



# How to Support Diverse Teams

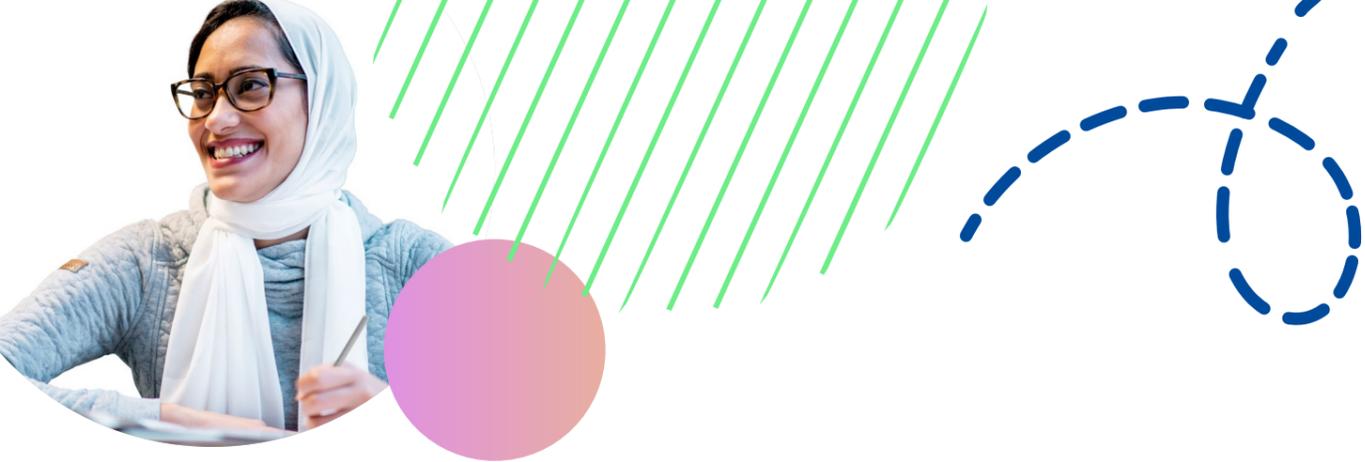
## A Guide for Managers

Equip yourself with the essential knowledge to lead, develop, and retain diverse teams.

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## Most businesses understand the business case for diversity, but what about inclusion?

It's nurturing an inclusive culture that gives employees a sense of belonging. Championing that culture and going above and beyond to invest in the career progression of diverse employees starts at the top, with you. That's why inclusive leadership matters. If your employees feel respected, uplifted, valued for their unique talents and perspectives, and supported in their development, businesses can **create not just an environment in which they want to stay, but one in which they know they can thrive.**

Some organisational leaders are unable to retain talented employees, which can be a real drain on productivity and increase the costs associated with employee recruitment. In an ideal world, all leaders would be adept at understanding their employees, but in reality, most aren't in tune with **what's important to diverse employees, both individually and collectively.** Inclusive leaders are those that actively adapt their leadership to the diverse needs of employees; supporting them, elevating them, and helping them bring their authentic selves to work.

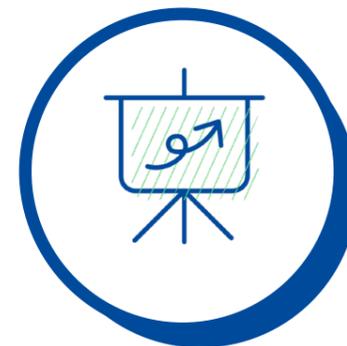
This toolkit is designed to empower leaders with the tools and knowledge to lead, develop and retain employees from marginalised groups, with a focus on three key areas: **Inclusive Leadership** - showing you how to lead with inclusive behaviours and create a sense of belonging in the workplace, **Managing Diverse Teams** - equipping you with the tools to challenge bias and leverage the unique perspectives within your organisation, and **Culturally Conscious Communication** - helping you tackle that feeling of 'not knowing what to say' and communicate effectively with your diverse teams, engaging in conversations that drive progress.



## What can you expect from this toolkit

The **Inclusive Leadership Toolkit** will equip your managers and future leaders with the skills to have better conversations and manage diverse teams more effectively.

The toolkit will be broken down into 3 key topics:



### Starting your journey to Inclusive Leadership

How to lead with inclusive behaviours and create a sense of belonging in the workplace

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### Managing Diverse Teams

Tools to challenge bias and leverage the unique perspectives within your organisation

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### Culturally Conscious Communication

Tackle the feeling of 'not knowing what to say' and communicate effectively with your diverse teams

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## What it takes to be an Inclusive Leader?

