



CRF DIGITAL COMMUNITY EVENT DIVERSITY, INCLUSIVITY AND WELLBEING

At a Zoom Interactive Event on 25th October, CRF's Diversity, Inclusivity, and Wellbeing Community came together to discuss the links between diversity, inclusion, and productivity.

Grace Lordan, Associate Professor at the London School of Economics and Founding Director of [The Inclusion Initiative](#), described the relationship between inclusion and productivity and shared her views on inclusive leadership. Attendees shared their views and experiences and posed questions.

This summary shares some of the key insights from the discussion.

THE LINK BETWEEN INCLUSIVE, DIVERSE ORGANISATIONS AND PRODUCTIVITY

Grace, who is a behavioural scientist, kicked things off by sharing insights from her research into inclusion and productivity.

- Grace's starting point, as a researcher, was not diversity and inclusion, but was about how to get teams to effectively assess risk, innovate, and create. Early work with small groups showed that when people with diverse perspectives gather around a table, you get more ideas. But usually, you don't get more assessment of risk, creativity, or innovation, and that comes down to a lack of inclusion. People around the table, for the most part, aren't really listening with an open mind, and aren't ready to take a leap of faith. This is often because of personal ego.
- Grace's work thus focuses on operationalising leaders to have the inclusive skills they need in order to really listen to people. Are we really open to the ideas around the table and how can we actually make leaders better equipped to bring out diverse voices? Often leaders are not equipped to do this; at the same time, diverse voices may be more reluctant to speak up due to past bad experiences with other, non-inclusive leaders.

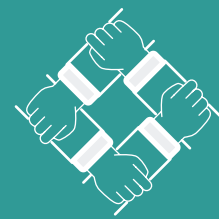
- In terms of the link to productivity and other business outcomes, there are studies at the macro-level that diversity is good for business, that it isn't good for business, or that it has a neutral impact on business. This is not publication bias, but instead is linked to whether diversity is actually translating to an inclusive culture at the organisations under study.
- At The Inclusion Initiative, Grace's work is now focused on three areas: operationalising the inclusive leader, quantifying (for investors) whether companies have an inclusive culture, and conducting experimental research to identify new techniques inclusive leaders can adopt.

How can HR professionals prove the link between inclusion and business outcomes?

In the best-case scenario, leaders do this themselves. They pay attention to team dynamics and outcomes. This is easy at the microlevel, but more difficult at the company level. At the company level, goals such as profits or innovation might be positively impacted by teams that are acting inclusively, but the signal might be diluted by other teams not being inclusive.

Grace suggests the I.D.E.A. Framework as a tool leaders can use to self-monitor and self-correct at the individual level, which can then have knock-on effects at company level. The framework can help leaders change how the hire, share opportunities, and promote within their team. Leaders who buy into this themselves help bolster the case for diversity and inclusion at higher levels, and contagion also comes into play – inclusive leaders are more productive and this success can be contagious, helping organisations eventually reach a tipping point toward inclusive leadership.

Here we share a case study from CRF's research, [Applying Social Science to Behavioural Change](#), on using the I.D.E.A. Framework to tackle groupthink in meetings.



CRF DIGITAL COMMUNITY EVENT DIVERSITY, INCLUSIVITY AND WELLBEING

TAKING AN EXPERIMENTAL APPROACH TO CULTURE CHANGE: APPLYING THE I.D.E.A FRAMEWORK TO TACKLE GROUPTHINK IN MEETINGS

The I.D.E.A. framework involves Identifying the problem you are trying to solve, Designing a potential intervention to solve it, Evaluating whether the intervention will work, and Assessing whether the intervention needs to be tweaked, abandoned, or pivoted away from.

In this case study, a question was posed to attendees: As a mid-level manager, how do you know that your team has a positive culture?

Surveys are often relied on to assess this, but they are problematic for many reasons. First, culture is very difficult to accurately measure. Second, managers tend to focus on the negatives that come out of surveys, and to rationalise any negative feedback.

