

19 Inclusive leadership: Facts and why you need to know them

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Inclusive leadership is a leadership approach that appreciates diversity, invites and welcomes everyone's contribution, and encourages full engagement with the processes of decision-making and shaping reality. *Inclusive leadership* aims to create, change, and innovate whilst balancing everybody's needs. Fairholm (2004) defines inclusive leadership as “Doing things with people, rather than to people, which is the essence of inclusion” (Fairholm, 2004, p.4)

For employees to say that they work in an inclusive work environment, they must believe that they are treated fairly, valued for who they are, and included in core decision making. *Inclusive leadership* involves making employees feel that they work in an inclusive environment. If employees feel they are treated fairly, valued, and included, then they are going to be deeply engaged, committed, and motivated. When employees have a voice, and they feel their voice is valued, they will believe that they are an important contributor in the organization.

In a study by Carmeli, Reiter-Palmon, and Ziv (2010), they examined how *inclusive leadership traits* (manifested by openness, accessibility, and availability of a leader) foster employee creativity in the workplace. Using a sample of 150 employees, they investigated the relationship between *inclusive leadership*, psychological safety, and employee involvement in creative work tasks. The results of structural equation modeling (SEM) analysis indicate that inclusive leadership is positively related to psychological safety, which, in turn, stimulates employee involvement in creative work.

19 Inclusive leadership facts

1. The inclusive leader influences and empowers constituents for the betterment of all without negative repercussions on the individual or particular groups. (Echols, 2009)

The aim is for universal participation of the populace and self-actualization of the individual utilizing a commonly agreed-upon goal or vision. The inclusive leader rejects the notion that certain groups have no place at the table regarding decision-making (Echols, 2009). Leaders who practice inclusion often believe it is not only morally wrong to marginalize certain groups within a constituency, but it is a grossly ineffective means of leadership that will minimize or even destroy the potential energy and creativity of any organization.

1. *Inclusive leadership* respects competition and cooperation as part of a participative process

In this regard, there is a belief that relationships in the workplace can accomplish things for the benefit of the organization as a whole. Competition within the organization is for the achievement of the desired end-goals. Employees are motivated based on each individual's ability to perceive and embrace the personal reward in the achievement of corporate goals for the greater good

1. *Inclusive leadership* brings the maximum number of individuals into participation

Top-down, non-participative leadership creates a separation of those who have power and those who do not, with little in between. This thereby upset the creative process as ideas are simply passed down from the top with no participation from all parties involved.

1. *Inclusive leadership training* empowers individuals to reach their full potential while pursuing the common good of the particular populace. (Fapohunda, 2014)

The leader is challenged to balance the goal of self-actualization of individuals while bringing the organization into its full potential of alignment

1. *Inclusive leadership* commits to allow future leaders to emerge.

Inclusive leaders do not attempt to institutionalize in such a way as to bring fossilization; rather, they work to keep the organizational structure somewhat fluid and dynamic.

1. Diversity wins

In a report by McKinsey (2020), it was found that the most diverse companies are now more likely than ever to outperform less diverse peers on profitability. The report showed an increasing correlation between being in the top quartile for diversity and financial outperformance.

1. *Inclusive leadership* attempts to disseminate influence throughout the organization rather than hoard it.

This dispersion allows for maximum replication of the most effective leadership practices and *inclusive leadership traits*. The goal is accomplished through the development of leadership that is trained and enabled to lead.

1. *Inclusive leadership* is manifested in the development of appropriate boundaries that maintain the integrity of the nature of the collective without marginalizing any of the populace.

1. You can't do it alone (Wiseman, 1996)

Inclusive leaders know this and know the importance of recognizing the contributions of others, even those other leaders might overlook. They understand the importance of team members in teamwork. They care more about their team succeeding than their own ego needs. They acknowledge even the poorly-conceived idea to encourage better ones.

1. If you want to be listened to, you have to do your share of listening

Gaining input from others will improve your decisions and those that contributed—even if they argued on another side—are more likely to act upon them. Inclusive leaders are good at facilitating discussions that

include everyone and focus on the issue at hand. They are likely to hear information they didn't know or consider viewpoints and perspectives that make them broaden their views, thereby encouraging more creative and responsive solutions.

1. *Inclusive leadership* has a competitive advantage

Practicing diversity and inclusion on a global scale allows for more effective talent management (attraction and retention), alignment, and team performance, as well as improved efficiency. These factors all contribute to building a high-performance organization.

1. Employee inclusion is linked to inclusion linked to employee reports of innovation and helpfulness

The more employees feel valued and included in the decision-making process, the more likely they are to contribute effective and meaningful ideas to the organization. This form of leadership fosters the development of critical *inclusive leadership traits* that help the organization.

1. *Inclusive leadership* is linked to humility, an important leadership trait

An inclusive leader is more likely to admit mistakes, learn from criticism and different points of view, acknowledging and seeking the contribution of others to overcome one's limitations. All these are essential *inclusive leadership traits* that are important for effective leadership.

1. *Inclusive leadership* fosters accountability

Accountability demonstrates confidence in direct reports by holding them responsible for a performance they can control.

1. Inclusive leaders are empathetic and curious about the perspectives of others and skilled at connecting with other people, especially across lines of difference.

1. Inclusive leaders activate diverse viewpoints for decision-making and increased innovation. (Wiseman, 1996)

When a leader fosters an environment that not only allows but encourages and rewards dissent and different points of view, even during times of great stress, that team will begin to innovate.

1. Inclusive leaders take risks, challenge the status quo, and bravely step up in difficult situations when they see that the core values of the organization are not being carried out.

1. *Inclusive leadership* dissipates the effects of group-think (Peterson, 2020)

By having a variety of opinions, there is likely to be more innovative ideas that benefit the organization as a whole. These ideas will help the organization to remain competitive on the market.

1. Inclusion dissolves fear within an organization (Peterson, 2020)

Creativity and innovation simply cannot exist when fear is ever-present. This is because people gripped by fear and stress are, in a sense, feeling too much empathy. Their need to survive sends their mirror neuron systems into overdrive, and not only are they receptive to external stimuli, but they can also internalize it – especially when that stimulus comes from someone in power.

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