

Inclusion Is and Is Not

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It is rare to come across an organization that does not have an inclusion statement or some internal effort related to inclusion. Many organizations see inclusion having a broader meaning as a platform for higher organizational performance and understand that they simply cannot afford to ignore inclusion.

In more progressive organizations, inclusion is being implemented as a path to competitive advantage—a central business strategy that accelerates organizational performance, builds stronger connections with organizational members and with customers, and produces superior bottom-line results. But even in these organizations, inclusion efforts can be hindered by misconceptions that inclusion is solely “a nice thing to do” that is separate from the core operations of the organization and its performance.

In organizations mired in legacy thinking, inclusion may be seen as indistinguishable from “diversity.” When some people hear the word “inclusion,” they think it means slower decision making, longer meetings, and more time to complete tasks. Others think it means lowering standards or they fear inclusion requires “everyone

involved in everything” and a subordination of business priorities to make people feel good. All of these are misconceptions and block the real workplace advantage

of inclusion. These assumptions must be addressed to actually achieve the workforce optimization and competitive advantages that inclusion offers.

Inclusion Is and Is Not

Inclusion is...	Inclusion is not...
1 Asking for input from the people affected, and having the right people doing the right work at the right time.	Involving everyone in every thing.
2 A way to accomplish the mission, strategies, and goals of the organization.	An end in itself, with no mission-related direction.
3 A way of hearing, valuing, and leveraging people’s differences to create breakthroughs.	Working with people who are different for the sake of it—“diversity for diversity’s sake.”
4 Supporting all people to do their best work and to continuously improve on it.	Sacrificing productivity or overlooking underperformance.
5 Building partnerships focused on work outcomes.	Focusing on the relationship at the expense of the task.
6 A two-way street.	Individuals not taking accountability for including themselves.

Conscious Actions for Inclusion

4 Keys that Change EVERYTHING

- 1. Lean into Discomfort**
Be willing to challenge self and others. Speak up—bring your voice and street corner.
- 2. Listen as an Ally**
Listen, listen, listen and engage. Be a partner. Challenge as an Ally.
- 3. State Your Intent and Intensity**
Clarify intent: State Notions, Stakes, Boulders, and Tombstones. Say what you mean and how much you mean it.
- 4. Share Street Corners**
Accept others' thoughts and experiences as true for them. Hear others' differences as additive.

Practiced together, these 12 Conscious Actions create a **Joining Mindset**, which builds partnership, collaboration, and teamwork.

Inclusion Is...
A sense of belonging;
Feeling respected, valued, and seen for who we are as individuals;
There is a level of supportive energy and commitment from leaders, colleagues, and others so that we—individually and collectively—can do our best work.

Sustaining Behaviors

- 5. Greet people authentically—say "hello."**
- 6. Create a sense of safety for yourself and your team members.**
- 7. Work for the common good and shared success.**
- 8. Ensure right people, right work, right time: Ask who else needs to be involved to understand the whole situation.**
- 9. Link to others' ideas, thoughts, and feelings—give energy back.**
- 10. Speak up when people are being made "small" or excluded.**
- 11. Address misunderstandings and resolve disagreements—work "pinches."**
- 12. Build TRUST: Do what you say you will do and honor confidentiality.**

CHANGE THE INTERACTION CHANGE THE EXPERIENCE CHANGE THE RESULT

Figure 1.

Inclusion is better understood as a process, as a means to an end—as a HOW—not as an end in itself. To gain the advantages offered by inclusive practices, it is more productive to establish a set of conscious actions that support the creation of an inclusive environment (see Figure 1, Conscious Actions for Inclusion). These conscious actions for inclusion become “standard work” for how people interact and are critically important in providing people with a roadmap for how to engage. While many organizations are focusing on unconscious bias and what not to do, conscious actions for inclusion provide clarity on the behaviors that will move toward greater inclusion. These behaviors, when tied to the mission, vision, and strategies of the organization, yield quantifiable results for customers, stakeholders, team

members, and the organization as a whole. In our work, we call this **Inclusion as the HOW®**. It is an essential driver of higher individual, team, and organizational performance.

Definition of Inclusion

An explicit statement of what inclusion is creates some common understanding and helps organizations and their people understand and practice inclusion in a way that enhances performance and accelerates results. Three key elements stand out as we think about inclusion: that people feel they belong, that their diversity is valued and respected and seen, and, most importantly, that the environment is supportive and enables people to do their best work. However, as important as it is to understand what inclusion **IS**, it is just as important to understand what inclusion is **NOT** and dispel myths that create resistance and perpetuate actions that do not align with clear business needs is just as critical (see Figure 2).