A more helpful approach is to embed a culture of active listening. An experimental leader understands that inclusive discussions are valuable to the business and the culture. Productive conversations move teams away from an overfocus on shared information, which tend to happen when people are uncomfortable or are afraid to speak up.

In the case study, attendees took on the role of an experimental leader, applying the I.D.E.A. framework to identify groupthink in meetings, design solutions to avoid it, and embed active listening and productive conversations instead.

Identify

How can you quickly tell if groupthink is a problem in your team meetings?

- **Monitor cascading.** To monitor cascading, the manager says very little and watches how the meeting unfolds, observing who speaks first, who speaks next and if they give any new information. Cascading happens when the same people reiterate the same points over and over again. It is a sure sign of groupthink, is bad for business, and should be interrupted.
- **Monitor who does not speak.** Is an individual or group getting ignored systematically? Why?
- **Monitor who speaks too much.** The over-extroverted need to be pulled back as much as the introverted need to be drawn out.

- **Enlist 'disagree and proceed'.** When there is a dissenting voice, the manager makes a note of it and the meeting proceeds. The manager then analyses who is disagreeing and whether there is a pattern of ignoring certain voices; if a pattern emerges, the manager self-corrects.
- **Commit to a post-mortem.** For any particular major decision, input and luck impact outcomes. A post-mortem is used to figure out whether the outcome - success or failure - was down to the team or to luck.

Design

So you've identified that groupthink is a problem in your team meetings. What are some potential interventions you can design to avoid it?

- **Trial and error learning.** This involves separating brainstorming from the decision-making process, introducing space for experimentation.
- **Improve psychological safety and embrace dissent.** For an in-depth look at how to improve psychological safety and embrace dissent, see pages 5.
- **Interrupt cascading.** People other than leaders can interrupt cascading; teach your team how to recognise it and empower them to intervene when they spot it happening.
- **Use 'tell me something I don't know'.** This technique changes the meeting agenda. Instead of focusing on shared information or being anchored by the leader's idea, attendees have the onus placed on them to get creativity by sharing something that isn't already known at the meeting.
- **Emphasise group success through rewards.** If possible, move away from individual incentives, instead tying the team's fate to one another.
- **Embrace specialists and divide team labour.** Making a group smaller can give people who haven't spoken before permission to speak. Validate people's specialist expertise by sharing what it is.
- **Adopt enthusiastic 'devil's advocates'.** Empower one or two people to play the role of sanctioned dissenter whose job it is to take the opposing view and ask challenging questions.



CRF DIGITAL COMMUNITY EVENT

DIVERSITY, INCLUSIVITY AND WELLBEING

- **Focus on the risks.** Often, when someone voices doubt about an idea, we challenge them to offer a 'better solution'. Instead, when doubts are raised, the team should discuss the costs, benefits, and risks of the doubted idea. When asked about risk, people will lean on their own expertise to answer the question. This is the availability bias, and it can cause people to miss other perspectives. By discussing risks together, you can get a much broader and probably more accurate picture.
- **Allow alternative forms of communication.** For example, use written response meetings (allow people to write down their ideas first), or call on colleagues randomly (this is a simple way to quieten dominant voices. It can also prevent cascades because it's random whether you will be called upon or not).

Evaluate

When we experiment, some things we do create positive change. Others have no impact or even create negative change, so evaluation is needed to ensure we are actually moving things forward and to ensure that we stop doing things that aren't working.

So how will you know if your groupthink intervention worked?

Monitoring how people behave during meetings is key – and relatively easy to do.

In addition to monitoring cascading and who speaks too little / too much, managers can count the number of 'new ideas' that came up in the meeting, count the number of 'go forward' ideas that came up in the meeting, and count the pieces of hidden information (hidden to the manager) that came up in the meeting.

