Five Organizational Levers to Support Inclusion

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Five Organizational Levers

> *What kinds of organizational changes are most essential to support inclusion? Is it possible to measure progress toward a more inclusive work environment?*

Inclusive actions flourish most readily in a supportive environment. Many leaders want to increase inclusion organization-wide, but are uncertain about where to start or what changes to prioritize in order to achieve their goals. A comprehensive approach to the inclusive leadership journey usually produces the best results, with special focus on five key levers of organizational support:

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Organizations
need to be able to
change and grow, to
reinvent themselves
in the face of shifting
circumstances.

1. Recruitment

2. Executive Engagement

3. Coaching/Mentoring/Sponsorship

4. Key Performance Indicators

5. Policy and Process

This chapter combines our own experience with a sampling of recent research. Although many of the studies in this area are U.S.-centric, findings based on broader samples and international data are referenced where feasible, along with data from our own *Inclusive Behaviors Inventory*.

Lever #1: Recruitment

Competing successfully for talent means hiring the most capable recruits to grow markets and serve customers wherever a company has operations. In sought-after fields such as engineering or computer science, mid-career hires come at a premium price, and college students may have multiple internships under their belts and job offers in hand well before they graduate. What makes one firm's recruitment efforts more effective than another's?

Shifting technologies and global demographics mean that new employees are often different from their predecessors in many ways: technical training, native language, nationality, racial and ethnic background, communication styles, and so on. A core dilemma that most recruitment efforts face is "*How can we ensure a 'cultural fit' with our new recruits while opening our organizational culture to change at the same time?*" This dilemma overlaps with a common challenge that most leaders face when they are elevated to new and more complex roles: "What got you here won't get you there."[1] In other words, the very work patterns that have been the foundation for success thus far, either for an individual or for an organization, may become obstacles as the environment changes. Industries rarely stand still, and there is a constant imperative to preserve essential cultural elements and competencies that continue to be relevant—values, expertise, relationships—while injecting new ideas, perspectives, and energy.

Managers in charge of recruitment in larger organizations usually have a keen awareness of this dilemma, yet they are under pressure to meet targets and fill open job slots. Moreover, they must work with an extended network of employees who conduct job interviews or travel to job fairs and college campuses. This network sometimes includes people who are happy to return to their *alma mater*, to revitalize their prior connections, and to seek out others who fit with their own implicit success criteria. These key players in the recruiting process, however, may not be deliberately seeking to identify others who could be successful but are unlike them.

How can managers ensure that their entire extended team is working in an inclusive way? Here are some characteristics of successful recruiting teams:

Characteristics of Successful Recruiting Teams

- The entire recruiting team shares **common goals** for finding candidates who are both well-qualified and diverse, with special attention to areas in which the company needs to expand its representation in order to grow and serve the communities where it operates.

- **Job descriptions** are scrutinized for language that might cause qualified candidates to exclude themselves based on gender, race, or other characteristics (see Figure 10.1).

- Use **non-traditional methods** such as Boolean search (a method of using key words and modifiers to search, for example, for particular types of colleges, associations, or names) to locate underrepresented candidates and create a more diverse hiring pool.

- Interviewers use a **common set of questions** and a common process for recording responses and impressions to reduce the effects of subjectivity.

- Recruiting teams incorporate a **diverse set of perspectives** through steps such as two-person interview teams for high-priority candidates, with interviewers comparing their impressions afterward. (This does not necessarily mean that members of every interview team must fully reflect the diversity of the candidates under consideration, which may be unfeasible for some organizations and exhausting for underrepresented minority members.)

- Teams consider establishing a **minimum number of minority candidates to interview** to ensure that they start with a sufficiently broad candidate pool. It is best to have multiple candidates rather than just one.[3]

- Recruitment team members volunteer to take on different roles such as contrarian or **devil's advocate** to ensure that various viewpoints are considered. ("How much of a change agent will this person be? Is there another candidate who would challenge us more?")

- Teams consider establishing a **"blind audit" qualification process** focused on task performance, analogous to the practice of blind orchestra audits which has resulted in the selection of more female orchestra members than in the past. (See Figure 10.2.)

- Recruiting team members build the skills needed to **recognize and counteract unconscious bias** in interviews and selection. For example, each aspect of unconscious bias outlined in Chapter 3 can apply to the recruiting process. Here are simple examples using the CIAO model:

  Confirmation Bias: This candidate is like me, and therefore is more likely to be successful in my company than other candidates.

  Insider Bias: This recruit participated in many of the same groups and activities that I did during my university years, so I am confident that he will fit in well.

  Attribution Bias: Candidate A did well based on hard work and persistence; Candidate B received special treatment.

  Overconfidence: I know what my company needs and which qualifications are most essential for a successful career here.

Figure 10.1: Modifying Job Descriptions[2]

- Created software to provide clients feedback on the likelihood that a job description will attract diverse candidates.

- Looks for patterns in data related to job descriptions in postings (how many applied, how long the job was posted, the demographic groups it attracted).

- The tool highlights words based on how well they do or do not work to attract a diverse audience.

- Mozilla reports the software has helped them fill positions 17% more quickly.

