Inclusion in the Workplace - Guide

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Why is Inclusion Important?

Inclusion in the workplace is the key to retention. When employees don't feel that their ideas, presence, or contributions are truly valued or taken seriously by their organisation, they will eventually leave.

Inclusion gives companies a competitive edge. By promoting a culture where everyone feels welcome to speak up and contribute, a company is more likely to benefit from a diverse range of perspectives that could help shape and develop new projects, products, and services.

How does inclusion occur?

Inclusion occurs when a diversity of people (i.e. from different ages, cultural backgrounds, genders) are respected, connected, progressing, and contributing to organisational success. Inclusion is about people gaining 'social acceptance', having positive interactions with one's peers and being valued for who they are. As such, inclusion must be 'internally motivated' and stem from embracing the belief that all people have value and the right to belong. As our communities and workplaces become more diverse the need for tolerant and inclusive spaces is more important than ever before. To ensure people feel welcomed and able to contribute, in a meaningful way, they need to feel as though the environment is accepting and inclusive of differences.

This inclusion model, from Diversity Council Australia, shows four quadrants that play an equal part in creating inclusion. These quadrants are:
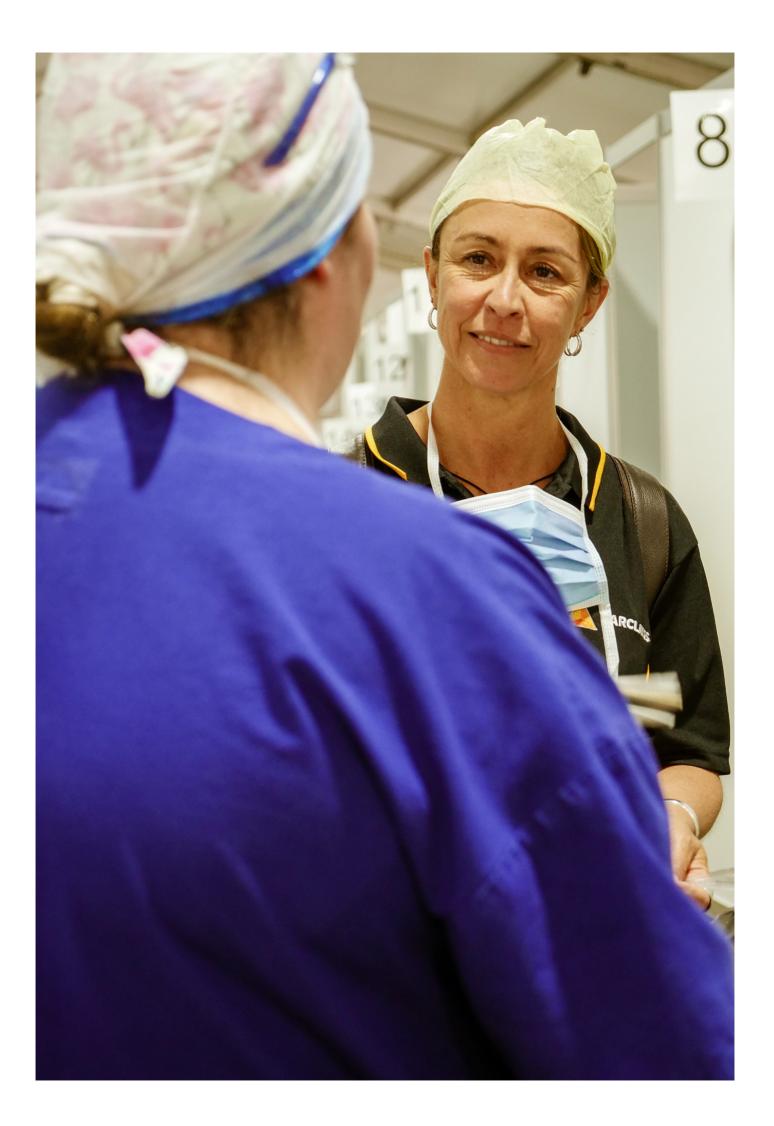
Figure 1: Inclusion Model from Diversity Council Australia

- **Connected:** Inclusion occurs when a diverse group of people feel connected to their co-workers and have a sense of belonging.