Over the longer run, managers should evaluate whether the small changes they are making are disrupting the status quo. Do so by:

- Enlisting 'disagree and proceed' and committing to post-mortems. Do you regularly ignore particular colleagues or groups of colleagues?
- Recording for each project whether it came in under budget, at budget, or over budget?
- Recording for each project whether it came in ahead of schedule, on schedule, or behind schedule?

The value in recording project cost and time is related to the planning fallacy. It is well-known that most public projects come in over budget and take longer than expected; after so many failures, how is it that this still happens?

It happens because groupthink in a meeting prompts people to always imagine the best-case scenario. This dynamic is exaggerated if there are cliques within the group.

Ask people to estimate up front the time and cost of the project, and then check to see who got it wrong and who got it right. This can be very revealing of group dynamics. One of the most powerful ways to get people to change group dynamics is to show them how they are biased in a way that they cannot deny.

Finally, when evaluating, think about common ways to measure the impact of multiple interventions. If you are intervening in meetings, the outcomes you are measuring should always be the same – for example, the presence of cascading and how many new ideas are generated. You don't want to constantly change the outcome you are measuring because then you can't make comparisons. A common unit of measuring makes it easy to gather information and easy to know if behaviour is trending in the right direction.

Assess

Assessing involves taking a pause. Ask yourself: was it worth it? What level of effect did you expect, and was it obtained? Assessment is about the size of change, not just about whether it is statistically significant.

It is also important to assess whether your team is happy, or languishing and burning out. Ultimately, change needs to be enacted in such a way that the benefits outweigh the costs.



CRF DIGITAL COMMUNITY EVENT

DIVERSITY, INCLUSIVITY AND WELLBEING

In summary

In summary, the I.D.E.A. framework is a powerful tool for the experimental leader trying to enact behaviour change. It allows managers of all levels to be clear on whether they are creating real change through changing their actions.

Use the framework to Identify and address your organisation's problems. Remember that your context is very specific – figuring out if the problem actually exists in your context, before taking action, is really important. The Design phase is enlivening – there is nothing better than you as the person who understands the context designing the intervention. You might get it spectacularly wrong, but that's where Evaluation is important. Finally, Assess the success and the size of the change to determine whether and how to proceed.

If managers can get the team meeting right, some other goals of inclusive leadership will fall into place.

Grace's research has reviewed diversity and inclusion strategies adopted by management across a number of large companies. About 90% of organisations report having initiatives, but they don't necessarily translate into impactful change. Why are these initiatives falling short?

- There are two explanations offered for why initiatives are falling short. One is that they don't work out because it's just virtue signalling from leaders, so there is a lack of sincerity, motivation, and follow through behind it. The second explanation, which Grace argues is correct in most cases, is that leaders are invested, and look to other companies for good practice. They bring in and implement those good practices, and then become frustrated because it doesn't seem to be working. Sometimes the new practices aren't working – good practices don't always translate from one context to another. But often, the problem is one of evaluation – organisations don't often evaluate whether or not their initiatives are working (which is strange given the large sums of money spent on training leaders, managing people, and on diversity and inclusion). And when they do evaluate, organisations tend to rely on short-term satisfaction surveys, which always show initiatives in a good light. We need long-term evaluation.



INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP: WHAT IS IT, WHY IS IT IMPORTANT, AND HOW DO WE DO IT?

After Grace's initial comments, a roundtable discussion focused on inclusive leadership. The following key points were made.

