



CINGA

Inclusive Culture Playbook



Land Acknowledgement:

We acknowledge that we are privileged to live, work and play on the traditional, ancestral and unceded territories of the Coast Salish People.

Introduction

Inclusive leadership is simply GOOD leadership.

But to get there, we need to cultivate a culture of diversity, equity, and inclusion that empowers individuals to contribute their unique perspectives, values, and skills, fostering a collaborative and innovative environment where everyone feels valued and heard. We need to increase our awareness and implement practices that overcome unconscious biases that we picked up over the years.

We also need to take a good hard look at the things we THINK are working well but may actually have a negative impact.

This is a continuous process of unlearning and relearning.

This guide is an overview of our approach to inclusive leadership.

At Cinga we envision a world where leadership development and inclusive culture work walk hand in hand, fostering thriving, diverse workplaces.

Our dream is to see every individual recognized and valued for their unique talents, working in environments where these gifts are actively utilized for the greater good.

**Kathy Andrews, Founder and Managing Director at Cinga
with Tracy Nazereth, Molly McGuire, and contributions from the Cinga Associate Team.**

The business case for inclusive leadership

People make businesses successful. Without people, there is no business.

Developing an inclusive culture is the key to:

- Attracting and retaining high quality talent by developing a reputation for being a good company to work for.
- Obtaining higher engagement and productivity. People who feel safe, feel like they belong, and feel like their contributions are valued do better work.
- Making the best use of the people on your team, benefitting from their perspectives, ideas, and contributions.
- Tapping into a talent pool that has been overlooked. This is especially valuable in the face of labour shortages like we're experiencing now.

Nurturing an inclusive culture is no longer a nice-to-have, it's a must-have. The world is changing rapidly, and you'll get left behind if you don't invest the time to implement inclusive leadership practices now.



The 3 pillars of inclusive leadership.

SELF AWARENESS

Inclusive leadership begins with understanding ourselves first. We can't influence our organizations or teams around us if we haven't first looked at our own blind spots.

ONGOING LEARNING

Ongoing learner is more than just taking a course or attending a workshop; it's about adopting a mindset. Inclusive leaders approach each day with an open heart and mind - ready to absorb, adapt, and apply new skills and concepts.

MINDFUL COLLABORATION

To put it simply, "mindful collaboration" is about being present and thoughtful in how we lead and interact. It's critical for creating workplaces where everyone feels seen, heard, and valued.

In this e-book, we will unpack each of these, sharing our best insights and tips. Let's begin with Self-Awareness.

1. Self-Awareness

Embracing self-awareness is the first step towards fostering an inclusive and productive work environment.

Self-awareness allows us to see ourselves from different angles, reflecting both our strengths and areas that need growth.

There are 2 key areas where inclusive leaders need to develop self-awareness:

- 1. Uncovering Unconscious Bias:** We all have biases, many of which we don't even realize. By developing self-awareness, we can spot these biases and address them. This isn't about blame; it's about recognizing that we all have blind spots - and working to "see what we don't see" more clearly.
- 2. Unpacking Power and Privilege:** The world of work, like the wider world, is full of power dynamics. Some of us have privileges that others don't, based on our backgrounds, roles, or experiences. By becoming more self-aware, we can understand these dynamics better. This clarity helps inclusive leaders make fairer decisions and create more inclusive workplaces.

By recognizing our unconscious biases and understanding the nuances of power and privilege, we're better equipped to guide our teams with empathy and fairness.

In this section, we'll look at how to do that.

Uncovering Unconscious Bias

Inclusive leadership begins with understanding ourselves first. We can't influence our organizations or teams around us if we haven't first looked at our own blind spots.

Unconscious bias refers to automatic judgments or preferences a person has towards certain groups or individuals, which they are unaware of, and which are shaped by their experiences, culture, background, and societal influences.

How to uncover your own unconscious biases

There is an activity that we do in our workshops that can help you notice unconscious bias.

Take a piece of paper and draw a table with 6 columns and 11 rows – allowing for the most space in the first column.

Now, think about your inner circle - the people you really trust the most who are NOT family members. Whose counsel do you seek in making decisions? Who would you trust to give you advice at work or personally?

Write their names down in column 1. You want to list exactly 10 people – no more and no less. If you have fewer than 10 names, then think about people you trust a lot that are not quite in your inner circle.

After you list your 10 names, label the remaining 5 columns:

1. Gender
2. Race/Ethnicity
3. Education Level
4. Age
5. Nationality

Place a tick beside those members of their trusted circle who are similar in that dimension to you.

Now look at your list. What do you notice? What patterns do you see?

Our inner circles tend to contain people just like us.

For most people, the people on the list are very similar to themselves.

Perhaps they are all men or all women. They may all be close to the same age. Chances are that most of them will be the same nationality.

Try changing the top row columns to other attributes like religion, sexual orientation, ability, interests, occupation, hobbies – anything, really.

You may notice that your most trusted advisors all belong to the same church or participate in the same sport or are all able-bodied.

Why does this matter?

Because we tend to trust those who belong to the same in-groups that we do.

