THE INCLUSION IMPERATIVE:

Creating a Psychologically Safe Culture

INTRODUCTION

This document to provides insights for psychologically safe facilitators, leaders, team members, and organizations on why and how they can leverage their diversity, facilitate an inclusive culture, provide a psychologically safe workplace, and thrive because of it. It is no longer a question of having a diverse workforce but how we ensure everyone feels safe, included, heard, and respected when they come to work.

"We all have the ability to promote a culture of acceptance and inclusion — and that is something I believe every leader has a responsibility to do. It starts with having a dialogue until we are all comfortable and no longer have the fear of saying the wrong thing."

~ Inga Beale

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PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

A psychologically safe culture is one where all employees believe they can speak up with candour and without fear to share their ideas, ask questions, report concerns, and make mistakes.[1] In a work world that is volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous, psychologically safe cultures provide space for tolerance, acceptance, and openness to new ideas.

Societal expectations for inclusive workplaces and changes in occupational health and safety and human rights legislation are driving a renewed focus on the importance of creating psychologically healthy and safe workplaces. Psychological safety is increasingly important in industries where employee and customer safety is paramount, as it has been shown to reduce employee errors and enhance safety.[2]

In addition, a growing body of research highlights the benefits of psychological health and safety for driving performance outcomes such as improved team performance, leadership effectiveness, and employee behaviours.[3]

Employees' and leaders' attitudes towards diversity and inclusion influence the degree that employees feel welcomed. It is impossible to achieve a psychologically safe workplace without considering diversity and inclusion.

Diversity and inclusion facilitate mutual learning between groups and define expectations for how people treat each other in the workplace.

More organizations are improving diversity by seeking to understand diverse groups' needs, adopting diversity and inclusion programs and policies, and implementing diverse hiring practices. Even with these efforts toward diversity, it is critical that employees not assume that inclusion practices automatically follow. Inclusion requires intention as it moves diversity concerns and perceptions into action.

At its core, inclusion is about creating a workplace culture where all employees feel they belong, welcome, and included. Not seeing themselves represented among senior leaders, middle and upper management, and even frontline leadership can strain some minority groups. This can create concerns about being treated fairly and equitably.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE CONTINUUM

A respectful workplace is defined as one where all stakeholders work towards a common goal of maximizing respect and civility while minimizing incivility, harassment, and violence.

As shown in Figure 1, the respectful workplace continuum presents the escalation model from misunderstanding to physical violence.[4] Under racial discrimination, as shown in Figure 2, a range of possibilities can result in diversity and inclusion challenges up to Criminal Code violations. You will notice on both continuums that for inclusion to happen in a just way it cannot be predicated solely on occupational health and safety or human rights legislation or Criminal Code direction. Ultimately, caring for and respecting others' differences is dependent on the alignment of values that all employees in the workplace matter.

Misunderstanding	Incivility	Conflict	Covert Psychological Bullying	Overt Psychological Bullying	Physically Bullying	Racial Discrimination	Psychological Sexual Harassment	Physical Sexual Harassment	Physical Violence
Miscommunication that results in a person feeling wronged	Act of rudeness to a peer	Verbal or written argument between two workers	Omission of a peer from activities	Name calling in-person or online	Physically preventing a person from moving	Use of racial pejorative terms to describe a peer	Making comments to a person about their body	Touching a person in a sexual non-consensual way	Throwing an object at an-other person.

Figure 1: Respectful Workplace Continuum

| Mistaken Identity	Commonality	Vernacular Appropriation	Unequal Celebration of Holidays	Exclusion	Assumption of Status	Racial Discrimination	Hate Crimes
Referring to a peer by the name of another peer *repeatedly* due to their similar race	Comparing "likeness" based on race, ethnicity, culture	Using cultural vernacular when speaking to or referencing a peer	Only allowing days off for Christmas and not other cultural holidays	Excluding a peer from meetings, activities, coffee runs, etc. because of their race	Assuming someone's role or status is lower than it is based on their race	Use of racial pejorative terms to describe a peer	Specifically targeting a person based on their race with violence

Figure 2: Racial Discrimination

Until all employees in the culture buy in and work together to create a psychologically safe culture where they can share their concerns and points of view to be heard and understood, diversity and inclusion will be elusive topics talked about more than experienced. Creating a respectful workplace is no different. Many employees will continue to experience unnecessary hardship until they feel comfortable dealing with misunderstanding, incivility, and conflict in a psychologically safe way. Until a workplace has a formal mechanism to deal with respectful workplace violations such as incivility, it is imperative to be open to the possibility that such actions negatively impact employees in your culture.

