

INCLUSION WITH ACCOUNTABILITY

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Defining Inclusion and Accountability

*First, we are responsible for our inclusion learning.
Then it must cause our colleagues to trust us more.*

Here's how one *Fortune 100* company defines their commitment to inclusion:



Inclusion

We recognize and respect the worth and dignity of every employee.

We strive to build a fair system, allowing each of us to contribute at our full potential.

We promote and sustain a sense of belonging, valuing diverse talents, beliefs, backgrounds and experiences, to help our company win.

Inclusion, defined this way, means that as employees we include ourselves in this learning and work.

We do not wait for others to engage us—developing an **inclusive mindset** is work we do internally. We own our growth, not because we have to, but because we get to.

We depend on the learning and wisdom of our colleagues—to establish our own **inclusive brand** requires that we make sure others see and experience how we are growing.

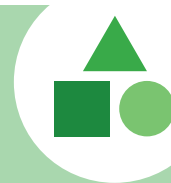
The idea of accountability has two aspects. First, each one of us is personally responsible for doing what we say we will do (intrinsic); and second, we want our colleagues to recognize us when we meet, and especially when we exceed, our commitments; and we need their help when we fall short of fulfilling expectations (extrinsic.)

Put another way, accountability is about **Me** ('I take responsibility') and **We** ('My colleagues trust me more').



Accountability is being responsible in ways that cause people to trust us more.

An Illustration: What Inclusion with Accountability Looks Like



You are on a team with eight colleagues who identify as men (as you do), and two who identify as women. The team has agreed to work on being more inclusive, and one of the new norms is that everyone gets a turn at speaking if they choose to. You notice that four of the men talk more often and longer than do the women, and that these guys are often interrupting the women. In a situation like this, there are several scenarios that could play out. Which of the following options express *Inclusion with Accountability*?

1. You say nothing, because it is embarrassing, and you hope someone else will bring it up.
2. You share your observation in the meeting and ask that the team take some time to revisit the new norm and talk about how to manage fairness for everyone's 'talk-time'; and then you and others watch to see that the agreements are kept.
3. You approach the two women after the meeting, share what you noticed, and ask them what kind of support, if any, they would like from you; and then you find ways to support them that work for you as well.
4. You separately approach each of the talkative guys after the meeting, share your observations, and engage them in a discussion about how the new norm can work with them; and then you watch to see how they are changing their behavior, and keep talking with them privately.
5. You make an appointment with your manager, talk with them about what you saw, and explore how you can work together to help the team behave more inclusively; then you help the team act with improved inclusion, and make sure you keep talking with your manager about your learning.

[2 through 5 show inclusion with accountability]

Accountability—being responsible in ways that cause people to trust us more—can take many forms. And inclusion with accountability will accelerate your professional opportunities.

Building Your Inclusion Brand

Success in our careers is fueled by who we are and what we do. Our behavior shapes how others see us, which is our 'brand' as a colleague. Our brand, or reputation, can open doors, and it can close them. Being known as someone who pursues inclusion with accountability will often open doors for you.

There are two aspects of your inclusion brand:

1. **Your own agency**—You are committed to your own inclusion learning, and putting it into action.
2. **The visibility of your learning**—Your colleagues and customers see and experience your learning about inclusion, trust you more, and tell others about it.

All of us can build a more inclusive brand with our colleagues and customers. There are so many aspects of identity—gender and race matter, but we should not be reduced into them. In organizations, a technical or finance or sales background may count, but it is only part of the talent mix. We all experience advantage and disadvantage in life (some more than others). Building our inclusion brand is an opportunity for each of us: those from historically advantaged cultures, those with a deep experience of disadvantage, and everyone in between. Each employee is accountable for growing their inclusion skills.

With our definitions of inclusion and accountability in mind, let's consider the ways your inclusion brand can operate. There are four choices, and these realities are working right now in how your colleagues see you.



