

WHITE PAPER



# The Role of Power in Creating Inclusive Workplace Cultures



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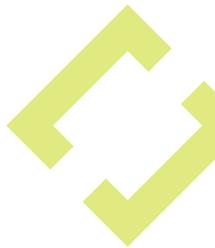
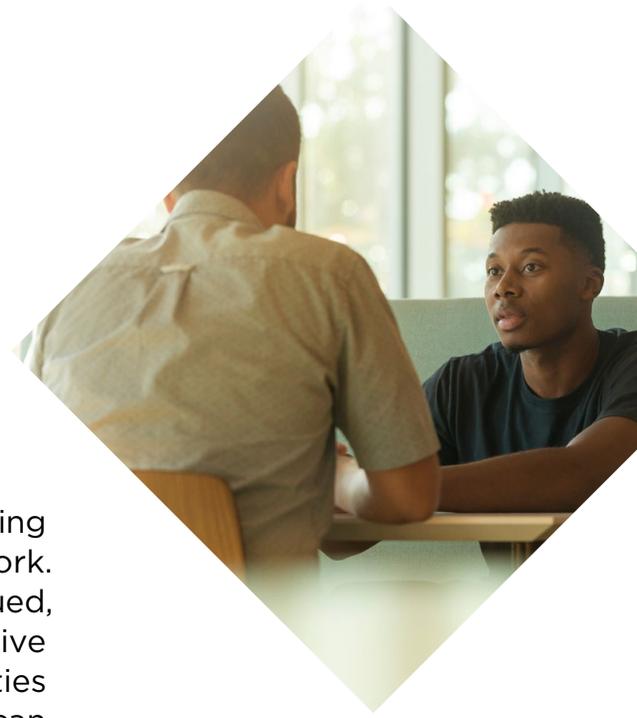
# Power & Inclusion

An inclusive workplace culture is one where people can bring their best selves—and their unique perspectives—to work. They feel respected for their ideas and appreciated as valued, contributing members of the organization. In an inclusive workplace, everyone has the same access to opportunities and resources, and all employees, no matter their rank, can contribute freely and fully to the success of the organization.

While diversity can be readily measured, inclusion is much less tangible and more difficult to evaluate. Organizations can put policies and procedures in place, but it's the daily behavior of employees that determine whether or not a workplace is truly inclusive.

***In an inclusive culture,  
actions speak louder  
than words.***

Inclusion is more than just an aspirational goal. It is inseparable from how a business is run, day to day, minute by minute, and interaction by interaction. Inclusion is felt in the way people talk and how they engage with others. It is felt in meetings, on phone calls, and through the emails we send. It's conveyed in the very first interview, in the onboarding process, and in the choice of where and how offsite meetings are held. It's evident in whether or not employees have access to the information and resources they need to be successful, in what language we choose and in the subtleties of our daily interactions. The nuance of inclusion, or the lack thereof, may often go unnoticed by many except for those on the receiving end.



# Culture, Power, and Inclusion

## *How do we achieve an inclusive workplace?*



Inclusion is an outcome of equity, the condition of equal access to resources and opportunities regardless of a person's identity or circumstance. When people have fewer advantages and opportunities than others, due to their social identity, they are less able to impact and influence others. In short, they have less power relative to others.

Power, however, is complex. Someone with a lot of power in the organization, say a Vice President, can feel a lack of inclusion, and likewise, someone in a lower ranking position can enjoy feelings of inclusion. The reason for this, is that there are many kinds of power, and thus there are many ways to have—and to lack—power.

How these many different kinds of power are used throughout the organization, between coworkers, and across ranks, plays a key role in workplace inclusion. Many organizational issues, such as low engagement, high turnover, absenteeism, discrimination, and harassment and bullying are directly related to the use and misuse of power.

Power is being used when we share or withhold information, welcome or shun newcomers, allow for or discourage different points of view, make sure everyone has a voice or make sure our voice prevails. These daily instances of power use in our professional interactions creates the experience and feeling of inclusion, or exclusion, in the workplace

Moving the needle on inclusion can only happen when we consider power as a set of actions related to how people treat each other.

# Types of Power

“But I don’t have any power!” is a common phrase, regardless of someone’s position in the hierarchy. As long as we conceptualize power as a hierarchy we will always be more in tune with our lack of power than the advantage of our position. Like the well-known ladder analogy, in a hierarchy there is always someone above us. And this focuses our attention on the power we lack, not the power we have.

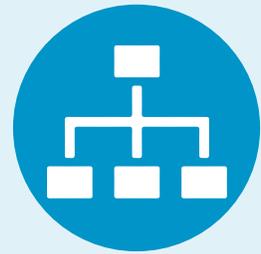
What’s more, by thinking in terms of ladders and hierarchies, we focus exclusively on position power. In other words, we think of power as something singular, when in reality there are many different kinds of **powers**.