Kieran Snyder
Cofounder and CEO, Textio

Cultural competence is relevant to recruiting team member preparation as well. Knowledge of culture-based behavior patterns can be important not only for dealing with international candidates, but also for making accurate judgments about diverse styles of work and communication within the same country. **"Intuition" is often misleading in an environment where people are assessing cues based on different cultural styles and behavior.**

For instance, an interviewer who is a very "Direct" communicator may underestimate candidates whose "Indirect" style leads them to be modest about prior achievements. Likewise, an "Independent," "Task-focused" interviewer may be put off by a candidate who gives a more "Interdependent" or "Relationship-oriented" response, even when that candidate has a strong track record of achievements. All team members should be prepared to recognize instances in which their own cultural profiles could cause them to misjudge candidates who are otherwise well-qualified and could be successful within their organization.

Figure 10.2: Blind Audition Process[4]

- Created an online blind-audition process where potential applicants are given a job to complete (e.g. web developers are asked to create a webpage). Hiring managers assess the completed task without any personal identifiers, including name, gender, work experience or educational background.

- Clients have seen a 60% jump in applicants from underrepresented groups compared to traditional screening.

- Reduces time to fill a position by almost 40%.
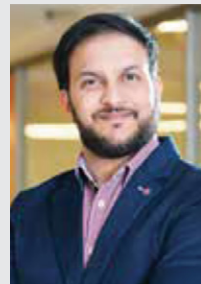
**Kedar Iyer**
Cofounder and CEO, GapJumpers

Lever #2: Executive Engagement

Nearly every set of criteria for an organization-wide inclusion initiative underlines the importance of getting key executives on board. There are countless pitfalls when executives are not committed or are half-hearted supporters. Initiatives that begin with fanfare sputter out due to sporadic investment of time or money; decisions are made that ironically neglect the input of true inclusion champions; and employees observe that the actions of executives themselves are undermining basic inclusion principles. In the absence of sustained executive commitment, other priorities ultimately take precedence and the focus on inclusion fades, leaving a deep layer of skepticism throughout the employee population. On the positive side, there is increasing empirical evidence that support for diversity on the part of top management is linked with favorable business outcomes such as higher revenue from innovation.[5]

Executives are under relentless pressure to perform. These leaders need to hit their growth targets, limit expenses in the face of rising costs, keep customers happy, retain vital employees, and invest in the next generation of technology. They are normally pleased to be able to celebrate success, to raise compensation, and to hire more people; yet even in the midst of good times they have to keep the potential for harder days in their minds as well. In organizational life there are few things more painful than having to lay off employees when the market turns downward or, worse yet, to declare bankruptcy when expenditures exceed revenue and the banks refuse to extend further credit. Executive roles are normally quite visible, and failure could permanently damage reputations that have been built up over years of hard work.
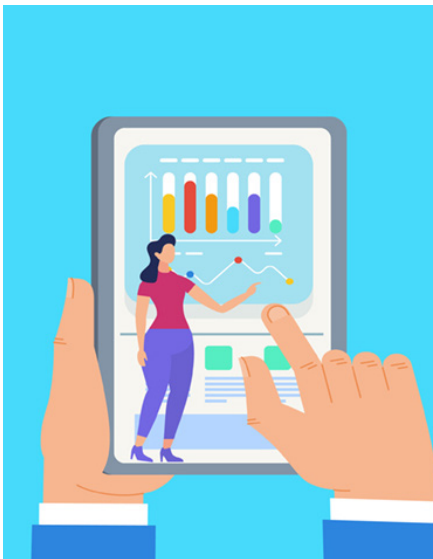
Executives are naturally most responsive to initiatives that are tied to growth, cost optimization, or acquiring superior talent. They want to win, and have also been trained to probe investment proposals for strengths and weaknesses. "How exactly is your initiative going to help us?" they are likely to ask. There is no substitute for a rational, company-specific business case that ties a proposal, for example, to organizational goals for expansion in a promising market, reduced legal costs related to alleged discrimination, or being able to lure key talent away from rivals. If an objective is to hire and retain high-potential employees from all backgrounds, they will want to track progress and revisit this at regular intervals, just like their other goals.

Senior leaders who are most dedicated to inclusion also tend to have some prior experience that made it significant and personally poignant for them: a difficult stint living abroad; a family member with a disability; a relative who was sexually assaulted; a spouse who is an immigrant; a close friend who is a minority group member; or a personal brush with illness or death. Parenthood has an impact as well: "Research on male CEOs, politicians, and judges shows that fathers of daughters care more about gender equality than men without children or with only sons."[6] Those without such a background can still deepen their insight and commitment through the kinds of diversifying experiences described in Chapter 9 with 360 degree feedback that invites them to consider how they are perceived by the people around them, or possibly via corporate training efforts featuring exercises such as personal "story-telling" that help them to see into others' lives. Such events need to be facilitated with sensitivity to ensure that the result is insight and inspiration rather than perceived blaming and shaming.

Personal Histories

At an offsite retreat, executive team members were asked to describe aspects of their personal history others might not know about. Several of the stories that emerged were surprising to everyone. One leader, whom everyone assumed had come from

a wealthy family setting, described his childhood being raised on a farm, the scholarship that was his only chance to attend college, and the opportunity a former manager who believed in his potential had given him to move into a challenging new role that was a career game-changer.

Another participant, who was one of the last to speak, said quietly that she was the only person from her small town in China to have passed the entrance exam for a university in Beijing and to have attended business school abroad, and that she was now sponsoring a program to enhance educational opportunities for girls back in her home province. The team members came away from the event with a much deeper appreciation for each other, and one summed up the shared spirit that emerged from their conversation by saying, "I'm going to help you in every way that I can, and I am committed to supporting every single one of our future leaders regardless of what their backgrounds are."