Additionally, employees who experience mistaken identity, commonality, vernacular appropriation, or any of the escalating factors on the racial discrimination continuum and have no recourse or mechanism to address them will also be negatively impacted. There has to be more in place than self-advocating or informed and caring upstanders. In the context of diversity, inclusion, and psychologically safe workplaces, leaders need to acknowledge the range of behaviours within the category of racial discrimination up to Criminal Code violations such as hate crime.

WHERE ARE YOU REALLY FROM?

A survey by SurveyMonkey showed that upwards of 60% of Americans have potentially been the subject of and/or witnessed **microaggressions**.

Seven out of ten *workers said that any of the actions listed in the survey would be upsetting. Of those, half said they* **would consider leaving their job.**[5]
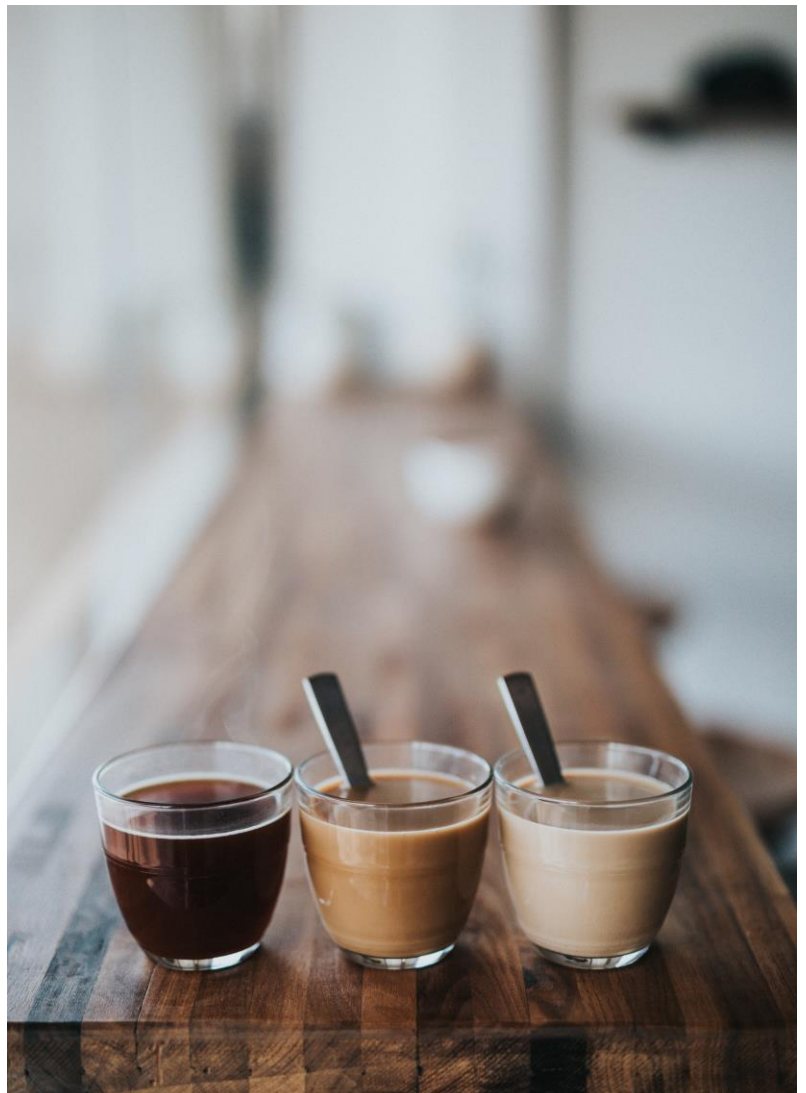
WHY DOES PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY MATTER FOR INCLUSION?