If I'm religious, I'll tend to trust other people in my religion because I know I can draw on a set of common underlying values that mirror mine.

It's the same for gender, age, etc. As we move our circle

of trust wider to include people we're friends with, but not extremely close to, the patterns may change. But our closest advisors and those we rely on most for sound insight are often an unconscious mirror of ourselves.

Workplace Implications

Although we believe we are making objective assessments of merit and treating people fairly, hidden preferences for people like ourselves can cause us to support the development and career progression of some people over others without us even knowing we are doing so.

This unconscious affinity bias can result in a tendency for leaders, people managers or recruiting managers to

- Hire and promote those who mirror attributes or qualities that align with their own.
- Actively solicit, pay greater attention to, and favour the contributions of in-group members compared to others.

When leaders assign responsibility for a high-profile piece of work, to whom do they entrust that responsibility?

Typically, it will go to the individuals they trust the most. Those people, it turns out, are similar to themselves.

Though not intentional, people who are not like us get overlooked and left behind.

I recall doing this exercise with the CEO of a company who realized that all his trusted advisors played golf, mountain biked, rock climbed – all privileged sports that required a lot of money. They were all members of a certain socio-economic class – and not representative of the people in his company.

He realized that he was sitting in his golf cart, making decisions about people he knew nothing about.

When you surround yourself with people who are just like you, instead of being challenged in your thinking, you get confirmation bias of a particular world view.

This exercise isn't about making you right or wrong. It's just an opportunity to learn.

We all have unconscious biases.

If you want to become a more inclusive leader, it's critical that you uncover them.

Sometimes this is as simple as pausing for a moment or two to reflect before making decisions to see if any of your unconscious biases are at work.

But it's not always easy. You may need to seek other perspectives or talk it over with others in order to see your blind spots.

Unpacking Power and Privilege

People often bristle when they hear someone say *privilege* because of the meaning they attach to the word.

Most associate the word "privilege" with wealth and having been given something you didn't work for.

Understandably, they may react something like this: "What do you mean I have privilege? I didn't go to private school in England. My family comes from poverty. I worked hard for every dollar in my bank account."

Having wealth, getting an inheritance, or attending elite educational institutions absolutely does confer privilege.

Wealth and societal class are not the only ways that people can have privilege.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines privilege in this way:

A special right, advantage, or immunity granted or available only to a particular person or group.

In our DEI work, privilege refers to unearned advantages conferred upon individuals due to attributes like race, gender, socio-economic status, ability, and sexual orientation. These advantages are systemic and often go unnoticed by beneficiaries.

Privilege isn't about merit or effort. It's about the circumstances of one's birth or societal context. It's also relative: a person might be privileged in one context and marginalized in another.

For example, someone might have the privilege of wealth in one setting, but experience discrimination based on race in another.

Everyone has some form of privilege, but the scale varies based on numerous factors.

The wheel below presents a good illustration of the many forms privilege can take.

Where would you place yourself in each of these categories?

When we look at this broader definition of privilege, we can see that we ALL have some privileges in some circumstances. And some people, through birth or life circumstances have more privileges than others.

Here are some common examples of privilege:

- **Able-bodied Privilege:** Those without disabilities may take for granted their ability to access buildings, transportation, or information without additional assistance or resources.
- **Socio-Economic Privilege:** Individuals with more wealth have more options. They can invest money in solving problems, send their children to private schools, and use money to buy back their time (for example, hiring help at home). In many cases they are seen as “better” than people of lower economic status. Consider the bias many people hold towards welfare recipients or the unhoused.

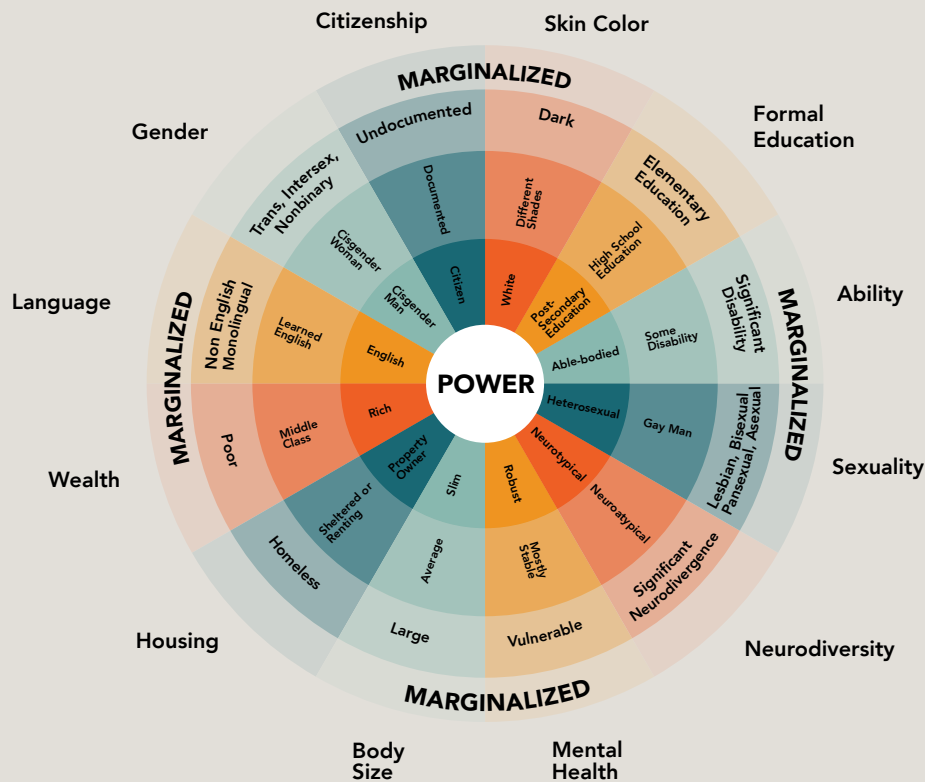
- **Education Privilege:** A higher level of education opens more job opportunities. Hiring policies often preclude people who lack degrees from jobs that don’t require a formal education.
- **Heterosexual Privilege:** Heterosexual individuals aren’t discriminated on based on their sexual orientation, have their relationships legally recognized everywhere, and see their relationships frequently represented in media.

