

INSPIRATION FRAMEWORK ILIAS.

Inclusive Leadership in Encouraging Collaboration

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INTRODUCTION

Over the past two years, we have been working on the ILIAS-project on Inclusive Leadership in Encouraging Collaboration. We explored the role of inclusive leadership in early childhood education and care (ECEC) services for enhancing collaboration in a diverse team. Our aim was to strengthen inclusive leadership in order to encourage collaboration among a diversity of staff, among all staff members. ILIAS aims to support individuals who take on leadership to shape an inclusive workplace, in order to have a positive impact on all staff members, the team and service quality.

Together with the participants in the pilots and with all Flemish and transnational ILIAS-partners who advised us, we regularly reflected on what inclusive leadership could be. We looked for and found starting points in research literature, practice guides, TED Talks, eBooks, ... In this text, we provide an inspiration framework that emerged from those exercises. So think of this text as an inspirational document. We do not pretend to have unravelled everything there is to say and learn about this important leadership style. However, we do hope to feed you, make you pause and reflect so that you can take steps forward together with your team in growing towards inclusive leadership.

This inspiration framework focuses on inclusive leadership in encouraging collaboration, i.e. relationships at the team level. Another important aspect of inclusion and dealing with diversity is focused towards the target group of basic services, children and families. But, enhancing the diversity of children and families was not the focus for the ILIAS project. Here we focused on the team level.

The inspiration framework is made up of five sections.

- In section 1 'Why tomorrow's leader will be inclusive', we describe the context and challenges in which the ILIAS project is situated. What is the importance of inclusive leadership in today's society? We identify five concrete challenges. We also give substance to the core concepts of diversity and inclusion. **Diversity** as a factual fact. **Inclusion** as a characteristic of the nature of interaction. Diversity is the mix. Inclusion says something about how to make the mix flourish.
- In Chapter 2, we interpret inclusive leadership as a **catalyst** for growth aimed at allowing a diversity of people to develop their full potential, and to work together optimally towards the organisation's mission. Inclusive leadership focuses on creating, growing and innovating together as a service while paying attention to each person's individual needs.
- In Chapter 3, we explore the components of the **inclusive workplace**, which inclusive leadership helps create. What makes a workplace inclusive? How do we recognise it? And how do the two basic needs of every human being, being **unique** (or special) and **belonging** to a greater whole, find a place in it?
- In chapter 4, we outline the **profile** of the inclusive leader and provide two models to guide a manager in achieving inclusive leadership.
- In the last chapter, we zoom out again and place the whole in the perspective of the **competent system**. Not only individual competences are important, structural layers also play an important role to achieve high quality ECEC-services.

We hope to inspire you and give new insights!



1 - WHY TOMORROW'S LEADER WILL BE INCLUSIVE

We live in a world in transition. Technological developments, demographics and globalisation are just three of the many megatrends creating a context that is far less homogeneous and far more diverse than we are historically accustomed to. Workplace diversity is increasing in many different aspects, such as age, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, economic standing and job profiles. This affects the functioning of ECEC-services. They face significant societal challenges. In the ILIAS-project, we focused on five challenges for which we see a key role for inclusive leadership. Furthermore, we also talk about the inclusion paradox.

1.1. FIVE CHALLENGES OF OUR TIME

1/ ECEC-services are facing a **shortage of staff**. This trend plays out both in Flanders and internationally. The shortage of childcare workers and teachers is acute. It is therefore important to critically review existing practices around recruitment and hiring. ECEC-services face the challenge of attracting and permanently motivating and supporting a broad group of potential, competent staff for a job in these sectors (ET Working group 2020, 2021).

2/ The staff of ECEC-services do not yet sufficiently reflect the social realities and target groups for whom they work. This **representation of diversity in society** is important to promote minority participation in training and to create a rich pedagogical environment, with multiple identity experiences, for children and families. In terms of both gender and ethnic-cultural diversity, the challenge is great.

The workforce in childcare, pre-school education and preventive family support is predominantly made up of female staff. On average, only 3.2% men work in pre-school facilities (OECD, 2019). So attracting and retaining male staff is a major challenge. And although there has been a gradual increase in the number of staff with a migrant background, this still remains limited. In education, for instance, it is estimated that only 1 to 5% of teachers would have a migrant background.

3/ However, merely focusing on the numerical aspect of diversity is not enough. If the values and norms, culture and practices in the ECEC-services remain unchanged, it will not be able to '**capitalise**' the diversity. Diversity and inclusion are two sides of the same coin. The challenge lies in creating an inclusive workplace, where every employee is treated fairly/equitably, can be authentically themselves, be a full part of the group and contribute meaningfully to the whole. Only then will new talents surface, leading to better performance and taking the facility to the next level (De Stobbeleir, 2015).

