

**The Dual Systems Model of
Inclusion[®] Part I:**

The Inclusive Leader System[®]

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Issued March 2022.
Updated September 2023.



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Company

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Preface

How can we create genuinely inclusive organisations? With our Dual Systems Model of Inclusion®, we address this important question.

We argue that inclusion occurs under conditions of two interconnected systems: The Inclusive Leader System and the Inclusive Organisation System. When both systems work in harmony, inclusion happens, and diversity reaches its full potential. This is when organisations and individuals can truly experience the benefits that diversity brings, such as increased performance and innovation; increased engagement

and wellbeing; improved decision-making and enhanced learning. For example, research shows that companies in the top quartile for racial and ethnic diversity across all employees, were 33 percent more likely to have financial returns above the national industry average. Organisations in the top quartile of gender diversity on executive teams were 25 percent more likely to experience above average

profitability. Even more compelling, companies in the bottom quartile for both gender, ethnicity and race diversity were statistically less likely to achieve above average returns, highlighting that organisations without a diverse executive team and workforce will not only fail to lead their competitors, but they will also trail behind as their more diverse counter-parts blaze ahead.¹

In addition to the commercial pressure for leaders to be inclusive to perform, social movements (such as Black Lives Matter in 2020 and Me Too in 2017) have led to growing expectations for organisations to demonstrate their commitment to social and corporate governance. Therefore, leaders have been urged from all angles to take accountability and drive equity, inclusion, and diversity. Governments around the world are introducing both hard and voluntary targets to ensure the participation of underrepresented groups on boards to better reflect their employee base and the communities they serve. For example, in 2015, Norway was the first country to set a target of 40 percent representation of both sexes on boards. In 2011, a 50 percent gender quota for boards came into effect for government-owned enterprises in Quebec². In 2016, a voluntary target of 33 percent women in leadership and on boards was introduced for FTSE companies in the UK³ and in 2020, the Parker Review Committee proposed that each FTSE 100 Board should have at least one director from an ethnic minority background by 2021, and for each FTSE 250 Board to do the same by 2024⁴.

Although significant progress has been made in many organisations to address issues related to attracting and hiring talent from underrepresented groups, diversity without inclusion is an incubator for prejudice and inequalities. For example, while 69 percent of organisations report positive results in

relation to the level of diversity in their organisation, 61 percent of respondents felt that there were issues around inclusion and 74 percent reported issues around equality⁵. When organisations address issues of diversity without considering inclusion and actively enabling a level playing field, they are at risk of creating an environment where employees from underrepresented groups are not able to fully utilize their skills and abilities, and their voices and perspectives are not heard. This means that even performing at expected levels becomes challenging, let alone having the opportunity to reach their full potential.

This paper focuses on the Inclusive Leader System and specifically, what it takes to become an Inclusive Leader. We argue that it is imperative to focus on the Inclusive Leader as, even within

an inclusive organisation, individuals can still feel excluded because of the impact of their line manager on their team's sub-culture. For example, 45 percent of employee experiences of inclusion are explained by their line managers' Inclusive Leadership behaviours⁵. Inclusive Leaders create the environment for diverse team members to thrive and reach their full potential, maximising their contribution to their organisation. Inclusive Leaders understand that high-performing teams need a diverse range of unique talents to be innovative, creative, and for problem-solving. Inclusive Leaders also understand the importance of ensuring that everyone in their team feels like they belong, that they can bring their whole self to work and learn and adapt together. The Inclusive Leader System is a framework that captures what to assess and develop to enhance Inclusive Leadership capability.

61%

of respondents felt that there were issues around inclusion

74%

of respondents reported issues around equality

45%

of employees experiences of inclusion are explained by their line managers' Inclusive Leadership Behaviours⁵

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Benefits of Inclusion

Before addressing the role of the leader in inclusion, it is important to highlight the substantial body of evidence which clearly shows a vast range of benefits to both individuals and organisations of diversity when inclusion is present. These benefits, when measured, evaluated, and communicated, form an important step in enhancing Inclusive Leadership capability. In addition to being good for business in their own right, these also work as rewards that reinforce inclusion.

Improved Wellbeing

Research indicates that Inclusive Leadership leads to enhanced wellbeing⁷; decreased psychological distress⁸; decreased work-family conflict and improved work-family enrichment⁹. Inclusive Leadership impacts outcomes linked to wellbeing as Inclusive Leaders minimise the impact of negative group behaviours. These negative group behaviours can include in-group favouritism, belittling out-group members and tribalism (a them versus us mentality)¹⁰. The desire to belong to a group, to identify with and be connected with others is a fundamental human need¹¹, a need that is so strong that people who do not feel socially connected (and therefore experience loneliness) have a 50 percent increased risk of mortality¹². Experiencing a sense of belonging will improve our wellbeing by satisfying a basic human need to connect with others.