Privilege isn’t intrinsically good or bad. Having it doesn’t diminish your achievements. Nor does a lack of it diminish your worth.

Human beings are biologically hardwired to classify people based on certain criteria. This happens in a nanosecond without our conscious control.

It’s the way our brains work and how our social systems work. We reflexively grant more power to those closer to societal “centers.”

When we look at society and our places of work through this lens, it’s easy to see that the people who have more



Adapted from James R Vanderwoerd (“Web of Opression”), and Sylvia Duckworth (“Wheel of Power/Privilege”)

privileges are more visible. They hold more leadership positions. They make the rules for others to follow.

The challenge lies in recognizing these privileges.

Those in privileged positions often mistakenly believe opportunities are uniformly available since they see others like them in power. Discrimination or disadvantages might be invisible to them because they haven't personally faced them.

Empathy is the ability to see the world from someone else's perspective.

The guidance to "check your privilege" is simply a reminder to consider if your actions or words are influenced by your societal standing.

Knowing how people stand in relation to other people is a foundational piece of inclusive leadership. It helps you identify who might be excluded or overlooked or have a disadvantage in a situation – giving you a chance to level the playing field.

When we pay attention, we can become aware of privilege and make changes in how we lead.

Let's look at language privilege as an example.

In a meeting with predominantly English speakers, people for whom English is not a first language have a disadvantage. They may be quiet in a meeting because the conversation is moving too fast for them to keep up. They must work harder to understand what is being said and to formulate their thoughts in a different language.

This doesn't make them less intelligent or make their input less valuable (on the contrary, gaining access to their unique perspective is part of what makes diversity so valuable). However, in this context, the English speakers are privileged. They have an advantage that the person who speaks English as a second language doesn't have.

An inclusive leader would recognize this situation, realize that this person has something to contribute, and make changes to the meeting structure or environment to help support that person to thrive.

This is also a good example of how privilege can change with the situation and context. If the meeting was conducted in the non-native speaker's primary language, the privilege dynamics would reverse.

Grasping the essence of privilege is essential for understanding societal power dynamics and building skills as an inclusive leader.

Recognizing, reflecting upon, and responsibly acting on our privilege can pave the way for more inclusive, empathetic, and equitable interactions in both personal and professional settings.



2. Ongoing Learning

Ongoing learner is more than just taking a course or attending a workshop; it's about adopting a mindset.

Inclusive leaders approach each day with an open heart and mind - ready to absorb, adapt, and apply new skills and concepts.

We recommend adopting these 3 mindsets as part of your ongoing learning:

CULTURAL HUMILITY:

This is about recognizing that every culture is different and has value - and our own culture doesn't necessarily hold "the best" or the "right" way to do things. By approaching interactions with people from other cultures with an open mind and genuine respect, we foster stronger, more authentic relationships in the workplace.

CURIOSITY:

Remember when we were kids, and everything was a big question mark? Tapping into that childlike wonder and asking "why?" or "how?" keeps us sharp and innovative. It's about looking at challenges as puzzles to solve, and always being hungry for more knowledge.

VULNERABILITY:

No one likes to admit they don't know something, especially in business. But there's power in saying, "I don't know, but I'm eager to learn." By showing vulnerability, we build trust with our teams and create an environment where it's okay to seek help and grow.

Let's look at each of these.

Cultural Humility

The essence of Inclusive Leadership is to foster environments where everyone feels valued and respected.

Central to this concept is cultural humility, which recognizes the importance of acknowledging and understanding different cultures and perspectives.

We are all products of our environments. This has led to some good things, but it has also created a society where power and privilege are unequally distributed.

Only by embracing cultural humility can we begin

dismantling power imbalances and creating truly inclusive workplaces.

Let's look at cultural humility, its importance in inclusive leadership, and practical steps for developing it.

What is Cultural Humility?

