Exploring Inclusion and Its Paradoxes: Toward Truly Engaging Diversity as a Valued Resource in Consulting and Coaching

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Questions for today:

What makes diversity and inclusion—seemingly so simple—also so complicated and difficult to achieve?

What are some of the key challenges and tensions that often arise as we strive to create inclusive organizations and groups?

Goal for today (why did you join the webinar)?

(type in chat box &/or “raise hand”)

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POLL:

1. With regard to **diversity**, I consider myself to be:
   - a novice
   - capable (advanced beginner)
   - competent
   - proficient
   - Expert

2. With regard to **inclusion**, I consider myself to be:
   - a novice
   - capable (advanced beginner)
   - competent
   - proficient
   - expert
POLL: Who is here?

What are your current professional roles?
• External consultant
• Internal consultant
• Executive or leadership coach
• Diversity & inclusion specialist
• OD specialist
• Researcher/scholar
• Faculty member
• Graduate student
• SCP Member, Fellow, or Affiliate

A word or very short phrase:

When you think about *inclusion*, what comes to mind?
To get the most of our time together:

**Be fully present**

**Speak for yourself**
- in your own voice
- try to focus on what’s key and what really matters

**Model respect & inclusion**
- listen to understand
- accept others’ reality as true for them
- remember that impact matters – not just intent

Anything else?

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Diversity & Inclusion: How and why do they matter?

**It’s right**

**It’s required**

**It connects us to our communities**

**It makes us better & more successful*:**
- Attract, recruit, & retain key talent
- Reduce costs/increase returns
- Generate more resources & ideas
- Catalyze innovation & creativity
- Improve results

* But only under the right conditions!
“Our lives begin to end the day we become silent about things that matter.”

Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

About Me

**academic, teacher**
Distinguished Professor, CSPP, Alliant International Univ.

**scholar, writer, researcher**

**consultant, speaker, facilitator, coach**
Ferdman Consulting

Focus:
- Diversity & inclusion (strategy, education, assessment, org. change)
- Multicultural & inclusive leadership
- Identity (especially Latinos/Latinas)
- Intergroup and intercultural relations

My passion: helping to create an inclusive world where more of us can be fully ourselves
### What Do We Mean By Diversity?

**It’s More than Numbers!**

“The varied perspectives and approaches to work that members of different identity groups bring.”

D. Thomas & R. Ely, 1996

“Any collective mixture characterized by differences, similarities, and related tensions and complexities”

Roosevelt Thomas, Jr.

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**Frameworks**
- Ferdman; Hayles

**Individual & Interpersonal Perspectives & Practices**
- Ferdman & Roberts; Wasserman; Bennett; Gallegos

**Organizational & Societal Perspectives & Practices**
- Winters; Offermann & Basford; Church, Rotolo, Shull, & Tuller; BooySEN; Nishii & Rich; Jonsen & Özbilgin; Mor Barak & Daya

**Key Application Issues & Domains**
- O’Mara; Henderson; Shorter-GoOden; Lukenskmeyer, Yao, & Brown; Richter; Härtel, Appo, & Hart

**Moving Forward**
- Wheeler; DeNisi; Nkomo; Ferdman & Deane

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More information: [http://practiceofinclusion.com](http://practiceofinclusion.com)
Diversity & Inclusion

Inclusion is **how we are** with each other. It’s **what we do** with our diversity.

Inclusion is about people’s experience and behavior.

Inclusion allows us to reap the benefits of diversity.

“Inclusion involves both being fully ourselves and allowing others to be fully themselves in the context of engaging in common pursuits. It means collaborating in a way in which all parties can be fully engaged and subsumed, and yet, paradoxically, at the same time believe that they have not compromised, hidden, or given up any part of themselves.”

Ferdman, 2010
When we feel included...

- We can be fully ourselves and also let others be fully themselves as we engage in common pursuits.
- We can work together, all fully engaged – without compromising, hiding, or giving up valued parts of our selves.
- We can be fully present and more likely to contribute at our best.

Inclusion

Safety Participation
Belonging Comfort

Difference
Uniqueness
Deviance
Discomfort
THE CHALLENGE OF INCLUSION
How much, in what ways, how well do organizations & their people fully CONNECT with, ENGAGE with, UTILIZE, BENEFIT from, and EMPOWER people across all types of differences?

