

FOSTERING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY



Table of Contents

01	What is Psychological Safety?
02	Fostering Psychological Safety Benefits Marginalized Groups on Your Team
03	6 Myths About Psychological Safety in the Workplace
04	Inclusive Leaders Foster Psychological Safety By...
05	Create A Culture That Recognizes & Values Vulnerable Behaviors
06	Strategies to Promote Psychological Safety
07	Statements that Offer Psychological Support
08	Reflection on Barriers and Capacities
09	Resources
10	Call to Action #2

What is Psychological Safety?

01

We can restore hope in a world beyond race by building communities where self-worth comes from our connection to land, people, and place. In a beloved community that is anti-racist and inclusive, diversity isn't required, but if difference arrives, it's welcomed and belongs. -Bell Hooks

Psychological safety: is a collective belief that team members are safe to take risks, share ideas, ask questions and make mistakes without fear of negative consequences. Psychological safety:

- is a key enabler of healthy collaboration, creativity and performance;
- foundation for a sustainably inclusive, diverse and equitable workplace;
- is fostered through the social and cultural environment of an organization;
- enhances innovation, employee engagement, and organizational resilience.



Fostering Psychological Safety Benefits Marginalized Groups on Your Team

02

"Psychological safety is collective, meaning it has a cultural context; it is not an individual feeling, like belonging, which is a personal feeling. The group feels psychologically safe or does not, and if historically marginalized groups do not feel safe, likely the entire group does not feel safe." — Amy Edmonson

Creating an inclusive and equitable environment is key to collaboration, innovation, and success. However, BIPOC individuals and other marginalized groups, such as LGBTQ+ members, international employees, people with disabilities, and women, often face invisible challenges that impact their confidence, belonging, and well-being. Leaders must recognize the complex histories and systemic oppression that shape these experiences. Investing in psychological safety is a powerful form of equity-in-practice that strengthens belonging, mattering, and inclusion across diverse teams.

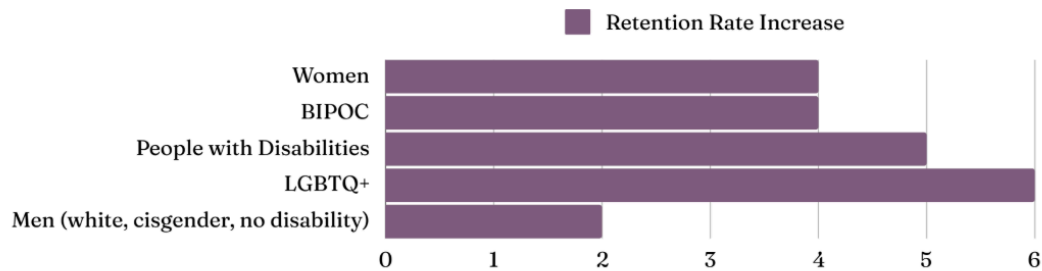


What thoughts arise as you reflect on this list?

For marginalized groups, systemic, institutional, interpersonal and internalized oppression can be experienced as:

- I need to be perfect in my job.
- I cannot make mistakes.
- I am unsure if I'm doing a good enough job.
- I need to fit in and conform with the group.
- People are expecting me to mess up, so I have to work harder.
- People are expecting me to be excellent, so I have to know what I'm doing at all times.
- I am overlooked for advancements in my job because of my identity.
- I have to ignore microaggressions and other insults and keep going.

When leaders successfully create psychological safety at work, retention increases particularly among marginalized groups. One study shows that in environments in which leaders foster high levels of psychological safety, members of diverse and disadvantaged employee groups said they were more likely to stay in their job as compared to their more advantaged peers in the same environment:



Boston Consulting Group
Report 2024

Diverse teams benefit from:

1. Spaces to care for basic needs.
2. Spaces to mess up and grow.
3. Spaces in which to express anger.
4. Spaces to be oneself.
5. Opportunities for flexibility and accommodation.
6. Spaces in which ideas can take root and grow.
7. Spaces that generate trust and authenticity.
8. Spaces to express opinions, ideas and needs.
9. Structures that foster repair and accountability.
10. Spaces to connect and value one another.



6 Myths about Psychological Safety in the Workplace

03

Many leaders aspire to manage diverse teams successfully, yet they may misinterpret what it truly means to foster a psychologically safe environment. Here are several common myths that can hinder inclusive practices and compromise psychological safety:



Myths



Realities

1

Psychological safety means being "nice" to everyone.

