

Inclusive Leadership and Effective Communication: An Unbreakable Bond

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Abstract

The study's objective is to derive and develop the core heart that of an Inclusive Leader. The importance of being inclusive comes out when cross-culture individuals communicate and tend to have differences among themselves. An inclusive leader comes into picture during that communication process and by using his/her communication skills; help others feel included, valued and heard. The study looks into what great leaders are doing that made them outstanding in their fields. This paper also entails effective methods and techniques from different researches, to illustrate that how one can be an inclusive leader with the help of communication skills, in order to shape one's personality and bring people from diverse backgrounds, on a common platform. The paper also seeks to explore challenges one might face during communication and ways to tackle them with the help of inclusive leadership thereby making this bond of inclusive leadership and effective communication stronger.

Keywords: Inclusive Leadership, Effective Communication, Cross-cultural differences, Communication Skills, Outstanding Leaders, Communication Challenges, Tackling challenges.

Introduction

On a course of leadership, there is a requirement of specific skills and strategies for effective communication. All of which are essential building blocks for inclusive leadership. Specific tools, skills and resources are necessary to bring the best out of yourself and others. Yes, others, because inclusive leadership means bringing the best out of everybody in the team. Good leaders change the world. Changing the world doesn't mean having a lofty goal like removing hunger from world; if that's the case I am glad but changing the world might mean changing the world of the community you live in, the world of your home or workplace, it can be big or small. But in both cases, a good leader is always required, and good communication skill is a pre-requisite of being a good leader. And if we all do that, imagine the impact that can have. It is up to the reader to define the size and nature of the world and the kind of change. Think of a person who inspired you, who is your role model who listens to you, understands your viewpoint. That is, the heart of inclusive leaders do well. Inclusive leaders make others feel included, valued and heard. We face challenges while communicating; in particular, the other person may be different

from us, from different culture and different background. This opens the floor for potential misunderstanding or miscommunication from either side. Just imagine if a person uses a lot of non-verbal cues to communicate and is asked to communicate to a visually impaired person, and that person definitely wouldn't be able to read any of those cues and that's where effective communication would become important. Research shows a methodology of EACH which we will explore in this paper that will help anybody become an inclusive leader. EACH stands for Empowerment, Accountability, Courage, and Humility.



Definition of Inclusive Leader

The meaning of the word Inclusion is, “A state of being included or including others in groups and structures”. Inclusion happens when you value both the differences and the commonalities of the others.”

Empowerment, an Adhesive between Leadership and Communication

Consider a situation when a direct report of yours is sitting silent during the performance review and is not engaging in the discussion. Empowerment means converting a situation where communication is blocked by one or more factors like intimidation, or grief, or fear into a situation where communicators are free from any blockade and is able to transfer thoughts freely without any hesitation. So, under given situation, the best bet would be to ask very politely if there is any shortcoming from your side, and also ask things that can be done to improve future endeavours. Simply telling the direct report that you were hired that implies you are capable of doing world class job, so there is nothing to fear. What we generally end up doing is reach conclusion very quickly and does not communicate what needs to be communicated. Taking another example, this would be clear. If a son is not doing his homework on time even after being told daily to do, the general reaction would be to conclude that the son is not interested in studies. But this type of situation can be easily handled by empowering and by politely asking why he is unable to do homework on time, by discussion with him different ways, brainstorm different strategies in which he finds time to do his daily routine and also the homework.

Making determined effort to understand the situation of other, empathy for the other person is very necessary for better communication. Creating space for other person to speak their heart out is very necessary, and that can only happen by making efforts to make others feel heard. Seek to

understand before being understood. While communication over social sites, pause and read the message before sending it. Encourage feedback on how your way of communicating affects others. Also, when somebody comes up with a problem, encourage them to find solution that works best for their situation, and resisting telling them what to do.