THE EXPERIENCE OF INCLUSION
Am I (are we) safe, trusted, accepted, respected, supported, valued, fulfilled, engaged, and able to be authentic in this group or organization?

Elements of the Experience of Inclusion (Ferdman, 2014)

- Feeling safe (self and group)
- Involvement and engagement in the workgroup
- Feeling respected and valued (self and group)
- Influence on decision making
- Authenticity/bringing one’s whole self to work
- Diversity is recognized, attended to, and honored
Inclusion: A Systemic & Dynamic Process

Inclusive Values, Policies, Practices, Behaviors
(society, organizations, leaders, work groups, individuals)

Experience of Inclusion
(individuals & social identity groups)

Source: Ferdman, 2014

Systems of Inclusion: A Multi-level Framework

Source: Ferdman, 2014
Inclusion: Key Insights

- CYCLICAL & DYNAMIC PROCESS
- ONGOING PRACTICE: IT’S NEVER DONE!
- SYSTEMIC & INTEGRATIVE
- CO-CONSTRUCTED

Inclusive Behavior & Practices: for EVERYONE

- Acknowledge, connect, and engage with others
- Lean into discomfort
- Listen deeply and carefully
- Increase your self-awareness
- Engage a broad range of perspectives
- Be willing to learn and be influenced by others
- Openly share information and seek transparency
- Be respectful and demonstrate fairness
- Be curious
- Foster interdependence & teamwork

Ferdman, Katz, Letchinger, and Thompson, 2009
How does leadership drive inclusion across the system?

Leadership as fulcrum:
Two key roles

Give meaning to/translate organizational-level processes, practices, values into everyday behavior & relationships

Give meaning and visibility to individual behavior/experiences; translate into organizationally significant patterns
To foster inclusion, leaders...

- Talk about inclusion, diversity, and their benefits.
- Are curious about and appreciate difference; encourage its expression.
- Support others in being themselves and not having to hide valued identities (and model this themselves).
- Help create inclusive policies and practices, and apply them fairly and consistently.

WHAT ELSE?

How can coaching support inclusive leadership?

- Self-awareness & authenticity
- Conceptual/operational clarity & vision
- Capacity for complexity & paradoxical thinking/behavior

WHAT ELSE?
How can consulting support inclusive leadership?

- Building and supporting inclusive systems
- Recommending best practices for diversity & inclusion
- Inclusive leadership development

What else might the practice of inclusion mean for coaching & consulting?
Coaching and consulting from the perspective of inclusion

- Modeling, exploring, supporting self-awareness, authenticity
- Co-creating an experience and relationship of inclusion
- Framing and refining goals (in context)
- Providing supportive challenge
- Influencing and working with and through others

Challenges of inclusion (in coaching & consulting)

1. What part of your identity do you rarely talk about at work because you don’t feel it’s included in your work environment?
2. When do you find your views of inclusion challenged?
3. When do you doubt inclusion can work?
4. Around what kinds of differences do you feel discomfort?
5. What are your concerns about connecting and working with people with whom you disagree or who somehow “push your buttons”? What makes that harder or easier?
What diversity or inclusion dilemmas, tensions, or paradoxes have you observed or experienced?

Dilemma: a situation in which a difficult choice has to be made between two or more alternatives, especially equally desirable or undesirable ones.

Paradox: a situation, person, or thing that combines contradictory features or qualities

Paradoxes of Inclusion

1. Self-expression and identity: belonging, absorption vs. distinctiveness, uniqueness
2. Boundaries and norms: stable, well-defined vs. shifting, open
3. Process goals: Comfort, preservation of “my” way vs. discomfort, mutual influence & change
SELF-EXPRESSION AND IDENTITY:
Belonging & Absorption vs. Difference & Uniqueness

How can we foster a sense of belonging and unity to elicit inclusion in a diverse group, AND enable our differences to add value to and inform the whole group?
How can we be BOTH alike AND different?

Paradox of Self-Expression & Identity
Who am I? How much & in what ways can I express that?

Belonging & Absorption
Inclusion means we can all belong and be the same.
Inclusion is possible only when all have full and equal membership, just like everyone else.
Inclusion permits everyone to serve and be seen as an exemplar or representative of the larger collective.
Inclusion encourages people to become more like each other, emphasizing the ways people are similar.