Kindness matters, but psychological safety means feeling safe to take risks, share ideas, and learn from mistakes.

2

Psychological safety means avoiding conflict.

Conflict is natural and healthy. A safe environment allows teams to address issues honestly and find common ground.

3

Psychological safety is a soft skill.

Teams with psychological safety are more effective, take risks, and achieve better results, making it essential to success.

4

Psychological safety is a one-time fix.

Building psychological safety takes ongoing effort to maintain a supportive work environment.

5

Leaders don't need vulnerability for psychological safety.

Fostering safety takes leadership, active listening, vulnerability, and a growth mindset.

6

Psychological safety means no accountability.

A safe environment delivers feedback constructively, making employees feel safe to fail, learn, and improve.

Inclusive Leaders Foster Psychological Safety By... 04

Empowering and coaching others

Valuing team member's mental health and well-being

Offering Empathy

Building trust and safety ongoingly

Communicating authentically

Admitting to mistakes or to not knowing the answers

Addressing conflict with courage

Paying attention and respond to the needs and capacities of the team

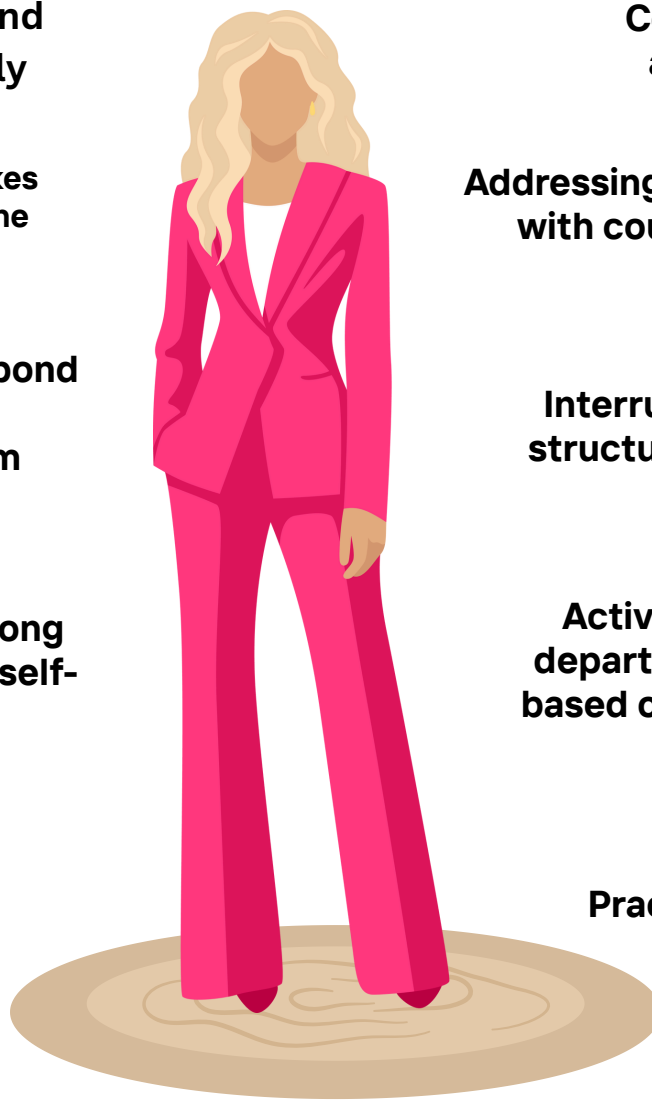
Interrupting cultural and structural norms that limit inclusion

Engaging in life-long learning & critical self-reflection

Actively improving departmental culture based on team's needs

Understanding and elevating team members' skills

Practicing patience & humility



Practicing Self-Care

CIRCLE THE ACTIONS THAT ARE A PART OF YOUR LEADERSHIP PRACTICE. HIGHLIGHT THE ONES YOU'D LIKE TO GROW. HANG THIS PAGE IN YOUR OFFICE TO INSPIRE INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP.

Create A Culture that Recognizes & Values Vulnerable Behavior

05

As teams form a shared work culture, individuals are often required to take vulnerable or risky actions to engage, adapt, and collaborate effectively. Willingness to take these risks varies based on lived experiences, beliefs, and identity. Leaders should first recognize the everyday risks team members take, then create conditions where these actions are safe from punishment or judgment. In environments that support growth, exploration, and conflict repair, teams build resilience, satisfaction, and creativity making inclusion and a sense of mattering key drivers of success.