Improved Innovation

Employees working for Inclusive Leaders demonstrate improved innovation¹³ and team creativity¹⁴. Inclusive Leadership improves creativity and innovation as Inclusive Leaders create the conditions for individuals to feel safe and therefore free to experiment and create, confident in the knowledge that they have a secure base in the team which they can return to¹⁵, free from repercussion should their experimentations not work out as planned¹⁶.

Improved Engagement

Evidence shows that Inclusive Leadership leads to improved work engagement¹⁷, enthusiasm or vigour¹⁸, drive to work¹⁹ and increased psychological empowerment²⁰. When we feel a sense of empowerment in relation to our work, we are more likely to feel engaged and consequently perform better. Inclusive Leaders enhance employees' psychological empowerment by listening to their opinions and providing them with opportunities to influence decision-making.

Improved Decision-Making

Individuals led by Inclusive Leaders experience enhanced decision-making²¹ and improved cognitive function²². The link between improved decision-making and diversity is relatively straight forward: working with people different from you challenges you to overcome old ways of thinking, highlighting alternative perspectives that a wider range of knowledge and experiences brings²³.

However, the importance of inclusion (in addition to diversity) in decision-making is highlighted by research on the impact of social exclusion on cognitive processes²⁴. In a series of experiments, participants who were led to believe that they would end up alone in life (therefore were socially excluded), experienced a decline in cognitive performance in tasks linked to decision-making. These effects were specific to social exclusion as the same effects were not observed for participants who received predictions of physical accidents or injuries. Social exclusion is experienced as a threatening, aversive event and as people strive to suppress their emotional distress, it impairs their performance in decision-making tasks. Considered together, these findings are clear that diversity with Inclusive Leadership offers improved decision-making.

Improved Learning

Inclusive Leadership leads to increased engagement in learning²⁵; team learning²⁶; knowledge sharing and learning from errors²⁷; improved employee readiness for organisational change²⁸ and career adaptability²⁹. Learning is an inherently risky behaviour as it involves abandoning our old, established ways of working and experimenting with new, unfamiliar strategies. As these new ways of working are practiced and developed, there will inevitably be mistakes along the way and even a temporary dip in performance before the learning is embedded. Inclusive Leaders create the conditions for individuals to feel safe and therefore free to experiment with new skills, secure in the knowledge that the learning journey will be supported by their leader and other team members.

Improved Performance

Organisations with Inclusive Leaders benefit from improved organisation³⁰ and task performance³¹; the ability to adapt performance to changing work conditions³²; improved project success³³ and increased organisational citizenship behaviours³⁴. The dangers of ignoring diversity and inclusion are demonstrated in data showing that organisations with poor diversity in executive teams underperform their national industry average for profitability by 40 percent³⁵.



Inclusion and the Role of the Leader

When we feel included, we feel that we are a valued member of the team and organisation. These feelings of inclusion stem from feeling seen and appreciated by others for what makes us unique and that we belong as an important member of the group. When we belong to a group, we have robust and stable relationships with other members of the group, consequently fulfilling one of our most basic human needs: to be connected to others.

This basic need to belong is so strong that research from neuroscience has demonstrated that social isolation causes cravings for social interaction in the same way that fasting causes hunger³⁶ and researchers believe that reactions to rejection and social isolation operate via the same mechanisms as physical pain³⁷. Demonstrating that “people are so vitally important to each other that social needs are ingrained in our very biology”³⁸. This evidence makes a clear link between inclusion, wellbeing, and performance.

“In every sphere of our lives, we seek connection with and acceptance from one another—including in our workplaces, where we spend a huge portion of our time.” ³⁹





Inclusive Leaders hold the mindset, have the knowledge, and engage in behaviours that satisfy team members' needs for belonging and uniqueness. However, we propose that Inclusive Leadership is not static or binary: we can all be inclusive sometimes and even the most Inclusive Leaders, despite their best efforts, will sometimes exclude. We know that our brains have limited capacity to process information: we have evolved to rely on mental shortcuts, known as heuristics, to process information and quickly make decisions. Unfortunately, these shortcuts are filled with bias. Our brains are wired to keep us safe, as social animals, safety is traditionally within our own social groups (the in-group), therefore bias-driven judgements are made about people not in our own social group (the out-groups) and they are subconsciously seen as social threats. Hence, we all exclude and are excluded more often than we think. Feeling uniquely valued and like you belong does not happen automatically for underrepresented employees, because, as confronting as this may feel, if we are not consciously including, this means by default, we are excluding⁴⁰.