- **Knowledge:** power based on skill, expertise, depth of information, experience, and understanding
- **Authority:** legal power of a role or position
- **Status:** power based on social identity, societal position, and access to resources
- **Personal Power:** power based on personality characteristics, skills, and abilities, what we use to persuade, influence, make an impact, and get along in the world
- **Informal Power:** power based on the ability to leverage norms and values of a given context, for instance popularity, seniority, and degree of belonging

## The Many Kinds of Power



Knowledge



Authority



Status



Personal



Informal





Each kind of power has both an opportunity and a threat, a promise and a peril—it can be used well, but it can also be misused through either over- or underuse. Power as we are using it here, can be broadly defined as your ability to impact others and the environment with the resources you have at your disposal.

For instance, consider one of the most common issues related to inclusion and exclusion: bias or preferentialism. Someone who has higher informal power by virtue of seniority, popularity, social identity, or social skills can enjoy the advantage of being an “insider,” a member of the “old boy’s club.”

They have the privilege of feeling comfortable in meetings, and of being well-liked and well-regarded. They are included in key conversations that grant them access to special knowledge and information, or they are invited to exclusive social occasions (that benefit their careers), or are asked more frequently than others to participate in high-priority projects or teams.

Chances are, because this isn’t a formal kind of power, this person doesn’t recognize the power they have, or the opportunities that derive from it as privileges. She or he might not notice how easy it is for them to speak up in meetings, to offer their opinions, or to volunteer for projects. They take their social aptitude for granted, and may see it as their skill, or innate ability.

And without the awareness of this as a form of power, they could be quick to wrongly label newcomers or those who are not as apt to speak up as introverts or outsiders who are simply lazy or have nothing of value to contribute.

Because this informal power comes naturally to them, they don’t see the costs and dangers that a newcomer or someone with a marginalized identity faces in speaking up, or the extra emotional toil that someone who is not an insider has to go through to have their voice heard.

This dynamic is not an exception, but a rule of social life. And it’s vital for people to understand the powers they do have, so they do not take unfair advantage of them at the cost of others and can instead use them to create a more inclusive culture for all.