Risky Behaviors

- Giving an incorrect answer
- Making and admitting a mistake
- Expressing emotions
- Expressing disagreement
- Pointing out others' errors
- Challenging the way things are done
- Sharing something personal
- Asking for more resources
- Raising a concern
- Receiving feedback
- Being one's authentic self
- Asking for help

Risk increases



1. Review this list of risky behaviors.
2. What actions in this list are more challenging for you personally? Why?
3. What risks do you notice your team members taking?
4. How do you respond to the risks taken by your team?
5. What actions from this list are not visible to you as a leader?
6. What factors in your organizational culture contribute to team safety?

Strategies to Promote Psychological Safety

06

Actions and habits initiated by leaders can significantly promote the collective care that inspires teams to flourish. The following are examples of how to activate psychological safety during various moments in a workday. As you read through the examples, **highlight** the ones that you would like to implement going forward. **Circle** the ones that are part of your existing leadership practice. Notice the thoughts and insights that arise as you reflect on these strategies.

Tend to the Basic Needs of Your Team

- Get to know your team members' personality, strengths, and work-related needs.
- Allow team members flexibility when navigating non-work challenges such as childcare, personal losses (death, divorce, etc.) and health events.
- Encourage breaks & working within business hours.
- Right-size scope of programs and duties so that teams can function within their human capacity.
- Advocate to your supervisors to protect team well-being and elevate their needs.

During a Staff Meeting

- Provide food or snacks during staff meetings.
- Offer structured wellness check-ins at the beginning of meetings.
- Provide a structured agenda for meetings so that team knows what to expect. Include a space where team can contribute their agenda items.
- Make space in the agenda to inquire about the impact of work on the team.
- Don't overwhelm team with too much information all at once.

Promote Group Safety

- Address incidents of bias and microaggressions promptly and with care.
- Acknowledge the emotional impact of community, national or global events that may affect members of your team (i.e. a death, racial or ethnic violence, political elections, climate disasters).
- Acknowledgement does not require that the group delve further into personal or political beliefs
- Implement a process to introduce new staff members to the team as a large group (with a meal or snacks if possible).
- Initiate a socials committee of team leaders to organize & implement opportunities for frequent team connection, restoration, & play.



Navigating Organizational Change

Involve team members in hiring by inviting them to voluntarily join hiring committees. When changes occur like staff departures, project funding cuts, or delays create space to process the impact together, while staying within policy. Ask questions such as:

- How are you feeling since the change?
- What questions do you have?
- How will this impact you?
- What support do you need?
- How can I advocate for you?

Organizational change can be challenging. Acknowledge the team's resilience and adjust productivity goals to allow time for adaptation.

Enhance Your Leadership Ability

- Practice holistic self-care consistently.
- Affirm often that it is okay to make mistakes and not know all of the answers.
- Grow your human-centered focus through mentorship, reading, training and getting feedback.
- Enhance your skills for listening, curiosity, patience and humility.
- Commit to life-long learning; allow yourself to ask vulnerable questions to the team that reveal places for you to grow:
 - How did my words impact you/the team?
 - What can I do to make this a better process?
 - What do you need to feel more successful?
- Make a habit of paying attention to what your teams are doing. Praise their small and large efforts regularly.

Enhance Individual Safety and Mattering

- Make effort to pronounce employee names correctly, by their chosen name, and by preferred pronouns.
- For employees who speak English as a second language, affirm their efforts, speak slowly to allow for extra processing time, encourage their progress.
- When mistakes are made, take a supportive approach that fosters learning:
- It's okay to make mistakes. This can be adjusted.
- What can you do differently next time to avoid this outcome in the future?
- What can I/we do to support you in the future?
- Offer praise when team members take risks to share ideas and opinions authentically:
 - Thank you for sharing this with me.
 - I appreciate you bringing this to my attention.
 - I will take your input into consideration and change our process.



Statement of Support

07

Fostering psychological safety in a team starts with effective communication. Leaders can model empathy, care, and openness to create a safe environment. Below are example statements and questions to use during moments of challenge and growth. These help calm stress responses and encourage a growth mindset. Read them aloud to get a feel for them. Think about where you can use these in your leadership moments. Speak with genuine empathy, adjust the wording to fit your style, and notice how team members respond as you affirm their experiences.

