

Inclusive leadership factsheet

Why is being an inclusive leader important?

The past few years have really shone a light on inclusion within organisations, with colleagues looking to leaders for direction through the pandemic and beyond; the renewed focus on anti-racism and social-economic issues to just highlight a few.

For inclusion to become an everyday reality and part of the DNA of any organisation, leaders need to “lead from the front” and role model behaviours, that really drive Inclusion and challenge the status quo.

The business case for inclusion is incredibly strong, with [Deloitte's recent research](#) highlighting that inclusive leadership (no matter at what level within the organisation) can increase team performance by up to 17%, show a 20% increase in decision making quality, and can also increase team collaboration by up to 29%.

The tone leadership set within any organisation around inclusion sets the tone for the culture of the organisation and “how it feels to work here”.

How do you think colleagues would answer these inclusive culture questions?

- Is excluding behaviour tackled or tolerated?
- Do we see diverse teams and thinking?
- Are colleagues comfortable they are sharing who they really are both in and outside the workplace?

Before we continue, it's important to consider what we mean by a leader; this factsheet is aimed at any role with people management responsibilities, as they all have influential inclusion touch points with colleagues within their organisation.

What skills does an inclusive leader need?

Inclusive leaders don't just appear out of nowhere, they take time to reflect on their behaviours and style. They consider their strengths, areas for growth, and take time to learn and ask for feedback from all those around them.

At Inclusive Employers we have combined our extensive experience of working with organisations and reviewed research around leadership skills to create the 'Inclusive Employers Leadership Framework':



At the heart of this approach are belonging, uniqueness and psychological safety, which are all needed to create the environment within organisations to allow colleagues and inclusive leaders to grow and flourish.

Then built onto this foundation, are the four behaviours of an inclusive leader:

1. **Courage**: the ability to step up and step in, challenge ourselves and others, and push through the discomfort.
2. **Emotional intelligence**: the ability to monitor one's own and others' feelings and emotions, and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions.

3. *Curiosity*: maintaining an open mind to new experiences, challenging our biases and assumptions and always learning.
4. *Self-awareness*: being fully aware of our strengths and weaknesses, our privilege and power.

Inclusive leaders should reflect on these behaviours and be honest in terms of their strengths and areas for growth. If they are unsure, encourage asking for feedback from those around them, and support them to be open and receptive to what others share. Use this valuable information and allow them time to do some personal action planning while setting some stretching objectives.

Why psychological safety?

As the Inclusive Employers model highlights, psychological safety is one of the essential factors in creating an inclusive workplace. It means that there is a supportive environment in which colleagues believe that they can speak up candidly with ideas, questions, concerns, and even mistakes without blame or punishment.

It's an environment where people feel it is safe to be their authentic selves. Inclusive leadership is an essential factor in creating and maintaining this environment; in terms of the tone they set, the language they use, how they include colleagues, how performance is managed, how they seek diverse views and how they encourage learning.

The role of belonging and uniqueness

To feel included in the workplace, there are often two conflicting needs; to feel like we belong, that we are part of a team and to feel connected, while also wanting to be seen as a unique individual. An inclusive leader sees the importance of balancing these fundamental human needs by:

- Getting to know their team members as individuals and understand their personal needs so they are engaged and able to perform at their best. This can be through regular one to ones, informal catch ups, using Inclusion Passports and inclusive social events.

- Providing opportunities for colleagues to be part of a team and contribute to organisational objectives – helping them to see how they belong, and the value their role has in the success of the organisation.

The importance of role modelling behaviours

Role modelling is so important in terms of reinforcing inclusive behaviours, and leaders have an essential role in setting the tone. They are perfectly placed to lead by example, to actively demonstrate what inclusive behaviours look and feel like and encourage and welcome underrepresented groups and voices into the conversation. Being an inclusive leader also involves showing an element of vulnerability, accepting they do not have all the answers and also being willing to share their own personal stories, which creates permission for others to do the same.

Being authentic

The dictionary definition of authentic is “of undisputed origin and not a copy; genuine.” An inclusive leader should find their authentic voice and style, as otherwise what they do and say could be seen as disingenuous or tokenistic. This can actually have the opposite effect and encourage exclusion rather than inclusion.

Encourage your leaders to find what is truly authentic to them. It can help them to think about what great leaders they have worked with or know, and also consider the question “what it is that made them great?”. While they are doing this, they could also reflect on how diverse these leaders were and to also take time to think about how they can diversify their role models to continue their growth as an inclusive leader.

If you would like to learn more about the Inclusive Employers Inclusive Leadership Development training follow this link: <https://www.inclusiveemployers.co.uk/learning-and-development/inclusion-and-diversity-topics/leadership-and-development/inclusive-leadership/>