1 Inclusion is NOT... involving everyone in every thing.

Too often people think that being inclusive means “everyone should be involved in everything.” As a result, too many people are asked to attend meetings that are not relevant to their work and are invited to give input on decisions that do not impact them. This not only creates confusion, but is also a substantial waste of people’s time. Meetings and processes become cumbersome and overwhelming. Even more damaging is the

backlash that this belief creates. When people struggle with the challenges this misperception of inclusion creates, they are likely to brush it off completely. Some attempt to include everyone, which of course does not work, and they give up. It drives people away from even attempting to be inclusive. They use the fact that they cannot include every single person as justification to keep inviting the same people: the in crowd, the A team, the trusted advisors, the yes people—whoever that exclusive group is.

While it may be useful to canvass a wider group on certain issues, if this becomes the standard procedure for all issues, it can lead to seemingly endless discussions and painfully slow decision-making processes. Instead of adding value, the volume of uninformed input—or input from those with no stake in the outcome—wastes the time of those who must sift through it. This “gather all opinions” approach can also cause confusion and anxiety among people who are unconnected to the issue at hand as they are asked to chime in on issues they are not involved in. Finally, it can also significantly lower the quality of the outcome. Rather than inspiring greater engagement, the involvement of too many of the “wrong” people raises frustration for just about everyone involved in the process. Having the wrong people involved also means that decisions are not always acted on efficiently...or at all. People say “yes” in the meeting, either not understanding their connection to the process (and therefore how they can contribute) or they believe it will not work and stall, hesitate, or “hold their breath.”

Inclusion IS... asking for input from the people affected, and having the right people doing the right work at the right time.

What is key to inclusion is that the right people are involved at the right time doing the right work. An organization can demonstrate its commitment to valuing people and their time by seeking input from all individuals affected by the issue/opportunity at hand. This kind of selectivity and careful thinking about who are the right people to be involved in the decision or conversation provides a forum that is indeed inclusive as individuals who need to be in the conversation are sought out and heard. What this also means is that the organization can no longer seek input from the same “go to” people. It requires thoughtful examination of the issue being addressed and who are the key people to include. Hearing from the people affected can help achieve a 360-degree vision of the issue that leads to better decisions. This process can also create a stronger sense of shared investment and accountability for co-creating the best solutions because those involved have added their thinking in the information-gathering/decision-making process. Participants have a stake in the outcome, which strengthens the ability to execute on the decision.

2 Inclusion is NOT... an end in itself, with no mission-related direction.

When inclusion is a goal in and of itself it can feel like a “program

of the month” that has little to do with doing the real work of the organization. Without specific, well-understood connections between inclusive behaviors and the essential objectives of the organization—e.g., the way work is accomplished and goals are met—people are often unable to justify the time, energy, or resources to behave inclusively, let alone help make inclusion the way people achieve organizational goals. Without that connection, people who already have too much to do see inclusion as extra work, not a foundational way to work.

Inclusion IS... a way to accomplish the mission, strategies, and goals of the organization.

When established as standard work for the organization’s day-to-day way of doing business—the HOW—inclusion adds value. It not only unleashes more of people’s skills, knowledge, and energy; it also increases alignment and collaboration, accelerates decision making and problem solving, and connects those resources toward fulfillment of the organization’s mission, strategies, and goals.

Inclusion as the **HOW** goes beyond merely engaging people; it enhances the way they interact to achieve results. As people see the results they get from inclusive interactions, they are more willing to lean into discomfort to challenge themselves and others. Different perspectives are shared as individuals speak up to offer their “street corners” or perspectives. As leaders and

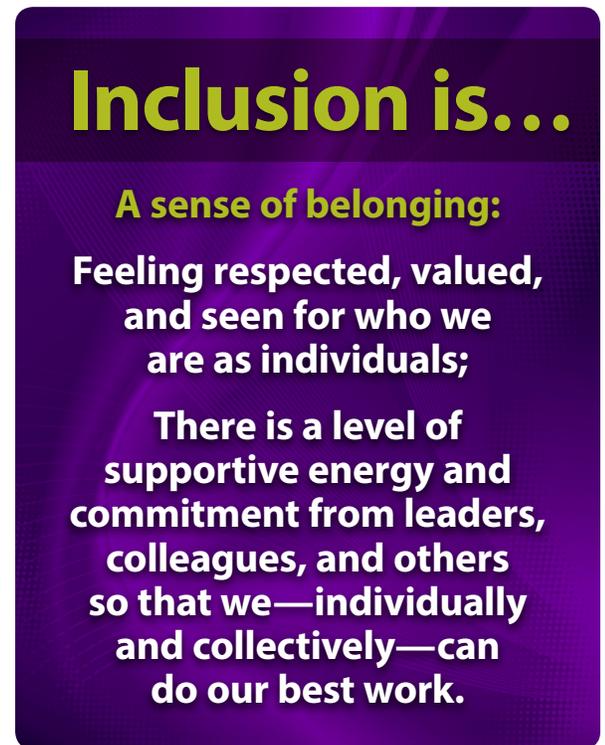


Figure 2.