There are potential downsides to executive enthusiasm, too. These include the large-scale, one-size-fits-all solution. Some corporate directors of inclusion and diversity have found themselves coping with sudden directives from leaders who have become true believers: "Women clearly face problems everywhere in the world. I've seen this with my own eyes. You have one goal this year, which is to raise the number of women managers company-wide!" Such directives may or may not constitute a reasonable next step, and they are sometimes not based on a broad and balanced inclusion strategy.

Another issue can be translating a single executive's enthusiasm to the rest of the leadership team and to mid-level managers who haven't yet caught fire in the same way. **Given the competitive and peer-conscious nature of people who have climbed the career ladder, a way to**

invite commitment is to establish project teams with specific goals: sell products to members of a growing minority population; preserve vital talent from a recent acquisition; build a more diverse pipeline of future leaders. Working together and even competing to make the biggest contribution on behalf of a common cause is frequently a more compelling invitation for senior leaders to get on board than is mandatory training.

Engaged executives normally also want to go beyond projects and task forces, and will look for a way to institutionalize inclusion efforts. Potential structures for sustaining inclusion over time include appointing a direct report to the CEO with a title such as Chief Diversity Officer (CDO), adding inclusion to the portfolio of the human resources department, or making this a responsibility of business units or divisions. There are potential pros and cons with each approach, and as a result many organizations create their own hybrid structures.

Chief Diversity Officer

Pros: This structure brings visibility to the topic of inclusion and diversity, and creates a clear line of accountability. It brings the CDO to the table with other members of the executive team, reinforcing their awareness of inclusion priorities.

Cons: Especially when there is little actual budget and few direct reports to this position, it can become more of a "movie star" role that enables line managers to avoid taking responsibility themselves. (One veteran of this role referred to it as having "alligator arms"—in other words, a short reach for actually getting things done.)

Human Resources

Pros: The human resources (HR) function has the personnel, both at headquarters and embedded within business units and regions, to follow through on initiatives. HR professionals can also ensure that inclusion initiatives are aligned and integrated with other policies and processes related to talent development, succession planning, and so on.

Cons: HR often has a long list of objectives, and a new addition to this list might be regarded as a low priority in the absence of explicit directives and a dedicated budget. The link with HR could imply ties with legal compliance measures in some organizations. Inclusion may not be seen as a business imperative by other departments; it will be associated with the image of the HR department, whether positive or negative.

Business Lines

Pros: When line managers take responsibility for inclusion, there can be considerable grass roots interest and energy, with specific applications to each part of the business. Many employees look to business leaders as role models, and real commitment by line managers transmits a clear message: "We are serious about this!"

Cons: If line manager adoption is uneven and uncoordinated, there are likely to be mixed signals and mixed results. Different managers may adopt their own homemade models and approaches, and, if this is the case, it will become difficult to track progress or disseminate best practices in a coordinated fashion.

Lever #3: Coaching, Mentoring, & Sponsorship

Research suggests that providing focused support to employees with backgrounds different from the organizational mainstream has a strongly positive effect on the advancement of minority employees.[7] This support can take a variety of forms, depending on career stage and corporate culture.

Coaching

New recruits from backgrounds outside of the corporate mainstream often find themselves a step or two behind from their first day in the organization. While others seem to dress appropriately, know the right things to say, and are off and running quickly, it may take longer for minority employees to learn their way around. The initial culture shock for them is greater, and they also frequently encounter subtle or not so subtle messages indicating that less is expected of them, or that they are expected to perform in a niche role with limited upside prospects. As a result, compared to members of the majority culture, it is common for this population to experience lower job satisfaction, negative performance evaluations, and higher attrition.

Coaching that is targeted at individuals or groups of early career employees can be useful in countering trends that over time tend to transform a diverse recruiting class into a homogeneous set of leaders. Although coaches are usually not positioned to call for organizational change, in their one-on-one conversations they can shed objective light on the internal narratives of employees that sometimes lead to conclusions such as, "My opportunities are limited," or "I just don't belong here." Women and minority employees in particular may have questions, beliefs, or doubts about themselves that foster a lack of self-confidence or willingness to take on risks for the sake of career advancement.

The examples in Figure 10.3 were gathered from a large pool of Asian women managers who attended a recent conference in Singapore, and reflect, in part, social expectations in the region that still place

the main responsibility for family care and child-rearing on women while regarding men as the primary breadwinners.

Figure 10.3: Self-Limiting Questions & Beliefs: Examples

Coaching provides individuals with the chance to identify and test their own beliefs, while exploring which of those beliefs are based on real obstacles and which are unfounded. When this type of coaching is conducted in a small group context, it also allows participants to share their fears and concerns with each other and to learn that they are not alone in having doubts about their ability to succeed. Coachees are able to discuss possible solutions together and build a network of supportive contacts in the process. As self-limiting obstacles are addressed, coaching conversations can move on to identifying key areas for knowledge acquisition and skill-building, as well as discussing how to move forward with professional and personal development while addressing real obstacles.

Mentoring and Sponsorship

For employees who are candidates for management roles, mentors or sponsors serve several purposes. First, they can offer information, contacts, visibility, and candid feedback that candidates would otherwise miss out on, limiting their career opportunities and areas for professional growth. Choice leadership assignments are normally offered to insiders with whom top executives are already comfortable, and **effective mentors or sponsors help promising candidates step over the threshold from outsider to insider**.

