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Grace Lordan   May 19th, 2022

Five ways for leaders to work faster, better, and more inclusively

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The world of work is changing and so should leaders. Besides being highly competent, they also must be highly skilled at listening to diverse team members and drawing the dots between their diverse ideas to find innovative solutions for products and customers. **Grace Lordan** *describes five ways for leaders to become more effective.*

The evidence on the future of work is clear: leaders need inclusive leadership skills as well as brains if they are to give their employer a competitive edge. Why? Businesses need leaders that are not only highly competent, but also are highly skilled at actively listening to diverse team members and drawing the dots between their diverse ideas to find innovative solutions for products and customers. But how can we lead inclusively for our organisations without making discussions too lengthy, deliberations tedious and decision-making filled with dissent? Here are 5 ways for leaders to work faster, better and more inclusively with their teams:

1. Evoke a 5:95 rule

A maximum of 5% of what we do on a day-to-day basis requires us to include our team members in the conversation. We waste too much time deliberating the small stuff. Inclusive leaders need to prioritise the 5% of things that are high stake for the business to draw on their team's views to give them an advantage. High stake decisions are high cost and sometimes even irreversible. They include product development and hiring a new colleague. For the remaining 95% of day-to-day activities, inclusive leaders need to operate systems of

transparency around how decisions are made, and who is the decision maker. Evoking a 5:95 rule allows an inclusive leader to leverage the diverse talent in their team for the important stuff, in addition to allowing their colleagues autonomy over making decisions on the rest. The transparency around low stakes decisions builds trust. The 5:95 rule approach also saves a heck of a lot of precious time!

2. Get meetings right

How do you know you are in a meeting with an inclusive leader? For inclusive leaders, inclusion occurs when all voices are heard in equal measure and all team members actively listen to one another. One or two colleagues do not dominate the conversation, no colleague is tuned out and meetings are never viewed as a waste of time.

How can a leader nudge their team meetings into this status quo?

When in a meeting the leader should not give their point of view at the beginning of any discussion where they want to elicit diverse views. In fact, they should be mainly actively listening, in addition to paying attention to the dynamics in the room to ensure that each of their team members is fully engaged. Leaders should encourage new insights from group members. They can do this actively by stating at the start of the meeting that they wish their team members to 'tell me something I don't know'. In behavioural science this is called priming. Priming is a phenomenon whereby exposure to one stimulus influences a response to a subsequent stimulus. Simply stating 'tell me something I don't know' at the beginning of the meeting primes team members to more likely to communicate unique information and save time by avoiding a meeting focussing on too few innovative ideas. If there are no unique insights to share or deliberate the leader can close the meeting early and give back time.

3. More than happy

Leaders should always aim for more than facilitating the formation of happy teams, since what makes people happy isn't always positive for the business. A team can be happy because they spend all day focussing on unproductive work and are engaged in too many social meetings. But a team can also be happy because they embrace dissent, deliberate, or discuss ideas in a manner that is comfortable and allows for better business outcomes. This is the sweet spot the best leaders aim for. An inclusive leader should aim to create a psychologically safe environment for individual team members so as not to harm their well-being. Top tips for improving psychological safety include ensuring that:

- all team members in their remit have fair access to opportunities and visibility

- all team members have voice in meetings

- there are fair and transparent processes around key moments in the career trajectory like promotions and pay increments

- adequate investment is made in honing each team members skills so that they are future ready.

If a leader gets 1) to 4) right, psychological safety within the team will mechanically increase, in addition to the team receiving the clear signal that productivity is noticed and rewarded.

4. Why so serious?

There is a rather compelling literature to suggest we are born smiling and laughing, and the amount we do so goes off a cliff when we enter the labour force. Yes, we get very serious when we get a job. And we don't see substantial increases in laughter, humour and smiling until we retire. Paradoxically, a light heart and working with humour has been shown to enhance productivity, in addition to enhanced team co-operation. Humour bonds people together. Right now, business has serious challenges to reckon with – a post-COVID recovery, fourth industrial revolution, the Great Resignation, it will help your team members if you make time for levity once in a while. and levity are powerful ways to build employee engagement and get teams to work better together. You don't need to morph into a stand-up comedian. Instead, simply sharing moments of lightness and being generous with laughter can trigger positive emotions and cooperation. This in turn aids in creating an inclusive team environment that is conducive to higher levels of productivity.

5. Invest in team resilience

It is clear that building team resilience pays dividends in stressful times, like the global financial crisis and the COVID 19 pandemic, as well as key moments for specific companies including creative destruction of key products, mergers and mass layoffs. Facing such stressors is becoming more common for organisations throughout the world. More and more often leaders are being tested on their ability to bounce back from dramatic changes, and the best investment they can make to ace this test is in team resilience.

Team resilience does not equal the sum of the resilience of individual people in the team. A team of highly resilient people could be extremely low on team resilience but their resilient individual nature drives them to look out for their own self-interests at the expense of their team's. Team resilience grows through the four C's collaboration, communicating, coordinating, and cooperating over time.

We have come full circle: an investment in enhanced autonomy, running better meetings, improving psychological safety, and bringing levity into your team are all direct mechanisms to hone resilience at the team. Why? Doing so improves collaboration, communication, and co-operation!

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Notes:

- *This blog post is based on insights from Grace Lordan's new course at LSE, Inclusive Leadership through Behavioural Science.*

- *The post represents the views of its author(s), not the position of LSE Business Review or the London School of Economics.*

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About the author

Grace Lordan

Grace Lordan is an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychological and Behavioural Sciences at LSE. She is the founder and director of LSE's The Inclusion Initiative (http://www.lse.ac.uk/tii), a new research centre that is demonstrating that inclusive leadership is good for business and creating inclusive leaders. Grace is also the author of "Think Big, Take Small Steps and Build the Future you Want". She has written for Harvard Business Review and the Financial Times and publishes regularly in top peer reviewed journals. http://www.gracelordan.com/

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