Inclusive Leaders create spaces where everyone can take part. They foster open, **two-way conversations**, actively pursue feedback and ensure all parties are not just seen - but heard.

According to the Employers Network for Equality & Inclusion, Inclusive Leaders are aware of their own biases and preferences and actively seek out and consider **different views and perspectives** to inform better decision-making.

Inclusive leaders see diverse talent as a source of **competitive advantage** and support employees in their career progression, driving organisational change towards a shared vision.

Inclusive Leadership takes commitment, focus, and an open mind; the reward is a thriving, diverse business, and an equitable workplace for all.

### Communication

People from different backgrounds may communicate differently, depending on how they were raised

### Example:

Some cultures see direct eye contact as respectful. For others it can be intimidating

### Feedback

Different cultures may have their own expectations about giving and receiving feedback in the workplace

### Example:

In China it is uncommon to criticise workplace superiors in any way.

### Dress Code

Cultural and generational factors often impact how people dress

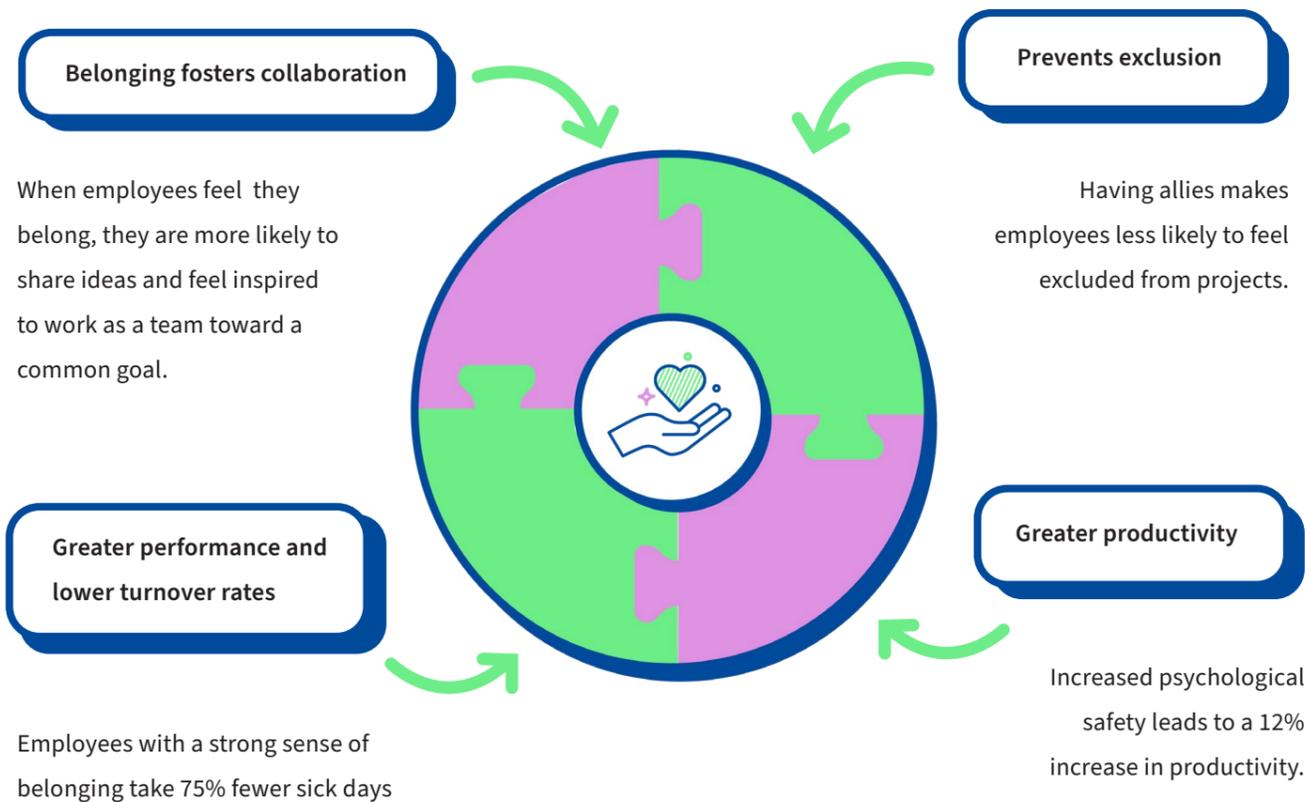
### Example:

Certain religious groups are required to wear specific clothing.