A psychologically safe workplace focused on ensuring diversity and inclusion is committed to removing any form of discrimination and providing all employees, regardless of diversity or rank, with a respectful workplace.

When employees feel comfortable asking for help, offering ideas, and challenging various points of view, the organization is more likely to attain the benefits of diversity. One aspect that has been left out of the conversation is the innate human need to *belong.*[5] As stated by Wador, "No matter their background, skin colour, or gender, employees wanted what I wanted: to belong".[6] Belonging is not simply a positive aspect of a work environment, employees *need* to feel that they belong. These feelings are positively related to work behaviours[7] and can be a better motivator than increased compensation.[8] For the organization, these belonging strategies can increase connectedness, reduce loneliness, and create a healthier workforce where employees invest more in their work to ensure they are not letting down [9].

As well, research has shown that leaders who value people and participation are more capable of fostering a psychologically safe workplace[10] that enables minority populations (e.g., black, indigenous), who are not yet represented at adequate levels in leadership, to experience a workplace that is open to differences and is psychologically safe for all employees.

A psychologically safe workplace reduces the risk of implicit bias — an unconscious association, belief, or attitude toward any social group.[11] Implicit biases are often automatic, general thoughts attached to people by persons who may not be fully aware that such thoughts influence their opinions, decisions. and actions.[12]

Implicit bias can be positive or negative, such as when a generalized comment is made about a person's role in parenting based solely on gender or someone's professional competency because of the university they attended. Implicit bias is involved in trends and behaviours that result in structural racism in workplaces (e.g., the kind of person who gets promoted).

In 2018, Culture Amp conducted a survey that showed the inequality of the employee experience and how workplaces are often a manifestation of our unconscious bias. The survey asked questions about willingness to voice opinions, the equality of opportunity, and the inclusion of various perspectives in decision-making. In all three categories, straight white men ranked the

highest, often by large margins. This survey also found that belongingness continues to be a key driver of engagement.[13]

For diversity to occur in a workplace, there must be an open, non-judgemental, and safe medium for diverse populations to express their voice and to be heard. However, having a diverse workforce does not mean it is inclusive. To effectively leverage diversity, it's important to capitalize on various opinions. The process of creative abrasion,[14] as coined by Jerry Hirshberg, president of Nissan Design International, is to bring together people who inherently have different ideas, perspectives, and ways of thinking to advocate for their point of view but also listen with intention. This process is intended to create a solution distinct from what was originally brought to the table. Inclusion, when done in a spirit of psychological safety, enables diversity to thrive.

This process is intended to create a solution distinct from what was originally brought to the table. Inclusion, when done with intention and in a spirit of psychological safety, enables diversity to thrive. Literature suggests that employees who must learn a task to succeed in their role will benefit when the workplace is committed to psychologically safe practices.[15] This makes sense because to learn a task there is a greater risk of slow and ineffective learning in a culture of fear where asking questions and making mistakes is looked down upon.

A psychologically safe workplace builds safe paths that all employees, regardless of their race, gender, age, sexual orientation, or cultural heritage, believe lead to an equitable, fair, and safe culture. McKinsey's research on diversity found that organizations with more diverse gender, culture, and ethnicity outperform employers that don't support diversity.

One of the most important roles for leadership is creating inclusive cultures that are psychologically safe for all employees.
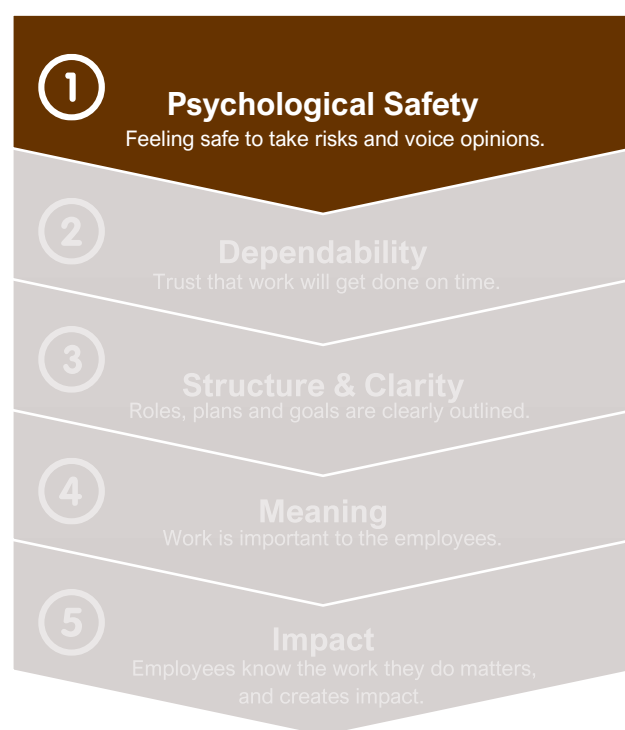