team members make the intent and intensity they have in the ideas and thoughts they share, others understand how they can participate in the decision-making process. Finally, as colleagues listen to one another as allies, they manage disagreements and work for shared success. Barriers to communication and cooperation are reduced or removed so knowledge is shared faster and used more effectively, resulting in fewer mistakes and less waste. It provides more energy and resources focused on an issue to produce faster and better decisions. Meetings run smoother; problems are identified faster; solutions are implemented more effectively. As people share a common language and build trust, everyone can contribute and do their best work (Katz and Miller, 2013a).

3 Inclusion is NOT... working with people who are different for the sake of it—"diversity for diversity's sake."

Although many organizations stress the need for diversity of thought, the reality of the world is that differences make many people uncomfortable. For too many people and organizations, differences between people are considered a deficit: "Things work better when we all think alike, act alike, look alike." Many people still hold an assumption (more often implicitly than explicitly these days) that, "If someone is not like me—if they have a different background or experience from me or think differently from me— their differences will slow me down." Many still believe that things work better if they minimize or ignore differences because acknowledging them might lead to discomfort, conflict, or an embarrassing situation. Others may agree in theory about the need for diversity but in practice focus on "let's just get it done" and go the route that is most comfortable and familiar. This thinking perpetuates an organizational culture that feels more like an exclusive club where there is one "right" way to be, think, and act. This makes it more difficult for people to bring a difference in style, tenure, nationality, language, experience, or even opinion to decision making and problem solving (Katz and Miller, 1995). People who bring their differences or acknowledge them are more likely to be judged negatively, making it harder for them to make a contribution and do their best work (Katz and Miller, 2013b).

Inclusion IS... a way of hearing, valuing, and leveraging people's differences to create breakthroughs.

A key aspect of the inclusion definition is that people feel respected, valued, and seen for who they are. This means that differences that people bring are recognized and valued, and seen as an asset to be leveraged. When adopted as a core business practice, inclusion focuses on the bottom-line advantages that differences can bring: different perspectives help achieve 360-degree vision to identify and address challenges and opportunities; different problem-solving styles provide valuable alternatives to group think and one-size-fits-all approaches; different skill-sets provide possibilities for unique work-arounds and hybrid approaches that no single person, department, or discipline could imagine.

In environments where differences are valued and leveraged in this way, the subsequent openness creates a faster and more effective flow of knowledge and ideas up, down, and across the organization—and improved results follow. Focusing on the value people bring, including all their individual and identity group differences and experiences, is a potent mindset that helps individuals and teams do their best work. It increases co-creation and enhances collaboration for higher individual, team, and organizational performance. Rather than lowering standards, which some people associate with differences, using differences in this way actually raises standards as diversity of

thought flourishes and people are held accountable for clarifying their objectives and intentions, listening to each other as allies, hearing each others' street corners, and achieving higher levels of partnering.

4 Inclusion is NOT... sacrificing productivity or overlooking underperformance.

Some people believe that the ultimate goal of inclusion is making everyone feel good in the workplace, and they interpret that to mean, "I better not be critical or demanding of anyone seen as not performing." This undermines organizational improvement efforts and undermines the true meaning of inclusion. Whether because of someone wanting to avoid conflict or any perception of bias toward individuals with certain differences, many people leaders are reluctant to provide the kind of honest, direct feedback that will enable someone to know where they stand. The result is that poor performance is perpetuated. People leaders who fail to provide critical feedback and tolerate underperformance do a huge disservice to not only the underperforming person, but their team members and the organization as well.

Inclusion IS... supporting all people to do their best work and to continuously improve on it.

Inclusion means providing the encouragement, coaching, mentoring, and performance-related feedback—including

difficult conversations—that will enable people to do their best work. If someone is not meeting standards, it is critical for people leaders to give that person honest and clear feedback in a supportive manner as a way of joining with the person to find a path to higher performance. Rather than avoiding the conversation, it is essential that people leaders “lean into discomfort” and identify what the performance issues are and either partner with the individual to develop a plan that addresses the concerns, or find a way to exit the individual respectfully. One of the most inclusive things people can do is let others know how they are performing, what contributions are expected of them, and what is needed to succeed.