Building Your Inclusion Brand

Inclusion Brand—Engagement Not Evident

Speaks to your willingness to learn, but if this work does not show up with your colleagues, you need to apply your learning with more energy.

Inclusion Brand—Disengagement Unnoticed

Is a low-performing option: you have minimal involvement in inclusion. The people around you are no more committed than you are, and therefore they don't notice your lack of motivation.

Inclusion Brand—Seen to be Disengaged

Is a risky reputation, and increasingly common: we are not focused on learning about inclusion (in fact, we may be excluding others), and we are operating in a climate where colleagues are more likely to hold us accountable, so they may trust us less and speak to others about our limitations.

Inclusion Brand—Visibly Inclusive

Is the best place to be—you are deeply engaged in inclusion, others see it and join you in the commitment, you are trusted more, and you are known for your inclusion knowledge and skills.

Where do you see yourself in these four Inclusion Brand choices? More importantly, how are your inclusion skills viewed by your manager, peers, direct reports (if you have them), and other colleagues?

If you don't know how you are seen, look for ideas about how to do that in the next section.



An Illustration of a Healthy Inclusion Brand



You are a manager based in India. You help to organize a diverse team of employees and managers who are disability allies and/or people with disabilities. All the team members have a close acquaintance with disabilities, and many are caregivers for a family member with a disability. As a result, the team develops a series of initiatives, including:

- Arranging for accessible activities for children with special needs during holidays.
- Building a community of employees to support family members with disabilities.
- Holding separate pre-interview sessions with managers to highlight areas that have the potential for bias, and with the candidates to be more successful in the process.
- Organizing on-campus events for young people with disabilities to help them see a future at a company like yours.
- Creating resources on the intranet that provide clear information around needs related to disabilities.

Stakeholders to your success—leaders above you, peers in management, and individual contributors alike—notice your courageous approach to educating around differing abilities, and how you come alongside your co-workers with ability in view. You are seen as a source for learning and as someone who acts. This distinguishes you among your peers and becomes a differentiator that helps to open professional doors for you. Most importantly, you know you are playing your part in an initiative and on a team of people that brings awareness and grows feelings of security and belonging to people with disabilities—as well as helping to expand the scope of identities that inclusion conversations regularly include in the company.

Inclusion with accountability means you commit to learning, and you are seen to do so.

How Your Inclusion Learning Builds Trust

Let's assume you are working on your inclusion knowledge and skills, since many companies are now clearly communicating to each employee that success requires such a commitment. We have defined 'accountability' as *being responsible in ways that cause your colleagues to trust you more*. How do we make this happen? How should we ask our colleagues to be accountable for their behavior?

Agree That We Are Mutually Accountable



'Being responsible in ways that build trust' around inclusion requires three agreements:

1. Each person accepts and pursues responsibility for their own inclusion learning.
2. Each person expects their colleagues to help them learn to be more inclusive.
3. People demonstrate #1 and seek out #2, and regularly talk about *how* they do both.

These agreements do not occur by management mandate. They happen when people on your team and across the company see how it will be good for them to act more inclusively. Talking openly about inclusion with accountability doesn't have to take a lot of time—with practice, this is an efficient method for living out the core values of the culture.

Give and Seek Feedback Courageously



Accountability as it is often expressed is mean and negative—it places blame or invokes shame. It can try to cover up one's own role in a mistake or it can focus on what did not work and not on what did. Accountability gets a bad name when it tears people down.

