

Inclusive Leadership Notes and Toolkit

Brave New Law



Brave New Law: Inclusive leadership notes and toolkit

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In our recent series of Brave New Law discussions, we tackled the topic of ‘Inclusive Leadership’ with a number of general counsel from different companies and jurisdictions. This toolkit is based on some of the main points raised in those discussions.



Don't ignore inclusion

Inclusion is a major issue for 21st century leaders – and one of the most compelling.

The biggest lesson for any business is don't just bury your head in the sand, deal with Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) head on, you'll find that people really appreciate it.



Admit what you don't know and embrace the uncomfortable

But this is a big change for many, including leaders. Leaders must not be afraid of asking questions and admitting what we do not know. Leaders can be worried or uncomfortable about speaking out through fear of saying the wrong thing, so instead, say nothing at all. But it's vital that leaders speak about these issues as conversations from leaders on these topics carry a huge amount of weight across the workforce.

A major area of discomfort in approaching D&I is due to the misapprehension that an inclusive and diverse organisation will be an organisation where everybody has the same opinions and there is no dissent. Diversity of opinion means that there are going to be different opinions and that will sometimes cause friction. Inclusive leaders have to be brave enough to manage the friction to ensure it's positive and creative.



Metrics to measure success

What gets measured gets done: for many organisations, so metrics are key. But increasingly the way forward is tying D&I metrics and success to performance, pay or bonuses. That emphasises the message that this is a business priority not a 'nice to have.'



It's got to be every day

We must ensure our focus is behavioural not just platitudes or statements. How are we making our day-to-day environments more inclusive for everyone to be able to express their authentic selves?

Areas to consider include:

- How are we running meetings? Is everyone having a chance to speak or share ideas in the best way for them?
- Are we ensuring progression is open and fair?
- Do we, as leaders, connect enough with a broad range of people not just our direct reports?



Authenticity is central to inclusive leadership

Lawyers can be very good at upholding the status quo. Inclusive leaders need to be courageous and authentic. That includes being open about their own backgrounds. Some participants in our discussions mentioned how we can feed the existing status quo by making ourselves fit what we think that is and moulding ourselves into what we think that should be. You can't be what you cannot see, speaking up about who we really are shows a path to progression for all those who look up to us.



Anyone can be an inclusive leader

Leaders can also be influencers on the broader culture by identifying employees who are the amplifiers in their organisation to push the changes that they want. Inclusive leadership can come from anyone, and we need to make anyone feel that they can be part of it.



You won't always get it right

There will be cases where even good people do or say the wrong things, but intent does not cancel out impact. Leaders need to communicate about mistakes and lead the education process. Culture change will not happen overnight - don't try to rush it.

Six traits that define inclusive leaders¹



Commitment

You must stay the course and be committed to inclusivity as a behavioural and cultural change. It's easy to respond to specific events and focus on inclusivity because of that. Truly inclusive leadership sees this as a constant and a way of thinking that permeates our day-to-day behaviours. There's a comparison with fitness or any behavioural change. It's easy to start a fitness regime as a response to a particular stimulus: clothes being tighter or a New Year's resolution. But if we don't make that fitness regime a habit and something we do all the time, then gains will be just short term not lasting



Courage

It can be hard to challenge entrenched behaviours. Change often carries with it discomfort for both the majority and the minority. There's sometimes a misassumption that inclusion means keeping everyone happy. The fact is that some people will not be happy. Inclusive leaders must apply their commitment to courageous actions to see through changes that may not necessarily be easy in the short term.



Cognisance of Bias

That's seeing not only others' biases but most importantly our own blind spots. Processes can be incredibly important here to build ways in which we can ensure our own biases and those of others are not hampering our judgement.

It's also important to consider micro-aggressions that may be hard to understand if you are not part of certain identity groups, and that lack of intent does not mitigate the impact. We may get things wrong and it's easy to react emotionally if we feel we are being labelled as someone who has biases. The best thing to do is pause and process before reacting in the moment and to really listen to what the injured party is saying.



Curiosity

Different ideas and experiences are fundamental for growth. Inclusive leaders have an open mindset, a desire to understand how others see the world, and a tolerance for ambiguity. We must realise we do not know all the answers and may 'fail' sometimes.

Series one of *Ted Lasso* referenced the Walt Whitman quote: "Be curious, not judgemental." That mindset is a great example of inclusive leadership.



Cultural intelligence

Going with curiosity is understanding that your way of seeing and understanding the world is not the only way. That's increasingly important in the global marketplace as diversity will mean different things in different parts of the world. Part of working as an inclusive leader will mean understanding that the ways we define certain criteria such as 'success' may not be compatible with different cultural norms.



Collaboration

The key to progress in the 21st century, particularly as digitisation increases, will be empowering and leveraging diverse perspectives not just group intelligence. Different perspectives are key and being comfortable to speak up with ideas that are different. That's where an inclusive culture is important. Inclusive leaders make everyone feel heard and comfortable, bringing their whole range of thinking and creativity to bear on problems.

¹ As defined by Deloitte in their 2016 report: <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/talent/six-signature-traits-of-inclusive-leadership.html>

Further reading

- **“The Key to Inclusive Leadership”**, Juliet Bourke and Andrea Titus *Harvard Business Review* March 6th 2020 <https://hbr.org/2020/03/the-key-to-inclusive-leadership>
- **“How Inclusive is Your Leadership?”**, Salwa Rahim-Dillard *Harvard Business Review* April 19th 2021, <https://hbr.org/2021/04/how-inclusive-is-your-leadership>
- **“10 Characteristics of Inclusive Leadership”**, Emilie R. Ninan, Virginia G. Essandoh, American Bar Association - https://www.americanbar.org/groups/business_law/publications/blt/2020/05/inclusive-leadership/
- **“Unconscious Bias Training That Works”**, Francesca Gino & Katherine Coffman, *Harvard Business Review* September / October 2021 - <http://resources.magappzine.com/feeds/production/comboapp/1126/media/135352/ebaa941d-88af-42c5-b9ee-5d853a1e60af.html>
- **Interview with Pedro Pina** - <https://uk.finance.yahoo.com/news/involve-google-vp-pedro-pina-named-top-lgbt-exec-role-model-in-the-world-outstanding-list-000102572.html>
- **“School’s in Session”** by Richard Sine, *Black In House Counsel Annual Report 2021* pp32-39 - <https://my.yupub.com/?tid=4f4f262e-d610-43fe-b457-1d94ed019b17#/page1>
- **“How to Be an Inclusive Leader: Your Role in Creating Cultures of Belonging Where Everyone Can Thrive”** Jennifer Brown, Berrett Koehler, 2019
- **“So, You Want to Talk About Race”**, Ijeoma Oluo (Seal Press 2019)
- **“Subtle Acts of Exclusion: How to Understand, Identify, and Stop Microaggressions”**, Tiffany Jana and Michael Baran (Berrett Koehler 2020)



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