Figure 3: Adapted from Google's Aristotle Project

EMPLOYEES' SUBJECTIVE OPINIONS ARE A MUST

There is no way to adequately measure through a diversity lens employees' subjective perception regarding psychological safety and inclusion without asking all employees. Data can be collected through surveys, interviews, and focus groups to obtain their input.

For employees to report they feel included regardless of their diversity they must feel their contribution is valued and respected by the organization. This generates the imperative that all perspectives matter, to reduce the bad habits of leaders making decisions without consulting or seeking to understand how they may be received and experienced by a diverse group.

The degree all employees feel welcomed in the workplace can only be fully understood by asking employees directly.
~ Dr. Bill Howatt

? HOW CAN YOU GAIN INSIGHT ON YOUR EMPLOYEES' PERSPECTIVES?

Great teams are built by leading individuals. Be sure to check in with each member of your team regularly. Even if an employee doesn't have much to share in one-on-one meetings initially, give them time to adjust and figure out how these sessions will work best for them. It may take a few meetings before they are comfortable being more open about their challenges, sharing successes, or letting you know what they need from you as a leader.

THE EQUITY CONTINUUM

E ○ qui ○ ty

the quality of being fair and impartial

There are certain requirements (in Canada), that must be followed when hiring and recruiting. The Canadian Human Rights Act, which prohibits discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity, disabilities, and other diversity and identity grounds. [16] The Employment Equity Act regulates federal organizations and those with federal contracts, requiring these organizations to employ a certain number of members designated under the act. These create a certain amount of diversity within a workforce but do not constitute inclusiveness. Creating an inclusive workforce includes actively searching and employing members from diverse cultural, ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds and persons with varying ideologies, perspectives, and ways of thinking, and leveraging this diversity in every realm to drive innovation. Research has shown that inclusivity is positively related to organizational commitment and job performance. [17]

Employment Equity

Employment Equity Act
Federally mandated to public sector and government contracted organizations to represent the dour designated groups equally within their organization.

Diversity

Actively employing individuals who have an array of identities, abilities, backgrounds, cultures, skills, perspectives and experiences that represent the current and evolving population.

Inclusion

Recognizing values and leveraging the diversity of your workforce. Incorporating all individuals into the structure of the organizations and its day-to-day functions and ensuring perspectives, opinions and ideas are heard and valued.

CREATING A POSITIVE DIVERSITY CLIMATE

Research on Diversity Climate has been ongoing for the better part of the past 25 years. Its origins are often attributed to the works of Cox,[18] Kossek, and Zonia. [19] Throughout its earlier life, it was defined as the presence of organizational policies, practices, and structure that promoted diversity. (e.g., affirmative action and career advancement programs). As research has progressed, the focus has shifted towards more subjective constructs. One of the more recent definitions is openness towards and appreciation of individual differences. [20]

 When organizations facilitate a positive diversity climate, there is potential for increased involvement, team identity, brainstorming success. reduced interpersonal aggres-sion, miscommunication, and diversity-related conflict. Diversity climate is a perceived level of acceptance within an organization. However, this perception on an individual level influence feelings of trust, safety, acceptance, and willingness to contribute. This means that the diversity climate and psychological safety of an organization are positively related.

