



Inclusive Leadership: Leveraging Diversity in the Professional Practice Environment

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Important Definitions

Diversity includes all the ways in which people differ and encompasses all the different characteristics that make one individual or group different from another; not only includes race, ethnicity, and gender but also age, national origin, religion, disability, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, education, marital status, language, and physical appearance. It also involves how individuals express different ideas, perspectives, and values.

Equity is the fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement for all people, while simultaneously striving to identify and eliminate barriers preventing the full participation of some groups. Tackling equity issues requires an understanding of the root causes of outcome disparities within our society.

Inclusion is the act of creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued to fully participate. An inclusive and welcoming climate embraces differences and offers respect in words and actions for all people. *It's important to note that while an inclusive group may be by definition diverse, a diverse group isn't always inclusive.*

Important Definitions

The **professional practice environment** is defined as “the organizational characteristics of a work setting that facilitate or constrain professional nursing practice”.

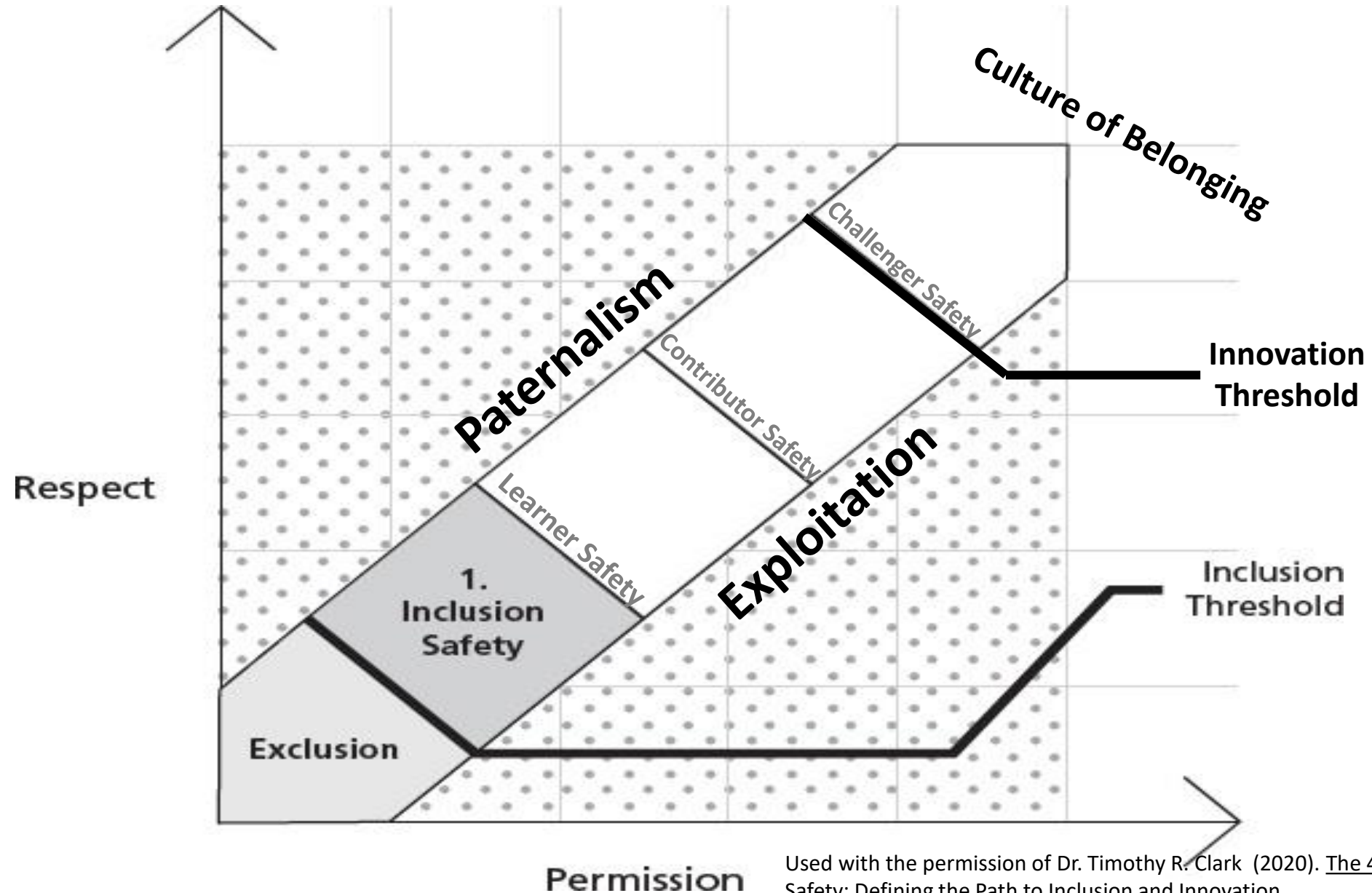
Inclusive leadership reflects a leadership approach that leverages diversity by welcoming unique and authentic individual contributions while simultaneously shaping a shared reality of belonging to ensure full engagement in problem solving, decision making, and commitment to organizational effectiveness.