## Traits of an Inclusive Leader



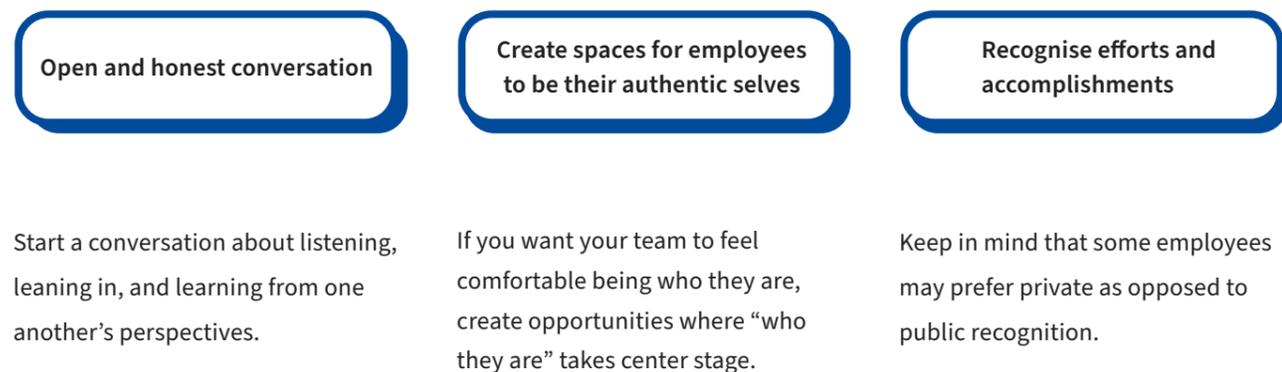
## The benefits of creating a sense of belonging



## How to create a sense of belonging

When a person feels left out, they often distance themselves from their team and their work.

These are the essential components of fostering a sense of belonging at work:



## Honing your leadership skills

As new contexts arise, and the workplace continues to evolve we need to ensure our behaviours create an inclusive and forward-focussed work environment. Here are some tips:

### Practice Active Listening

It isn't about 'showing' the other person you're listening - it's about taking the conversation on board; building trust, connection, and validating the experiences of others. You'll also gain a deeper understanding of the content and context so you can respond, rather than react.

### Remain open to new ideas

Remaining open, curious and receptive to new ideas will help you see the big picture, benefit from a range of perspectives, and become a more inclusive organisation.

### Seek out different perspectives

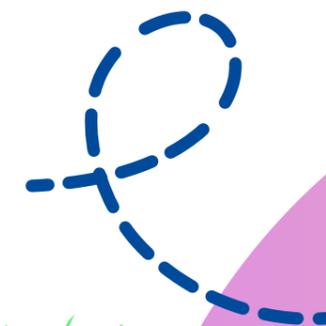
Being open isn't always enough - you'll likely need to seek out different perspectives; actively creating space for multiple voices, and working toward greater equity together.

### Build bridges

Make authentic connections with people who are different from you. Building these connections on mutual respect will enhance your cultural intelligence and enrich inclusion, in and outside the workplace.

### Stay courageous

Taking risks and subverting the status quo takes courage, but that's what good leaders do. It all starts with admitting and interrupting your own personal bias, changing your mind, and pushing past discomfort toward growth.



## Tackling bias within ourselves



## Championing and showcasing leadership behaviours

Leadership is the art of building trust and connection within your team. Dedicating yourself to this vocation will fortify and prepare them for the challenges that lie ahead. Here are three fundamentals to get you started:



### Compassion

Compassionate leadership is the act of building and demonstrating a genuine interest in the success and wellbeing of your team. This will allow you to see from all angles, and equip yourself with the knowledge and insight to take appropriate action.



### Communication

Cultivate a listening culture. When employees know they will be heard, they become more confident, productive and invested in their work. Let your team know that feedback is a two-way street, and progress is a dialogue.



### Coaching

The most successful leaders are those that find ways to tie people’s individual development to organisational objectives. When leaders take an active role in each of their team member’s personal goals and skills development, employees feel supported, uplifted, and valued.