5 Sentence Starters that Help De-Escalate Emotions

1. I can understand how frustrating it is when...
2. I realize how complicated it is to...
3. I imagine how upsetting it is to...
4. I know how confusing it must be when...
5. I'm sorry to hear that...

Statements to Affirm and Uplift

1. I am proud of you for _____.
2. As a team, we've accomplished a lot.
3. I'm proud of the collaborative effort on _____.
4. I appreciate your hard work and dedication.
5. Your efforts are invaluable to the team.
6. I'm grateful for your contributions to this project.

Statements to Promote Growth After Mistakes

1. *I know this must be disappointing. Let's figure this out together.*
2. *Mistakes happen. What can we learn from this?*
3. *I appreciate your honesty in bringing this to my attention.*
4. *It's okay to make mistakes. We all do.*
5. *Let's discover how we can fix this.*

5 Statements that Empathize

1. That's not unusual, it can be confusing.
2. I'm glad you asked that.
3. Good point.
4. A lot of people run into that problem.
5. It makes sense where you're coming from.



Vulnerable Statements Leaders Can Say to Build Trust

1. I wish I could give you more information, but I don't have any further updates at this time.
2. I made a mistake. I'm learning right alongside of you.
3. I'm not sure how to handle this situation. I need your help.
4. I'll admit, I'm not always right.
5. I'm sorry. I handled that situation poorly.
6. I'm grateful for your support and understanding.
7. I'm open to feedback, both positive and negative.

Statements to Disrupt Harm or Acknowledge Upset

1. Can I just say something here?
2. I'm sorry to interrupt, but...
3. Can I stop you there for a moment?
4. I'd like to mention something that I noticed
5. X made me uncomfortable. Can we address that
6. This is an upsetting situation for many of us. Let's take a moment to pause.
7. This has been a difficult time, no doubt
8. If you need to take a break, feel free to do so.

Reflection on Barriers and Capacities

08

Fostering psychological safety as a leader is an ongoing practice that is flexible, adaptable and responsive to the present-moment needs and configuration of your team. Inclusion efforts take time, planning, emotional labor, and presence. As you enhance your leadership abilities, allow yourself the grace to make mistakes and actively course correct. Allow yourself the opportunity to try something new. Allow yourself lots of space to restore and receive support.

In the space below, reflect on any personal barriers to putting psychological safety strategies and statements into practice (see p. 9-12). Refer to the ladder of vulnerability (p. 8) to understand vulnerable actions that are at your learning edge.

WHAT ARE SOME BARRIERS OR CHALLENGES YOU MAY FACE IN FOSTERING PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IN YOUR TEAM?

BARRIERS TO FOSTER PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY INCLUDE:

- Too much work
- Lack of time
- Toxic supervisor/institutional culture
- Tendency to avoid conflict
- Fear of messing up
- Difficulty setting boundaries
- Difficulty expressing feelings
- Self-doubt
- Power imbalances and hierarchies
- Team members with different goals
- Navigating role boundaries (i.e. having a friend who is a supervisor)
- External factors that are out of your control (political climate, organizational changes)



**WHAT ARE SMALL STEPS YOU CAN TAKE TO OVERCOME BARRIERS
(INCLUDING GROWING YOUR SKILLS, TAKING RISKS, CELEBRATING
SUCCESSSES, SEEKING SUPPORT)?**

WHAT EXISTING STRENGTHS DO YOU EMBODY THAT WILL SUPPORT YOU?



**WHAT IS THERE TO GAIN BY INCORPORATING STRATEGIES FOR
PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY INTO YOUR LEADERSHIP STYLE?**

Resources

- American Psychological Association. (2024). Work in America: Psychological safety in the changing workplace 2024 report. <https://www.apa.org/pubs/reports/work-in-america/2024/work-in-america-report.pdf>
- Boston Consulting Group. (2024, January 15). Psychological safety: Leveling the playing field for employees. Boston Consulting Group. <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2024/psychological-safety-levels-playing-field-for-employees>
- Brown, B. (2018, October). Dare to lead: Brave work, tough conversations, whole hearts. New York, Random House.
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Inclusive Leadership Training

Call to Action #2

Please complete the following before our next coaching/training session:

□ **Deepen your learning:**

Read through the session Toolkit thoroughly to solidify your understanding of psychological safety in a team environment. There are many skill-building strategies and activities woven into the materials.