Psychological Safety

Highly inclusive leaders create a work environment where team members feel (1) included, (2) safe to learn, (3) safe to contribute, and (4) safe to challenge the status quo—all without fear of being embarrassed, marginalized, or punished in some way.

The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety



Used with the permission of Dr. Timothy R. Clark (2020). [The 4 Stages of Psychological Safety: Defining the Path to Inclusion and Innovation.](https://www.leaderfactor.com/psychological-safety)
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- I encourage team members to bring their whole self to work and express aspects of themselves that may be different from their peers.
- I ensure team members can engage in the discovery process of learning, asking questions, experimenting, and even making mistakes—not if but when they will make them.
- I encourage a workplace environment where individuals feel secure and confident enough to engage in constructive risk-taking behaviors without fear of being undermined or shamed.
- I advocate innovative thinking by supporting individuals to step outside of the status quo by sharing their different thoughts or ideas without retribution, reprisal, or viewing them as a troublemaker.
- I facilitate dialogue and productive debate, and work to manage conflicts productively.

Accountability

Highly inclusive leaders demonstrate confidence in direct reports by holding them responsible for performance the direct reports can control. This includes holding team members responsible for their behavior, development, and work processes.

- I guide team members to set clear and measurable goals in alignment with organizational purpose, goals, and values.
- I set clear expectations ensuring team members understand what they need to achieve to be successful.
- I provide access to relevant information, resources, and opportunities to participate in shared decision making.
- I avoid inconsistent treatment by making exception or “idiosyncratic deals” for some team members but not others.
- I provide regular feedback to discuss strengths and opportunities for development including mentoring and coaching.

Curiosity

Highly inclusive leaders have an open mindset, a desire to understand how others view and experience the world, and a tolerance for ambiguity. You proactively seek to understand different points of view by cultivating your perspective-taking skills.

- I actively and intentionally seek the perspectives of diverse others especially when problem-solving and facilitating high stakes decision making.
- When listening to a team member describe an issue or challenge, I do not immediately try to fix it. Instead, I ask meaningful follow-up questions to better understand their viewpoint and perspective.
- I engage in dialogue to understand others' experiences, unearth deep-rooted assumptions, and identify adaptations that need to be made to strengthen the team climate of inclusivity; includes ask what is and is not working.
- I encourage team members and colleagues to communicate their “here and now” experience” including thoughts, feelings and needs and make requests.
- I am vigilant about observing group dynamics especially power dynamics (e.g., microaggressions), evidence of shifting standards, or flawed assumption-driven behavior.

Humility

Highly inclusive leaders learn from criticism and different points of view as well as seeking contributions from others to overcome one's limitation. You take ownership for mistakes and learn from missteps.

- I am aware of how my own social identities and that of others impacts perception of and reactions to workplace experiences.
- I challenge my assumptions by not assuming others share my experience, viewpoints, or approaches.
- I recognize the limitations of my individual perspective and seek different points of view.
- I acknowledge that admitting mistakes or limitations may feel risky for some individuals and I role model how not to cover up mistakes.
- I am receptive to feedback about my unconscious biases, cultural blind spots, and intercultural insensitivities.

