THINKING LIKE AN INCLUSIVE LEADER

Eddie Pate & Jonathan Stutz

It is far more difficult to *be* an inclusive leader than it is to *understand the qualities* of inclusive leaders. Developing the wisdom to inclusively lead a diverse workforce is a gap that exists today for many leaders. It is a muscle that requires daily exercise to grow and build. It requires a lifelong commitment to doing the work of learning about and understanding people and cultures, customs, norms, and styles.

We developed the 7 Insights of Inclusive Leadership (2IL) model to help you do this work (see Figure 1). *Intelligence* is understanding what the seven insights are. *Wisdom* will come from learning how to apply them in your daily life as a leader to build a culture of belonging.

Thinking Like An Inclusive Leader

There are many, many ways to characterize Inclusive Leadership. If you are curious, type "Inclusive Leadership definition" into your favorite search engine and look at the flood of hits you get. Our Insights of Inclusive Leadership model (2IL) is merely one example, albeit a very comprehensive and easy to understand one that illuminates all the key insights and concepts a leader should think through as they develop their inclusive leadership wisdom.

As our work and the field of Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity (ID&E) evolved, we realized we needed a framework to have legitimate, impactful conversations about the key drivers of inclusive leadership. It was important to name the daily dynamics that were driving inclusive interactions and engagement. Developing the

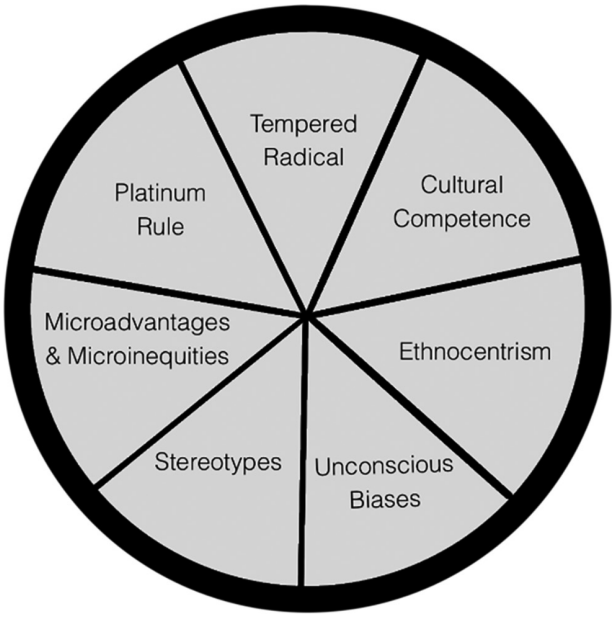

FIGURE 1. INCLUSIVE INSIGHTS MODEL: 7 KEY INSIGHTS FOR LEADERS TO UNDERSTAND AS THEY WORK TOWARDS LEADING INCLUSIVELY. ILLUSTRATION BY JACLYN STUTZ–BURRICK. USE PERMISSION GRANTED.

model facilitated dialogue, understanding, and helped grow our awareness of our impacts on others, especially when unintentional.

The Insights of Inclusive Leadership model is rooted in social psychological principles around how:

- individuals interact one-to-one, one-to-a few, and one-to-many
- we function day-in and day-out given all the external, often unconscious stimulus bombarding us constantly.
- in-group/out-group dynamics play out.
- we perceive our Identity and how this perception affects our interactions with others.
- oppression, racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination manifest during interactions.

Social psychological perspectives help us to understand why, for example, what someone intends clearly has the opposite impact, why leaders build teams made up of people that look like and behave like everyone else on the team, and why the same people are consistently promoted, or given visibility to leadership. The list could go on, but you get the point.

The Insights of Inclusive Leadership model is also built on a shared understanding of diversity, inclusion, equity, and intersectionality. A shared understanding enables a common vision for why this work is needed and how best to approach it. Without it, there could be a critical misalignment of the why and how of ID&E strategies and programs. Below are brief definitions of these key terms.

Diversity. We like to envision diversity as a tree with a robust root (see Figure 2). The various dimensions of diversity are either visible (in the branches and leaves of a tree) or invisible (in the root system below ground). We might characterize race as a visible dimension of diversity whereas thinking style may fit as an invisible dimension in the root system. It is important to note, however, that what may be a visible aspect of diversity for one person may be an invisible one for another. Race can be invisible as some people can be perceived as another race or actively "pass" for another race.

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Having a disability is another great example. Someone in a wheelchair has a visible dimension of diversity. However, for someone who is dyslexic or with a very tiny hearing aid, their dimensions of diversity may be invisible.