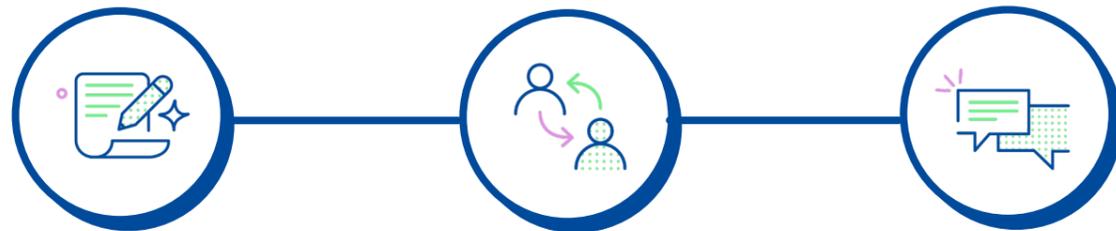
## Support for career development

A rewarding career is one that is built into your life. Circumstances will vary from person to person, so it's important to **consider the personal needs** of each employee and find ways to accommodate them where possible - like offering flexible working, or pathways to a more suitable position.

Expand horizons and feed back into your organisation by championing **skills**

**development.** Job rotation, cross-training, mentoring, internships, coaching, and career strategy groups are all valuable interventions to consider.

You can also help employees visualise their future with transparent **succession planning**, so they understand what skills they need to progress, and how they can attain them.



### Remove barriers

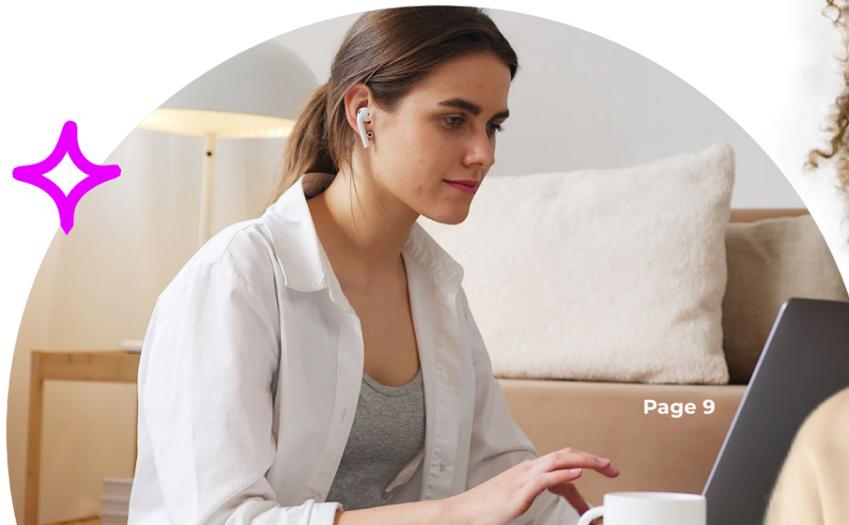
- Review outdated policies and take diverse employees with you on that learning journey
- Create more flexible policies informed by that learning
- Be cognisant of disadvantages diverse team members might face and help them get the skills they need to access opportunities

### Provide soft skills development

- This is often overlooked, but can be key for individuals from marginalised groups
- Ensure soft skills training is a safe learning space

### Be transparent

- Provide clear and actionable roadmaps for progression
- Include skills development, feedback goals, and personal growth plans



## Protective hesitation: avoiding failure in feedback

### What is protective hesitation

When a leader avoids/adjusts feedback for diverse employees due to fear of how they may be perceived/ inciting a negative response.

### Why is this problematic?

Marginalised groups tend to get lower quality/ less frequent feedback, which can result in lower performance review scores - stunting development and hampering progression.

### How can you avoid protective hesitation?

- Identify your bias and how it might be affecting your feedback
- Democratised the process, consulting other parties to gain a range of perspectives
- Ensure a standard frequency and quality of feedback through HR
- Use self-reflection and peer review



## A more inclusive approach to feedback

### Be Specific

- Use measurable data, as this tends to be more objective
- Base feedback on observable behaviours, as opposed to subjective judgements
- Have clear performance standards so everyone knows what is expected of them

### Start a dialogue

- Acknowledge the power dynamics at play in the conversation
- Communicate your intention to start a dialogue
- Listen and learn from the feedback given to you, bearing in mind that employees may feel uncomfortable providing feedback to their superiors

### Interrupt your biases

Here are a few kind of bias to look out for during the feedback process:

- **Tightrope bias:** women and people of colour are not taken seriously if they're "too nice", but seem unlikeable if they're "too aggressive"
- **Confirmation bias:** seeking out evidence that confirms our points of view, and discounting behaviours that contradict them
- **Prove it again bias:** requiring certain groups to prove their competence more frequently
- **Affinity bias:** a preference for people who are like us



## What is Culturally Conscious Communication?

Human beings are in constant communication, whether through tone of voice, body language or speech itself. All these elements contribute to the **message we're trying to get across**, but we aren't always aware of how these messages are translating.