□ **Reflection Activity:**

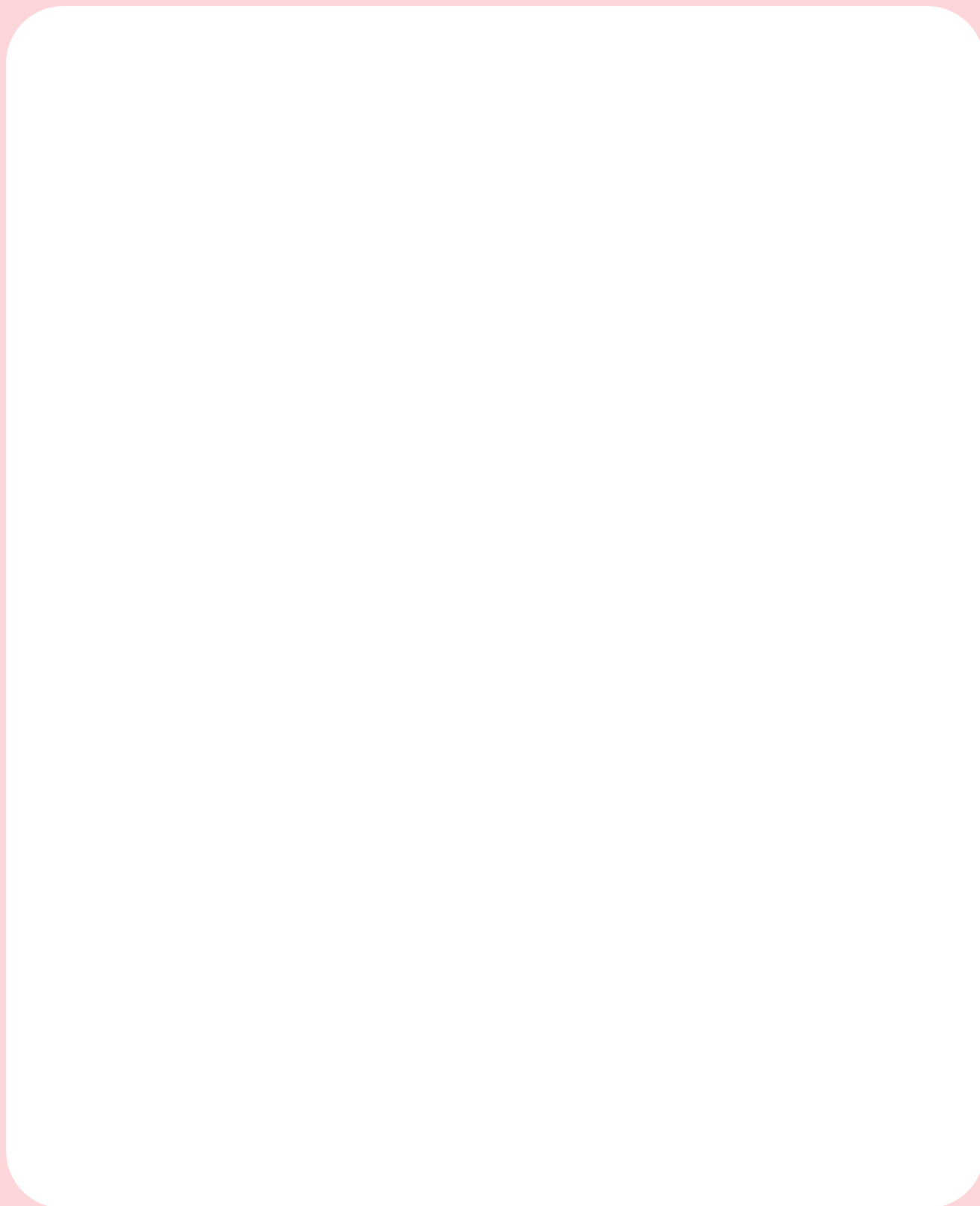
Review p. 8: Create A Culture that Recognizes & Values Vulnerable Behaviors. Set a timer for 10–15 minutes and write out your responses to the insight questions at the bottom of the page. What did you gain through this reflection?

□ **Take Action:**

Read through the strategies and statements for fostering psychological safety presented on p. 9–12.