Second, mentors or sponsors may provide encouragement and support for taking on responsibilities that candidates are capable of handling but hesitate to assume. Extensive interviews with women in one large organization produced a troubling set of findings for those committed to equal developmental opportunities. Many women observed that men are considered for, and accept, a role or promotion where they may not have all the qualifications or experience required. The trend for women, however, is that they are not considered for, nor will they accept, a role for which they do not feel completely qualified.

Other research suggests that a lack of confidence or hesitancy to take risks, both of which are sometimes attributed to gender differences, could actually be natural responses to organizational realities: "Because women operate under a higher-resolution microscope

than their male counterparts do, their mistakes and failures are scrutinized more carefully and punished more severely. People who are scrutinized more carefully will, in turn, be less likely to speak up in meetings, particularly if they feel no one has their back. However, when women fail to speak up, it is commonly assumed that they lack confidence in their ideas."[8] A gentle push—"You can do this!"—plus the knowledge that one has a supporter who is willing to provide both guidance and a safety net in case things go wrong, could be just enough for women or minority candidates to contribute more innovative ideas or to accept a challenging role they would otherwise decline. **An employee's image of what a different course of action or a new role entails could be getting in the way**, when in fact there are ways to prepare for or to avert potential problems.

Sponsors typically have the mandate to ensure that their protégé stays with the organization and is able to advance. Along the way, many become personally invested in their candidate's progress. Personnel decisions about recruiting or next-level positions tend to fall into a gray zone where biases easily take hold; under these kinds of circumstances minorities and women are more frequently evaluated critically and eliminated from the candidate pool, while men from the majority culture are given the benefit of the doubt.[9] Such decisions can be swayed by a credible advocate who is able to make a pitch on a candidate's behalf, both highlighting objective qualifications and conveying an emotional undertone of personal conviction. **A powerful and enthusiastic sponsor may go beyond encouragement and advocacy to take on the role of a "snowplow"** who helps to smooth the way for protégés, assuring that they will have opportunities commensurate with their abilities and be judged fairly for their performance. Some companies prefer to avoid putting an official

> ## A powerful and enthusiastic sponsor may go beyond encouragement and advocacy to take on the role of a "snowplow"...

sponsorship program in place—appointing only mentors instead—because this might be seen as a form of favoritism toward certain employees; other firms are sufficiently alarmed by lower retention or promotion rates for targeted groups that they regard sponsorship as an indispensable method for leveling the playing field.

The utility of mentors and sponsors is clear, and benefits accrue to them as well as to the candidates they are supporting. Each individual who takes on such a role should keep in mind potential pitfalls.

## Common Pitfalls for Mentors or Sponsors

- Rushing to be "helpful" without thoroughly understanding a protégé's circumstances, and providing guidance that fits the mentor's own experience and background but not those of the mentee

- Letting bias or stereotypes—e.g., "Women lack confidence," or "Minority candidates have advanced through affirmative action"—get in the way of a clear assessment of individual capabilities

- Trying to solve problems without sufficiently enabling mentees to figure things out and take action themselves where needed

- Letting mentees' self-doubts prevent them from taking on roles that they could handle

- Pushing protégés too hard to jump into roles they are not ready for; failing to understand what they can or cannot change in their own social context

- Failing to provide ongoing support to those who have taken on new challenges but are now struggling

- Allowing enthusiasm for their protégés and sense of competition with other sponsors lead them to create a new set of unfair advantages or disadvantages

Lever #4: Key Performance Indicators

The metrics used to gauge progress in inclusion tend to be relatively blunt instruments. It is easy to measure numbers of women, minorities, or people of various nationalities in management roles, for example, and there is of course value in establishing a baseline for comparison with external benchmarks and for setting future targets. What an organization chooses to prioritize and track will of course depend on the legal framework that governs its headquarters operations, the locations in which it has a presence, its business priorities and plans for growth, and its corporate mission and values.[10]

Several cautionary notes apply to the use of inclusion metrics, however. The first is that the mere presence of a diverse range of employees in different roles or at various levels does not guarantee positive business outcomes. Moreover, although for statistical purposes it is preferable to have clear and straightforward ways of categorizing people, the reality is usually more complex: "No one is just female, or just black, or just Muslim. Each person is 'a whole package of interlocking attributes.'"[11] Employees with multicultural backgrounds may also be reluctant to identify with any single nationality—this would force them to choose between parents, or between their current homes and their countries of origin. LGBTQ employees in some countries may push for non-binary gender categories, while in other places these categories are illegal. Racial classifications such as "white," "black," or "Asian" may fail to take into account differences in educational opportunities or socioeconomic backgrounds.
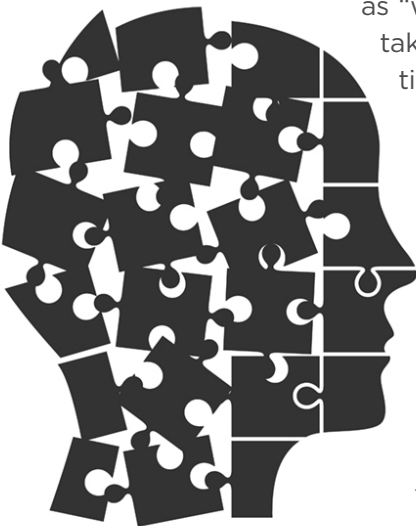
There is also research pointing to the value of "deep-level diversity"[12]—personality, values, and abilities—that is not immediately apparent or easy to track. Differences in cognitive styles fall into this category of less readily visible features as well. The leadership team attributes most closely linked

to innovation, according to one recent study, are diversity in career path, industry background, national origin, and gender.[13] At the same time, employees who belong to racial minorities may feel that excessive focus on personalities or cognitive styles fosters neglect of the difficult work of addressing social inequities with deep historical roots, unequal distribution of power and privilege, and limited opportunities for advancement.