Courage

Highly inclusive leaders speak up and challenge the status quo, and they are humble about their strengths and weaknesses. You act in accordance with your principles, even when it involves personal risk-taking or is uncomfortable.

- I stand up for my convictions and principles for the advancement of the greater good, even if it is uncomfortable or risky.
- I identify behaviors that contradict the message of inclusion and intervene to stop those behaviors.
- I challenge entrenched organizational attitudes and practices that promote homogeneity.
- I track and discuss unintended consequences, missteps, and progress in creating an inclusive culture.
- I take responsibility for setting the tone of my team culture by role modeling my values e.g., if I say, “*I value honesty,*” I proceed to speak my truth.

Allyship

Highly inclusive leaders recognize that biases contribute to institutionalized norms and behaviors that may contribute to inequities and to individuals being excluded. You actively support people from underrepresented or marginalized groups.

Tips for Listening with a Third Ear

- 1. Spare the advice:** Make space for people to speak and let silence do its part instead of rushing to fill the air with your words.
- 2. Beware of assumptions:** Train yourself to listen attentively, and don't rush to fill in the gaps with your own interpretation.
- 3. Practice intellectual humility:** Acknowledge to yourself and others that you don't have all the answers.
- 4. Use the power of open-ended questions:** Recognize that inquiry provides an opportunity for folks to exercise their voice.
- 5. Know your weaknesses:** When it comes to listening to others, where do you fall short?
- 6. Put Listening on Your Learning Agenda:** If you're not naturally predisposed to being a good listener, make it a point to include this in your self-development as a leader.

- I identify processes that create subtle advantages for some and subtle disadvantages for others which perpetuate inequity and undermine inclusion.
- I amplify the voices of underrepresented or marginalized individuals and support them in learning how to use their voice.
- I engage in dialogue with employees about the realities of biases, discrimination, and barriers, and co-create strategies to address.
- I interrupt biased behaviors—and encourage others to do the same including following processes to ensure personal biases do not influence decisions overly-advantaging or disadvantaging others.
- I reflect on who is considered an ally or not and disrupt the idea that allyship is reserved for people who are white, able, heterosexual, and/or male.

“Poke Your Brain” Resources

- Diversity and Inclusiveness in Health Care Leadership: Three Key Steps <https://catalyst.nejm.org/doi/full/10.1056/CAT.21.0166>
- The Key to Inclusive Leadership <https://hbr.org/2020/03/the-key-to-inclusive-leadership>
- Leveraging Diversity Through Psychological Safety https://scholar.harvard.edu/files/afriberg/files/leveraging_diversity_through_psychological_safety_hbs_article.pdf
- Creating a Culture of Accountability in Healthcare <https://www.powerdms.com/policy-learning-center/creating-a-culture-of-accountability-in-healthcare>
- 5 Common Mistakes Made by Well-Meaning Allies <https://www.throughthewoodstherapy.com/5-common-mistakes-made-by-well-meaning-allies/>
- Tackling the Allyship Gap at Work <https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/tackling-the-allyship-gap-at-work/>
- “I Don’t Even See Color” <https://www.throughthewoodstherapy.com/dont-even-see-color-owning-privilege-contextualize-pain-oppression/>
- We Can’t Talk About That at Work: How to talk about race, religion, politics, and other polarizing topics https://www.wintersgroup.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/We-Cant-Talk-About-That-At-Work_Excerpt-9781523094271_WEB.pdf
- The Six Signature Traits of Inclusive Leadership <https://www2.deloitte.com/au/en/pages/human-capital/articles/six-signature-traits-inclusive-leadership.html> (download the report)
- Inclusive Leadership: Steps Your Organization Should Take to Get it Right <https://www.ccl.org/articles/leading-effectively-articles/when-inclusive-leadership-goes-wrong-and-how-to-get-it-right/>