



For individuals, Equal Opportunity means not being discriminated against; experiencing access to, and real choice to participate in, or contribute to, relevant processes and activities of the team or organisation; and receiving appropriate treatment in relation to their ability and circumstances.

The fact that organisations may fully adhere to the law and their codes of

practice does not of itself necessarily result in all their people experiencing equal opportunity as defined above, or indeed, feeling included!

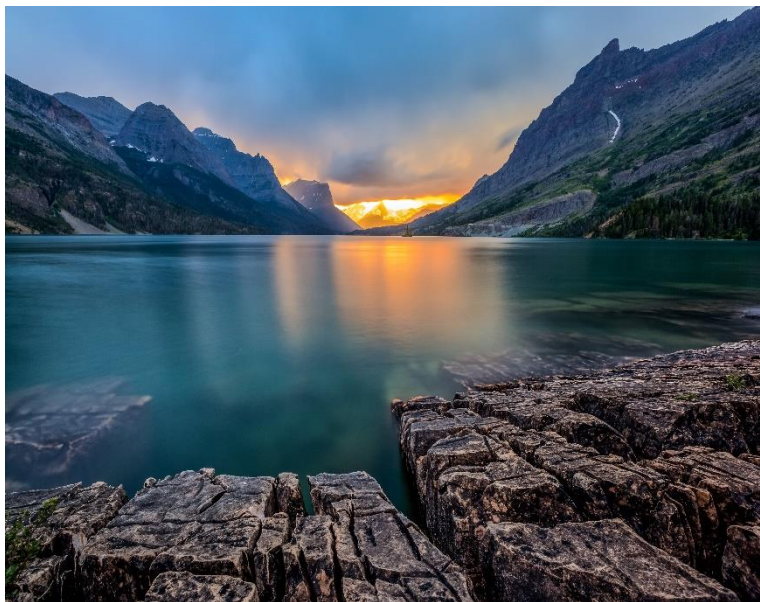
INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

Inclusive Leadership is an intentional relationship of influence the purpose of which is to cause people to consistently experience a sense of inclusion, that is; feeling respected, valued, safe, trusted and having a sense of belonging.



An intentional relationship of influence the purpose of which is to cause people to consistently experience a sense of inclusion

The Inclusive Leader consciously manages inclusion. This is not to be confused with managing diversity. For me, the term managing diversity conjures up an image of difficulties and problems that must be dealt with. Policies, courses and programmes called Managing Diversity are often perceived, and frequently subconsciously received by the participants, as addressing the 'problems' of, rather than the 'opportunities offered through' diversity.



Apart from the disadvantages above, managing diversity is simply not possible.

Diversity is like time - we have it whether we like it or not. We can use it well, or abuse it; make the most of it, or waste it; what we cannot do is 'manage' it.

Diversity is like time - we have it whether we like it or not

When seeking to use our time more productively, we

work on managing ourselves better. When our focus is diversity and our intention is to increase the benefits we derive from diversity, our task is to manage inclusion. Talking about managing diversity is not just an inaccurate statement of intent, for the reasons stated above, it is likely to slow organisations down in their endeavour to get more value from the diversity of their people.

FIVE QUALITIES of INCLUSIVE LEADERS

1. Inclusive Leaders Respect Themselves and Others

Phil Wall – Executive Performance Coach and a good friend and colleague, talks about respect as being relational, resilient, and reciprocal.

Respect is **Relational**, for it forces us to look to people who are very different from ourselves and find things within them that we can value. Of course, negatively this can mean giving permission for snobbery and only valuing things within our own value set. But the point here is we're talking about something far more profound whereby, as



leaders, we commit to building relationships with those very different from us, so that we might discover something within them that we can affirm and value.

Respect is also **Resilient**. Genuine respect survives conflict and disagreement. Respect has the rigour and strength to withstand disappointment and frustration. Genuine respect is willing to hang in there over the long term despite challenges that emerge.

Finally, respect is also **Reciprocal**: As we express it, invest in it, model it, affirm it, and even reward it within our leadership and organisations eventually we receive it back.