The Diversity Tree example represents one possible combination of visible and invisible dimensions but in no way is an exhaustive list or necessarily contextual globally.

Inclusion. If diversity is what comes through your doors, inclusion is what you do with it—how you

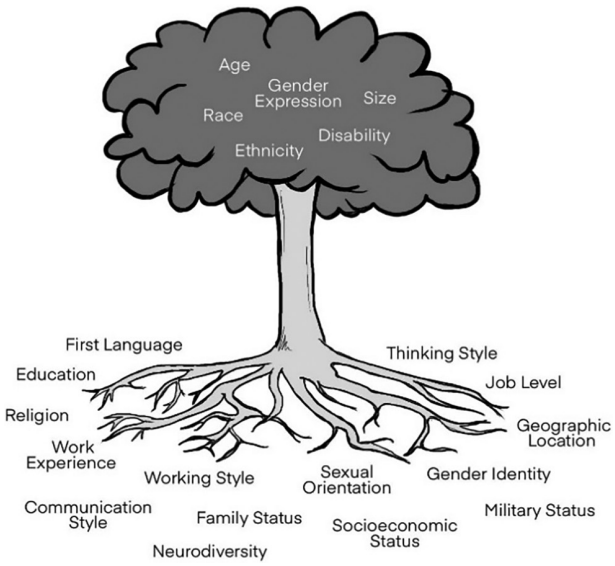

FIGURE 2. DIVERSITY TREE. ILLUSTRATION BY JACLYN STUTZ–BURRICK. USE PERMISSION GRANTED.

Equity is everyone getting what they need to be successful.

ensure each person with their visible and invisible dimensions of diversity feels seen, valued, and that they belong. There is obviously more context and complexity to the notion of inclusion but this, for us, has been a good jump-off point for meaningful conversations.

Equity. Equity is everyone getting what they need to be successful. It is about ensuring that the systems, practices, mechanisms, and policies create equal access to the opportunities, recognition, and resources that support success. It is NOT about creating undue advantage or disadvantage for anyone. It is about fairness.

Intersectionality. All of us are a combination of diverse dimensions that we can identify on the Diversity Tree (Figure 2). According to the global nonprofit, Catalyst, intersectionality is a concept for understanding how these different dimensions overlap with each other and with systems of power that can oppress or give advantage to people. When we look at how our identities intersect, we are encouraged to view the unique lived experiences of each person through the lens of privilege, power, and marginalization.

The term intersectionality was coined by UCLA Distinguished Professor of Law and civil rights activist Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to make the point that not all women share or experience the same levels of discrimination simply because they are women. She contended that antiracist politics, antidiscrimination, and feminist theory failed to recognize the lived experiences of Black women like herself because these perspectives focused solely on one diverse dimension: gender. We saw this clearly illustrated in one of our previous companies. An empirical analysis of attrition data showed a significant attrition rate for women that was much higher than their male coworkers. When we looked at the intersection of race and gender, however, we found an astonishing insight. The attrition issue wasn't an all-up women's attrition issue. As it turns out Black women had three to four times the attrition rate of Latiné and Asian women and 5x that of white women. A simplistic one-dimensional view on diversity masked the true issue. Armed with this knowledge, we were able to intentionally zero in on closing the Black women's attrition gap using far fewer resources to do so.

Empathy, Inclusion, and Belonging

The notion of belonging is fundamentally human. It is more than wanting to belong to something. According to Amanda Enayati, founder of The Coherence Lab, "As humans, we need to belong. To one another, to our friends and families, to our culture and country, to our world. Belonging is primal, fundamental to our sense of happiness and well-being."

The pathway from inclusion to belonging is an important one to understand. Inclusion is the means; belonging is the end. Leaders build a culture of belonging by being inclusive, by dropping pebbles of inclusion daily that causes ripples of change throughout their organizations. Inclusive leaders build a sense of belonging that allows employees to be comfortable using their voices and to be confident that there are empathetic ears listening to what they have to say.

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Empathy is necessary for inclusive leadership and inclusive leadership is what builds a culture of belonging. Each of the seven insights of inclusive leadership—Cultural Competence, Ethnocentrism, Unconscious Bias, Stereotyping, Micro–Advantages and Micro–Inequities, the Platinum Rule, and being a Tempered Radical—require leaders to have empathy for the people around them.

In this article, adapted from our recent book *Daily Practices of Inclusive Leaders: A Guide to Building a Culture of Belonging*, we'll focus on three of these practices, Cultural Competence, The Platinum Rule, and being a Tempered Radical.

Cultural Competence

Cultural Competence is an experiential understanding and acceptance of the beliefs, values, and ethics of others as well as the demonstrated skills necessary to work with and serve diverse individuals and groups.