This is the definition we use at Cinga:

Commitment to continue the work of cultural sensitivity through self-evaluation and self-critique, to redress the power imbalances in relations to others, and to develop mutually beneficial and non-paternalistic partnerships with communities on behalf defined populations.

Cultural humility begins by acknowledging that we are all products of our environments, with our own biases and limited perspectives.

Traditional approaches view cultural sensitivity or awareness as an academic exercise, studying other cultures in isolation like a history lesson or as if they were in a fishbowl.

Cultural humility goes beyond that. Cultural humility is a mindset.

Practicing cultural humility means recognizing that we have limited knowledge about others' cultures and their influence on their worldview. It gives us permission to not have to know everything.

Instead, we can get curious and immerse ourselves in other perspectives.

Cultural humility calls for a commitment to continuous learning, self-evaluation, and self-critique to address potential power imbalances that may exist between individuals and communities.

Why Does Cultural Humility Matter?

Cultural humility is indispensable for leaders striving to create inclusive environments.

When leaders recognize that every individual's experiences and perspectives are shaped by their cultural background (including their own) they can mitigate the harmful effects of "othering" and hierarchical thinking that permeate the workplace.

From this baseline, they can create an environment of psychological safety where every team member can contribute, and the company benefits from diversity.

How to Develop Cultural Humility

To embody cultural humility, leaders can take several practical steps.

1. COMMIT TO LEARNING

First and foremost, an honest commitment to learning and actively seeking knowledge about cultures different from their own is essential. This includes reading about people's stories, particularly those from marginalized communities, to gain insight into their experiences and challenges.

For instance, understanding the intergenerational trauma caused by residential school experiences can foster empathy and inform inclusive actions regarding our indigenous colleagues.

2. APPROACH WITH CURIOSITY

Secondly, leaders must approach cultural humility with curiosity and a genuine desire to understand others, while refraining from judgment.

Recognizing that one's own values and beliefs shape personal identity and influence interactions with others is a critical aspect of cultural humility. By engaging in open and respectful dialogue, leaders can build meaningful connections and bridge cultural gaps.

3. STAND SHOULDER-TO-SHOULDER

Moreover, leaders should prioritize partnership and collaboration based on mutual respect rather than paternalistic attitudes. No one culture is superior to others. Embracing a non-hierarchical approach helps establish inclusive relationships where individuals feel valued for their unique perspectives.

Cultural humility encourages leaders to stand shoulder-to-shoulder with marginalized individuals, offering support and solidarity rather than sympathy or pity.

Cultural humility is a vital attribute for leaders aiming to foster diverse and inclusive environments.

Cultural humility means recognizing the limitations of our own knowledge and engaging in a lifelong journey of learning and self-reflection.

By actively seeking to understand the experiences, perspectives, and histories of others, leaders can build authentic connections and mitigate power imbalances.

Cultivating cultural humility allows leaders to create inclusive spaces where individuals from all cultures and backgrounds feel valued and empowered.

Through this commitment to ongoing learning and partnership, inclusive leaders can not only create great places to work – they can also contribute to a more equitable and harmonious society.



3. Mindful Collaboration

To put it simply, “mindful collaboration” is about being present and thoughtful in how we lead and interact.

It’s critical for creating workplaces where everyone feels seen, heard, and valued.

Mindful collaboration is built on these components.

- **Choosing Our Words:** The words we use, how we say them, and even our body language can create a picture of inclusion or exclusion. It’s more than just dodging phrases that might upset someone. It’s about choosing words that make everyone feel involved and respected.
- **Understanding Intent vs. Impact:** Sometimes, even with the best intentions, things don’t land the way we hope. Being mindful means checking in to see if our good intentions matched the outcome. And if they don’t, we learn and adjust.
- **Building a Safe Space at Work:** Everyone wants to work in a place where they feel they belong and can speak their mind. That’s where psychological safety comes in. When people feel safe, they share more, innovate more, and aren’t afraid to be themselves. As leaders, creating this kind of environment lets everyone do their best work.

Let’s take a closer look at each of these.

Choosing Our Words: The Role of Language in Shaping Inclusive Workplaces

Before we begin, let’s talk about ice-skating. The very first thing we teach new skaters is how to fall. Falling is inevitable, so it’s best to practice falling – otherwise the fear of falling can keep you from trying.

We recommend adopting this strategy and mindset to inclusive leadership.

You WILL fall. You’ll mess up and use the wrong word. You’ll say the wrong thing. It’s inevitable. So, learn to fall. Apologize quickly, then move on.

This work isn’t about never making a mistake, it’s about learning and getting better.

Here are some easy substitutions you can use when writing any communication or policy for your organization, giving a speech or address, or just

everyday conversation with your team:

- Use gender neutral titles, such as “chairperson” or “chair”, rather than gender-specific titles like “chairman.”
- Use generic nouns like “servers” rather than “waiters” and “waitresses.”
- Avoid gender specific pronouns (his, her) by:
 - Addressing the reader as “you.”
 - Repeating the noun (e.g., “when the manager decides such-and-thus, the manager will...”)
 - Dropping the pronoun completely.
 - Making the noun plural and using “they” or “them.”
- Avoid phrases that make gender assumptions, such as “managers and their wives.”
- Alternate the order of gender terms in phrases like “men and women”, “girls and boys” and “his and hers”, so that men don’t always appear first.
- Avoid stereotypical phrases such as “ladylike”, “women’s work”, or “like a man.”