When Inclusion has as its foundation shared goals and supportive energy, it becomes a safety net for people leaning into conversations that focus on differences of opinion, disagreements, performance discussions, and other hard conversations. These honest conversations in which people are able to listen to one another as allies and challenge each other as allies are in contrast to behaviors in which people feel judged, nibbled¹, or made small². In this context, remarks that are intended to be supportive and respectful—even if in a corrective direction— are expressions of inclusion.

5 Inclusion is NOT... focusing on the relationship at the expense of the task.

Too often, people think inclusion is about being friends with everyone and people feeling

liked. In this view, preserving a relationship among colleagues is more important than the task or goal to be achieved, and shared tasks or goals are addressed in the context of the relationship. This focus draws people’s energy away from the work at hand. When relationship is the priority, people often avoid conflict, constructive criticism, and challenges to deliver greater effort or achieve higher performance. Similarly, when existing relationships are given greater importance than the tasks to be accomplished, less attention will be paid to assuring that the right people, perspectives, and skill-sets have been included in the process.

Inclusion IS... building partnerships focused on work outcomes.

Inclusion enables and facilitates collaboration, not for the sake of the relationship but to enable people to do their best work together. The emphasis is on achieving a common objective, task, or effort—working for the common good and shared success. Use of inclusive behaviors makes it easier and faster for people to forge connections, build trust, and address the key issues needed to achieve higher performance. As people interact more frequently and honestly, it builds trust among individuals and team members; as trust is built, people join with one another more rapidly and give one another the benefit of the doubt, thereby increasing the speed of problem solving and decision making (Katz and Miller, 2010). Inclusion supports better partnerships, and better partnerships support better

collaboration. It is important, however, that having good partnerships are not seen as goals in and of themselves, but as important parts of HOW the best possible outcomes and results are achieved.

6 Inclusion is NOT... individuals not taking accountability for including themselves.

One popular misconception is that inclusion is the job of the organization or its leaders, and not the job of each individual. In meetings, for instance, people might wonder why a key person is not in the room, but they stay quiet, assuming that the leader has already had this thought and the person is missing for a reason. If a problem results from that missing street corner or input, people might blame the organization or the leader rather than questioning their own role in not suggesting the person attend or speaking up when the person is not at the meeting. Others may want to be included a meeting and blame the leader or other team members if they are not invited. In short, they do not see themselves as accountable for including others or themselves.

Inclusion IS... a two-way street.

To create and maintain an inclusive work environment, everyone must share ownership and accountability for being included as well as including others—practicing inclusive behaviors as well as benefit from them. Everyone must see inclusion as a two way street—asking whether all the

right people are in the room and what other perspectives must be included to obtain a 360-degree view of the issue at hand. People have a responsibility for including themselves if they feel they need to be in a meeting or a conversation. When included in a meeting, people need to understand they have as much responsibility for bringing their voice and perspectives and adding value to the meeting, as it is the meeting facilitator to include them. Meetings are not a spectator sport! (Miller, 2013).

Inclusion IS the route to higher performance.

When everyone in the organization practices inclusive behaviors as Standard Work, the organization becomes more productive. People share a common language. They actively seek out one another to share knowledge and co-create new ideas. They establish a norm and expectation of “right first time” interactions that reduce mistakes and false starts and eliminate waste. Individuals and teams share their “street corners” to achieve 360-degree perspectives for solving problems. People not only have better interactions in general, they interact more across differences, breaking down traditional barriers of hierarchy, division, discipline, and work group. Knowledge transfer and knowledge application become exponentially faster across the organization. Units, departments, and divisions align toward common purposes. The organization draws on the full range of its people’s talent, innovation, and resources. The bandwidth for innovation expands, and the organization thrives.

Inclusion does hold extraordinary power for organizations. A full grasp of the concept—dismissing what it is not, understanding what it is, and separating fact from misconception—enables organizations to apply the unleashing power of inclusion to achieve a significant advantage.

References

- 1 In *The Nibble Theory and the Kernel of Power*, Kaleel Jamison described the process of diminishing language, actions, or behaviors, whether directed inwardly at the self or outwardly at others, as “nibbles.”
 - 2 Building on concepts in *The Nibble Theory in Be BIG: Step Up, Step Out, Be Bold*, Katz and Miller describe how we make others “small” and how we can choose to build others and ourselves up to do our best work together.
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