Developing cultural competence is a dynamic process requiring ongoing self-assessment and continual expansion of one's cultural knowledge about, and respect for others. It begins with an understanding of your own culture, continues through interactions with individuals from various cultures, and extends through your expansion of knowledge. As you might have guessed, a prerequisite for cultural competence is a desire to learn about differences and how others' differences align to who they are. You must want to learn about stuff outside your own limits, culture, and norms. Building cultural competency occurs over time and with that development, so too does the ability to see cultural differences not as a problem but a strength.

Developing cultural competence happens through interactions with people and groups that are different from you. This is a basic but key starting point. To become culturally competent, we need to actually experience difference, to venture into new territory, to step away from the comfortable into the unknown. It involves finding multiple ways to learn about different cultures—from books and food to conversation and travel, and more. Becoming culturally competent is a lifelong pursuit—and what a fun pursuit at that! We are never done with developing cultural competence.

This journey of cultural competency can begin with self-learning (e.g., books, movies, videos, and podcasts), but experiencing differences in real life is the most impactful and arguably the most fun way to grow this skill. Traveling is clearly a great way to learn about other cultures, but your "trip" does not always have to be out of your area or country. Do not get us wrong, if you have the resources to do so, traveling abroad and experiencing different cultures, environments, and geographies is an amazing way to develop cultural competency skills. But it is not the only way and it can present a high bar. Try traveling to areas that you know are different from your own where there are folks from different cultures or life experiences. Developing cultural competence can be as easy as finding an authentic "ethnic" restaurant near you and experiencing the food, atmosphere, and, if you are comfortable doing so, engaging with the folks around you.

Join organizations for which you would be considered an Ally or Accomplice of that group. Show that you have an interest in the group and value it enough to want to be a part of it, to respectfully learn from its members, and to do your part to help them with the challenges they face.

There are many rich resources to help you learn how to respectfully interact with people from other cultures. For example, there are plenty of robust online cultural competence tools; we like *GlobeSmart* by Aperian Global. Classic studies and books teach about the different nonvisible dimensions of culture such as individualism versus collectivism, and high versus low power distance. We like Fons Trompenaars' highly consumable *Riding the Waves of Culture* and Geert Hofstede's seminal *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. There are more recent books on the topic such as Erin Meyer's *The Culture Map: Breaking Through the Invisible Boundaries of Global Business*, which does an outstanding job of providing very useful anecdotes and stories to help readers understand and apply the lessons of cultural styles to

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your work across the globe. Whatever your mode of learning, the key is to be willing to ask questions and truly listen. That is how you develop the wisdom that that will help you on your journey.

We encourage leaders and all employees to "think global, act local." Throughout your work as a people leader or individual contributor, evaluate your personal behavior, the decisions you consider, and your work product through a global lens. Consider the impact of everything you do on how it will be received by people and cultures around the world. Likewise, ID&E strategy should be globally inclusive; you can accomplish this by working closely with local market experts to develop specific solutions based upon local market challenges, opportunities, and issues, whether that be the US, India, Japan, Israel, Brazil, or Germany. It is also important to listen closely to local market employees and empower them to take ownership for the work.

Platinum Rule

The Platinum Rule is treating people how they want to be treated, not how we want to be treated.

Many of us were taught the Golden Rule growing up: Treat people how we would want to be treated. With a greater understanding and respect for all the ways in which people are different, we are now challenged to consider how others want to be treated. For example, not everyone handles direct feedback well–-even if that may be how you like to receive it. And so, you take a more subtle, indirect approach to helping them improve. It does take a little more work as a leader to learn about others' preferences and act outside of our normal ways of being, but it makes us more effective and inclusive. This is a good reminder to inclusive leaders that we need to take the time to get to know our people and truly understand who they are, what they need and why, how they want to be led, and to understand their goals and aspirations. By centering the needs of the other person, we are showing that we really care about who they are. We are not taking a cookie cutter approach to interacting with them, and we are taking another step toward building a culture of belonging.

One of the most valuable methods to understand *how* the people on your team want to be treated and to support building a culture of belonging is the one-to-one meeting. It is a widely under-rated mechanism to build connection with direct reports.

For individuals who come into the workplace with less power, less status, and less privilege in society, the one-to-one meeting is a distinct opportunity for managers to build psychological safety, a sense of belonging, to message worth, to demonstrate support, to encourage, to protect, and to motivate and inspire them. Here are our tips for holding inclusive one-to-ones. While some may seem obvious, in our experience, most leaders could use the nudge to make them a daily practice.