2. Inclusive Leaders are Authentic

They are genuine: They show their real selves to their 'followers', their peers and other stakeholders. They don't act one way in private and another in public; they don't hide their mistakes or weaknesses out of fear of looking weak. They're focused on enabling their team to achieve high quality results, not on their own power, money or ego. They're able to put the mission and the goals of the organisation ahead of their own self-interest.

They are Truthful: Fred Johnson, CEO of InitiativeOne, asked a group of leaders, "Will you choose to manage information or will you choose to lead with information?" There's a big difference between leaders who are more eager to avoid difficult conversations than they are with speaking truthfully and those leaders who openly share information to enable the best decisions to be made. Johnson's description of managing information unveils the temptations that inclusive leaders overcome.

Managing information can morph into massaging information. It can become a method of control, whereas a courageous choice to lead with information is a means of empowering others to do their best work. Whether information is good or bad, comfortable or uncomfortable, people want their leaders to share and they expect them to be honest. The truth is a necessary ingredient for creating inclusive environments.

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They lead with their heart, not just their minds. They are not afraid to show their emotions, their vulnerability and to connect with their people. This does not mean that leaders who are authentic are “soft.” In fact, communicating bad news or unwelcome messages in a direct fashion is often critical to successful outcomes, but the inclusive leader does it with empathy; directness without empathy can be crushing.

3. Inclusive Leaders Are Courageous



They experience fear but they have the courage to still take the necessary action. We often think and talk about courage as though it was the absence of fear. But I want to suggest that without fear there can be no courage. Fear, defined as a negative emotion toward a real or imagined threat to your life, personality, values or principles can often cause leaders to respond to situations in unhelpful ways. *Oliver Wendell Holmes* says “Have the courage to act instead of react.” Courage is about taking considered action in spite of fear.

Without fear there can be no courage

"I learned that **courage was not the absence of fear**, but the triumph over it. The brave man is not he who does not feel afraid, but he who conquers that fear." - *Nelson Mandela*

Inclusive Leaders know that to treat everyone equally well, they must treat everyone differently. They also know that, in spite of deliberately seeking to create an inclusive environment, those who do not yet feel included might see this action as discriminatory or preferential treatment. **Treating people differently anyway; takes courage.**

Inclusive leaders understand that they make assumptions and prejudgements about situations and people and is committed to CPD – their continual *personal* development in order to reduce the frequency and mitigate any harmful or unhelpful impact. Personal development in this area takes courage. *Marianne Williamson* says “It takes courage to endure the sharp pains of self-discovery rather than choose to take the dull pain of unconsciousness that would last the rest of our lives.”



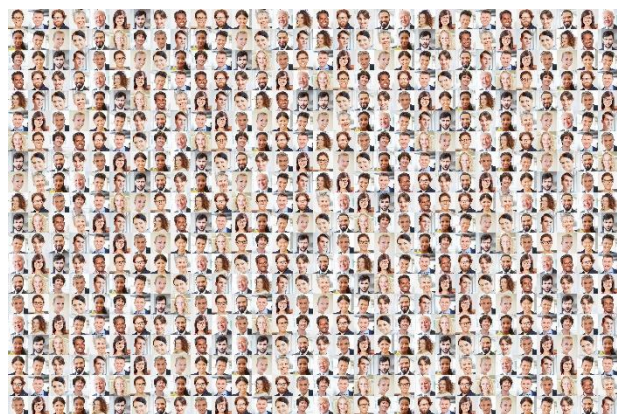
4. Inclusive Leaders Value Diversity

They believe that actively valuing diversity by helping more of their people to be more engaged with their work more of the time, enables the organisation to consistently deliver more - to more of their clients, other stakeholders and the wider community, more of the time.

To the Inclusive Leader, **diversity matters** because they believe ...

- **a diversity of perception**, thinking and approaches - all of which are more likely when a group is made up of people from different backgrounds - adds value to organisations
- **combating discrimination**, promoting equal opportunity, valuing difference, and managing inclusion is morally right, socially desirable, and economically sensible
- **by increasing the involvement of employees** whose whole-hearted contribution organisations have previously failed to harness, they will increase the quality and quantity of their output.

