Leiden Leadership Centre

The importance of inclusiveness

In order to improve their services, more and more public organisations are striving for an inclusive work environment. Inclusiveness is important to be representative of a diverse society and to be able to respond to it effectively. Inclusive leadership contributes by ensuring a workplace in which employees can be themselves and work together effectively in a team.

Inclusive leadership is crucial for the balance between uniqueness and belongingness

While traditional bureaucratic values inform leadership based on the idea of uniformity and equality, there is an increasing need for valuing differences and equity. To foster inclusiveness in a group, inclusive leadership is needed.

What does inclusive leadership entail?

- Inclusive leadership involves behavior to stimulate the appreciation and exchange of different backgrounds, perspectives and ideas that organisational members have.
- Leadership to ensure a safe environment within a team in which everyone can put forward ideas, is listened to, and is respected. This means, ensuring that organisational members feel at home and can be themselves.
- Express the value of diversity, to show that every team member is a valued part of the whole.

Inclusiveness: balancing between uniqueness and belongingness

Inclusiveness is about the balance between uniqueness and belongingness: employees can have their own social identities, while being a valued member of the organisation and the team.

What to do when there is no balance between uniqueness and belongingness?

- Too much emphasis on belongingness without valuing uniqueness, results in assimilation: employees can feel forced to adapt to the prevailing dominant culture and norms and therefore suppress individual characteristics in order to be accepted.
- Too much emphasis on uniqueness without belongingness, results in differentiation: employee differences are only valued for specific (visible) diversity characteristics particularly for those organisational functions which require diversity to effectively interact with diverse stakeholders, such as clients, citizens, or students. However, these employees are not considered a full-fledged member of the organisation or the team, while others (majority group employees) are.
- A lack of room for differences and without fostering belongingness, results in exclusion: minority employees are not treated as a valued member and are excluded of work and decision-making processes.

Diversity does not equal inclusiveness

Diversity can be about both objectively observable and subjective aspects on which individuals can differ from each other. An increase in does not automatically mean more inclusiveness. You have to (continue to) work on inclusiveness.

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The research

The above findings result from the PhD research of <u>dr. Tanachia Ashikali</u> on leadership and inclusiveness in public organizations. The research used a quantitative research design based on various studies. The first two studies are based on questionnaires among employees of various public organisations (respectively 664 and 10,976 people). This made it possible to obtain a representative sample. In addition, two team studies were used, in which both team leaders and their teams participated (respectively 128 and 45 teams).

Inclusive Leadership Self-scan©

To ensure inclusiveness in teams, inclusive leadership is required. With the inclusive leadership scan below, you can test to what extent you demonstrate or perceive inclusive leadership. Even if you are not a formal manager, you can demonstrate inclusive leadership. Each statement can be answered on a scale of 1 (completely disagree) to 5 (completely agree). The higher the average score, the more inclusive leadership you demonstrate or perceive and vice versa.

"As a manager/supervisor/leader […]"	-- 1	- 2	-/+ 3	+ 4	++ 5
1. I encourage team members to discuss diverse viewpoints and perspectives on problem-solving with colleagues.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. I make sure team members have the opportunity to express diverse viewpoints.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. I stimulate team members to exchange different ideas with colleagues.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. I encourage team members to use colleagues' diverse backgrounds* in problem-solving.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. ensure that team members use colleagues' diverse backgrounds* as a source of creativity and innovation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. I stimulate team members to learn from colleagues' diverse backgrounds*.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. I stimulate all team members to actively participate in the team.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. I ensure that all team members are treated as an equal member of the team.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. I try to prevent team members from thinking in negative stereotypes about colleagues.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. I try to prevent that team members form groups that could exclude colleagues.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11. I make sure that all team members have the opportunity to be themselves in the team.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12. I communicate to employees the benefits of diversity* in the team.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13. I ensure that all team members have the opportunity to have a voice in the team.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Total score = (number of points) / 13					

"My manager/supervisor/leader […]"	-- 1	- 2	-/+ 3	+ 4	++ 5
1. Encourages me to discuss diverse viewpoints and perspectives on problem-solving with colleagues.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
2. Makes sure I have the opportunity to express diverse viewpoints.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
3. Stimulates me to exchange different ideas with colleagues.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
4. Encourages me to use colleagues' diverse backgrounds* in problem-solving.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
5. Ensures that I use colleagues' diverse backgrounds* as a source of creativity and innovation.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
6. Stimulates me to learn from colleagues' diverse backgrounds*.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
7. Stimulates me to actively participate in the team.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
8. Ensures I am treated as an equal member of the team.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
9. Tries to prevent me from thinking in negative stereotypes about colleagues.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
10. Tries to prevent that employees form groups that could exclude colleagues.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
11. Makes sure I have the opportunity to be myself in the team.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
12. Communicates to employees the benefits of diversity* in the team.	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
13. Ensures I have the opportunity to have a voice in the team	☐	☐	☐	☐	☐
Total score = (number of points) / 13					

* Diverse backgrounds can include both functional or professional experience and socio-demographic characteristics, particularly those related to having a minority status.

To reflect on your score:
1. How important are the above behaviors in your work context and why?
2. To what extent can you also apply and/or develop the above behaviors and what is the reason for that?