! FACILITATING A POSITIVE DIVERSITY CLIMATE

There may be no more important strategy to understand what employees are experiencing than conducting an assessment like the *Mental Fitness Index (MFI)* that can help employers discover the experience of diverse groups, the level of fear in the culture, average employee's experience with their leaders regarding psychological safety, and experiences with incivility and respectful workplace factors (e.g., bullying, harass-ment, discrimination, and workplace violence).

Another option is leveraging *Listening Tours* to collect qualitative data from employees one-on-one or in focus groups and then aggregating it to gain insights on employees' perceptions around diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

To learn more about the *Mental Fitness Index* or *Listening Tours* contact info@howatthr.com

BUILDING AN INCLUSIVE CULTURE, ONE INTERACTION AT A TIME

Here we introduce our framework for facilitating a caring and inclusive culture. The foundation for facilitating an inclusion culture in the workplace is authentic relationships that will happen one interaction at a time[21]. A large percent of inclusion training focuses on what people shouldn't do that research is showing such training can increase avoidance[22] . This model takes a different position it focuses on what employees and leaders can do, how to have open, and inclusive interactions that support facilitating a caring and inclusive culture.

OPENNESS TO UNDERSTANDING OTHERS CONTINUUM

This framework begins with recognizing the possibility that we all are at different levels of readiness to engage this conversation. We can think about readiness like a traffic light[23]. We may feel green light (ready), yellow light (ambivalent) or red light (not ready). In a typical day, when you interact with others in the workplace, what is your level of openness and readiness to be mindful of other people's perspective and issues of point of views in a caring and welcoming manner regardless of who they are. Never assume another person is starting where you are at and recognize that readiness can fluctuate. We all have our level of readiness so it is most helpful when we are aware, and we do not judge others.

GREEN

Curious, open, empathetic, kind, warm, approachable, and interested in others' point of view in a welcoming and caring manner. This person would be defined as a high facilitator for supporting and facilitating inclusion.

YELLOW

Appear to be rushing, often challenged by daily demands, focused on their current priorities. However, they can and often do have situational empathy that allows them to be open and interested in others point of view. There distraction can result in blind spots that can impede inclusive opportunities not because they do not care but they do not observe or notice.

RED

Not aware off other needs most of the time self centered, often perceived as standoff-ish, cold, often have a strong point of view, internally focused, often can be perceived as uncaring about others point of view, can be driven by fear, lack of awareness, lack of experience with diverse perspectives. Often simply not aware of how their beliefs and behaviors can impede and hurt other feelings of safety and belonging.
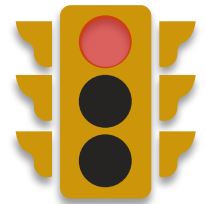
FRAMEWORK FOR FACILITATING INCLUSION

At the core, the word inclusion refers to every person in the workplace regardless of their situation, title, job, age, ethnicity, interests, history, experiences, body image, gender, are entitled to feel safe, respected, valued, heard, listened, and cared for (PERIOD). We believe by facilitating an inclusive culture that encourages building safe and authentic relationships in the workplace this creates the space to allow employees to get to know and accept each other for who they are versus what they are.