- **Respected:** Inclusion occurs when a diverse group of people feel valued and respected for who they are.

- **Contributing:** Inclusion occurs when a diverse group of people can contribute their talent and energy to the organisation.

- **Progressing:** Inclusion occurs when a diverse group of people has the opportunity to develop and progress their career.

Another example of demonstrating inclusion is building genuine partnerships. When partners have defined expectations and understand each other's strengths, they develop mutual respect. Respecting your partner is indispensable in making a partnership work.

Three key elements that can lead to establishing healthy and effective partnerships include **communication, collaboration, and mutual commitment.**

Helping People Feel Connected

What does it mean to "feel connected"? In simple terms, feeling connected is being in touch with someone, or people, who care about us. Most people acknowledge that children need to feel a safe attachment to an adult who cares for them. The reality is that adults also need a secure attachment to other adults.

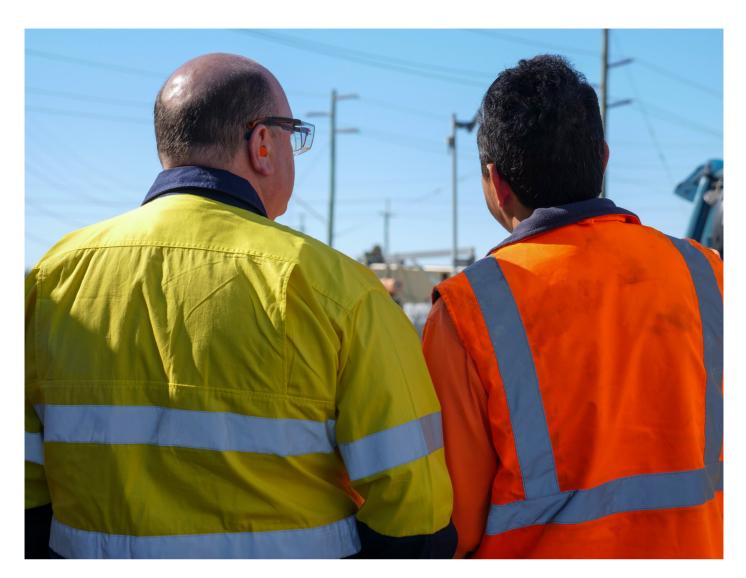**Some examples of when people feel connected are:**

- When people take the time to listen to someone else and feel real empathy for them.

- Helping someone else out of unconditional goodwill.

- Offering and recieveing sincere gratitude.

Feeling connected also relates to purpose, values, and outcomes. The way we communicate and engage people around these factors impacts how people feel connected to their organisation, department and team.

Sharing and exploring how people are feeling about our purpose, values, and the outcomes we are striving to achieve, creates greater connections to these factors.

Here are five simple ways to help people be connected:

1. Invite people to events or meetings.
2. Greet people when you see them. "Hello", "Good Morning", "How are you?".
3. Be sincere and authentic in communicating with people.
4. Ask people for their ideas or input during meetings.
5. Introduce people to others, help people develop contacts.

Helping People Feel Respected

Respect means that you accept somebody for who they are, even when they're different from you or you don't agree with them on certain things. Respect in relationships builds trust, safety, and improves wellbeing. Respect doesn't have to come naturally – it is something you learn.

Respect also means showing regard for a person's abilities, worth and valuing their feelings and their views, even if you don't necessarily agree with them. It's about accepting others on an equal basis and giving people the same consideration, you would expect for yourself.

Here are seven ways to show respect for others:

1. Be punctual. If you say you're going to be there at 2:00, be there at or before 2:00.
2. Compliment the achievements of others. It's important to be sincere in this.
3. Be sincere and authentic in your feedback and sharing ideas.
4. Allow others time to speak and avoid cutting people off.
5. Lose sarcasm.
6. Be present, give the speaker your attention (stay off your phone).
7. Be polite.

Helping People Feel Like They Can Contribute

Instead of obsessing over performance and perfection, people often think about what they can contribute to the group experience. This is what we call a 'Contribution Mindset': a focus on rewarding contributions rather than encouraging competition, greed, comparative grading curves, and avoiding mistakes.