Distinctiveness & Uniqueness
Inclusion means we can all belong and be different.
Inclusion is possible only when all are free to be different from each other.
Inclusion requires allowing and fostering authenticity and even dissent.
Inclusion encourages people to follow their own paths, emphasizing the ways people are different.
Suggestions for Managing the Paradox

Avoid polarizing between the two sides, by understanding that identity with the collective can allow for distinctiveness, and that affirmation of uniqueness can strengthen a sense of authentic belonging.

Recognize that “special” interest and affinity groups, serve the whole by strengthening its parts.

Understand how we are all joined together in our difference and uniqueness.

Construct multi-faceted accounts of collective identity, applicable to all, while recognizing and addressing specific histories, needs, and aspirations.

Find ways to address both collective identity and individual uniqueness.

Accept and embrace intergroup processes and perspectives, even while emphasizing individuality.

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BOUNDARIES AND NORMS
Stable & Well-defined vs. Shifting & Open

How do we clearly and effectively define our collective boundaries and norms (especially around inclusion) without losing the benefits of expansion, challenge, and pressure that can help make our norms more adaptive to and representative of changing membership and changing conditions?

How can we pay attention to and address everyone’s needs and views AND still do work (especially as membership shifts)?
Suggestions for Managing the Paradox

Recognize and own the paradox, in part, by noting our own internal ambivalence about boundaries and norms.

Engage across differences in the spirit of learning and possibility. Expect to engage across different approaches for engaging across differences.

Understand that inclusion implies both loosening boundaries and simultaneously enhancing them; for "new" or "different" people to feel included, the overall category must be clear yet, at the same time, must be redefined.

Understand and communicate that inclusion does not mean the absence of limits, that "anything goes," or that there is an absolute possibility to question everything.

Co-construct norms and processes for inclusion— with clear parameters—and hold each other accountable.

Create and use rules for dissent and rule-breaking.

Create a collective definition of boundary based on shared values while holding spaces for divergent values.

Work with those present, while making space for newcomers and their possible dissent.
**PROCESS GOALS**
Comfort vs. Discomfort

*How do we experience, balance, and manage the inherent tension between the discomfort of differences and creation and maintenance of a “comfortable,” inclusive environment?*

*How can we become comfortable with discomfort?*

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**Paradox of Safety & Comfort**

*How much freedom of action and what range of expression do we each have? What demands can we make of each other and what responsibilities do we have toward each other? How can we be safe as we interact?*

**Comfort & “My Way”**
- Inclusion is about increasing individual and collective comfort.
- Inclusion is possible only when everyone can be more at ease.
- Inclusion requires encouraging everyone to be fully authentic and accepting them as they are, so they can be fully comfortable as themselves.
- To foster inclusion, no one should need to change; everyone should be able just to "be.”

**Discomfort & Openness to Change**
- Inclusion is about leaving individual and collective comfort zones, expanding options and responses.
- Inclusion is possible only when everyone is more attentive, sensitive, and less focused on feeling at ease.
- Inclusion requires everyone to mutually adapt and support each other, learning new patterns better suited for a diverse collective.
- Everyone needs to change to co-construct inclusion.
Suggestions for Managing the Paradox

Understand and accept that comfort always has limits and that self-expression and self-determination must happen in a collective context of mutual understanding and collaboration.

Engage in ongoing dialogue and learning, be willing to learn new ways to do things and to engage with others, and recognize that growth and learning are an essential part of being human.

Remember that becoming more oneself requires growing and learning, especially from those who are very different or whom we do not understand.

Promote and accept dissent, in the context of improving and perfecting the society and system.

Learn to be able to be uncomfortable, and to understand that those whom we do not understand are important.

Remember that:

- Inclusion inherently involves dilemmas & paradoxes
- Inclusion requires attention, intention, and learning
- Inclusion can be challenging and even uncomfortable
- Inclusion is rewarding!
Reflection

What insights emerged for you?
What is one implication for you going forward?

How might noting and managing the dilemmas of inclusion affect how you think about and approach diversity issues in consulting and coaching?

Questions, comments, dialogue?
Thank you!!

References & Resources

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