The presence of employees who straddle multiple categories can be regarded either as an obstacle or as a source of opportunities for deeper and more fine-tuned analysis. Organizations with data for large numbers of employees could be asking questions that might lead to effective follow-up measures:

- Is there a difference in the functional backgrounds of women who advance in our organization versus those who do not?

- Are some nationalities more successful than others?

- Are Hispanics with an international background promoted at the same rate as those with a domestic background?

- When individuals join as mid-career hires from similar or different industry backgrounds, how do they progress in comparison with other employees?

Follow the Talent Cycle

The diversity of executive teams or board members receives considerable attention due to media scrutiny, but the entire talent cycle merits careful examination. To track the progress of a particular group or groups of people over time—most commonly based on gender, race, or nationality—it is valuable to establish measurements for each phase of the employee life cycle. Leaders confronted with a lack of diversity in their ranks are tempted to say, "The main problem is our recruitment pipeline. We have to hire more qualified recruits to increase our pool of talent!" This helps to kick the can down the road while avoiding the need for close scrutiny

of day-to-day organizational patterns, especially when ownership for metrics is delegated to a staff function such as the chief diversity officer or human resources rather than being owned by each line of business. However, the value of inclusive practices comes from their application to the full path from fresh recruit to executive, and from holding line management as well as staff functions accountable. See Figure 10.4 for common metrics that can be applied to successive stages of the employee talent cycle.

Figure 10.4: Talent Cycle Metrics[14]

- *Recruitment*: Is the company hiring qualified employees from select institutions or industry backgrounds in the targeted categories?

- *Representation*: Does the demographic profile of employees reflect the general population and/or the available pool of technical specialists?

- *Workplace Climate*: How do the satisfaction rates for different groups of employees compare with each other based on race, gender, age, rank, or nationality?

- *Compensation*: Are employees in the same job categories being paid at equal rates regardless of their background?

- *Retention*: Is the organization successful in retaining employees of all categories at the same rate, and if not, which groups tend to have higher or lower rates of attrition?

- *Promotion*: Are all groups promoted at the same rate at each level of advancement? If not, which groups tend to move ahead or fall behind, and at what point in their careers?

- *Succession*: Is there a robust, diverse pipeline of future executives with the right experience to step into top jobs?

Other metrics that some firms examine include participation in skill-building programs as well as costs related to prevention, investigation, and legal defense of employee discrimination claims. On an optimistic note, some organizations have targeted specific initiatives based on skill requirements and a sense of social mission. SAP, for instance, is in the midst of a multi-year recruiting and onboarding effort that will increase the number of "neurodiverse" employees to 1% of its total workforce—a number chosen because it corresponds roughly to the percentage of people in the general population with a diagnosis of autism.[15] And for companies with international operations, tracking whether they have sufficient local national talent with the requisite skills to drive future plans for growth and market penetration becomes another vital metric.

Measuring Inclusive Actions

The five dimensions that comprise the *Inclusive Behaviors Inventory* provide a model for building individual self-awareness and commitment to inclusive actions. This framework can also be useful for measuring inclusion on the organizational level in order to identify and address common challenges.[16]

Combined survey results from a variety of companies and industries indicate that, among the five dimensions discussed throughout this book, "Working Across Boundaries" is the area in which respondent self-ratings are the lowest across the board.[17] Such evidence is not surprising, as even people who are comfortable working with certain aspects of diversity—say, working across organizational functions—are still quite likely to identify other areas—for instance, racial

Figure 10.5: Inclusive Behaviors Inventory

Learning about Bias | Building Key Skills | Working Across Boundaries | Becoming a Champion | Getting Results

or generational differences—with which they are relatively uncomfortable. Two of the lowest scoring items within this "Working Across Borders" survey dimension single out differences in gender and cognitive styles. For an organization that mirrors such overall results, targeting selected development opportunities related to this particular survey dimension or items within it could be components of an effective strategy.

Lever #5: Policy & Process

Experience with well-meaning initiatives to foster greater inclusion has demonstrated that some methods work better than others. Ineffective methods can even have unintended negative consequences. For example, mandatory diversity training may produce a backlash among employees who continue to discriminate in subtle ways; testing designed to promote fairness is sometimes applied unfairly to screen out minorities but not others; and grievance systems tend to spark retaliation. Each of these methods is actually correlated with declines in the number of women and minorities in management roles.