**“It can be difficult
for members of
privileged social
identities to have
awareness of their
own advantages”⁴¹**

Despite our biological limitations, we believe that the meaning of 'different' can be reframed from being a potential threat to a reward, consequently creating a positive automatic response to diversity. Therefore, we propose that Inclusive Leadership can (and should) be learned and developed and the Inclusive Leader System® can help us to do that.

The Inclusive Leader System®



The Dual Systems® of Inclusion

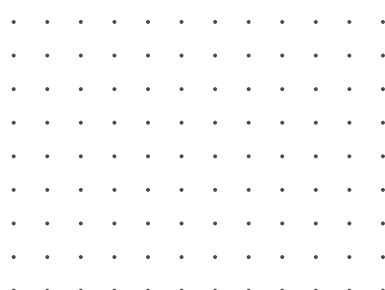


The Inclusive Leader System®

The Inclusive Leader System® is a framework that helps organisations and individuals to understand and consequently develop factors influencing inclusion.*

The system consists of three interlinked components, which impact one another, enhancing or undermining Inclusive Leadership capability: Leader Wellbeing, Drivers of Inclusive Leadership and Inclusive Leadership Behaviours. We discuss these three components, highlighting the areas of priority for leaders who aspire to feel, think and behave more inclusively.

* Inclusive Leadership as a leadership theory is not designed to be all encompassing, instead it is complimentary to other approaches to understanding high-performing leaders. For example, Inclusive Leaders still need to engage in a range of other important leadership behaviours such as strategising, visioning, solving problems, innovating and demonstrating situational adaptability.



Leader Wellbeing

We know that wellbeing and inclusion are interdependent: inclusion enhances wellbeing⁴², equally we struggle to behave in an inclusive way when our wellbeing is low⁴³. For example, if we are juggling an extremely heavy workload with a tight deadline, we are more likely to exclude others from decision-making to minimise using additional time and energy we don't have. Equally, if we are tired due to insufficient breaks from work, we are more likely to operate under autopilot as we conserve energy. Our autopilot operates with biased reactions.

To help us understand how we can ensure that wellbeing does not become a barrier to Inclusive Leadership, we must consider the multiple aspects of our wellbeing while at work⁴⁴:

- **Professional wellbeing:** Describes aspects of job-related motivation such as autonomy, aspiration, self-efficacy, ambition and professional competence. When professional wellbeing is good, individuals will feel motivated, aspirational and experience belief in their own professional competence.
- **Relational wellbeing:** Describes how individuals feel toward the people they work with and how they function within social groups at work. When relational wellbeing is good, individuals will feel positive towards the people they work with and that they belong as a valued member of the group.
- **Emotional wellbeing:** Describes mood, emotional exhaustion, job satisfaction and feelings of organisational commitment. When emotional wellbeing is good, individuals will experience positive emotions about work, feel satisfied with their job, be committed to the organisation and be free from emotional exhaustion.
- **Cognitive wellbeing:** Describes the degree to which workers are able to take up new information and able to concentrate on their work. When cognitive wellbeing is good, individuals have the mental energy to learn new information and concentrate on work.
- **Physical wellbeing:** Describes the presence (or lack) of psychosomatic complaints such as back pain or headaches, which may be traced back to challenging work conditions such as long hours. When physical wellbeing is good, individuals will be free from any physical symptoms.

If we ignore our wellbeing, our ability to be inclusive will be compromised, consequently, leaders should prioritise their wellbeing. They can do this by firstly, developing their ability to assess their own wellbeing, such as by taking a regular 'health check' for how they feel they are performing in each of the five aspects of wellbeing. Secondly, seeking to understand the causes of unhealthy wellbeing habits (at individual, team and organisational levels). For example, pressure to respond to emails out of work, may be leading to cognitive overload (and poor cognitive wellbeing) and impacting psychosomatic wellbeing (such as difficulty sleeping) as a consequence of insufficient time to 'switch off' and recover from work.

Next, leaders can develop favourable wellbeing practices around the unhealthy wellbeing habits identified, such as setting an out of office email notification at the end of each workday and on weekends and deleting the email app from personal smart phones to eliminate email notifications out of working hours.

Finally, leaders can check in on the wellbeing needs of others, working with them to apply the same steps to their wellbeing needs.

