

Inclusive leadership in the moments that matter

A practical field guide for stronger teams, safer conversations and better decisions.

Diversity
Australia & New Zealand

AusIMM

Post-session resource

Culture is what people learn they need to do to belong

People read the everyday signals around them—not only the values on the wall.

What leaders say

Values, policies and stated purpose tell people what the organisation intends.

What leaders do

Who gets heard, how work is shared, and what happens when someone raises a concern.

What leaders tolerate

What is ignored, excused or allowed to keep happening becomes a powerful signal.

The culture people experience is often revealed in the gap between the three.

How a leadership signal travels

1. **Behaviour** — what you do
2. **Signal** — what people read
3. **Culture** — what feels normal
4. **Brain state** — threat or safe enough
5. **Team action** — speak, share, try
6. **Outcome** — performance & safety

Use the gap as a diagnostic

If the message is “raise concerns early” but the response is impatience, blame or silence, the lived lesson may be “keep it to yourself”. Check one repeated response and make the next step consistent with the value you want people to trust.

Psychological safety is safe enough to think, speak and contribute

It is not the promise of comfort or the absence of challenge. It is a working climate where people can raise concerns, ask, disagree and learn without being diminished.

Is it safe to speak?

Thank the person for raising it; make the next step clear.

Is it safe to challenge?

Ask for the reasoning before the room settles on an answer.

Is it safe to be different?

Adapt how you communicate; keep expectations clear.

Does my contribution matter?

Recognise the input and close the loop on what changed.

Clear standards

Name the task, risks and what good looks like.

Respectful support

Make questions, challenge and correction possible.

In a real task

Set the standard plainly. Invite the question that could change the plan. Respond to the person with respect, then verify the work using the agreed process.

When uncertainty feels risky

People may become more cautious about asking, sharing information or challenging a decision when the response feels unpredictable. Reduce unnecessary uncertainty: explain the task, make the route for questions clear, and respond without humiliation. Silence is not evidence that everyone understands.

Support and challenge belong together

The webinar's matrix helps a team discuss its working climate. The goal is support and psychological safety alongside meaningful challenge and clear expectations.

Comfortable but stuck

People feel supported, but difficult feedback or meaningful challenge is avoided. Ask: what are we not addressing?

Learning and growing

People feel supported and are challenged to do their best. Questions, experiments and honest feedback are part of the work.

Switched off

Low support and low challenge can leave people going through the motions. Reconnect the task to purpose, clarity and contribution.

Stressed and unsafe

High pressure without enough support can make people reluctant to raise problems. Clarify the risk, make help accessible and respond respectfully.

Support and psychological safety increase from the bottom row to the top; challenge and expectations increase from left to right.

Use it as a conversation—not a label

Ask the team which description best matches one real task or routine. Request an example, then choose one action: add clarity, invite challenge, make support easier to access, or respond differently to a concern. Do not diagnose a person from a quadrant.

Some conflict is healthy

Tuckman's model is a useful lens for team development. Differences can be part of learning to work together; disrespect is not.

1. Forming

People are learning their place and may be cautious or polite.

Leader move: Clarify the purpose, roles and routines. Make it easy to ask the basic question.

2. Storming

Different views and ways of working become visible.

Leader move: Keep disagreement focused on the work. Invite concerns and set a clear boundary against disrespect.

3. Norming

The team establishes agreements and repeatable patterns.

Leader move: Check whose preferences became the default. Make shared expectations explicit.

4. Performing

Trust and constructive challenge help the team deliver.

Leader move: Keep feedback flowing, share influence, and continue noticing whose voice is missing.

Challenge the idea, not the person

A constructive disagreement is specific, task-focused and open to evidence. Personal attacks, ridicule and repeated exclusion are not a necessary stage of team growth. Set the boundary and use the appropriate conduct process if it is crossed.

Teams do not always move through stages once or in a fixed order. Changes in membership, tasks or leadership can send a team back to earlier questions.

The 6Cs of inclusive leadership

Six everyday behaviours that help build psychological safety. They are connected: one leadership moment may call for more than one C.

Commitment

Make inclusion visible in repeated decisions.

Courage

Act when silence would be easier.

Cognisance

Notice bias before it makes the decision.

Curiosity

Ask before you assume.

Cultural intelligence

Adapt your approach across difference.

Collaboration

Share voice, influence and credit.

A quick leadership check

Before the next meeting, pre-start or decision, choose one C and ask: “What is one behaviour I can use here?”

Commitment

Inclusion is proven in what you do every day, not in what you say once.