Meanwhile, alternative methods such as voluntary training, mentoring, task forces, and dedicated diversity managers are correlated with relatively positive outcomes.[18] Other research points to the need for a foundation of inclusive organizational practices that appears to be necessary in order to reap the potential benefits of diversity; these include participative leadership, equal pay for equal work, and a strategic emphasis on diversity and inclusion led by the CEO.[19]

Psychological Leverage

Such positive or negative results appear to be influenced by basic psychological principles, including aspects of unconscious bias that were presented in Chapter 3. Humans value the capacity for autonomous action—which is linked with one's basic sense of control over environmental circumstances and ability to handle stress—and tend to react negatively when their autonomy is

threatened by directives issued without consultation.[20] "Insider" versus "outsider" dynamics shape whether a candidate for employment or promotion is subjected to rigorous testing. Having a grievance filed against you or your department could produce an instinctive "fight" response, possibly due in part to overconfidence that your own department is blameless. In addition, a form of confirmation bias known as anchoring influences managers who read employee self-evaluations before writing their assessments, leading them to unintentionally reward self-promotion and punish modesty.[21]

Those who shape policies and processes designed to promote inclusion are well advised to not only take these aspects of the human psyche into account, but to turn them to their advantage. **Voluntary training or task force participation enables participants to preserve their own sense of autonomy while shaping an updated concept of themselves as supporters or champions of inclusion**. Structured recruiting interviews and involvement of minority team members can counter insider bias and produce a sense of teamwork in service of a common cause. Leaders who convincingly describe their own inclusion journey, perhaps through transformative personal experiences or encounters with workplace colleagues, encourage employees to drop their "fight" response to perceived threats, responding instead with empathy. And when managers view employee self-assessments after they have formulated their own evaluations rather than before, this enables them to judge more objectively and to better coach those with inflated self-images as well as those who lack confidence.[22]

Informal organizational practices may be more powerful and pervasive than formal ones, and are reinforced by social values that shape role expectations. Analysis of how office "housework" assignments—taking notes, handling meeting logistics, ordering food, planning parties, keeping lists of tasks, and so on—are made in comparison with the process for assigning coveted growth opportunities indicates that the less prestigious roles are assigned disproportionately to women and minorities, including employees hired for professional roles.[23] Similarly, many organizations send informal signals through office space allocations, forms of recognition, or even pictures displayed on the walls. **It is worth examining these kinds of informal aspects of office life for the signals they send about fairness and equal access to opportunities**. Seemingly small

adjustments can have a surprisingly large symbolic effect. Work-life flexibility is another area where both informal and formal policies come into play. Although organizations normally have formal policies related to childbirth, for example, actual practices vary widely according to national laws, health issues, family situation, and individual preferences. Conducting a personalized check-in with each individual before, during, and after maternity or paternity leave helps employees to feel that they are valued and will be able to continue their careers in ways that fit their own aspirations; adopting a child holds its own distinctive set of challenges for which employees may need understanding and support.[24]

Policy & Process Overview

- Executive sponsorship and role modeling

- Participative leadership practices

- Task force participation

- Voluntary training

- Structured recruiting interviews

- Equal pay for equal work

- Coaching and mentoring

- Peer group support; prevention of "onliness"

- Performance assessment prior to viewing self-evaluations

- Fair distribution of office housework; development opportunities

- Informal signals: office space; recognition; pictures on the wall

- Work-life flexibility

- Dedicated inclusion and diversity function

Career Crossroads

Beyond formal and informal measures to increase organization-wide inclusion, intensive efforts targeted at specific career points are also very useful. Our experience with a variety of organizations in different industries suggests that there are three particularly crucial inflection points, or career crossroads:

> **A. Onboarding:** If the starting point for a career is compared with a marathon run, not everyone is toeing the same starting line on the first day of work. Some are suited up and ready to go, having practiced for years and ready to take off at a sprint, eyeing fellow racers who are equally well-prepared. Others are still getting dressed for the race, wondering what a marathon is, or are delayed on the subway trying to get to the starting point. If you are the first person in your family to have a professional career, are self-conscious about how you stand out as a racial minority, are working in a white collar workplace environment for the first time, and/or are unsure that your prior education and training have prepared you adequately for this new job, you are likely to start out at a different pace.

> A structured onboarding program for all employees addresses this unequal starting point issue in several ways. It provides everyone with a shared basis of knowledge about the organization, a common introduction to organizational values and strategy, and insider tips that may otherwise filter through to some new employees but not to others. Such onboarding can also include teambuilding exercises that encourage a sense of camaraderie, self-awareness, shared purpose, and mutual inquiry rather than rivalry and unexamined bias.

> **B. First Promotion:** The KPIs favored by many organizations regularly provide findings that are both startling and disappointing. **In spite of extensive**

recruiting efforts targeting women and minorities, for example, such groups often fall behind the overall performance curve in their early career stages, receiving low assessments on average and thus fewer chances for advancement. This marked difference in performance ratings usually begins with the first assessment and extends through initial promotion decisions at the two- to five-year mark (depending on the industry). Employees who see themselves already falling behind their peers at this stage are less likely to be fully engaged at work or to sign up for the next stage of training or testing. They are also more likely to leave, and the organization's talent pipeline suddenly begins to sprout leaks.

Rather than blaming recruiters for not finding the right talent and then repeating this pattern with another crop of new hires, it is better to apply more systemic solutions to the causal factors that appear most salient. Targeted internship programs prior to full-time employment, for instance, are commonly linked with better performance results for minority hires than for those without an internship experience—this makes sense because employees who have been interns take on full-time jobs with a good understanding of the corporate culture and a fairly clear sense of performance expectations. Additional measures that can prevent women and minorities from falling behind and curb attrition include foundational onboarding for all employees and coaching for select individuals or groups, as discussed previously. These steps help to address the issue that some recruits arrive better prepared than others, and that qualified individuals may be holding themselves back through self-limiting beliefs or the sense that they are not a good fit for the workplace.

A related area of research focuses on the positive effect of having more than one woman or minority member on a team, rather than just one such individual who generally experiences greater isolation and more biased interactions.