Psychological safety is an environment that encourages, recognises and rewards individuals for their contributions by making them feel safe when taking interpersonal risks. A lack of psychological safety at work can inhibit team learning and lead to in-groups and blind spots.

Psychological safety is a condition in which you feel:

1. Included in the conversation.
2. Safe to learn and experience.
3. Safe to contribute ideas and thoughts
4. Safe to challenge the status quo—all without fear of being embarrassed, marginalised, or punished in some way.

Lack of trust destroys psychological safety. People flourish in a safe and trusting environment. People must know there won't be repercussions if they share ideas or their perceptions of the truth or if they make a mistake. Your job as a leader is to live this truth.

Here are eight tips to build psychological safety in the workplace:

1. Show your team you're engaged. Positive energy.
2. Let your team see you understand them. Acknowledge and reflect.
3. Avoid blaming to build trust. Seek to understand and redirect.
4. Be self-aware—and demand the same from your team. Be vulnerable.
5. Nip negativity in the bud. Redirect and reaffirm openness and learning.
6. Include your team in decision making. Ask for people's thoughts.
7. Be open to feedback. Thank people for their feedback (even is hard to hear).
8. Champion your team. Set clear expectations, allow space and reinforce progress.

Helping People to Progress

To make extreme progress, you need momentum. To get momentum, you need to be consistent. Not just consistent, but you need to continually be getting better. To get better, you need goals that you're actively pushing toward.

We love to move forward. We love to feel a sense of momentum. And, more than anything, we love to tick things off a list. This manifests as something called completion bias, a happy-making hit of dopamine that we get whenever we recognise a task as complete.

Feeling accomplished means that you feel generally good about yourself and what you did for the day. Whether it's doing your morning routine, accomplishing deadlines, and showing your full potential today, this alone is something worth being proud of yourself for.

Acknowledging progress in others, recognising small adjustments to major goals or performance outcomes impacts how people feel about making progress. Even something as simple as acknowledging somebody for their input demonstrates the importance of speaking up to create progress.

Four Common progressing areas that are important to people:

1. Achieving organisational, departmental, team and individual goals and objectives.
2. Seeing and experiencing changes in culture and team behaviours.
3. Experiencing Learning, Development, and Capability.
4. Access to and exposure to career pathways and variety of roles.

General Behaviours that Help Create Inclusion

- Check in: Ask how your colleagues are feeling and how their day is going.

- Listen: Pay attention to what they say.

- Maintain eye contact: Maintaining eye contact is important for respectful communication.

- Professionalism: Be mindful of boundaries and be conscious of how you behave when communicating.

- Radical Candour: Giving feedback and guidance with the balance of care personally and challenge directly.

- Assume Good Intent: Before judgement or labelling allow time for curiosity, seek insight, understanding and information from others.

How does Trustworthiness Relate to Inclusion

- Credibility: Being able to trust what someone has to say, that they are honest, allows for greater connection.

- Reliability: Being able to rely on someone to do what they say and be consistent allows for greater respect and ability to contribute.

- Intimacy: Being able to speak and share thoughts and feelings with someone allows for greater intimacy which builds connection.

- Self-Orientation: Putting other's needs, opinions and voice before our own. Allowing others to speak before ourselves enables people to feel like they can contribute and progress. Regularly check in to understand how YOU make others feel.

Increasing Awareness and Understanding

Creating an inclusive culture through self-awareness and social awareness can be supported by using personality tools like DISC. These tools provide insight into people's behavioural traits, how these traits impact communication, workplace situations and our relationship with others. By using a self-assessment tool like DISC, you can:

- Increase Self-Awareness: knowing yourself, how you respond to different situations, natural traits of communication and emotions allows for greater opportunity for others to know how to interact and work with us.

- Increase Social Awareness: understanding different personality traits and their needs allows us to adjust our approaches to accommodate others. Being able to shift how we communicate and interact to accommodate other preferences helps people feel respected and connected.

A combination of self-reflection and team reflection with tools like DISC creates a common language and mutual understanding of people and their personality traits among a team. These processes are not about defining what is 'good' or 'bad', it's about seeking to understand. A well-designed engagement strategy that's used to explore oneself and the natural traits of others will increase the knowledge and capability for inclusion.