4/ Capitalising on **diversity in thinking** is also necessary to move beyond the status quo. The complex and changing context forces ECEC-services to constantly reinvent themselves. This is important to keep things workable and staff motivated, but it requires great flexibility and agility to constantly adapt vision and strategic planning to changes in policy and society. With a diversity of thinking, ECEC-services are stronger to deal with this challenge. The role of a coaching leader with great interest and attention to group dynamics, who can take difficult decision to give people a different role, for example, cannot be underestimated in this (Lamberts & Havermans, 2019).

5/ This also requires a **culture of cooperation** between the different profiles. But in many facilities, this is not yet evident. It is often difficult for colleagues to take time together to plan and reflect. Creating a reflective culture and 'in-service training' that are so important to encourage staff to continue to



enrich themselves, strengthen their professional identity and keep the quality of provision high, ... this also remains a major challenge.

The role of **INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP** as a catalyst to respond to these societal challenges formed the focus of the ILIAS-project. Attracting diversity in ECEC-services is a prerequisite to ensure high quality services. But at the same time, capitalising on the multiplicity of perspectives poses a difficult hurdle to overcome. This is the inclusion paradox that the inclusive leader tries to solve (see below).

Two key words that are often mentioned in the same breath in this context are 'diversity' and 'inclusion'. Let us explain both terms in a bit more detail.

DIVERSITY = THE MIX

Diversity is differences. Diversity in a team refers to the **mix** of unique people with their own identity. Each one of us develops an original identity from a multitude of elements, such as gender, age, language, religion, culture, education, talents, ... Diversity is **multi-layered**. Many of these elements we share with others, and at the same time we each have a unique cocktail of them. We have similarities with our colleagues, and yet no one is exactly the same. Our identity shapes us and we constantly shape it ourselves. It is not fixed for life, but shifts with time. Diversity, in other words, is **dynamic**. And which elements of our identity we highlight at any given moment depends on the situation we find ourselves in. Diversity is also **contextual**. Diversity is a given, it refers to reality as it is. Diversity becomes visible in a society where we give each other the freedom to show ourselves as we (would like to) be.

INCLUSION: MAKING SURE THE MIX WORKS

Inclusion is literally 'including', or full inclusion in the group. It often refers to creating full participation for colleagues who are unheard or at risk of being disadvantaged based on their identity. Inclusion is opposed to exclusion and discrimination. The foundation of inclusion is **equality** in rights and duties. An inclusive organisation sees diversity as an asset and adapts. Obstacles to employees' full participation and growth are removed (literally and figuratively) so that every colleague can contribute to the organisation's mission to the best of his or her ability. Gender, age, ethnicity, religion or limitations should not be an impeding factor. The focus is on **talents** and merits. This benefits both the individual employee and the organisation.

1.2. THE INCLUSION PARADOX

Diversity in thinking and doing brings a multitude of perspectives to the workplace. This is a huge asset, as it stimulates creativity and innovation. Yet it is best not to be naive-euphoric about this 'richness', because it is often not that simple in practice. After all, this wealth does not come naturally. To ensure that current workplaces function properly in contemporary society, more is needed than just representation of diversity.

Dutch organisational anthropologist Jitske Kramer examines what makes groups ('tribes') work together, keep together, thanks to/despite the diversity of individual employees. She notes that we prefer to work and live together with people who are very similar to us. That differences or 'otherness'



of the colleague is then quite tricky, because how to deal with it? "Can't they act normal, like us?" (Kramer, 2019).

We all like to be in our comfort zone, surrounded by people who agree with each other. But the diversity of people challenges that comfort zone. Kramer: "Diversity chafes, teeters, it constantly challenges you". And that is quite normal. We look beyond language, culture, ethnicity or certain 'disabilities' that require adjustments. It's also about different initial education and statuses. There are different styles in dealing with children, there are differences in communication styles with parents, differences in the priorities staff set or in the way they work out a theme, differences in who needs more guidance and encouragement than another ... These are daily prompts to deal with diversity.

The challenge for leaders is not to get everyone back into their comfort zone, but to lead employees from diversity to **learn from each other**. "Diversity holds the promise of creativity, if properly managed," says Kramer. "But we rarely respond with: 'how nice that you are or do something completely different! What can I learn from you? What do you see that I don't?'" Diversity in the team forces us to reflect on things we take for granted, to face the other person and to rethink and adapt habits to a lesser or greater extent.

This tension between 'be yourself' and 'adapt' is what Jitske Kramer calls **the inclusion paradox**. Inclusive leadership tries to connect those two dynamics. It presupposes that we ask questions like: how do we deal with someone who thinks or acts differently? How do we deal with the minority voice? Who sets the 'norm' here? How do we give a place to the 'wisdom of the minority'? "Perhaps we need to challenge ourselves to look differently at the one who walks the path differently," says Kramer. "How do you make sure you really listen to all voices, and not just the one that suits you?"