- Circle the examples that are part of your existing leadership practice.
- Highlight the examples that you would like to implement going forward. Examine barriers to your successful implementation using the activity on p. 13–14: Reflection on Barriers and Capacities
- Choose 3 action items that you highlighted. Apply the chosen strategies to your leadership efforts within the next month.

Journaling Page

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SESSION 1: INTRODUCTION TO *INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP *



TABLE OF CONTENTS

What is Inclusive Leadership? 01

Benefits of Inclusive Leadership? 02

6 C's of Inclusive Leadership 03

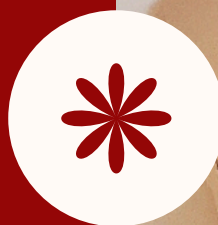
Examples of IL In Practice 04

Inclusion Enhancement Plan 05

Resources 06

Call to Action #1 07

Doodles, Insights, Take Aways Page 08



WHAT IS INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP?

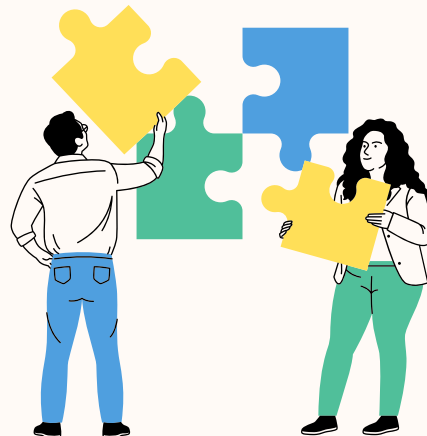
What we choose to love, we choose to move against fear, against alienation, and separation. The choice to love is a choice to connect, to find ourselves in others.

-Bell Hooks

Inclusive Leadership (IL) has no single definition, but rather varies across contexts. The following definitions are drawn from peer-reviewed research, leader interviews, and social inclusion data.

Inclusive leadership is a style of leading others that:

- Seeks to understand and maximize the diversity that characterizes its team. It values different viewpoints, experiences, and skills and foster equitable participation from all team members
- is grounded in various leadership styles:
 - Democratic leadership- meeting needs and interests of the group through shared decision-making and participation.
 - Distributive Leadership- tasks performed and involve people from different functions and levels within the organization
 - Transformation Leadership- creating positive change at the individual, interpersonal, group and community level.
- values authenticity and establishing a culture of diversity and inclusion in the work place.
- is a set of practices that help create more diverse environments.
- protects basic human rights and seeks to create campus populations that are more representative.



BENEFITS OF INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

An inclusive leadership structure offers many benefits for individuals, teams, and organizations. As adrienne maree brown notes in Emergent Strategy, when leadership embraces diverse perspectives and creativity, it leads to emergence where complex systems and patterns grow from simple, meaningful interactions. This approach highlights how strong human relationships shape a system's resilience and success.

BENEFITS TO INDIVIDUALS/TEAMS

- **Sense of Belonging:** teams feel cared for, valued and respected for their uniqueness and strengths.
 - **Personal Growth and Development:** through ideas and perspective-sharing, individuals are in an environment to grow and self-develop
 - **Increased Confidence:** teams are more likely to express their opinions and take on new challenges in an environment that values creative expression and connection
- Stronger Relationships:** collaboration opportunities foster trust among team members, strengthening workplace relationships

BENEFITS TO THE ORGANIZATION

- **Enhanced Innovation:** Diverse teams bring varied perspectives, leading to more creative solutions and innovative ideas.
- **Improved Decision-Making:** promotes diverse viewpoints, resulting in more comprehensive and informed decision-making.
- **Higher Employee Engagement:** fosters greater employee commitment, leading to increased job satisfaction and success outcomes.
- **Attraction and Retention of Team Members:** when inclusion is prioritized, the organization appeals to a broader talent pool, enhancing recruitment and reducing turnover.