Accountability, Responsibility that Every Leader Must Possess

Accountability is about holding yourself and others responsible for inclusive communication. Accountability is really about remaining committed to using your voice. Accountability is very important when there are setbacks and bumps in the road of communication. Holding yourself responsible and actively trying to rectify the situation is accountability. One can use the EACH method to rectify the issues that arose during communication. You can ask for clarification from people to check your own assumptions and the ways you are thinking about something to be better be able to connect to others and really create opportunities for making meaningful change in situation. Getting clarification would only include listening but also courage, both of which will be explored in later sections. For leaders, clarifications may be asked via emails or texts, so that the communication is empowered by giving others the time and space to respond. All of it would entail the perspective of the others rather than relying on your own assumptions and would make you a better inclusive leader. Let us take an example here how this works in real life. If you received a mail from your employee that last night at a restaurant all employees discussed how bossy you can be at times, general tendency is to reply back that you are not at all bossy. But taking accountability in mind, the best response would be to take a pause and think why this could have happened and rectify those reasons which made your employees think that. In another example, your friend posted something on social media which you find offensive, general tendency is to comment something in the spur of the moment and ask him to delete that. But if you hold yourself and him accountable, you would ask him open ended questions on why he posted something to understand his viewpoint. It happens a lot when a frustrated employee post something and is fired on the spot for saying such things, but there are ways to get of this type of situations and that is communicating. As another example mentioned in *How to Make friends and Influence People* by Dale Carnegie when he was asked to pay double the money for staying in a hotel, the general tendency would be to leave hotel on the spot but he went down and had an open conversation with the manager, he was able to get room at previous price only.

Courage in Communication

We all have designed our closet and getting out of that closet is scary. Courage is about helping us to understand, address and communicate across difference. In the context of communication courage is about the willingness and the ability to engage across differences. It's about stepping outside of our comfort zone to consider things from another perspective and viewpoint. Courage as a tool is very helpful in situations which are unfamiliar or uncomfortable to us. Courage requires vulnerability and requires us to be willing to step outside of comfort zone in order to interact or engage with others. Discomfort in communication is caused by differences and differences may arise from difference in gender, ethnicity, or personality attributes, anything that makes anybody unique.

DIFFERENCES ARE WHAT MAKE US UNIQUE

We can use these differences as a way of connecting us and bridging and helping us to really bridge difficult conversations. Courage is about using perspective-taking as a tool to step outside of ourselves. It is also about sharing personal stories and beliefs, sometimes a taboo in workplace settings, but creates a sense of belongingness and opens the door for further communication. Courage is contagious. If somebody gets out of comfort zone, others at the same time get out of their comfort zone. For example, let's say Akhil is sad because of recent divorce and Rakhi a friend didn't ask anything about it. A general conclusion would entail that Rakhi is selfish and don't care about others. But when Akhil asked Rakhi that isn't she bothered at all by his sadness, to which Rakhi replied, I was bothered, and I wanted to know about it, but from where I come, it is completely impolite and inappropriate to barge in. So, it took courage to go ask or answer honestly as there are number of differences lying around us and may hinder effective communication. There is no "best opportunity" that we wait for and then make action into play, courage is about removing ambiguity as soon as possible. Take a look at the TAKE 5 communicating with courage and endorse the steps written in it.

TAKE 5

communicating with courage

1

Think before you speak or act. Calm your emotions to create a space for you to choose a more inclusive nonverbal posture and language.

2

Ask thoughtful clarifying questions. Gain a deeper understanding of where the other person is coming from to reduce defensiveness.

3

Use "I" (and "We") statements instead of "you" statements. Discuss your reactions in a way that avoids interpreting intent or assigning blame.

4

Getting others to think or feel the same as you do is not the goal of inclusive communication. Sometimes, you will have to gain an understanding of each other's perspectives, agree to disagree, and move on.

5

Commit to follow up, learn from missteps, set a new course of action, and explore potential areas of growth.