Instead, when a colleague fails to be inclusive, we can remember that they are more likely to recover when we offer them the constructive gift of our presence and questions and ideas. **One of the most powerful ways to provide feedback that helps someone improve their inclusion skills is to be transparent about the impact that their mistake had on you.** This form of honesty registers that the perceived mistake has occurred and invites the person who made it to correct it. A few examples:

Inclusion Mistake	Understandable Reaction	Healthy Accountability Responses
<p>White Male Manager: I don't see you as a black woman, Sarah. I just treat you like everyone else.</p>	<p>Sarah: Don't patronize me with your racism and sexism!</p>	<p>Sarah: That sounds inclusive, but you actually are invalidating two vital parts of my identity, so I'm not feeling very included.</p> <p>Manager: I'm so sorry, that was not my intention. Thanks for telling me how it impacted you—you as an individual are important to me.</p>
<p>USA: We have an All-Hands meeting at 2:00 pm Pacific.</p>	<p>India: Sounds like we don't matter, since that is the middle of the night for us.</p>	<p>India: Since we are all committed to inclusion, we are wondering if we can rotate the times of the meetings or hold them regionally, so that everyone is included.</p> <p>USA: You're right, that was not very inclusive—let's build the rotating schedule now.</p>
<p>A woman colleague tired of being singled out: I am sick of you men just seeing me as a woman and not as the professional I am.</p>	<p>A male colleague: I want to honor you for your contribution, and I don't want to ignore that being a woman may also be important to you.</p>	<p>The woman: Of course, my gender identity matters to me, but I want to be seen and judged for what I do around here, not spotlighted based on being one of the few women.</p> <p>The man: Got it—I will focus on your contribution and not on highlighting a gender difference.</p>
<p>Leader from a historically disadvantaged racial group: The way to solve for systemic bias is to prioritize opportunity for underrepresented people during promotion decisions.</p>	<p>Person from a majority racial group: Now I'm the one who is missing out on opportunity due to the color of my skin.</p>	<p>Person from a majority racial group: Let's talk about how diversity and merit figure into promotion decisions—we want to solve for bias, not redirect it, and we need everyone to support how we advance people with inclusion in mind.</p> <p>Leader with experience of disadvantage: That's what I've always wanted—seems like we need to dig into precisely what 'fair' looks like.</p>

How Your Inclusion Learning Builds Trust

In summary, provide honest and actionable feedback when an inclusion mistake is made.

We can ask for input from our colleagues and listen carefully for their suggestions. Then we can try out the new behavior, and ask them again: “How am I doing? Are you seeing me act more inclusively?”. Such courage gathers the relationship-building power of inclusion with accountability, and asking for feedback provides you with a clearer picture of your inclusion brand.

Generously Recognize Inclusion



Accountability is often associated with ‘catching people’ at mistakes. But accountability works better when it catches people doing things right. Strangely, it often requires courage to recognize colleagues for their inclusion successes. Why is that? Maybe:

- We think that praise will make people complacent—but acknowledgement is a profound motivator.
- We are better at focusing on other’s limitations—and we need to get better at seeing how these same people contribute every day.
- When inclusion is done right, it is often not as noticeable as exclusion or failed attempts at inclusion.

What’s holding you back from recognizing the contributions of every colleague you work with? Find the courage to thank people when they do something well. When a co-worker does something that makes you feel like you truly belong, tell them!

This mix of methods is what it looks like to bring a healthy approach to ‘holding people accountable’:

- Hold them up with praise.
- Demonstrate your respect for them, talking honestly about a problem.
- Listen to them with care, and, together find ideas for improving.
- Expect your colleagues to ‘hold you accountable’ for being inclusive in the same ways.