When it comes to deliberately seeking to be more effective at reaching markets, clients, customers, other stakeholders, and the wider community; understanding the implications of diversity matters a great deal. Achieving greater effectiveness and profitability can be enhanced by re-viewing the following ideas through the lens of diversity.



- **Access** to markets or customers, other stakeholders and the wider community
- **Attractiveness** to employees
- **Anomie** in society
- **Avoiding** the cost of discrimination.

Access to markets or customers is vital to the survival and growth of any enterprise. If an organisation doesn't understand the nature of a particular marketplace and/or client group, then getting access will be difficult, if not impossible. Organisations that

fail to reflect the diversity of the marketplace and/or client groups risk being shunned by those markets or clients in the long run.

Attractiveness to employees and investors is key. Truly successful organisations are attractive places to those who would invest their time and energy as well as to those who would invest their money or their client's money. When it comes to attracting and keeping talented employees, the inclusive leader knows that actively valuing diversity and creating and maintaining inclusive environments must be given the same priority as corporate ethics, health & safety and the provision of on-the-job training.

In the continuing struggle for talented employees, diversity is an attractive feature. All of us would prefer to work in an environment where our unique contribution is sought after and valued. Also, talent doesn't come in one size, colour, gender, family structure or background, sexual orientation, skill set, way of thinking or academic background.

Anomie in society: Anomie defines a state of total lack of adherence to social or moral standards when individuals or groups are alienated from the wider society. If particular groups conclude that they have no stake in society they are likely to believe that no matter what they do, however antisocial or unacceptable, it won't matter because they have nothing to lose. Maintenance of a stable society is clearly desirable and the implications for the economic and social wellbeing of the nation is self-evident.



Responsibility for ensuring that no section of our society is in a state of anomie rests not only on the 'social agencies', it's just as much a bottom-line business concern as making sure head office overheads are kept in check! Corporate entities, especially those in the public realm, do not have the luxury of disowning society. Well-functioning, vibrant communities are crucial for our continued economic health and well-being.

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Avoiding the cost of discrimination. If ever there was an unnecessary, damaging, and divisive cost to an organisation, then the cost of discrimination is it. When organisations discriminate, the cost comes in a package; and the package contains:

- bad publicity
- damage to staff morale
- increased absenteeism and staff turnover
- damage to reputation
- impact on recruitment
- a financial penalty and often much more

For organisations that discriminate, are accused of, and/or are perceived to be discriminating, paying the price can persist long after the offence or allegation. Loss of reputation in particular, can dull organisation effectiveness and profitability for very many years.

Better **access** to markets, other stakeholders and the wider community, **attractiveness** to potential employees, pre-empting **anomie** in society and **avoiding** the cost of discrimination are some of the reasons why diversity matters.

5. Inclusive Leaders Actively Manage Inclusion

They understand that getting value from the diversity of their people requires inclusive environments in which people can be their best selves and therefore do their best work. They are very clear that inclusive environments don't happen because they wish it to be so, but rather that it takes conscious, consistent, and careful work to create and then maintain such environments.



Inclusive environments don't just happen

The Inclusive Leader pays attention to the individual needs of her/his people and understands that equal treatment does not mean same treatment. Their commitment and intention is to treat all their people equally well; and they are alive to the fact that this will, in many instances, mean treating people differently.

equal treatment does not mean same treatment

At the beginning of this article, I defined inclusion as an emotional state in which people feel, respected, valued, safe, trusted, and have a sense of belonging. So, **actively managing inclusion** requires the leader to behave in ways designed to generate those emotions. There are some very simple (not simplistic or necessarily easy) behaviours all leaders can adopt and/or demonstrate more consistently:

Respected: A powerful foundation for respect is to always use people's preferred name. For some of us, some names might take a little work but demonstrating respect by using someone's preferred name is really important.

Another important and practical way of respecting your people is to listen, and demonstrate that you're listening intently by always giving them your full attention. Not just when they are speaking to you personally, but when they're speaking to the team as a whole. Nothing says 'I don't respect you' more than not paying attention when one of your people is presenting something to the rest of the team

Safe: People feel safe when they have a sense of certainty, when others, especially their leaders, are consistent. Can you imagine the level of stress that must be engendered in someone who can never be certain what line the boss is going to take today because it varies from day to day.