THREE PILLARS

The below pillars are designed to help you have a framework for facilitating inclusive conversations. The goal isn't to memorize the below points, these points serve as a way to increase your awareness of where you are starting, what you are thinking, how you facilitate conversations with others and your openness to learn from your conversations with others. Be mindful what readiness (i.e., red, yellow, or green) you are starting at and your openness. It is beneficial to be patient and allow yourself space, time without self-judgement to learn and discover how to become comfortable as you learn to rethink your own mental frame of reference. Self-compassion (e.g., being kind to ourselves and others as it is human to make mistakes) is critical in any type of learning[24]. In the end we all will win when we are able to accept inclusive cultures are safe, non-judgemental, and caring that allows for learning and growth[25].
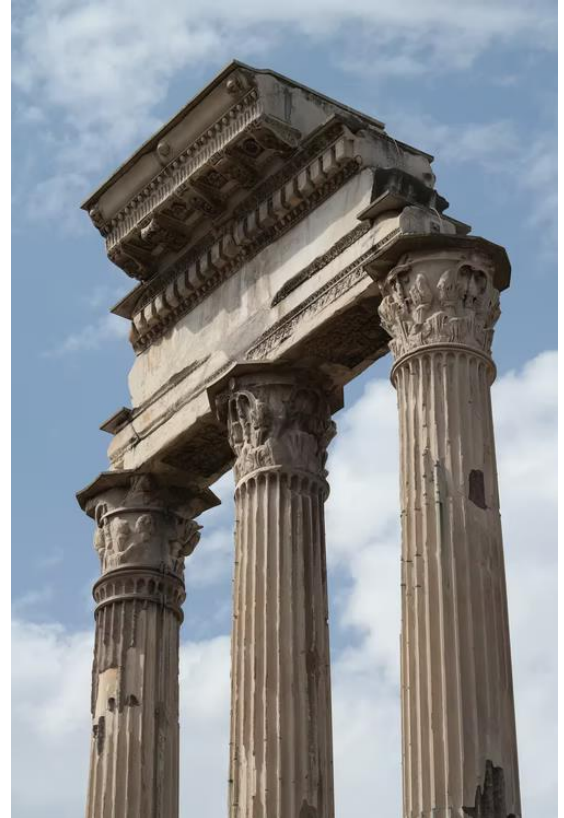
AWARENESS

This pillar's primary focus is on your internal thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, notions, that influence how you perceive other that may impact how you interact with others in the workplace.

Things to consider, to enhance your intrapersonal skills that promote an openness to differences:

1. We all hold implicit bias (i.e., actions taken based on some basis of prejudice and stereotypes without intending to do so;[26]). All of us, whether we know it or not, have implicit bias. The goal of inclusion is for us to all learn how engage others in an authentic way that moves past our implicit biases.
2. Be aware of where you're starting from with regards to your personal openness.
3. Recognize that others will be different than you (often in ways we can't anticipate), as a result, they will have different point of view.
4. Seek to discover your own personal biases. It is helpful to note that these biases can be both conscious and unconscious[27].
5. Recognize implicit bias can exist in structures and systems, not just people[28] Seek to be curious, learn and ask questions to better understand the different kinds of structural, systemic, cultural barriers and biases that influence human behaviour.

DISCOVERY

The purpose of this pillar is to facilitate the opportunity for psychologically safe interactions with another person(s) regardless of their differences[29]. The goal is to create space and the opportunity to discover, learn, understand, how to best interact with anyone in the workplace with the one intention to do no harm. Focus on being curious and not rushing to outcomes too quickly. Things to consider, to enhance your interpersonal skills that promote an openness to differences:

1. **Context**: Think about this quote from Einstein: "If I had an hour to solve a problem I'd spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and five minutes thinking about solutions." Seek to understand before launching into problems solving. Be curious, interested, and open to others. Remember that this requires us to tolerate some uncertainty[30].
2. **Curiosity:** Resist the urge to make statements (e.g., "you think", "you believe") and rhetorical questions always. (e.g., "don't you think", "shouldn't you"). Instead ask open ended questions that allow space for discovery and curiosity (e.g., "how is that for you", "what is that like").
3. **Listen:** Engage in active listening that involves clarifying and ensuring you understand the other persons point of view, with the goal to remove any assumptions.
4. **Emotional literacy:** Recognize and manage your own emotions[31]. It's normal for emotions to show up when having difficult conversations. Emotions come from an automatic and unconscious part of our brain so there's no way to deliberately control them[32]. The part you can control is your behaviour. Name the emotions ("this is guilt"), be kind to them ("it's normal to feel this way") and try to still engage in curiosity and active listening through your actions (e.g., asking open ended questions, being mindful of non-verbal communication).
5. **Acknowledge:** Validating and accepting someone's experience isn't the same as endorsing their beliefs. It's just about recognizing that is their perspective period. It's not about "why" do you feel that way, it's about "okay, you do feel that way, how could we proceed." We may never truly understand another person's experience. It's more important to validate and acknowledge their experiences than to expect to "know what that feels like".
6. **Openness:** Keep top of mind when contributing to an inclusion culture that openness is the antidote to fear and biases that may be conscious or unconscious[33]. The end goal for all interactions is they are two-way, safe, free from judgement that allows for psychologically safe experiences that supporting building a caring and inclusive culture on interaction at a time.