Let’s be mindful of our words and realize their power in creating the workplaces we want.

Intent vs Impact

One of the places we get in trouble when building an inclusive culture is discerning intent from impact.

- **Intent** – is what you intend to convey through your words and actions.
- **Impact** – is how your words and actions make others feel.

In an ideal world, our intent and impact would line up perfectly. What we mean to say or do would be interpreted exactly as we intended.

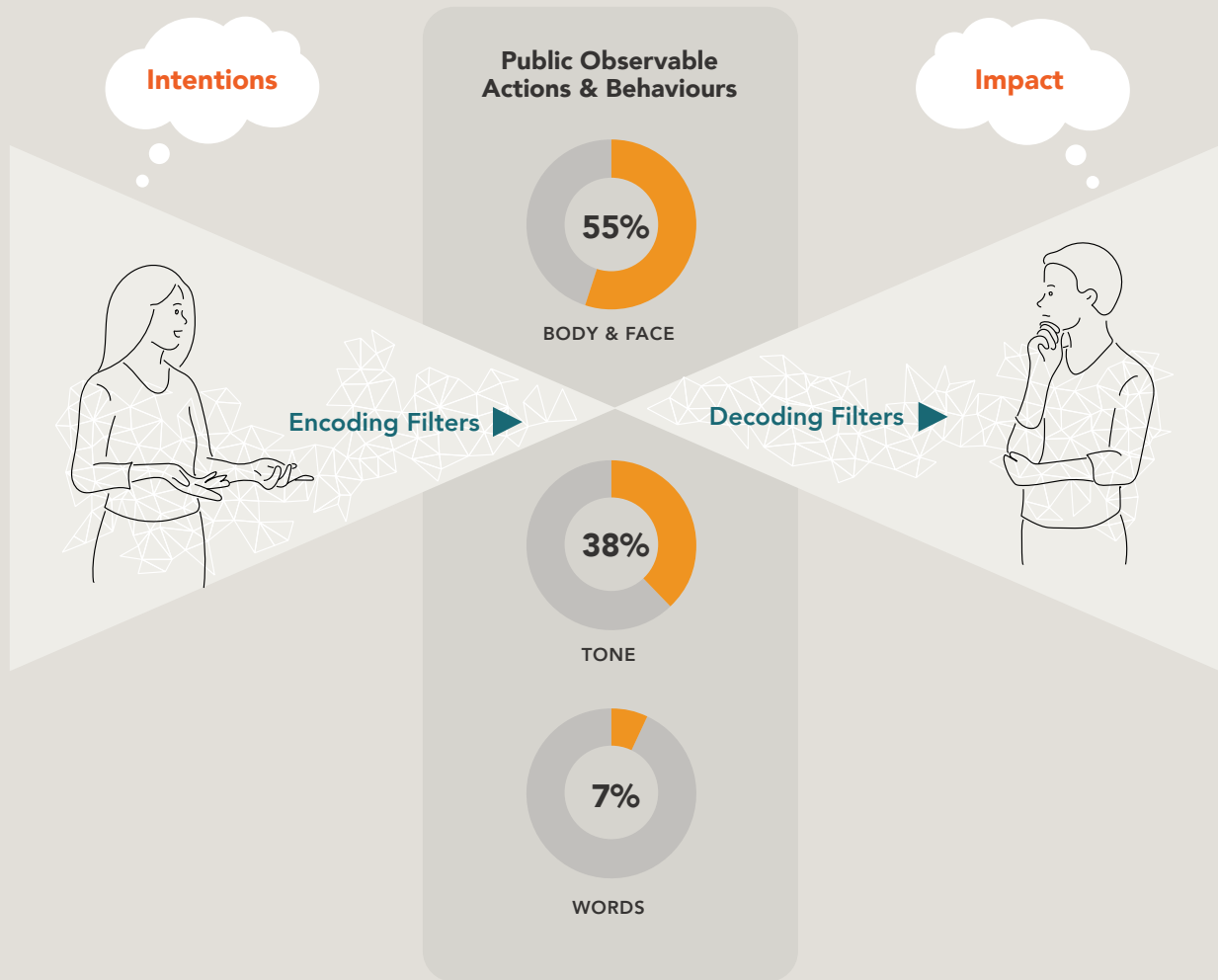
We would take actions and say words intended to communicate that everyone belongs and is appreciated and respected. And the people on the receiving end of these words and actions would feel like they are appreciated, respected, and belong.

Unfortunately, in real life things don’t always work out that way.

One party may do or say something with a positive intent – only to have the receiver feel hurt or offended.

Intent does not equal impact. Here's why.

We each see the world through our own filters.