“

It may be common for privileged leaders to consider themselves fair when they engage in equal rather than equitable treatment. Although both equality and equity are presumed to promote fairness, equality attains this through treating everyone the same regardless of need, while equity achieves this through treating people differently dependent on need”⁴⁵

Drivers of Inclusive Leadership

Human behaviour is infinitely complex and therefore to fully understand what may influence or drive Inclusive Leadership behaviour, it is essential to also examine important characteristics within the leader themselves. We call these 'Drivers of Inclusive Leadership' as factors such as an individual's mindset, lived experience and knowledge can all act as precursors to important behaviours.

The drivers of Inclusive Leadership are interlinked and can work together to enable or allow the leader to be able to behave in an inclusive way. Equally, the absence of these drivers can also act as barriers, inhibiting the leaders' ability to engage with others inclusively. We discuss each of these drivers next.



1. Mindset

Mindset explains the mental attitude and characteristics of the leader that influence how they view the world and engage with others⁴⁶. Drawing from the principles of neuroplasticity, we propose that an inclusive mindset can be developed and nurtured rather than being fixed and innate. Although restructuring and rewiring our brains might sound impossible, we can directly change our mindset by firstly raising awareness of our current mindset and then proactively pursuing new habits around our desired mindset. We can also engage in activities that can help to positively influence our ability to create new neuropathways at a general level, like physical exercise⁴⁷ and engaging in artistic activities⁴⁸. The presence of an inclusive mindset can enhance the leader's capability to identify and consequently mitigate biases in their thinking and behaviour for themselves and others. We identify four characteristics of an inclusive mindset:

1. **Curious:** A desire to understand how others view and experience the world⁴⁹, with a positive attitude to lifelong learning and receptivity to the "new".
2. **Humble:** Accepting that one is not the centre of the universe in their relationships with others⁵⁰, being vulnerable, allowing others to see one's mistakes and weaknesses. Recognising and appreciating other's strengths.
3. **Empathetic:** The ability to listen, sense, understand and share the feelings of others⁵³.
4. **Courageous:** Can speak up and challenge the status quo⁵¹, not afraid to go against established social norms. Embraces fear as an integral part of learning and development.



It goes a long way to walk in and say, “I need your input, by the way, I made a mistake. I have stumbled, I have fallen, I have dropped the ball, but I don’t want to do it again. And I want to make the best decision.” ⁵²

Inclusive Leaders pay attention to their mindset. They identify and explore anti-inclusive beliefs when they occur. Usually, the process starts with understanding the importance of mindset on inclusion. Next, reflecting on our own triggers and hidden beliefs that move us out of an inclusive mindset. Followed by a desire to understand these triggers to be able to respond to them in an intentional way. We can then begin to form new habits around developing and maintaining an inclusive mindset. For example, allowing ourselves to feel vulnerable in a safe environment, saying yes to an idea we would usually automatically say no to, or consciously nudging curiosity when a judgemental thought emerges in a conversation.

2. Lived Experiences

Our lived experiences (experiences over the duration of our lifetime) influence our ability to be aware of potential barriers to inclusion and our openness to be inclusive. For example, the extent to which we have been exposed to people different to ourselves over the duration of our lifespan and whether those experiences have been viewed as more positive or negative⁵³.

While our lived experiences up to the present, are fixed, the narrative we tell ourselves about our experiences (and even the experiences we have inherited from our family) are not. Crucially, responses to lived experiences can vary greatly and therefore, alone, they do not predict inclusive behaviours: two individuals with the same lived experiences may exhibit very different inclusionary (or exclusionary) behaviours.

Therefore, most importantly, Inclusive Leaders seek to understand their and others' lived experiences through focused reflective practice, such as through guided reflective writing or with coaching, to understand the influence these experiences have had on shaping them. Where appropriate, this narrative can be reconceptualised, creating a new narrative on how their lived experience defines the leader they are today. Equally, Inclusive Leaders seek new experiences to enrich their appreciation for diversity. For example, by expanding their social networks to purposefully reach out to different people and cultures, while embracing unfamiliar experiences. Finally, Inclusive Leaders should explore the different cultures at work and the lived experiences of others to anticipate risks in misjudging or overlooking individual's intentions and needs.



3. Knowledge

Our final driver of Inclusive Leadership is knowledge. Inclusive Leaders are continuously developing sound knowledge of topics and issues relevant to inclusion, while acknowledging the risks of complacency that can come, particularly with advanced expertise. This knowledge is not limited to scientific education but also includes facts and evidence of what is happening around us in terms of diversity, such as from a multicultural perspective. Without this underpinning knowledge, we are in danger of being ignorant to our ignorance.