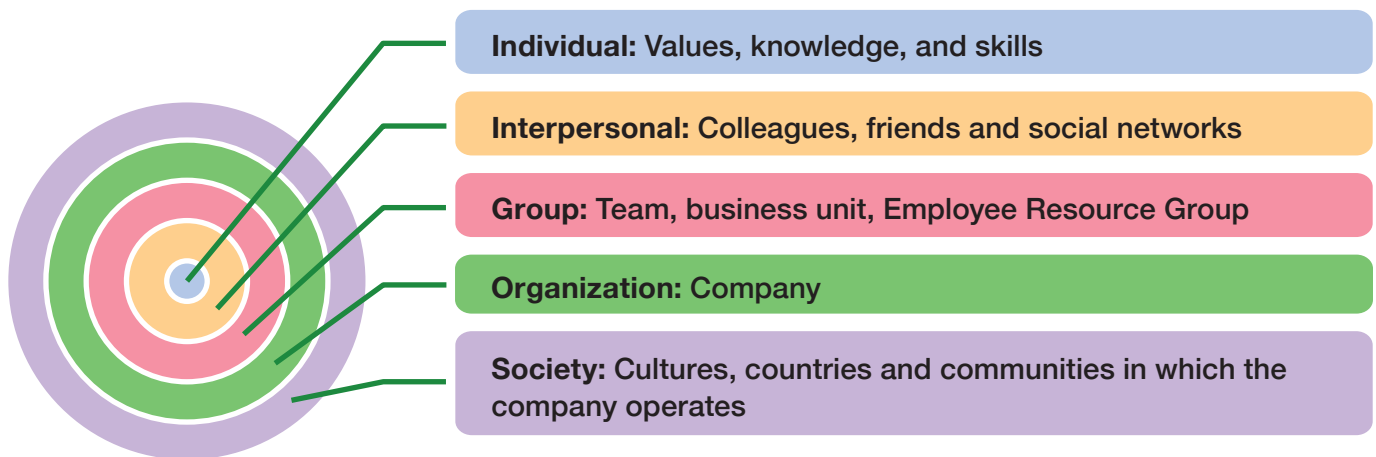


Where Accountability Systems Come In

The obvious context for organizational accountability is to be found in your organization’s performance management process and system, and in the ways people coach, mentor, and sponsor.

Whatever your role in the company, you can take the initiative to set goals related to your inclusion learning, and discuss them with your manager, peers, direct reports (if you have them), and other colleagues and customers. Remember, inclusion with accountability is learning about inclusion in ways that benefit others—“being responsible in ways that build trust”.

Another useful way to think about accountability with systems in mind is the consideration of the five Spheres of Context.



Where Accountability Systems Come In

Our inclusion learning should span these Spheres of Context. In this document, we have focused on taking responsibility for our inclusion learning at the individual and interpersonal levels. A deepening commitment to inclusion will also motivate us to discover what inclusion looks like with our team, out into the company, and beyond to our communities and nations.

Is inclusion with accountability personal? Absolutely yes. *And* we must not limit our learning to 1 to 1 interactions. Across centuries of history, humans have baked bias into:



Systems: The ways we hire, develop, advance and retain talent; and how we design for, sell to, and serve a global mix of customers.



Structure: The nature of decision-making and deference across hierarchies, with advantage and disadvantage apportioned unfairly, and organized to keep benefiting some over others.



Cultures: The tendency to categorize some as 'in-group' and others as 'out', impacting how individual freedom and 'fitting-in' are defined and enforced; the resistance to change to become more inclusive.



Nations: The unique geographic expression of systems, structures, and cultures; and the competitive clash between them.

Inclusion with accountability equips us to **play our personal part** in solving for these larger challenges. And it is an especially timely and potent way to learn, as we learn to directly face and solve for the systemic nature of racial, gender-based, and other biases.

Finally, It's About Trust and Integrity

One definition of trust is ‘the making and keeping of promises over time and across differences’. Inclusive relationships are built with trust and accountability. Here are three things you can start doing right now, from wherever you are in your level of understanding and skill around inclusion:

- I can promise my colleagues that I will learn to behave more inclusively, and then I will do it. I will seek feedback, keep doing what others experience as inclusive, and change behaviors that exclude others.
- I can recognize my colleagues when they keep their promise to include me and others.
- When colleagues fail to act inclusively, I can provide them with feedback and support, so they become more inclusive.

Inclusion with accountability, simply put, is a matter of integrity: we show that we value the uniqueness in each of our colleagues, we recognize and accept the differences between us, and we make and keep inclusive promises with one another. This is the power of inclusion with accountability: when we take responsibility for our inclusion learning and build trust with colleagues and customers, we grow our careers, we innovate to solve the problems we face, we build high-performing teams, and we grow an inclusive company culture together.