- Inclusion requires a mindset change at leadership level and in recruitment practices: if we continue to recruit people like ourselves, we're not going to get the diversity we need in our organisations. What can HR leaders do to help business leaders understand this and move the dial?
 - » This is a tough challenge. Individual people in organisations may have a diverse, inclusive mindset, but on aggregate, organisations are not there yet. In part, this is because we have over-relied on tone from the top (then hoping it's contagious) and we have over-relied on HR (it's an HR problem not an individual leader problem).
 - » Therefore, the change we need to see is an expectation of inclusion as a required leadership quality, and an understanding that without it, businesses will not do as well or will possibly fail in the new, high-pressure economy.
 - » Those who want to be trained as inclusive leaders can then come forward and get trained. Eventually, they become a tipping point toward an inclusive organisation because they have changed their behaviour and done something fundamentally different. In short, tone from the top is necessary, but insufficient on its own.
 - » With respect to HR, they must become enablers, not compliance-enforcers. One of HR's biggest areas for enabling is around hiring. There is a fundamental problem in that we hire people like ourselves. People like doing this and are still doing it. This makes it less likely that someone who is different in discipline, culture, gender, or other background factors is going to get hired. Leaders have to seek someone different than themselves when hiring because they know their team will be worse off if they don't. The criteria should be that the voice belongs in the room and needs to be heard; not that it's someone to go to lunch or the pub with.



CRF DIGITAL COMMUNITY EVENT

DIVERSITY, INCLUSIVITY AND WELLBEING

- There are several funnels where diversity and inclusion fall short. First, we fail to hire diverse people. Or, we hire them but don't invite them to the table. Or, we invite them to the table but then ignore them. When diverse people aren't listened to, they engage in one of four responses: they leave, they disengage, they conform, or they dissent. None of these responses are good for business. Organisations have a tendency to expect diverse people to adapt to the status quo, rather than shifting, being open, and listening to their perspective(s). Inclusive leadership really takes that person's perspective into account. While leaders themselves can have immediate improvements when they are open-minded as individuals, aggregating inclusive leadership at the company level is a medium-term journey.
- In terms of practical things leaders can do to be more inclusive, meetings are one of the first things to get right. Meetings are where people come together to interact, where they feel they waste the most time, and also where leaders can show that they are trying to change the dynamic. Avoiding groupthink in meetings is key. Several small changes can hugely impact the dynamic in meetings for the better:
 - » Leaders should leave their ego at the door, and refrain from prescribing where they want the meeting to go. Don't anchor attendees to your idea; instead say that you want to hear as many ideas as possible.
 - » Don't let one or two voices dominate a conversation.
 - » Stop the same idea getting rehashed over and over.
 - » Keep people speaking to a defined amount of time. If people choose not to speak, that's ok, then attendees get time back. But don't let others run over their time and thus dominate the conversation.
- Psychological safety is an important tool for bringing a sense of inclusion to an organisation. This means it's safe for people to raise their voice and offer different opinions. Some attendees reported that psychological safety is gaining traction at their organisation. One attendee shared that their organisation has just delivered training on psychological safety for all employees globally – what it is and how managers can lead by example and foster psychologically safe environments. The training was very well received, and the organisation is now thinking about how to elevate and keep engaging with it.
 - » Psychological safety feels very intangible for many organisations; everyone wants it in principle, but operationalising it feels difficult. Grace's advice is to focus on providing equal visibility, opportunity, and voice for all the diverse people around a table. The underlying issue that degrades a sense of psychological safety is that some people get more, and others less, of visibility, opportunity, and voice.
 - » Other things that improve psychological safety are autonomy (all humans want autonomy) and social cohesion. Grace's advice is to give trust to people, even if you feel it's unearned. Trust that they will do a good job, tell them you're leaving it to them to get on with, and then watch what happens. When you trust people in this way, it typically results in a self-fulfilling prophecy where expectations of good performance are met, and then psychological safety also tends to increase because employees now trust their managers. This mutual trust then translates to social cohesion, which is more challenging to achieve in diverse teams. Leaders have a tendency to focus on social cohesion activities that they personally enjoy, rather than autonomy and providing equal visibility, opportunities, and voice. Leaders need to use a broader toolkit to build the basic foundations of a psychologically safe team.
- Some organisations are beginning to define and be transparent about what inclusive leadership looks like at their organisation. In general, there is a focus on taking small steps that will make a big difference. But some organisations report that, many months down the road, these principles are beginning to drift. One particular challenge is around very high-ego leaders, of which there is currently a large cohort in organisations.
 - » For a long time, organisations have rewarded command and control type behaviour. But the economy we have now – built around advancing technology and rapidly moving markets – requires low-ego leaders who listen and bring together diverse ideas to connect dots in a way that they haven't been connected before. This skill is largely missing from the currently dominant style of leadership.