Individuals and organisations can ensure that diversity and inclusion topics such as cultural differences; biases; privilege; prejudice; stereotypes; microaggressions and power dynamics are integral to leadership development and ongoing education. Opportunities for ongoing learning and development, even for those already conversant in these areas, can also be created, such as with peer group reflective practice and platforms to enable knowledge sharing.

Inclusive Leadership Behaviours

The final element of the Inclusive Leader System® is Inclusive Leadership Behaviours. These describe our actions or the things that we do. Often, our behaviours are outside of our awareness and are driven by our autopilot. To reset behaviours, we need to shift our intentions and habits consciously. We identify seven Inclusive Leadership Behaviours:

- 1. Bringing people together:** Inclusive Leaders are collaborative⁵⁴, they remove obstacles to enable others to work collaboratively⁵⁵ and they support feelings of belonging across identities and cultures⁵⁶.
- 2. Being culturally intelligent and open:** Inclusive Leaders are aware and appreciative of other cultures and life experiences, and adapt behaviour accordingly⁵⁷. They behave in a non-judgemental and tolerant manner, particularly when feeling uncomfortable.
- 3. Focusing on fairness and equity:** Inclusive Leaders ensure that everyone has a fair opportunity⁵⁸, they focus on distributing power, ensuring equitable treatment, they listen attentively, focusing on employee needs⁵⁹.
- 4. Being an ally:** Inclusive Leaders understand that leadership is a privilege that should be used to support and voice the needs of underrepresented groups, while dismantling inequity, unfairness, and discrimination.
- 5. Promoting uniqueness:** Inclusive Leaders have a concern for others' interests⁶⁰, they consider differences among team members⁶¹, they facilitate, motivate, and appreciate team members contributions⁶², they value distinctiveness⁶³ and advocate for diversity.
- 6. Reflecting on biases:** Inclusive Leaders recognize that leading inclusively is fluid and not static and therefore engage in regular reflective learning⁶⁴ in order to continually identify and mitigate biases.
- 7. Being emotionally agile:** Inclusive Leaders are able to identify, express and where appropriate regulate their own emotions, particularly when working in unknown or unfamiliar contexts, and are able to tolerate ambiguity⁶⁵. They have a high awareness of their own and others' emotions and are able to adapt behaviour accordingly.

The Inclusive Leader System®

These behaviours can be nurtured at the individual level, with leaders paying attention to their motivations to change and defining what the new patterns of behaviours would look like in daily life. Triggers of the old ways can be identified and addressed with nudges, instigating and rewarding the new patterns. For example, a leader might diarise time at the start of each project to reflect on the cultural composition of the project team, actively showing appreciation to other cultures while reflecting on cultural biases and stereotypes. Organisations can also encourage and support these behaviours by embedding them in leadership competency frameworks, talent assessment criteria and learning and development curriculums.

Conclusion

Compelling evidence identifies inclusion as key to maintaining the competitive edge by harnessing the power of a diverse workforce and, consequently, accessing a diverse client base.

Diversity without inclusion normalises inequality and reinforces prejudice. Equally, it is easy to be inclusive when there is little diversity. Consequently, diversity and inclusion must be considered as two sides of the same coin and leaders play a fundamental role in creating an inclusive workplace.

In the Inclusive Leader System®, we have translated the breadth and depth of this complex topic into a workable framework, which forms the basis of our statistically reliable and valid Inclusive Leader System® Assessment. Our assessment measures Inclusive Leader wellbeing, drivers and behaviours, providing leaders with a clear understanding of their own Inclusive Leadership capability, with tailored recommendations for their personal growth and sustainable behavioural change.

It is our hope that the Inclusive Leader System and associated Inclusive Leadership Assessment can guide organisations, teams, and individuals on assessing and developing their Inclusive Leadership capability, to help level the playing field, creating inclusive workplaces for all.



About The Inclusive Leadership Company

The Inclusive Leadership Company specialises in Inclusive Leadership diagnostics, development, and research. The company was founded by Dr Priscila Pereira Law and Professor Rebecca Jones, with the shared vision of building equitable and inclusive organisations through Inclusive Leadership.

We are experts in quantitative and qualitative diagnostics, evaluation, and research methods, and we adopt an evidence-based approach to everything we do. We are also multi-disciplinary practitioners, drawing on perspectives from psychology, sociology, behavioural sciences, and neuroscience.

We take pride in working with the most talented associates and partners with strong academic credentials and practitioner experience. To find out how the Inclusive Leadership Company can support you, including learning more about our Inclusive Leader System® Assessment and to read about Part II of the Dual Systems Model of Inclusion®: the Inclusive Organisation System, contact us at:

enquiries@inclusiveleadershipcompany.com

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