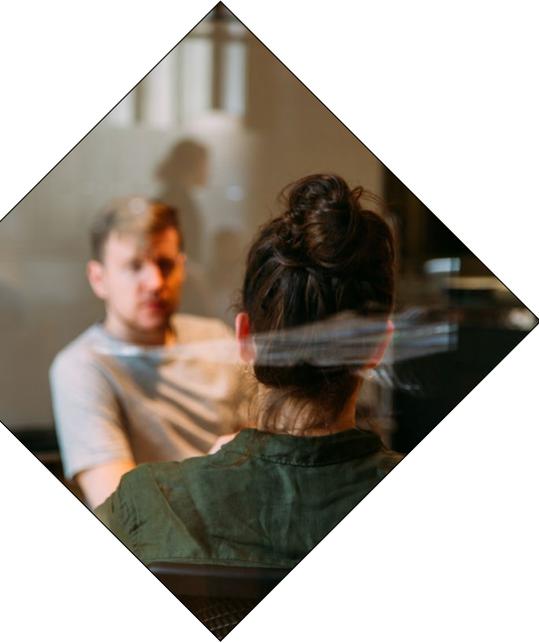


## How do the different types of power contribute to the experience of inclusion and exclusion?

Type of Power	Description	Positive use ( inclusion)	Misuse (exclusion)
<b>Authority</b>	Formal position or role we occupy in an organization.	Placing the good of the organization ahead of your self-interest. Being transparent and accountable. Allocating resources fairly. Coaching, mentoring and giving constructive feedback. Communicating openly and clearly. Setting clear goals for yourself and others. Clarifying roles, responsibilities and expectations. Holding others accountable.	Using your role to further your own self-interest. Making exceptions to rules to benefit you or your friends. Using personal preferences and bias to direct your decision-making. Refusing blame or blaming others. Failing to regulate your emotional responses.
<b>Knowledge</b>	Expertise, information, skills, and experience that is valuable to others.	Sharing information. Teaching and mentoring others. Collaborating and contributing your expertise in teams. Using institutional knowledge and seniority to onboard, include, and support others.	Hoarding knowledge for your own gain. Having to be right, or having to have the answer. Applying your expertise outside of your role or domain. Being unable to ask questions, ask for help, or learn from others. Ignoring others' expertise when making a decision.
<b>Status</b>	Rights, advantages, access, and resources granted or denied because of social identity — race, gender, class, religion, nationality, ethnicity, education, physical and mental ability, and sexual orientation.	Being aware of the limiting beliefs, biases, and generalizations you hold about others who are different from you. Having empathy and understanding about the challenges those with less social status face. Using your ease of access or advantages to benefit others.	Acting with entitlement. Denying or being blind to difference. Displaying intolerance and lack of empathy for others. Believing that your advantages are earned on the sole basis of merit. Being unaware of your biases and impulses underlying your decisions.
<b>Informal</b>	Rank within a group based on degree of belonging, for instance popularity, seniority, and alliances. Our ability to align with the norms and values of the group.	Opening doors for others. Inviting people into your circle. Using your network and connections to help others advance. Reaching out to newcomers, outsiders, and those with marginalized status to make them feel welcomed and to make it easier for them to participate.	Creating ingroups, outgroups, and cliques, and using gossip to further your own status. Leaving newcomers to flounder. Using your network to create alliances against those you dislike or are threatened by. Allowing friendships and personal preference direct your decision making.
<b>Personal</b>	Innate and developed traits, skills, and abilities that help us succeed, such as the ability to make and keep friends, negotiate conflict, influence others, cope with and learn from difficulties, and find purpose and meaning in challenge.	Collaborating with others. Having emotional self-regulation. Managing stress well. Being able to influence others without authority. Negotiating conflicts for yourself and others. Being able to cope with change and uncertainty. Being open to feedback and engaging with others across differences.	Using emotions to manipulate, deceive, or dominate others. Monopolizing meetings and discussions. Being overbearing, argumentative, righteous, bullying, or controlling.

# The Many Faces of Inclusion

It is important to take this broad approach to power, because people are keenly attuned to experiences of injustice and will notice—and react to—another’s power regardless of its source. If we define inclusion simply as an issue of social identity, and don’t include the more subtle dimensions of power, we create the potential for backlash, hampering efforts to create an inclusive, diverse, and equitable workplace.



## For example:

- In startup culture, the degree of influence and power you have—and thus access to the leadership group—often depends on whether you are part of the early founders’ group, regardless of your skill-set, experience, or positional title.
- In a geographically distributed organization, employees at global offices often feel excluded, regardless of their social identity, experience, or skill. Headquarters is considered the most prestigious location because this is where the major decisions are made, often without input from those in remote locations. Employees phone into meetings at odd hours of the day and night to accommodate time zone differences and are left out of the small-talk and non-verbal communication which add an important layer of understanding to the conversation and decision making process for those who are physically present.
- When corporate support functions such as finance, HR, legal, and IT are considered cost centers, employees who work in those functions can feel marginalized, not seen by others as adding value. Those who work in the corporate profit centers such as sales, product development, and engineering enjoy more cache, often have a greater voice, and are more frequently acknowledged for their contributions.

# Power Is Behavior

*Bias is in your brain.  
Whether or not you're behaving  
inclusively is in theirs.*

— Khalil Smith

The most popular approaches to diversity and inclusion training currently focus on cultivating self-awareness of biases, beliefs, and attitudes that we hold about people with marginalized identities.

Becoming aware of these biases, while raising awareness of ourselves and others, does not automatically translate into tangible change. There is little evidence that awareness is linked to actual behavior change or to a more inclusive workplace culture.

In order for workplaces to become more inclusive, **behavior** has to be the focus of change. Changing behaviors which are sometimes deeply ingrained requires not only knowing which behaviors to stop and which to start, but also sustained practice, feedback, and coaching. By focusing on behavior we can more readily achieve outcomes because:

- **Behavior** can be broken down into small, actionable steps that can be tracked
- **Behavior** improves through practice
- **Behavior** change requires feedback from others.



# Seven Behaviors of an Inclusive Culture

Based on two decades of research into power and leadership, Diamond Leadership has developed seven core competencies for using power in the service of one's role to create healthy, inclusive, and productive workplace cultures.

**Empowerment:** allowing others to contribute meaningfully by creating conditions for them to succeed. Includes mentoring, coaching, providing resources and information, clarifying tasks, roles, and deliverables, and taking an active interest in the development of others.

**Conflict Competence:** being able to engage productively despite differences, conflicts, and disagreements. Includes the ability to raise controversial topics, have difficult conversations, hold people accountable, deliver straightforward feedback, and intervene appropriately when interpersonal difficulties and conflicts arise.

**Respect:** being considerate of others, behaving on a principle of mutual respect without discrimination, hostility, or rudeness. Requires awareness of your communication style and how you come across to others—not only in your spoken words, but also in your nonverbal signals, tone of voice, and in both digital and face-to-face communication.