Whether on executive teams or within an everyday workplace context, the implication is that it is better to assign two or more employees in one location rather than to spread women or minorities so thin that they all experience the negative effects of "onliness."[25]

Peer relationships created through group coaching are another way to build a network among individuals who might otherwise feel isolated.

The first-line manager or supervisor also plays a critical role. It is most effective to apply a three-legged stool of support for employees facing a crucial career inflection point that is linked with frequent, unwanted turnover. Two of the three legs are coaching that promotes self-reflection and resilience, and a mentor/sponsor who offers insider insights, encouragement, and opportunities or a more responsible role when this is warranted. **The third, most often neglected leg of the stool, is the direct manager or supervisor**. Research has long identified the relationship with one's immediate manager as being the single most important factor linked with overall employee turnover.[26] First-line managers are frequently new to formal leadership roles, having previously been individual contributors themselves, and are preoccupied with learning to oversee a broad set of technical responsibilities in addition to managing people.

Under pressure to perform, managers may revert to the set of "go-to" people with whom they are most familiar, and shy away from proactively managing the diversity on their teams. This tendency can be unintentionally reinforced by a human resource department that provides a scary list of "don'ts" regarding protected classes of

employees, sexual harassment, and/or discriminatory acts that could embarrass the organization and instantly derail a manager's career. Providing managers or supervisors with information and skill-building opportunities to leverage the diversity on their teams can get these junior leaders pointed in a more inclusive direction while tapping their energy and ambition. They may also need to know that someone is paying attention in order to keep the task of countering natural sources of bias front of mind. The presence of a dedicated inclusion and diversity function keeping track of targeted KPIs is correlated with higher promotion rates for women and minorities.[27]

Most first-line managers welcome a list of "do's" that they can safely engage in while avoiding the "don'ts," yet many have to generate this list on their own, if ever, through lengthy trial and error. Here is a set of recommendations for supervisors to begin to comprehend and tap the full capabilities of their team members. The list of acceptable areas of conversation varies considerably according to cultural and legal norms; we have kept it focused on professional topics.

Figure 10.6: Do's For First-Line Managers or Supervisors

- **Relationship-Building:** Make an effort to get to know each team member. Ask about:

  - **Professional interests:** *Please tell me about what you're most interested in doing or learning.*

  - **Prior experience:** *What kind of prior work experience do you have that would help me to understand your background?*

  - **Strengths and areas for improvement:** *What would you identify as your own greatest strengths and/or areas for improvement?*

- **Current challenges or concerns:** *Do you see any particular challenges or have any concerns about your current tasks?*

- **Motivation:** *What kind of work do you find most exciting? What do you like most about your current role and what would you like to do more or less of if we can arrange it?*

- **Career plans, aspirations:** *Do you have any thoughts about the next steps in your career? Is there anything you are currently doing that you would like to do more of or to learn about?*

- **Requests for support:** *How can I best support you? What can I do to be a better manager?*

- **Open-ended:** *What else would you like me to know about you? Is there anything else you would like to discuss?*

    Note: Questions about personal subjects—hobbies, health, family, etc.—are expected in some cultures, especially in informal settings, and are regarded as prying or even illegal in others.

- **Opportunities:** Provide all team members with equal opportunities to participate in activities and take on tasks that fit their capabilities, including meeting attendance, technical training, and project assignments.

- **Informal Contacts:** Include all team members in informal conversations and events—water-cooler conversations, company updates, social occasions, and so on.

- **Feedback:** Ensure that all team members receive performance feedback on a timely, even-handed basis. Make comments that are constructive, objective, concrete, and conducive to action.

- **Assessment:** Focus assessment on job performance relative to key objectives; be careful to check for possible forms of bias when stating observations.

C. Transition to Executive: The challenges that occur at the upper end of the talent pipeline come in a variety of forms, and many of these are cultural. Leaders who have performed well within the confines of a particular function, business unit, or country operation may one day find themselves being assessed for or placed in executive roles with a different, less familiar set of norms. The two examples that follow illustrate how the assessment process itself may require cultural calibration, and show sample adjustments that individuals need to make.

What's Wrong with the Brazilians?

The director of leadership development for a major organization was surprised by the failure rate of high-potential Brazilian candidates going through the firm's "assessment center" evaluation process for the next level of leadership. The candidates from Brazil, even those with otherwise stellar credentials, were only passing the battery of assessment center tests at a 20% rate, far lower than the 50% rate of their North American peers. Upon further investigation, it turned out that Brazilian candidates were receiving very low scores for critical competencies such as "clear and

direct communication" and "results orientation."
Still mystified by these outcomes, the head of
leadership development decided to sit in on
some of these assessments. She realized that the
core problem was primarily cultural: "When the
candidates from Brazil were asked a question,
they would usually respond first with a story, and
only later with an answer. It turned out that they
felt this was a better way to get their point across
that was also quite common in their country, but
it earned them consistently low grades from our
North American assessors. When we coached them
to flip their communication around and start with
the answer before telling the story, the assessment
results changed in a hurry. Our candidates soon even
started to coach North Americans coming to Brazil
on how to alter their own communication styles to
become more effective."

Executive Presence

Henry, an Asian manager in a Western company
voiced his despair over the feedback he had received.
"They're telling me I don't have executive presence.
What does this mean? I've worked here for twenty
years and have always received great performance
reviews. Now I've finally worked my way up almost
to the top and they're telling me that something
is missing. Is it the clothes that I'm wearing?" he
asked, pointing to his shirt and shoes that conveyed
a flawless business-casual appearance suited to his
industry. "Or is it the fact that I'm originally from
Hong Kong and don't speak perfect English?"