The sender communicates their message through the lens of their culture, assumptions, histories, preferences, past experiences, and physical state.

The receiver filters the message through THEIR lens – which may be very different.

This creates an interpersonal gap.

Example of intent <> impact

People often run into intent vs impact when they try to use humour to connect with their colleagues.

For example, someone notices that their coworker is very conscientious and detail-oriented when it comes to managing projects.

They make a joke about how they “must be OCD.” The intent of the joker is to make a connection by sharing a laugh. They may even see their comment as a compliment.

However, the receiver has heard this before – including times when the intent was NOT positive. They interpret it as an observation or even accusation that they have a mental illness. Or worse, perhaps they DO have a mental illness and are hurt by the joke.

The intent was positive. The impact was negative.

This is an example of what we call a microaggression.

A micro-aggression is a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group.

If you can imagine what it would be like for the person on the receiving end – it feels like a death by a million cuts – even if some of those cuts weren't intended.

Our role as leaders in these situations is to be aware of these microaggressions, notice when they are happening, and then take action.

So what can be done? How do we close the gap?

Closing the gap

Resolving intent vs impact situations can be tricky because nobody is necessarily wrong.

We're each just acting in the way that we have learned growing up in our respective cultures. From this, we have our own definitions and interpretations of what things mean.

Responsibility for closing the gap falls on both sides.

As the sender of the message:

- Share your intent freely and often: don't assume that the other person will intuit it.
- Inquire into the impact of your words and actions on others: if in doubt, ask.
- Own your impact: accept responsibility and apologize for negative impact, even if your intent was positive.
- Clarify, but don't defend your Intent. Defending your intent amplifies the negative impact and negates any apology you offer.

As the receiver of the message:

- Notice and share the impact that the other person's words and actions are having on you: remember that the sender can't read your mind and hasn't had the lived experiences that you have had.
- Assume positive intent: most people don't intend to be hurtful.

- If you find assuming positive intent to be challenging, inquire into their intent. Ask: did you mean this?

Closing the gap is an ongoing process – it's something we'll be doing all the time.

Remember that we all bring our own assumptions, histories, cultures, and preferences to our interactions.

We need to clarify our intent and own our impact.

Inclusive leadership is about clear communication, recognizing that we are all different, and being OK with that.

Establishing Psychological Safety

If you want to lead inclusively, it's important to establish psychological safety.

Teams thrive in environments where every member feels valued and safe to express their opinions without fear of retribution.

The journey to a psychologically safe workspace is integral to inclusive leadership and can be achieved by understanding and implementing the four stages of psychological safety as described by Timothy Clark in his book, [The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety: Defining the Path to Inclusion and Innovation.](#)

What follows below is my summary of the concepts I learned from both him and Amy C. Edmondson, author of [The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth.](#)

What is Psychological Safety?

Psychological safety is the shared belief that the team is safe for interpersonal risk-taking.

It is an environment where individuals can be their authentic selves, express their opinions, ask questions, and admit mistakes without fear of humiliation or punishment.

When teams have psychological safety, members feel accepted and respected.

They are free to innovate, collaborate, and take constructive risks because they trust they won't be penalized for doing so.

Psychological Safety and Inclusive Leadership

Inclusive leadership goes hand in hand with psychological safety.

An inclusive leader understands and values the diverse perspectives and strengths each team member brings. Such leaders actively foster an environment where everyone feels valued, listened to, and understood.

When people feel psychologically safe, they are more likely to share their unique perspectives and insights, contributing to richer discussions and more innovative solutions.

Moreover, an inclusive leader actively works against biases and unfair hierarchies that might threaten this safety.

The Four Stages of Psychological Safety

Understanding the stages of psychological safety can provide a roadmap to creating and maintaining an environment where everyone feels secure and respected.

How is your company doing in each of these areas?

1. INCLUSION SAFETY

Inclusion is the foundational stage and is a prerequisite for everything else. It's where every individual feels included in the team and believes that they belong.

This begins by fostering a culture based on the premise that everyone deserves respect and deserves to be included, simply because they are human.

You can actively grow inclusion safety through team introductions and team-building exercises – along with regularly checking in with team members to ensure they feel connected and included.

2. LEARNER SAFETY

In this second stage of psychological safety, individuals feel safe to engage in the learning process, ask questions, and even admit when they don't know something.

Observe your meetings. Do people feel free to ask "dumb questions"? Do they offer ideas? How do other people (especially leaders) respond?

If you want to provide learner safety, create an environment where failure isn't just accepted, it's rewarded.

3. CONTRIBUTOR SAFETY

When you have contributor safety, individuals feel safe to contribute to the team, take on responsibilities, and offer ideas.

Pay attention to your speaking time. Do you spend more time telling people what to do? Or do you listen to what they have to say?

Get to know your team and assign tasks based on strengths and areas of growth. Consider holding meetings or workshops where team members can collaborate and share their ideas.

4. CHALLENGER SAFETY

At this highest level, team members feel safe to challenge the status quo. They believe they can voice concerns and suggest improvements without facing negative consequences.