**Fairness:** treating others equitably regardless of your personal preferences, biases, or beliefs. Includes making sure that opportunities for development and advancement are distributed evenly, and being aware of how your biases intersect with the choices and decisions you make.

**Approachability:** inviting participation, making it safe to speak up and contribute, and being available and supportive. Approachability means being able to receive feedback, inviting others to speak up, easing pain points, modeling vulnerability, and creating an atmosphere that encourages creativity, risk-taking, and collaboration.

**Discretion:** keeping information confidential and refraining from gossip. Discretion means being professional in how, what, and with whom you share information. It includes keeping confidential information private, not venting, criticizing, airing grievances publicly, or discussing work matters, people, and the organization in an inappropriate context.

**Judiciousness:** placing the needs of the organization, the team, or the project ahead of your own self-interest. Being accountable to the role and using it to advance the needs of the greater good rather than your own agenda or personal needs.

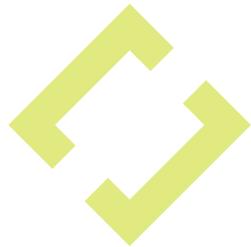
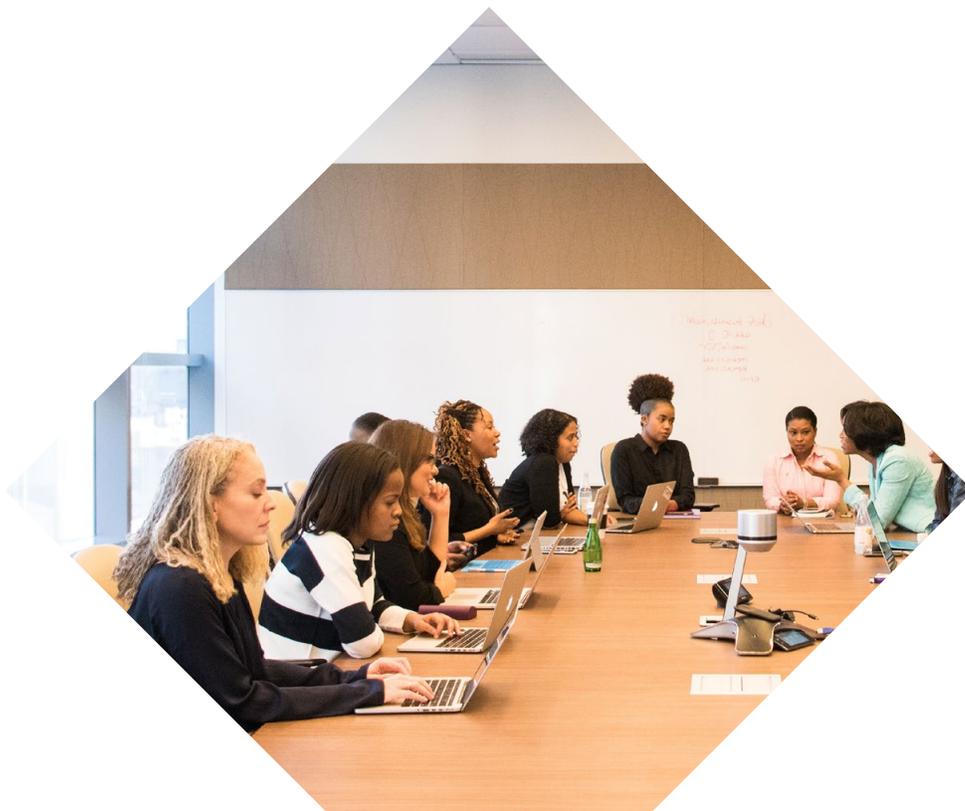
These evidenced-based behaviors, when assessed through employee feedback, and supported through practice and coaching, enhance employee experience and create a climate of inclusion.



# What Are the Next Steps?

Inclusion is the missing piece in the diversity puzzle for many organizations. Yet inclusion shouldn't be seen only as way to attract and retain a diverse workforce. Inclusion should be a fundamental feature of every workplace, so all employees can enjoy greater wellbeing and engagement.

What is the road to a more inclusive workplace? For organizations, the first step is to see inclusion not only as an aspirational goal, but as a dynamic set of learnable, day-to-day behaviors exhibited in every interaction. Second, it is important to take a data-driven approach and assess whether and to what degree these behaviors are present in the workplace. Promoting, teaching, and practicing these behaviors is the next step in improving employee experience. Achieving a truly diverse workplace, one that attracts and retains top talent, requires managers and leaders who model these behaviors in every interaction. Leaders who are aligned with diversity and inclusion and who congruently model inclusive behavior send the message that this organization is one in which people from all walks of life can flourish.





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