6 C'S OF INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP



DIMENSION	DEFINITION	ATTRIBUTES
Commitment	Dedication to diversity and inclusion because these objectives align with your personal values and because you believe in the multi-dimensional positive outcomes of DEIAB (diversity, equity, inclusion, access and belonging)	• Personal Values • Organizational Values
Courage	Challenging the status quo (existing practices, policies, systems) through advocacy and voice; humility about strengths and accountability for limitations and areas of growth	• Humility • Bravery • Vulnerability
Cognizance of Bias	Mindful self-awareness of personal and organizational blind spots and biases; Self-regulation and personal growth efforts to shift thinking and practice toward core qualities of inclusion (value, respect, belonging)	• Self-Regulation (Awareness) • Fairness
Curiosity	Open-mindedness and a genuine desire to understand and integrate how others view and experience the world; willingness to face uncertainty; active steps toward adaptation & growth	• Openness • Empathy • Resilience
Cultural Intelligence	Confidence and effectiveness in engaging with diverse individuals and teams, recognizing how personal experiences and culture shape worldview, while maintaining a growth mindset to learn and adapt in unfamiliar environments	• Drive • Knowledge • Adaptability • Care
Collaboration	Actively empowering individuals to grow in their capacities and leadership; leveraging the strengths of diverse groups toward greater creativity & outcomes	• Empowerment • Team Composition



EXAMPLES OF LL IN PRACTICE

Individual

Actions you can take as a leader

Interpersonal

Actions across team members

Structural

Actions built into the operations and policies of the organization



- Define & understand personal values
- Define & understand personal values

- Ask team members for feedback and participation on how to enhance inclusive practice during 1-1 and team meetings

- Add DEIAB into the mission of your department
- Include outcomes of inclusion into annual strategic plan



- Reduce and shift fixed mindsets around your capabilities as a leader
- Foster inner awareness on how your leadership style affects others

- Practice active listening to foster trust
- Communicate with transparency; address limitations, grievances and conflict directly

- Develop a standard process for safely voicing disagreements
- Assess staff & constituents on how they are experiencing the org



- Practice continuous self-awareness
- Solicit feedback to identify areas of growth
- Further educate yourself on DEIAB (read, attend trainings, talk to people)

- Support team in reconciliation processes when a bias incident occurs
- Pronounce names correctly; address people with their correct gender pronouns

- Hold annual training on unconscious bias, cultural competency, and inclusive communication
- Evaluate and adjust hiring practices to increase diversity



- Practice empathy and open-mindedness to learn from team members
- Notice resistance to change and discover ways to work through it
- Share your process w/ others

- Stimulate dialogue and innovation by asking open-ended questions during small group meetings
- Invite teams to share personal stories during structured check-ins

- Conduct intermittent evaluations to provide & receive growth-oriented feedback from team
- Slow down work to care for team during periods of uncertainty & change

INCLUSION ENHANCEMENT PLAN

FILL IN THE BLANK WITH YOUR ANSWERS

I commit to enhancing my inclusive leadership by:

Things that may affect my progress
are:

I will work through these barriers
by:

Some measures of success that will indicate my progress are:



RESOURCES

- Bourke, J., & Titus, A. (2019, March). Why inclusive leaders are good for organizations, and how to become one. Harvard Business Review. <https://hbr.org/2019/03/why-inclusive-leaders-are-good-for-organizations-and-how-to-become-one>
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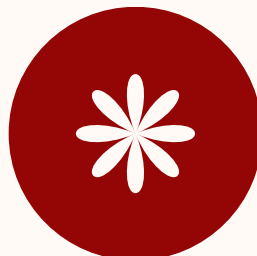


INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP TRAINING

Call to Action #1

Please complete the following before our next coaching/training session:

-  **Refresh your learning:** Read through the session Toolkit to solidify your understanding of inclusive leadership dimensions (6 C's) and how to practically implement such strategies within yourself, across your teams, and as a department. Note down questions you have and submit them using the QR code:
-  **Implement your Inclusion Enhancement Plan:** There are many elements of Inclusive Leadership that may already be in play within your teams. Notice what you are doing well, notice areas for growth. Implement the actions you identified in your Inclusion Enhancement Plan by the end of this calendar year. Track and share any leadership successes you have.
-  **Practice IL with your Team:** IL is a practice of authenticity and vulnerability toward growth and resilience. Take 15 minutes in your next team meeting to start a conversation on inclusivity in the department. Ask three questions, either via survey assessment or directly to gauge the sense of trust, connection, and belonging that your team members feel when they come to work each day. Below are some sample questions. Feel free to adjust or change these as needed:
 1. On a scale from 1 to 10, how comfortable do you feel sharing your ideas and perspectives in team discussions? What factors influence your comfort level?
 2. Can you describe a time when you felt valued for your unique contributions to the team? What made that experience significant for you?
 3. To what degree does our team actively embrace and celebrate our diverse backgrounds and experiences? What changes would help foster a greater sense of belonging?



DOODLES, INSIGHTS, TAKEAWAYS