CREATE INCLUSIVE EXPERIENCES

The purpose of this pillar is about enacting behaviours that facilitate respect, acceptance, understanding, agreement and inclusive culture. This is about recognizing our actions are important and more under our control than biases, beliefs, or feeling[34].

Whether we know it or not, micro-interactions that can only last seconds, create the context and experiences for how all employees experience the workplace[35]. The possibility and the magic of inclusion is when individuals, in real time, allow themselves to become learners, that shapes and influences their perceptions, beliefs and attitudes. We believe, every interaction does not have to be complicated, over thought, or worrisome, the goal is for interactions to be authentic, real, and genuine. When all employees are focused on practicing and mastering Pillar #1 and #2 this creates the space for learning and growth that is needed to become and caring and inclusive culture.

1. **Value clarification:** Be in tune with your core values around the importance of inclusion: Why does it matter to you to show up this way in the workplace. Strengthen your values and compassion towards the value and importance of inclusion in the workplace[36].
2. **Brave:** Be courageous and ask questions with curiosity and respect. That includes asking questions about how the other person is doing in the interaction. This isn't about being better mind readers. It's about being willing to ask and listen. Be willing to have difficult conversations in the service of your values. Courage doesn't mean the absence of fear. It means feeling fear and doing it anyway.
3. **Own your behavior:** The only part you have control over each day is your own behaviour[37]. Just because you bring an issue up, doesn't mean it gets changed to your liking. The part you control is bringing it up, what happens with it isn't under your control it requires others' input, agreement and action.
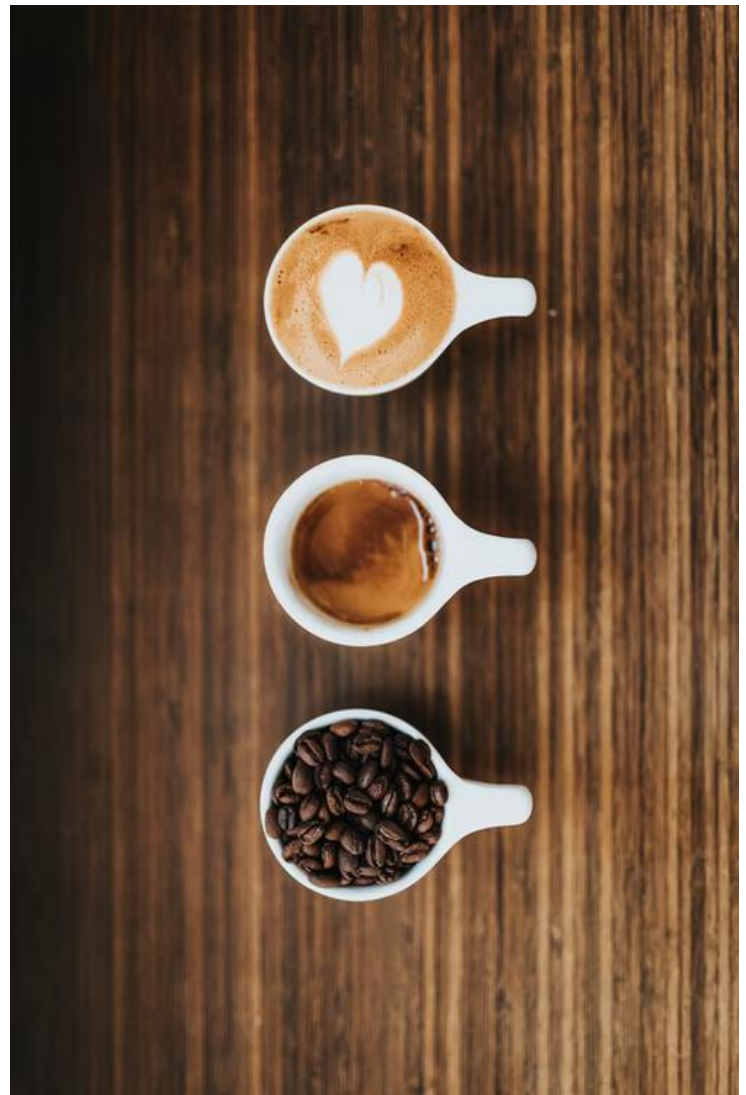
4. **Be an upstander:** Recognize that regardless of your title, that your behaviours matter to yourself and other in every moment and interaction in the workplace. This includes the importance of being an upstander and not a bystander[38]. We can all play a role when others are being judged or mistreated in a way that goes against the core mission for creating an inclusive workplace[39].