To create challenger safety, you need to ensure that leaders are approachable and open to being challenged. Reward people who have the courage to speak up and highlight a problem.

Even better, assign people to actively look for problems.

Establishing psychological safety requires an ongoing commitment.

It requires leaders to actively foster trust, respect, and open communication.

By understanding and implementing the four stages, leaders can cultivate an environment where individuals not only feel secure but are also empowered to innovate, collaborate, and drive the organization towards success.

Conclusion & Next Steps

Summary: Inclusive leadership is simply good leadership (be a decent human being)

If you want the individuals on your teams to contribute effectively and work well with their leader and colleagues, they need to feel psychologically safe.

This is the heart of building an inclusive culture.

Inclusive leaders recognize and accept our inherent biases as humans, and actively work to mitigate them by consulting with others, seeking diverse opinions for decision-making, and fostering a sense of inclusion in the workplace.

This can be achieved through mindfulness in language, appreciating cultural diversity, promoting curiosity, and deliberately nurturing psychological safety among team members.

Here are 3 steps you can take to begin your journey towards building an inclusive culture.

1. Develop Self-Awareness

Being an inclusive leader hinges on self-awareness.

We need to recognize that we all have unconscious biases and that many of us have power and privileges that others lack.

Historically, certain groups of people have “held the microphone” in various contexts for a very long time.

”

We don't see the world as it is, we see it as we are.

ANAÏS NIN

Inclusive leadership is about shifting that dynamic. It's about paying attention to when this happens and giving other people an opportunity to shine.

A good place to start is with monitoring your own “airtime.”

If you find yourself doing a disproportionate amount of the talking in a meeting, it's a cue to stand back and let your team members take the floor.

2. Educate Yourself

Learning requires humility, vulnerability, and curiosity. Develop a thirst for understanding lived experiences that are different from your own.

Make your learning visible to your colleagues. Bring in materials and reference points that demonstrate that you are continuously learning about the workforce and communities that you serve.

”

A well-educated mind will always have more questions than answers.

HELEN KELLER

Declare your commitment to learning. Let your colleagues and team know that you are on a learning journey, that you will do your best to create inclusion and a sense of belonging on the team, and that this is important.

Give people permission to bring things to your attention – places where something rubs them the wrong way or where you make a mistake or missed something you should have noticed.

Invite them to tell you right away or to pull you aside after a meeting to chat about it. You can't commit to being perfect, but you can commit to listening and learning.

Remember that it takes a lot of courage for people to “speak truth to power” in this way, so make sure you appreciate them for doing so.

3. Be an Active Bystander

One of the hardest things for leaders is recognizing that they're responsible for setting the tone.

This requires being aware of micro-aggressions, noticing them, then taking action.

A micro-aggression is a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group.

”

In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR

Note: the “Micro” prefix is NOT a measurement of size. Micro-aggressions happen at “micro” level (between individuals) as opposed to “macro” level (social structures and institutions.)

For example, if someone says something that might be offensive – even if they didn't intend it that way, even if they were trying to be funny – it's the leader's job to pay attention, notice it, and address it.

This might mean calling it out, distracting the group, or chatting with the person it happened to.

To begin with, it often means simply noticing, then shifting gears to create some space to think so that you can understand what to do next, then following up later.

4. Give it Time and Make the Commitment

It takes time and commitment to learn these new skills.

Many people worry about getting it wrong.

The requirement to be perfect, especially when it comes to language, can be a significant barrier. It can even lead to paralysis.

My advice is to do the best you can.

Set the tone ahead of time. Let others know that you're on a learning journey, and that you're open to feedback. If you make a mistake, you'd like to know, and there won't be any repercussions for pointing it out. You're committed to doing better.

Additionally, if someone on your team feels excluded or like they don't belong, let them know that you're available to talk.

Creating an environment where everyone feels valued and supported is essential for productive teamwork.

You want your team members to feel empowered to do their best work and bring their best thinking to the table.

Ultimately, “inclusive leadership” is simply good leadership.

About Cinga

Four Keys to Effective Change

At Cinga, we're in the business of helping companies change and thrive. Here is what we know to work, based on years of experience in the field.

SIMPLE STRATEGIES MAKE THE BIGGEST IMPACT.

Building an inclusive culture and society is a massive undertaking. Something we won't be able to accomplish in our lifetimes. If we look at the whole project all at once, it seems to call for a comprehensive and complicated plan. But it's been our experience that simple strategies, executed well, make the biggest difference. In this way, you can build a foundation for a strong and inclusive culture by laying one brick at a time.

PRACTICAL APPLICATION BEATS THEORETICAL MODELS.

In a similar vein, there are a lot of theoretical models that sound great...in theory. But when it comes to implementation, there's a gap. At Cinga, we're biased towards practical application. Because we've all been in these roles ourselves – and we've worked with dozens of corporations – we have years of experience in the trying, failing, iterating, trying again cycle that runs in a learning and leadership environment. As a result, we only curate and promote the models that are “sticky” – the ones that work in real life.

REAL PRACTICES ARE BETTER THAN BEST PRACTICES.