Commitment turns a stated value into a reliable pattern. People notice whether the same principles guide the routine choices: who gets the stretch task, who receives useful feedback, and whose concern gets followed up.

What it looks like

- Make the expectation observable: say what inclusion looks like in this task, not just that it matters.
- Build it into routines—pre-starts, handovers, one-to-ones and decision reviews.
- Notice who gets access to information, development, recognition and influence.
- Follow through. A promise that disappears without explanation teaches its own lesson.

A useful phrase

"We said everyone should be able to contribute. Let's make space for the people we haven't heard from yet."

Keep in view

A one-off statement cannot compensate for repeated decisions that contradict it. Consistency is what makes the signal credible.

Try it in your next workday

Choose one recurring routine. Add one visible inclusive behaviour to it, repeat it this week, and tell the team what you will do next.

Courage

Speak up, step in and own mistakes—especially when staying quiet would be easier.

Courage is a behaviour, not a personality type. It can be a calm pause, a direct question, a respectful interruption or an admission that your call was wrong. The aim is to protect the work and the people doing it.

What it looks like

- Interrupt a moment that could exclude, stereotype or silence someone.
- Ask for the concern behind a quick agreement or a room that has gone quiet.
- Own your part without shifting the burden onto the person affected.
- Thank the first person who raises uncertainty, then act on what they said.

A useful phrase

"Can we pause for a moment? I want to check that we have heard the concern before we move on."

Keep in view

Courage does not require a dramatic confrontation. Be specific, respectful and proportionate; follow the relevant safety or conduct process when needed.

Try it in your next workday

Pick one cue where you tend to stay quiet—time pressure, a senior voice or a risky shortcut. Rehearse one opening sentence before it happens.

Cognisance of bias

Everyone has bias. Inclusive leaders slow down and check it before it makes the decision for them.

Bias often enters as an untested shortcut: familiarity feels like capability; one communication style feels more credible; or a first impression gets treated as the whole story. The practical response is not self-blame—it is a better decision process.

What it looks like

- Pause when you hear yourself use a broad label such as “not ready”, “not a fit” or “not committed”.
- Separate what you observed from what you inferred. Look for evidence tied to the task.
- Use the same relevant criteria for everyone; write down the evidence before comparing.
- Check who you go to first, who gets opportunities, and whose availability you assume.

A useful phrase

“What specific evidence leads us to that conclusion—and are we applying the same standard to everyone?”

Keep in view

A gut feeling can be a prompt to investigate; it is not evidence by itself. “Cultural fit” should not replace job-relevant criteria.

Try it in your next workday

Take five: Who do I go to for high-stakes work? What am I assuming about roster, background or availability? Have I checked directly with the person?

Curiosity

Swap the label for a question. Ask what you are missing before you decide what is true.

Curiosity makes room for information that a quick judgement would miss. It is active listening: ask a clear question, give the person time, reflect what you heard and check the next step. In urgent work, pair curiosity with the required safety controls.

What it looks like

- Ask about the work itself: “Talk me through how you will do this.”
- Use open questions that cannot be answered with a reflexive “all good”.
- Wait after asking. Silence can be thinking time, not proof of agreement.
- Check understanding by summarising what you heard and inviting a correction.

A useful phrase

“I noticed we have not heard your view yet. What do you think we should consider?”

Keep in view

Curiosity is not cross-examination. Explain why you are asking, stay genuinely open to the answer, and avoid asking someone to speak for a whole group.

Try it in your next workday

In your next conversation, replace one assumption with a neutral question. Pause long enough for a real answer, then reflect it back.

Cultural intelligence

Same standard, different pathway. Adapt how you lead without lowering the bar.

Cultural intelligence means noticing the assumptions built into your usual way of working, then adapting how you connect across difference. Difference can be national or ethnic, generational, professional, trade-based, organisational or about communication style.

What it looks like

- Make instructions plain; explain local shorthand and unspoken routines.
- Ask how the person prefers to receive updates, ask questions and give feedback.
- Check whether the briefing assumes shared history, confidence or familiarity.
- Offer practical supports—such as a named contact, written follow-up or a walk-through—while keeping the expected outcome clear.

A useful phrase

"What would help you understand the task and raise a concern early? The standard stays the same; I can adjust how we get there."

Keep in view

Do not guess someone's preferences from their identity. Ask, listen and agree a workable approach together.

Try it in your next workday

Ask one colleague: "What is one thing about how you work best that we do not know?" Use the answer to adjust one interaction.

Collaboration

Diversity in the room is not diversity in the decision.

Diversity describes who is in the room. Inclusion is what happens once they are there, with respect as the foundation. Collaboration gives people a real chance to shape the work: who was consulted, who decided, what changed and how credit is shared.