5. **Be clear on intention:** Share your intentions, clarify interactions by describing your intent that are typically not clear to others: "the reasons I want to have this awkward conversation is because inclusion is important to me", "I'm asking these questions because I would like to know more about you in a genuine way". In the absence of clearly specifying our intentions, assumptions can be made about our behaviour which might be quite the opposite of our intentions. Remove the ambiguity by clarifying your intentions.

6. **Value based problem solving:** When there are differences or challenges look to utilize value-based problem solving. Value-based problem solving is about finding collaborative resolutions by valuing differences of opinions to seek to understand the options and making together decisions versus trying to fix problems on our own. Recognizing that disagreement and experiencing conflict is normal part of human interaction it is not a "bad" thing, we just want a way to stay connecting and respectful, even if we disagree. In fact, studies show diversity increases innovation and improves problem solving specially because there is a diversity of perspective[40].

7. **Being human is OK.** No human is perfect; we all will make mistakes, there is no exceptions. We won't get it right all the time and we shouldn't expect ourselves or others to be perfect. Self-compassion and compassion are critical skills when trying to make changes[41] in order to create an inclusive culture. Creating a safe space can happen by accepting and owning mistakes quickly and seek support to learn from mistake. The priority once you make a mistake is not what you did, but what you will do to fix and your commitment not to repeat it. Sometimes a mistake is nothing more than a sign we're trying to do something new - that is, it's an opportunity to learn.

12 TIPS FOR FACILITATING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN THE WORKPLACE

1

Create a sense of belonging for all employees

This is a critically important psychological need for an employee to feel connected to their peers, leaders, and organization.

2

Do not assume; educate all employees and leaders on the diversity and inclusion strengths and gaps in the organization

To get employees' buy-in and support, be truthful as to where the organization is and what it plans to do to close gaps. Educate all employees on the expectation for their behaviour and how this supports creating a diverse and inclusive workplace.

3

Train leaders to be psychologically safe leaders

Ensure leaders are trained in how to be empathetic leaders skilled in emotional and social intelligence.

4

Make diversity and inclusion a behavioural expectation

Ensure all employees know that diversity and inclusion require developing new knowledge, skills, and micro-behaviours to promote diversity and inclusion (e.g., honest, safe, and open conversations) on needs and experiences that promote awareness and context for change

5

Drive fear out of the culture

Create a conversation that teaches employees how to challenge ideas without attacking belief systems or people. Open storytelling and sharing of experiences create opportunities for positive change in a culture where all employees can feel valued.

6

Create a positive diversity climate

A diversity climate is open towards and appreciates individual differences.

7

Keep an open mind

Be open to the possibility that not all employees are having the same experience. Do not assume; ask questions to be committed to constantly discovering the experience of diversity groups and seek to understand tangible steps to address gaps and concerns.

8

Level playing field

Power differentials are a roadblock to creating a psychologically safe workplace. Seek to understand cultural habits and practices that favour one diversity group over another and challenge them head-on to create organizational change.

9

Instill a sense of trust

There is a link between the perceived status of an employee and their willingness to speak up and voice opinions. Instilling a sense of trust among all team members allows them to feel more confident in their decision making, voicing of opinions, and self-advocating.

10

Foster diverse thinking

Encourage honest conversation and healthy debates. When you hire a diverse group you are also hiring diverse minds and brains that think differently, interpret differently, and problem-solve differently.

11

Encourage co-worker relationships

Research has shown that co-worker relationships positively influence individual learning and engagement, which reinforces a psychologically safe workplace.

12

Reflect on personal feelings and biases

Leaders must develop cultural competency,[16] coming to terms with their stereotypes and biases, understanding cultural values and norms, and promoting diversity.

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