Humility, the H in EACH

Humility is taking the opportunity to reflect and think about how we can learn, and understand, and accept our mistakes as well as learn from others, particularly criticism about our own limitations, on areas where we need improvement, as well as going proactively after and getting feedback to help us develop and grow and learn. It is more about listening which is often overlooked. Generally, when we talk about communication general tendency is to think about speaking, may be about writing, but less so about listening. But listening with humility is a critical element how effective communication and inclusive leadership happens. Listening neither means that we have an understanding nor an agreement. We need to work on our listening to make sure we reach understanding and that we then reflect back that understanding to whoever is that we are communicating with. So that we can make sure communication is really moving forward. There is a difference between sympathy and empathy. Humble listening is inclined with showing and having empathy for others. Empathy is putting yourself in other's shoes and understanding the situation the other person is in, even if you don't agree. Thus, humble listening is not a passive act.

HUMBLE LISTENING IS NOT A PASSIVE ACT

Many times, it happens that if we are given a role of power, we tend to dominate everybody by telling them that we are right anyway, because we are boss, and we have more experience about situations, so others felt left out. But humble listening in these cases can have a great impact of the effort others put in if they are feeling heard and valued.

Listening doesn't mean you have to be silent, listening can also occur when you are the one who is speaking but is taking account of non-verbal cues the audience is giving you. If whatever you are saying isn't making any sense to your audience or is making them angry, taking the note of their expressions and reacting to it effectively will prevent any disaster to happen.

Humble listening is not about acting that you are listening; it is not about nodding while the other person speaks but failing to understand his viewpoint. It's not listening when you are busy with your smartphone or busy texting or watching TV, which is common in today's generation, so one must keep this in mind that listening is pure dedication towards the other communicator.

Listening is not agreeing, listening is just giving full attention and to empathize the other person. Humility is about feeling other person's emotion and then conveying that level of understanding back to them. General tendency is to relate experience and hard skills with leadership, but in actual, a good listener is a good leader.

Best decisions are taken when perspectives of all is taken in not by autocracy. We don't know what we don't know and it's great to ask and listen to other people's perspective on the prospect. Nobody is bound to have all the right answers, and listening is about taking that pause to let others speak on the situation.

Referring to 4 stages of awareness (modified version of psychologist Abraham Maslow's 4 stages of competence (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Four_stages_of_competence) first stage would be UNCONSCIOUSLY UNAWARE, where the information is so lost that nothing is actually known absolutely. As a leader this is problematic that we are unaware of the fact that there is some deficit that can truly help us. Second stage would be becoming conscious of this unawareness, let's call it CONSCIOUSLY UNAWARE, this stage is difficult for those "know it all" leaders, its unsettling to admit that there is some information missing, that they lack something, this can be fearful. But one can focus on end result here that if one is ready to admit, that more information is bound to make more effective decisions. This is a lot about humility to admit that there is something we don't know, and we also don't know how much we don't know. This also requires courage.

Next stage is to become more receptive to incoming information and of course, to visualize how to better implement it. Now that others have given information and opinions, it is required to better utilize it as if we move back in circle, they may feel that their opinion is not valued and may refrain from helping us next time. That takes us to CONSCIOUSLY AWARE, the third stage where we have accumulated all information from others that is needed to make better decision. And by continuously doing this, the fourth stage, UNCONCIOUSLY AWARE is achieved where we by nature know how to make a better decision on any prospect.

TAKE 5
humble listening

Here are some methods to demonstrate humble listening in your communication—both face-to-face and online.

- 1** Be open to different perspectives. Demonstrate empathy in your communication—regardless of your own expectations about what another person “should be” saying.
- 2** Use encouragers. Encouragers are verbal and nonverbal reassurances that you are present and listening deeply.
- 3** Clarify understanding. To check your understanding, paraphrase by using tentative language and asking if you got it right.
- 4** Reflect meaning when communicating. It is important to reflect both content (what is being said) and feeling (the feeling or mood behind what is being said).
- 5** Pausing in the moment allows you to take a deep breath and reflect. Sometimes this means postponing a conversation for another time.

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Appendices

Note:

The paper owes its acknowledgement to the Ted talks and various online sources as the paper is being developed by carefully listening to the listed below:

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