Lack of consistency generates huge issues regarding a sense of safety. Consistency is a big requirement, it sits alongside authenticity - the boss being open about how they like to work, how their people can get the best from them. Also, though it might be a bit of a stretch for some leaders, but my sense of safety would go through the roof if I know that the boss always takes the blame and gives away the credit.

The boss always takes the blame and gives away the credit



Trusted: When people are given responsibility, they feel trusted. At one level it's so obvious, but giving team members responsibility for an area of work or activity can be a big boost to the trustometer. And if you can encourage all your people to ask for support or help from another colleague, they will increase their trust in each other.

Valued: If you want them to feel valued and to value each other, then Invest your time in your people. All your people. If you're like me, you probably find it easier to invest time in some people than in others, but if we want to reap the rewards that come from an inclusive team, we need to invest in them all.

Deliberately and consistently keep them informed of things that you know are going on - assuming you've not been instructed not to tell, of course. Also, thank them and compliment them when they do good work; be very specific about what they actually did and the positive impact it had and on whom or, because of your experience, the impact you know it will have further down the road.

*the team is the
people not the
place*

A sense of belonging:

Connection is vital if people are to have a sense of belonging, not so easy during these times of Covid-19, but it's important that you constantly remind your people that the team is the people not the place.



Consistently connect all your team members to each other by generating and encouraging conversations based on your organisational values. Conversations based on the lived values of the team can be a powerful way of enabling team members to consistently feel that they belong.

MANAGING INCLUSION

Assumptions

My belief in the need to manage inclusion is based on a few simple assumptions.

- Most teams or work groups have some members who are not fully engaged in the work of the team and consequently the team operates at less than 100%, sometimes a lot less than 100%
- It is often the case that the reason team members are not fully engaged in the work, is because they do not feel included in the team
- The individuals who feel excluded, often include a disproportionately high number of people who are members of, or aligned with, 'traditionally marginalised'¹ groups
- There are large numbers of people in organisations who do not feel they are included in, and therefore do not fully contribute to, the work of their teams.
- Exclusion is costly: Over a period of four years, I asked thousands of managers what proportion of their people they believed were not contributing fully to their teams. Their answers ranged from 30% to 50%. That represents a huge cost to organisations in terms of creativity, performance, productivity, and profit.



¹ These include, disabled people, gay men and lesbian women, minority ethnic communities, transgender men and women and women in certain roles.

More Practical Actions

Organisations that want to maximise the quality, productivity and sustainability of their products and services need to take action to engage fully the commitment, abilities, energy and diversity of perceptions, beliefs and approaches of **all their people all of the time**.

To achieve this, organisations need to understand the critical importance of **managing inclusion**, and then invest in developing the skills of all their leaders at every level to be competent managers of inclusion.



All leaders need to:

1. Actively seek ways for the team to benefit from the differences they each bring
2. Listen to understand! Check that what you've said, and/or asked someone to do has been understood
3. Consistently invite, and expect feedback from everyone in the team; and in response, demonstrate behavioural change, or communicate your reasons for not changing
4. Praise colleagues publicly and critique performance or behaviour in private, and if any criticism is not intended to be constructive, then don't give it
5. Coach, support and encourage your direct reports to do all the above, and recognise and reward them for it.
6. Consistently ask yourself whether all your people are treating each other equally well.

Even If You Do Nothing Else, Focus on The Following

1. **Know your people**
 - Find out about the knowledge, skills and interests of your team and encourage them to share them with others
2. **Show your people**
 - Consistently model inclusive behaviours. Be the change you want to see.
3. **Challenge your people**
 - Call out biased, stereotypical or prejudiced language or actions every time you observe it. Make sure your people understand that excluding behaviours are 'off limits'.
4. **Support your people**
 - Regularly ask your people what you should do differently in order to help them be their best selves. When your people are not co-located, such as in this period of Covid-19, it's important to be proactive to ensure that although some people are apart from, they still feel a part of.