Culturally conscious communication involves **being mindful of how we communicate with people from different cultures**, developing an awareness of how our behaviour might be interpreted and how we - consciously or unconsciously - interpret the behaviour of others.



As Leaders, it's important to **learn about different cultures**, not only in order to recognise and celebrate that we all are unique individuals, but to become more sensitive to diverse backgrounds, traditions and social norms in the workplace.

Being culturally conscious is not about generalising, but **tuning into the way we - and those from cultures we are unfamiliar with - might behave and communicate.**

## How to consciously communicate as a Leader ?

Communicating in a culturally appropriate manner, is all about understanding culture and working effectively with each other's cultural influences.

These are essential components of favouring CCC at work:

### Be clear

about your message. Phrases, body language and gestures can all mean different things to different people, so use words for clarity

### Be aware

of how your delivery style might be received and how team members may respond to CTAs - for example

### Be mindful

of the cultures and backgrounds of those around you. Colloquial phrases and in-group jokes can cause unnecessary misunderstandings

## Career conversations and supporting progression

Highlighting opportunities and making time for career conversations with your diverse employees is an important part of becoming a truly inclusive leader. Taking an active role in their career progression and development supports growth for both parties. As a leader, career conversations will also help you to identify skills gaps, and provide an insight into areas of improvement needed in your organisation.

Have regular chats with your teams to **increase engagement, improve retention, and highlight opportunities for growth.**

### What can you talk about?

- Personal strengths: help employees identify their skills and value
- Career opportunities: consider how to make your organisation more transparent and equitable when it comes to progression
- Short and long term goals: discuss and create an action plan

Remember to take a **holistic approach**. Human behaviour is interconnected with social, cultural and psychological identities. Consider how learning and development happens for each individual, and aim to understand how you can facilitate their unique learning and growth.



## Who is UpSkill Digital?

We develop programs to support the needs of underrepresented employees, working closely with institutions to drive accessibility, progression, and impact.

Leveraging our network of expert coaches, we provide a people-centric approach to training, alongside practical tools and frameworks to encourage teams to drive lasting change across an organisation.

We use the latest technologies to ensure that people receive the most engaging, interactive and inspirational learning experience possible.

Our vision is an equitable world where everyone can access the skills they need to thrive, regardless of their background. No matter where you are on your diversity and inclusion journey, we are here to help you every step of the way.

Please visit us at [www.upskilldigital.com](http://www.upskilldigital.com)

## Organisations we have supported



## Creating safe spaces for communication

### Be authentic

- Leading as your whole self can help develop a culture where all employees feel safe to bring their authentic selves to work
- Developing self-awareness can help you understand how to show your personality in a professional environment, and encourage others to do the same
- This means leading with empathy, listening, and valuing the whole person in front of you

### Facilitate speaking up and aim to learn

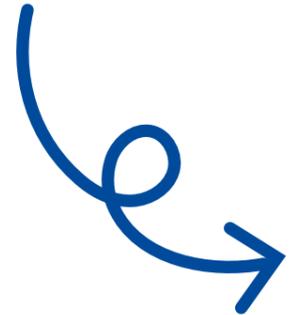
- Actively facilitate conversations that prioritise listening/learning from others
- Champion diverse voices in these conversations, especially when 'in-groups' are dominant
- Ask leading questions to go deeper

### Create space for new ideas

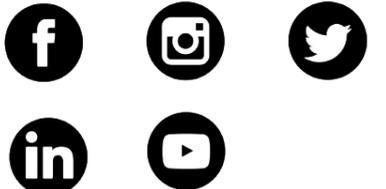
- Show curiosity and positively reinforce honesty and truth-telling
- Show you are open-minded and interested in employees' viewpoints
- Revise the unwritten rules, values and norms of the workplace together

### Build relationships

- Use action - not just words - to show employees you understand their needs
- Positive relationships enhance psychological safety



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