CRF DIGITAL COMMUNITY EVENT

DIVERSITY, INCLUSIVITY AND WELLBEING

- » At organisations that are used to rewarding command and control behaviour, a shift in mindset is needed. It's early days and this shift is going to take time, but meetings are a key space in which to challenge the old behaviours. Many leaders have been in place for a very long time, and need help from HR enablers to learn how to equally share voice, visibility, and opportunities.
- » How can HR enable leaders to acknowledge when their behaviour isn't very inclusive, to listen and to take responsibility for being an inclusive leader, instead of believing it's the job of marginalised groups to sort out?
 - * In this sort of situation, it's useful to put the focus on the desired collective outcome, not the individual's shortcomings. Give the leader data that shows him or her that things aren't necessarily as they think they are (for example, 360 feedback that shows how they are perceived). But let the leader receive this feedback privately, and learn from it in silence. Then give the leader tools for self-correcting.
 - * Another strategy is to encourage allyship across the leadership team, with leaders demonstrating to each other how they can make a difference in many different ways.
- One attendee reported that high commitment from the top has really helped their organisation embed inclusion and belonging. This organisation's CEO named inclusion as a company value that they want to see more of. From there, inclusion has been cascaded down through processes and systems. It has taken a lot of hard work and long-term commitment, but it is proving effective.
 - » As part of the work to embed inclusion as a core business value, this organisation conducted a survey which highlighted some interesting issues. The survey revealed a disconnect between what leaders think happens in the lower ranks of the business and what actually happens. Leaders thought of themselves as inclusive and enabling, but the reality was that team members disagreed. For example, they said they were unaware of opportunities and weren't being selected for them. The data showing this reality was very powerful, and helped leaders stop and reflect.
 - » From these insights, the company built a tailored programme for top leaders, based on local, real (anonymised) examples. The programme explained why it's important to change, and how to capitalise on your own individual capacity for change as a leader.
- Inclusive leadership isn't just for people leaders. One attendee reported that at their organisation, inclusive leadership training is available to any kind of leader (technical leaders, etc.), whether they have direct reports or not. This is because the organisation needs all the people who are making decisions and running meetings to practice inclusive behaviours.

Takeaway Actions

The session ended with Grace sharing key actions that attendees can implement in their working environment to move toward more inclusive leadership.

1. Focus on equalising opportunities, visibility, and voice for the members of your team.
2. Then look around you. Beyond your own team, are there people in your periphery who you know to be talented, and who aren't getting opportunities, visibility, or voice? What can you do to help? Can you help them get their point across in a meeting? Do you know about opportunities that you can refer them to? Are there ways you can raise their visibility to others?
3. Get involved in Grace's research at The Inclusion Initiative. The Diversity and Productivity Project needs professional workers from all sectors to participate in the research. If your organisation is doing creative and innovative work, and you'd like to get involved, visit www.diversityandproductivity.com or [contact Grace](#) for more information.

FURTHER READING

CRF. 2022. **Applying Social Science to Behavioural Change.** Research. <https://www.crforum.co.uk/research-and-resources/research-applying-social-science-to-behavioural-change>

The Oxford Group. 2022. **Unlock Innovation with Psychological Safety - Why It's Time to Face Up to the Challenges of a Polarised World.** <https://www.oxford-group.com/insights/unlock-innovation-psychological-safety-why-its-time-face-challenges-polarised-world>

crf SAVE THE DATE



The next session of the Diversity, Inclusivity and Wellbeing Community:

Tuesday 24th January 2023

Register your attendance [here](#). Also please get in [touch](#) with any topics that you would like to discuss and feature at the next session.