

Leading through complexity

Tuesday 19 September 2023 | 1.00 - 2.00 pm BST

During this webinar we explored how leaders should be equipped to understand their role in removing barriers and harnessing the individuality of their teams, whilst championing positive change through inclusive practices, processes and shared learning.

- What makes a work environment safe enough for you to be who you really are and perform at your best?
- How do leaders create an environment that supports high performing teams and encourages participation and diversity of thought and action.
- How do we have courageous conversations that challenge current practices?

1. Everyone is a leader

Everyone is a leader, regardless of where they sit within an organisation. All of us can demonstrate personal insight through curiosity and consider how their behaviour aligns with their own, and with their organisations, values.

2. Changing leadership

Traditionally, the concept of leadership can be considered as hierarchical, associated with authority, assertiveness, power and privilege. However, contemporary leadership has shifted away from this to require meaningful inclusivity and engagement with social issues. For instance, employees have been active in expressing their views to employers. Further, recent events that could be considered watershed moments such as the murder of George Floyd have made it imperative that leaders in corporate spaces take a stance on social issues.

3. The impact of identity politics

The rise of global identity politics has catalysed the fracturing of organisational cohesion and encouraged people to separate into different groups. To overcome this, leaders should consider what they can do to create an environment in which people not only feel valued and included, but can also perform at their best. Leaders who might not be privy to the lived experiences of their peers require the flexibility to learn about their experiences. Owing to the rise of identity politics, it is more important than ever that leaders and other peers are afforded the opportunity to ask questions or make genuine mistakes with good intentions rather than fearing the repercussions of being ignorant to nuances in religion, sexuality, and gender, amongst other identity differences.

4. Creating psychological safety

A key part of driving high performance is creating an environment of psychological safety. Aside from organisational policies and processes, how leaders make their team feel through their everyday behaviour is strong determinant of how engaged teams are and their trust in management. This can be achieved by proactively connecting with colleagues from different backgrounds to your own, and showing vulnerability, empathy and curiosity in these interactions. Leaders should demonstrate adaptability in their leadership style and express humility in admitting where they have got things wrong.

5. Inclusive leadership with real performance outcomes

It is not possible to have high performance without inclusion, diversity and equality. Senior leadership should emphasize the importance of looking at inclusivity beyond representation of underrepresented groups. For instance, considering equity sequence training – i.e., how each decision within a larger decision is made, ensuring that all hiring panels are diverse, and that talent programs exist for underrepresented groups. Leaders often have a lack of lived experience of the issues that the rest of the workforce faces. They can take part in reverse mentoring which unlocks a close connection with people and changes leaders' perspectives. Further, affinity groups at a grassroots level are helpful to the extent that senior leadership integrates their feedback. Gathering anonymous feedback from staff regarding how included they feel before meetings can create a helpful evidence-base. Facilitating decision-making whilst allowing disagreement can encourage cohesion. Leaders can also benefit from taking a data-driven approach.

They should track where conscious bias, unconscious bias and exclusion is present in their organisational system and decision making processes, as this results in organisational trends and patterns. Having targets is important in driving inclusion.

that it may not be possible for people to entirely see eye to eye. What is important is that colleagues can treat each other with genuine respect despite their fundamental differences, and that their behaviour aligns with organisational values.

6. Challenges to inclusion

Often, champions of inclusion are from marginalised groups. The panellists discussed the reality that the team members who engage with ID&E initiatives are typically the same. Often those that are prohibiting a change in culture or greater inclusion are those who do not make the time to engage in such initiatives to begin with. There is a recurring theme that the people showing up are those who have already bought into the importance of inclusion. In response to this, organisations could consider adopting punitive measures such as reducing leaders bonuses or making active participation in ID&E a measurable bonus. Organisations could also consider allocating a portion of team meetings to ID&E training, such as regarding emotional intelligence.

Lack of self-reflection is another significant barrier to inclusion, for example not carving out the space to learn about inclusive leadership or show willingness to change.

7. Respecting your differences

People may not feel included due to clashes of firmly held beliefs, for example religious and philosophical beliefs (e.g. disagreeing with gay marriage due to religious beliefs). Whilst the legal framework set out by the Equalities Act 2010 sets a baseline level of preventing discrimination, beyond

8. Power and privilege

Concepts such as power and privilege often pose a barrier to organisational cohesion and require demystifying. Leaders should encourage open and healthy conversations regarding the different types of privilege, and recognising their own privilege and how it affects their lives. We should also remove the language of blame surrounding privilege – privilege is often combined with hard work, even though it gives people an initial advantage and is important to recognise.

9. Beyond allyship

There is some discussion around the idea that if one identifies as an ally they do not see the problem, in this instance, inclusion and diversity, as their problem. Allies should actively embrace the importance of diversity inclusion and acknowledge that it is also their problem if their teams are not diverse as it ultimately prohibits their peers from becoming high performers. It may be helpful to re-frame the language of 'allyship' to that of 'co-conspirator', to encourage allies to not just stand with people from marginalised groups, but also take responsibility to instigate change and take practical steps to improve inclusion in the workplace.

#WeAreNotNeutral

Moderator:



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Our Panel:



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TV Entertainment
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