



Developing an Inclusive Workplace Culture

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Coventry City Council

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A little bit about myself.....

- Born in Oldham, Lancashire to Bangladeshi heritage parents.
- One of 6 children.
- Father a primary school teacher but a manual worker in England.
- Experiences of difference at an early age – primary school, and then throughout secondary. Recognition of what is right and wrong.
- Values – promoting social justice, fairness and equality.
- Ignited my passion which led to me coming into social work.
- Qualified social worker for over 34 years.

Why leadership is critical to inclusion



Leaders shape culture through what they notice, challenge, and prioritise – authenticity, visibility and language



Leadership behaviour directly affects trust, engagement, and retention



Inclusive cultures require psychological safety to enable challenge and learning – how do you create this, what is privileged and what isn't?

Psychological Safety

'psychological safety is a shared belief that a team or environment is safe for interpersonal risk taking - meaning people can speak up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes without fear of punishment, humiliation or negative career consequences.....'

What do we mean by an inclusive workforce culture?



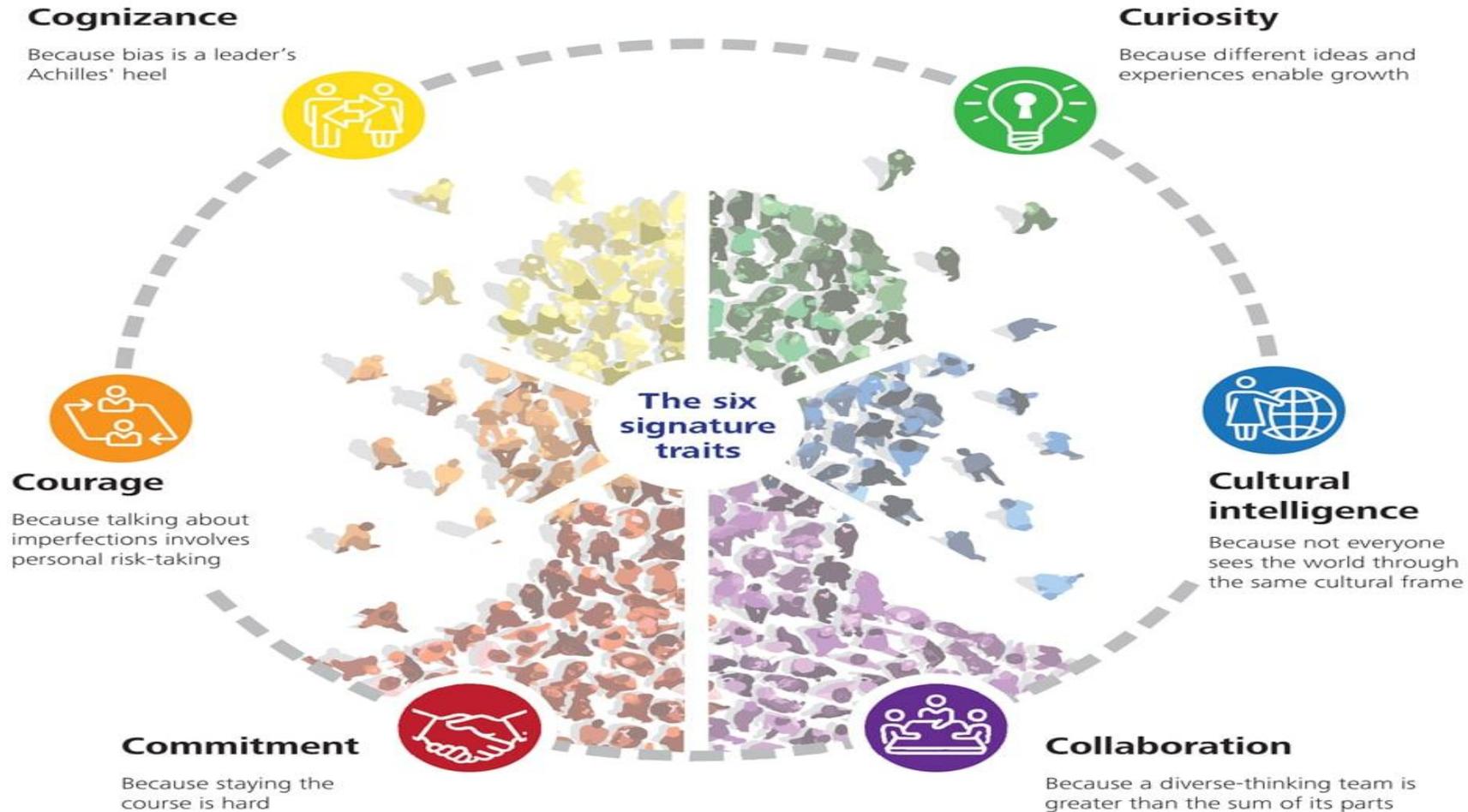
A workplace where people experience fairness, respect, voice, and belonging

Differences are valued, not merely tolerated

Systems, decisions, and behaviours actively reduce inequality

Inclusion is reflected in everyday experiences, not just policies

The six signature traits of an inclusive leader



Day-to-day inclusive leadership behaviours



Set clear expectations about respectful conduct – what is and isn't acceptable including microaggressions



Respond well when concerns are raised – listen, protect, act, feedback loop



Use data to identify patterns and disparities – what does recruitment, progression, staff surveys, grievance and disciplinary themes and leavers insight tell you



Advocate for under-represented groups – opportunities to unlock talent through coaching, mentoring, shadowing etc....



Model learning, reflection, and humility – acknowledge that mistakes will be made as we grow together, will not have all the answers and keep the conversation going no matter how hard and challenging

Examples of Inclusive Leadership in Coventry

Corporately – Employee Networks, DEI Strategy, Race Equality Statement, Leadership Board, Diversity Leads, Senior Leadership Network, DEI Board chaired by Deputy Leader, EmbRACE sponsor

Children's and Education Services
– Black History Month 2024-
beginning and continuing the
narrative, Children's and
Education Conference,
Neurodiversity Pledge, DEI action
plan with KPI's, Social Matters Anti
Racism Training

What inclusive leadership looks like in practice



Creating the culture of doing the right thing, emotional intelligence, ie reading the mood and understanding what is needed, taking risks, recognising that small actions over time lead to bigger impact. Be persistent and consistent, stay with the discomfort and the dialogue. It's not a sprint but a marathon and remember you are not alone.....



What actions have I taken as a Leader?

Black History Month 2024 – launch of BHM celebrations and the start of 'continuing the narrative'.

Fortnightly Director bulletins intentional in celebrating diversity .

Children's and Education Conference 2025 – Social Matters theme of anti-racism.

Storytelling – sharing leadership journey corporately and across the networks.

What inclusive leadership looks like in practice



Inclusive recruitment panels – transparency including in secondment, act up and temporary positions



Coaching and mentoring as well as shadowing – enabling fair access to progression and development opportunities



Incorporated DEI objectives in individual appraisals



Talk about race, disproportionality and anti-racist practice in multiple partnership forums



Reward and recognition – weekly Friday Stories



Social Matters – delivery of anti racist practice sessions and action learning sets

Silence is not a neutral act

“The culture we have is the culture we tolerate”

David Marquet 'Leadership is Language' 2020



Final Reflections

“If you want your team to stand up for inclusion, you need to stand up....”

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“Build power, not by putting others down but by lifting them up”

“Truly inclusive leadership is never going to be easy, comfortable or simple...”

'It's in your hands to make a better world for all who live in it.'

Aligns with own values of social justice, fairness and equity

'Do what you can, with what you have, where you are.'