We need to tread lightly when we wade into the territory of Inclusivity. So many problems are caused by people who presume that they “know better” than the excluded communities they are trying to serve. The practice of developing inclusive leadership is about learning as we go along. It's about iterating. There are no “best” practices because as soon as you write down a practice, it will have changed. Progress towards the dream comes from gently introducing one real practice after another.

PEOPLE THRIVE IN DEVELOPMENT-ORIENTED ENVIRONMENTS.

We all want a sense of agency, growth, and development. We witness this with our clients time and again: when the organization focuses on growth and development, engagement goes up. Productivity increases. Results show up on the bottom line. Building an inclusive culture isn't a side project that takes resources from core business activities – it IS (or should be) a core activity!

Interested in Working with Cinga?

If you'd like some support implementing the ideas expressed in this e-book, we welcome you to visit our website for more information or to contact us for a free consultation.

Appendix:

Words That Matter

DEI

Stands for Diversity, Equity, Inclusion.

Diversity

Diversity includes differences that are visible, such as race, gender, country of origin, age and disabilities, as well as invisible differences such as sexuality, academic history, culture and disabilities.

Diversity is not a spectrum or a measure. One person cannot be more diverse than another. Diversity is created when people who are different from one another come together and includes everyone in the room.

Equity

Ensuring that all people have access to equal opportunities and fair treatment, and ensuring elimination of discriminatory practices, systems, laws, policies, social norms and cultural traditions. Equity encompasses balancing power and correcting where inequality exists.

Inclusion

The deliberate creation of a trustworthy work environment through eliminating discriminatory practices and behaviour while also creating safe opportunities for diverse viewpoints to be expressed and valued.

Privilege

Privilege refers to unearned advantages conferred upon individuals due to attributes like race, gender, socio-economic status, ability, and sexual orientation. These advantages are systemic and often go unnoticed by beneficiaries.

Privilege isn't about merit or effort. It's about the circumstances of one's birth or societal context. It's also relative: a person might be privileged in one context and marginalized in another.

Micro-Aggressions

A micro-aggression is a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination against members of a marginalized group.

Note: the "Micro" prefix is NOT a measurement of size. Micro-aggressions happen at "micro" level (between individuals) as opposed to "macro" level (social structures and institutions.)

Bias

Bias is a prejudice in favour of or against one thing, person, or group compared with another, and is generally considered unfair. Biases may be held by an individual, group, or institution and can result in negative or positive consequences.

Biases develop over the course of a lifetime. Starting with childhood, we are exposed to direct and indirect messages about race, ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation and the socio-economic status of others. These messages and learned associations directly impact our feelings, attitudes and opinions about other people.

Unconscious Bias

Unconscious, or implicit bias is a systematic way of thinking that can cloud our judgment and impact our decision-making. It refers to attitudes based on stereotypes that we have been taught which affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious manner. The attitudes and beliefs are often involuntarily and outside of our awareness or intentional control. Everyone holds unconscious beliefs about various social and identity groups, and these biases stem from our tendency to organize social worlds by simplistic categorization.

Belonging

It focuses on the person's experience within a setting. It means that not only can people feel that they are welcomed, and structures exist to ensure fairness, but that each person feels that they can be their full, authentic self within that culture, group or setting. They don't have to cover who they are or downplay personal traits.

Allyship

Allyship is an active, consistent, and arduous practice of unlearning and re-evaluating, in which a person of privilege seeks to operate in solidarity with a marginalized group of people. Allyship is not an identity—it is a lifelong process of building relationships based on trust, consistency, and accountability with marginalized individuals and/or groups of people. Allyship is not self-defined—our work and our efforts must be recognized by the people we seek to ally ourselves with.

Gender Pronouns

A pronoun is a word that refers to either the people talking (“I” or “you”) or someone or something that is being talked about (like “she”, “it”, “them”, and “this”). Gender pronouns (he/she/they/ze etc.) specifically refer to the person you are referring to. Pronouns are part of someone’s gender expression, and people can have multiple sets of pronouns for themselves (such as using he/him/his and they/them/theirs). Pronouns are not “preferred” but instead are required for respectful communication. Not only transgender or nonbinary communities use pronouns, as it is something we all use and have since we were little. (LGBTQ+ Resource Center)

Stereotype

A standardized mental picture that is held in common by members of a group and that represents an oversimplified opinion, prejudiced attitude, or uncritical judgment. (Merriam-Webster)

Discrimination

Bad treatment based on a characteristic like race. A person discriminates under the BC Human Rights Code if:

- They treat someone badly or cause them harm in an area such as employment.
- A personal characteristic like race is a factor in the harm.
- There is no defense for the conduct.

For example, a person refuses to sell a house to someone because they are Black. This is discrimination. A person can discriminate even if they do not intend to. For example, a person cannot work on Saturday because of their religion. A store makes everyone work on Saturday. They do not mean to discriminate, but the rule has an adverse effect on the person because of their religion. This is discrimination unless the store proves it could not reasonably keep the person at work. (BC Human Rights Tribunal)



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