What it looks like

- Invite input before a senior person anchors the room with a preferred answer.
- Make more than one route to contribute: spoken, written, in advance or in a small group.
- Name whose perspective is missing and whether they need time or context to join.
- Close the loop: explain what you heard, what informed the decision and what happens next.

A useful phrase

"Before we decide, whose perspective have we not heard—and what would help us include it?"

Keep in view

Inviting input is not the same as giving everyone a veto. Be clear whether the group is contributing, recommending or deciding.

Try it in your next workday

For your next meeting, send the question in advance, invite one round of input before discussion, and summarise how it affected the decision.

The new contractors who did not ask

A shutdown crew's fast, shorthand-heavy pre-start left new specialists nodding without understanding. On day three, one isolated the wrong point. No one was hurt—this time.



The leadership lesson

A nod is not a check of understanding. When the routine depends on insider shorthand, newcomers may decide that asking is the risky option.

Three Cs change the moment

Courage	Go first: "I want to check one part of this before we start."
Curiosity	Replace "All good?" with "Talk me through the isolation and what you will verify."
Cultural intelligence	Drop unexplained shorthand; pair each newcomer with a named crew contact.

A practical pre-start sequence

- Explain the task and any local terms before the group moves.
- Ask each person to talk through their role and the verification step.
- Invite "not yet" or "I need to check" without penalty; resolve it before work proceeds.

Follow your site's approved isolation and verification procedures. This conversation guide supports—not replaces—those controls.

“Not a cultural fit” is not a hiring criterion

In the webinar scenario, the strongest candidate trained overseas, came from another industry and was quiet in interview. The panel’s “gut feel” began to outweigh the agreed evidence.

1. Name the criterion

What capability or requirement is relevant to this role?

2. Show the evidence

What did the candidate do or say that demonstrates it?

3. Test the comparison

Are we judging both candidates against the same standard?

Questions that make the room safer to challenge

- “Which agreed criterion does ‘not a fit’ refer to?”
- “What specific evidence supports that concern?”
- “Could a different interview style be affecting how we read the evidence?”
- “What capability or perspective might this person add?”

For the chair

Invite a different view before the room converges: “Who sees it differently?” Then score against the agreed, job-relevant criteria—not familiarity or style alone.

Small moments send clear signals

Use the words that fit your voice. The important part is the behaviour that follows.

A mistake is raised

“Thank you for raising it. Let’s understand what happened and what needs to change.”

Courage · Commitment

Someone disagrees

“Talk me through what you are seeing. What might we be missing?”

Curiosity · Courage

A voice is missing

“Who have we not heard from yet? You can add a view now or send it after.”

Collaboration

Small moments: inclusion and repair

Keep the response specific, respectful and followed by action.

A newcomer looks unsure

“What part would be useful to walk through together?”

Cultural intelligence

You get it wrong

“I missed that. I’m sorry. Here is what I’ll do to correct it.”

Courage · Commitment

A label enters the decision

“What specific evidence do we have, and what else could be true?”

Cognisance · Curiosity

Make your delivery match the words

Put down the device, orient your attention to the person and leave space for an answer. Do not treat eye contact, stillness or speaking speed as a universal measure of engagement. Check understanding instead.

Turn one idea into a workday habit

Start small enough to repeat. One visible behaviour in a routine you already have is a useful first step.

Before the next shift or meeting

Choose one C and one moment where you want to act differently.

During the moment

Use the behaviour: ask, pause, invite, adapt, challenge or close the loop.

Afterward

Notice what happened. Did someone contribute, ask or correct the plan? What is the next step?

Write a specific commitment

In this routine

pre-start / handover / meeting / decision / one-to-one

I will practise

one behaviour from the 6Cs

I will say or do

the words or action I can use

I will notice

what changes for the people involved

A useful measure is not whether you said the right words once; it is whether people can reliably see the behaviour in your decisions.

People are constantly learning what is safe here

Inclusive leaders answer through behaviour—every day.



Is it safe to speak?

Thank the person and make a next step visible.

Is it safe to challenge?

Ask for the reasoning before the decision closes.

Is it safe to be different?

Adapt your approach without changing the standard.

Does my contribution matter?

Show how input was considered and close the loop.

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands, waterways and skies on which we're learning today. We pay our respects to their Elders—past and present—and to the strength of First Nations cultures, stories and care for Country.

Based on Diversity Australia's Inclusive Leadership webinar. The concepts are expanded here into practical workplace behaviours; use this resource alongside your organisation's policies and approved safety procedures.