

# Leading Inclusively: Four Leader Capabilities to Break Through the Illusion of Inclusion



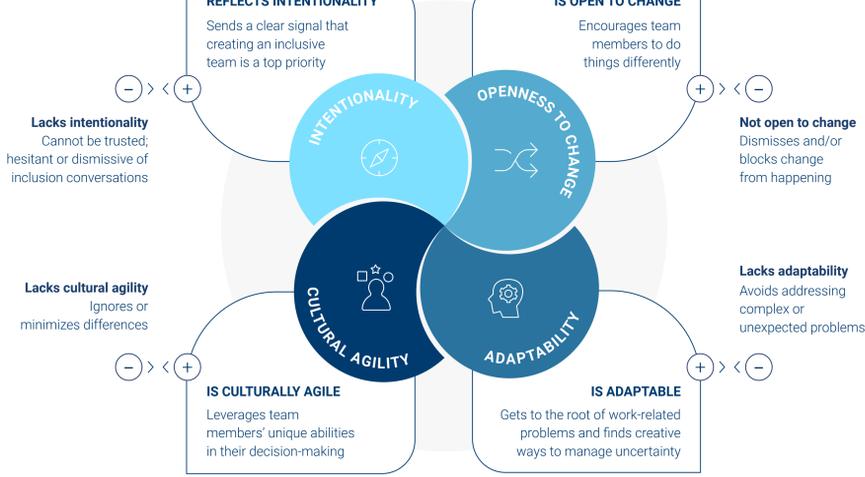
In order to create a culture of inclusion, every leader within an organization must lead in a credible, intentional and inclusive way – whether the CEO of a multinational corporation or the frontline manager with only a few direct reports. But because their experiences and perceptions around inclusion are often very different than those of their employees, many leaders may be operating under an *illusion of inclusion*.

To overcome this disconnect, leaders must first fully appreciate what a culture of inclusion really does – it fosters an environment in which employees are **truly valued, can use their voice, have decision-making influence and can contribute their best**. They must also understand what it means to be an inclusive leader, why it matters and the pitfalls to avoid in order to bring out the best in their employees and teams.



## The Inclusive Leader

> To lead inclusively, leaders must act with intentionality, practice cultural agility, demonstrate openness to change and exemplify adaptability.



## Good News

### Leading Inclusively Boosts Employee Performance

> When people leaders embrace the core capabilities of an inclusive leader, talent thrives.

Employees are

**2X**

more likely to feel they develop professionally at the organization.

Employees are

**2X**

more likely to feel they receive fair feedback on their performance.

Teams are

**+17pts**

more willing to surface and validate ideas before making a decision.



## Bad News

### Leaders' Good Intentions Are Not Good Enough

> Leaders often assume that having the best of intentions will translate into inclusion within and for their team. It will not. [Our research](#) demonstrates good intentions alone are not enough to foster favorable employee experiences.

#### You may not be as inclusive as you think.

The majority of leaders are disconnected from the experience of employees and don't model inclusive leader behaviors:

**55%**

of employees think their leader demonstrates zero or only one of the inclusive leader capabilities.

Only

**22%**

of employees feel their leader demonstrates all four inclusive leader capabilities.

Even managers and the most senior leaders are not immune to this struggle:

**38%**

of managers and

**23%**

of senior leaders feel their own leader demonstrates none of the inclusive leader capabilities.

#### No single capability can drive inclusion.

Inclusion is greater than the sum of its parts. When people leaders demonstrate all four capabilities, there are powerful impacts:

**85%**

of employees experience a sense of belonging, signaling that organizations must be purposeful in their development of inclusive leaders around all four capabilities.



## Now What? Leader Actions You Can Take Today

> Inclusion does not just happen. It is created and notably leader led, requiring a lens of inclusivity to be embedded in everything you do. How can leaders build greater capabilities in intentionality, cultural agility, adaptability and openness to change?

### Intentionality

#### Take charge with an unwavering commitment.

Emphasize and prioritize inclusion in your organization's vision, values and talent development programs. Be willing to talk about the difficult aspects of your culture and shift performance management processes to root out bias. Understand your own strengths and limitations as an inclusive leader and work to develop your own skills and capabilities to lead inclusively.

### Adaptability

#### Be prepared for challenges before they become urgent.

Faced with a challenge or crisis, you and your team may tend to revert to what has worked in the past, over-relying on the usual players to solve the problem. Leverage quieter work periods to develop contingency plans that make use of the skill sets of all team members and ensure everyone has a voice.

### Openness to Change

#### Question current ways of working.

Your organizational systems and processes may exist simply because "that's how things have always been done." Search for opportunities to incorporate broader perspectives and opinions and encourage teams to utilize new and different approaches.

### Cultural Agility

#### Show up intentionally in new spaces.

Look for opportunities to create connections with those with different perspectives or from different backgrounds, walks of life or cultures. This could include joining a community organization, an employee resource group or a sub-committee within a professional organization.



Source: [Inclusion Study Report: Demystifying Inclusion – Rewards and realities of fostering an inclusive culture](#), Kincentric 2023.

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