1. **Make it a recurring event on the calendar**. Doing so communicates they are important to the success of your business.
2. **Be on time**. This demonstrates they are a priority to you.
3. **Change the conversation and setting occasionally**. An informal, relaxed meeting helps to build trust.
4. **Let them set the agenda**. This communicates your interest in their priorities.
5. **Celebrate Wins!** Show appreciation and give thanks for work well done.
6. **Demonstrate vulnerability to build trust**. Ask what you can do better to best support them.

7. **Focus on your employee's strengths**. Share why you value their specific talents on the team and the projects they are assigned.
8. **Inform your employees on changes that will impact them directly**.
9. **Ask how you can help them**. Where do they need your assistance?

Tempered Radical

"A Tempered Radical understands that systemic change requires the aggregation of a bunch of little wins that add up to the organizational and cultural change we are seeking."

The term Tempered Radical was coined by Debra Meyerson in her book of the same name, which has since been retitled *Rocking the Boat*. A tempered radical knows that they do not have to do it all and certainly not all at once. All they need to do is drop a pebble that causes a ripple of change. That ripple causes someone else to drop a pebble, which causes another ripple. And so on and so on.

For us, being a Tempered Radical means that leaders do not need to do it all or overwhelm themselves by adding tons of ID&E stuff to their already full plates. Just do one thing. Find a pebble each day and drop it. It could be as simple as respectfully calling someone out (or in) in a meeting for unintentionally using a microinvalidation. It could be adding an ID&E participation question to a promotion process or discussing an unconscious bias priming document before every talent review process. It could be introducing the use of a "pause button" to slow a conversation down so an intentional or unintentional ID&E related issue can be addressed without causing too much undue stress doing so.

Do small things consistently. Develop a daily practice of dropping pebbles. This tempered approach gives leaders a means to operationalize their inclusion efforts in a way that does not become all-consuming and hence unrealistic.

A story about our partnership with Ryan Brown, now VP of Environment, Health, and Safety (EHS) & Environmental, Social Responsibility, and Governance (ESG) at Coupang (often described as "the Amazon of South Korea"), is a good illustration. When Ryan was Amazon EHS Director, he worked with us to implement Candidate Slating into the hiring process for his team even though the larger divisional organization was not on board. Candidate slating for us meant that for every open position we had to interview at least two women and/or two people of color. Research reported in the *Harvard Business Review* indicates that having at least two people from underrepresented groups on interview slates significantly increases the likelihood that these job candidates will be selected for the role. However, the chances are reduced to nearly zero when only one person from an underrepresented group is on the slate. The upstream ripple effect on Talent Acquisition was that recruiters had to cast a wider net. As a result, they discovered rich new resources of talent in professional and technical organizations focused on women and people of color, as well as in Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) and Hispanic-Serving Institutions (HSI). They also identified innovative search techniques to identify alumni from Black and Brown fraternities and sororities. The impact resulted in a significant increase in the representation of historically under-represented people on the team. Ryan took a risk by dropping a pebble that rocked the boat at Amazon, leading the way as a tempered radical.

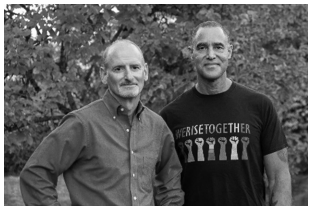
Conclusion

The 2IL is an important framework to guide our growth as leaders. It gives us a common language and understanding that facilitates meaningful engagement. It gives us a means by which to challenge others to adopt and intentionally deploy insights, tools, and mechanisms that create inclusive workplace environments and build cultures of belonging.

We encourage you to own as much of the ID&E topic as you can and commit to a continuous learning journey; this is how you develop the wisdom to drop

pebbles strategically. Part of that ongoing journey is also growing your awareness of the behavioral and conceptual dynamics that undergird your actions and behavior. These include having the courage to act and the heart to demonstrate empathy, compassion, and vulnerability.

This article is adapted from the book *Daily Practices of Inclusive Leaders: A Guide to Building a Culture of Belonging*, by Eddie Pate and Jonathan Stutz (Berrett-Koehler, 2024).



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Jonathan Stutz, M.A. (he/him/his) {left, in photo} is the President of Global Diversity Partners. He has over 25 years experience working in leading edge companies such as Amazon, Microsoft, and Zulily. Jonathan earned his M.A. from City University of Seattle in Organizational Leadership and B.A. in Political Science from the University of Washington. He is a Human Services Commissioner for the City of Kirkland, WA, and serves on the Board of Trustees for the Bellevue, WA non-profit, Youth Eastside Services.