Upon further examination, it turned out that a
key point was the way Henry was communicating

information. "Henry is too much in the weeds," was a common remark from the top executive team members. "He needs to be able to step back and give us the picture at the 30,000 foot level, and then dive into the details if we need that level of analysis." What Henry had thought was a reasonable and important level of detail for others on the team turned out to be too much information. They wanted to hear his big picture summary and then to be able to drill down as needed. Once Henry began to adjust his style and provide the right doses of information at the right times, switching nimbly between his strategic summary and a "deeper dive" set of numbers when requested, he was soon welcomed to the executive team. Several team members commented that they had misjudged his capabilities.

In both of these cases, individuals who were at the cusp of taking on executive roles found ways to increase their self-awareness and to adjust their actions through frame-shifting, or style-switching. These are key global leadership capabilities that help leaders deal with culturally conditioned approaches to areas such as communication or hierarchy, which are frequent sources of misunderstanding. Learning to serve as a "cultural guide" is also important, as this enables leaders to explain why things are done a particular way in a different cultural setting, thereby assisting others with frame-shifting as well.[28]

But new executive team members should not be the only ones who are adapting. Senior level teams get the best results when all of their members have gone through diversifying experiences of their own—serving in various functions, businesses, and geographies, for example—and are prepared to adjust to each other. It is naturally important to have certain core operating procedures, but these should not be allowed to blind a team to different perspectives or prospects for doing business. Instead of expecting new members to simply assimilate themselves to a dominant monocultural style, leadership

team members with an agile mindset will deliberately engage them as a source of possible insights into cultural norms, best practices, or untapped markets.

Conclusion

Individual initiative is the most powerful driver of inclusion. There is no substitute for leaders at all levels who are willing to take up the cause of inclusion because they believe in its value, both for the business and for everyone involved. Such initiative can also be inspired and its effects multiplied by the organizational levers described above; the combination of individual initiative with supportive systems can produce a productive whirl of creativity and enthusiasm. People shape the culture in which they live, and are in turn shaped by it.

Of course there may be a degree of diversity or inclusiveness that is overwhelming to an organization, especially one that is unprepared. Diverse perspectives that are irreconcilable or poorly managed inhibit timely decision-making and fully aligned implementation; inclusion that is overly focused on satisfying every constituency and checking every box becomes detached from the business case. And providing equal access to challenging opportunities does not mean staffing projects with employees who are unqualified. There is no single, easy switch for turning on inclusion, or for adjusting the setting upward. Selecting which organizational levers to pull and when depends on the organization and the needs of the business.

Yet what is ultimately at stake with inclusive leadership is the capacity of an organization to renew itself.[29] No business model or pattern of success lasts forever, and many once-mighty companies, not to mention empires, have been relegated to the dustbin of history or are now visibly in decline. Organizations need to be able to change and grow, to reinvent themselves in the face of shifting circumstances. The term sustainability has become overused, but inclusive leaders who embrace new ideas, colleagues, and ways of serving customers can make their institutions uniquely sustainable. Inclusion is the price of vitality, an essential ingredient for building open, self-renewing systems.

Resources

Books

- *Global Diversity: Winning Customers and Engaging Employees within World Markets* presents the key cultural variables relevant in eight major markets. The business impact of each unique set of diversity variables is explored and recommendations are provided for developing employees and realizing local market opportunities.

- *Leading Across New Borders: How to Succeed as the Center Shifts* explores new imperatives that will help global leaders better understand and navigate across cultures, markets, and management differences.

Quick Guides

- **Quick Guide to Unconscious Bias**
  http://tiny.cc/UBQuickGuide

- **Analyzing Your Talent Life Cycle for Inclusion**
  http://tiny.cc/TalentLifeCycle

- **6 Tips for an Inclusive Recruitment Strategy**
  http://tiny.cc/InclusiveRecruitment

- **Quick Guide to Managing Inclusively**
  http://tiny.cc/InclusiveManagement

- **Tips to Prevent Bias on Global Teams**
  http://tiny.cc/TeamBias

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About Aperian Global

Aperian Global has provided consulting, training, and online learning tools to 40% of the Global Fortune 100. Aperian Global's employees are dedicated to helping clients work effectively across boundaries, both at home and abroad. The company provides scalable resources for building practical skills and knowledge that help individuals and organizations thrive in an increasingly diverse business landscape.

Aperian Global specializes in research-based inclusion practices—impactful in domestic work environments and adaptable to different world regions—along with strategic global mobility support and holistic cultural competence learning solutions. *GlobeSmart,* the company's flagship online tool, has had more than one million users, and its work-style profile provides a way for team members to compare their styles and adjust to each other. The *Inclusive Behaviors Inventory,* available in both self-assessment and 360 versions, is also part of the *GlobeSmart* platform's assessment suite.

Aperian Global's products and services empower leaders at all levels to work in an inclusive way, engaging partners, colleagues, and employees from any background to deliver results through high-performance teamwork.

Founded in 1990, Aperian Global has offices in Bangalore, Boston, Kolding, Oakland, Paris, Raleigh, Shanghai, and Singapore, and staff and consultants on the ground in over 80 locations worldwide.

For more information, visit www.aperianglobal.com.