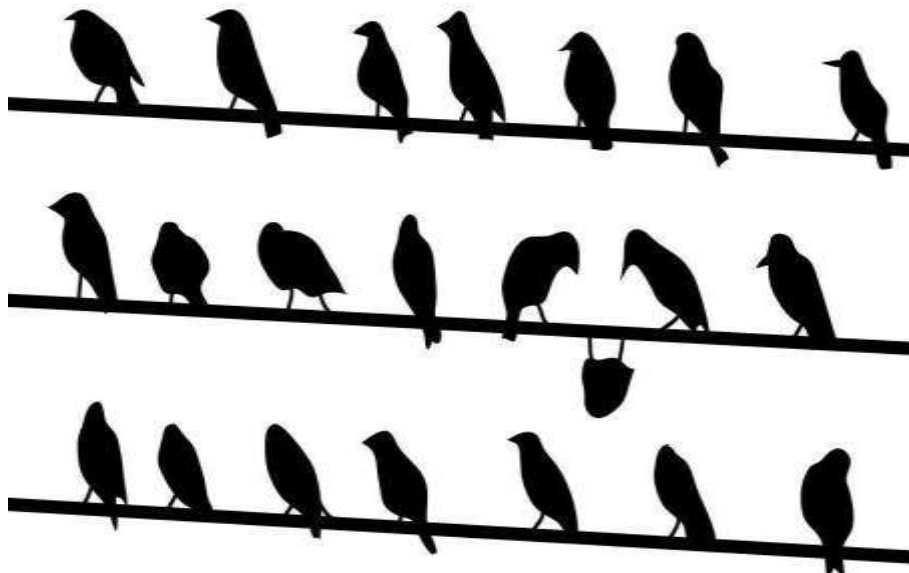


Figure: Jitske Kramer



2 - INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP AS A CATALYST FOR GROWTH

Diversity is the **mix**. Inclusion: **ensuring that the mix works**. ECEC-services need diversity of thought and action to respond to current societal challenges. At the same time, heterogeneity brings teams and staff out of their comfort zone. Diversity challenges to move towards learning-from-each other so that added value can be harvested. A leadership style and an organisational culture that continue to assume homogeneity will not provide the answer. A one-size-fits-all approach no longer works to keep people motivated.

What does work, is creating conditions in which a diversity of people can simultaneously develop their full potential and join forces. And while the basics of good leadership do not change much - such as giving direction and motivating people; these elements are timeless - an important component has been added that is increasingly coming to the fore, namely **INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP**.

The leader of tomorrow will be an inclusive leader. That requires an **inclusive mindset and inclusive behaviour**. For leaders who have developed their leadership in a more homogenous environment, rapid adaptation is in order. This does not involve a totally new leadership paradigm. It is part of a social trend that we have been seeing more and more in recent years. The image of the leader at the top, the lone hero who brings salvation by giving top-down direction to an obedient team, has been abandoned for some time already. In its place, new forms of leadership are growing - shared, connective, co-creative, participative leadership styles - in which sharing power and responsibility are central, and in which there is much more recognition and appreciation of the wisdom of each team member.

Inclusive leadership builds on this trend and adds a powerful new element to it – the specific ability to deal with diversity. An inclusive leader is someone who **consciously** brings out **diverse perspectives** in the team to ensure that insights have depth and decisions are robust. It is a person who is actively committed to a workplace where a diversity of talents is nurtured, whatever the 'packaging', and where diverse teams reach their maximum potential. It is a person who understands the link between diversity, inclusion and quality, and who has the courage to remove barriers for people at risk of exclusion (Bourke et al, 2012; Bortini et al, 2016).

The **unpredictability and multi-perspectivity** of a diverse team means that top-down leadership no longer works. The risk of the leader's blind spots causing bad decisions has become too great. Moreover, it is impossible to manage authoritatively a group of people who do not perceive the same things as motivating them. The role of the leader is shifting from 'at the top of the ladder' to a more **coaching, guiding role**. We are moving towards teams where responsibilities are shared among employees, according to their strengths and talents. It is up to leader to make strengths visible and give all employees relevant roles that benefit the organisation. The goal of inclusive leadership is to create, grow and innovate as a service while paying balanced attention to everyone's individual needs (Bortini et al, 2016).

"Inclusive leadership means first of all treating all people fairly, taking into account their own unique characteristics, rather than 'pigeonholing' them because we find it easier if we can compartmentalise complex society; but at the same time realising that people (want to) be part of teams and a bigger picture. Inclusive leadership also means knowing how to harness that diversity in such a way that both the company, and the team, and the individuals who are part of that team benefit." (ZigZagHR, 2020).



INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP - A WORKING DEFINITION

Based on what we described above, we arrive at the following definition:

Inclusive leadership is a form of shared leadership with a specific ability to deal with diversity in the context. Inclusive leadership aims at treating all employees fairly, understanding and valuing their individuality while including them as a full member of the team. Diversity in thinking is used as a lever for better thought processes and better decision-making.

In this perspective, inclusive leadership is not only the responsibility of the formal manager. Every team member, according to their own capabilities and talents, can take up part of the leadership and thus contribute to the growth of an inclusive workplace.

3 - THE INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE

Diversity is a wealth for an inclusive workplace, where every employee can participate and be fully included in the team. Inclusive leadership encourages the growth of an inclusive workplace, but what ingredients are needed for this? What makes a workplace 'inclusive'? What makes employees feel fully included?

Dillon and Bourke (2016) have been researching inclusive leadership since 2011 and in doing so have gained a better understanding of what inclusion is - what it means, how it is perceived by others. Their research revealed that employees experience a workplace as inclusive, or feel fully included, when they perceive that:

- they are treated fairly (equitably) and respectfully;
- they are seen and valued in their individuality, and at the same time belong;
- they have a say in the decision-making about the fulfilment of the mission.

So, the elements of inclusion in a team are fairness and respect, appreciation of uniqueness and attention to belonging, and commitment to the collective story.

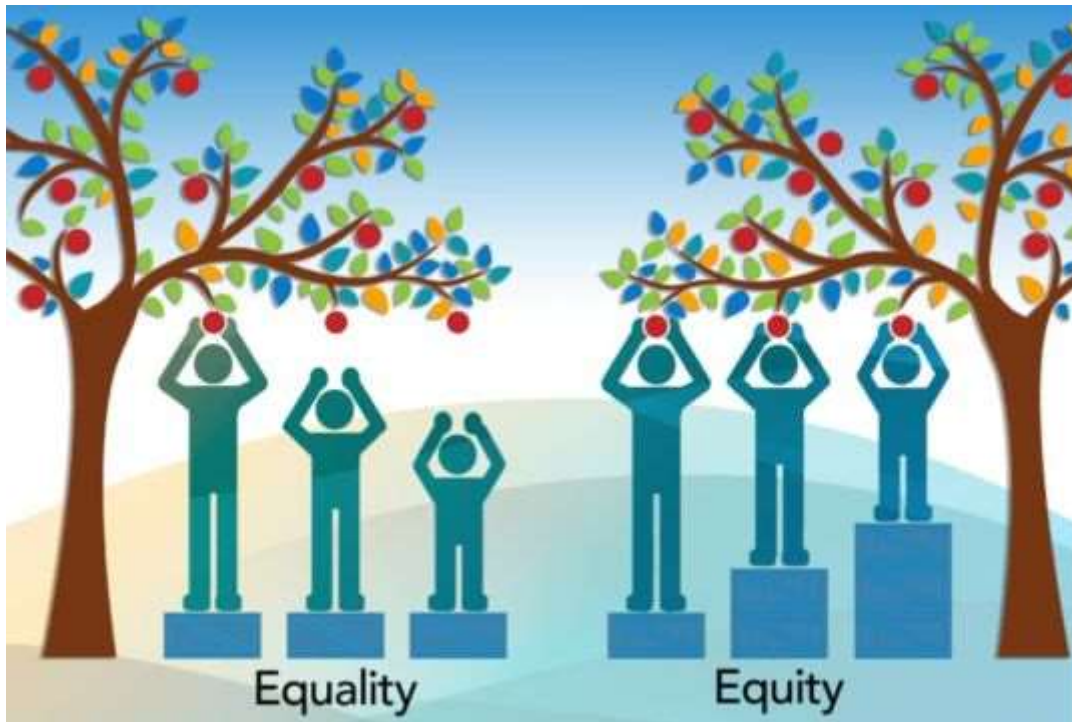
We elaborate on these elements below.

3.1. EQUITY AND RESPECT

Employees experience a workplace as inclusive or feel fully included in the organisation when they are treated **fairly** and with **respect**. This is the foundation on which the other pillars of inclusion rest. It starts with recognising everyone's inherent value. Every colleague is a valuable member of the team and deserves equal opportunities to grow and develop their own talents in the workplace.

This is about **equity**. Individual employees do not all have the same support needs. Equal opportunities for development are thus contrasted with 'equal' treatment. "*Nothing is more unequal than the equal treatment between unequals,*" Hans Galjaard, em. professor of human genetics said this, "*We are equal as human beings, but unequal in motivation and competences.*" The illustration below, found in many variants, illustrates what is meant by this. Being treated fairly and respectfully implies the demand for equity and 'customization': creating a context for growth for each colleague that matches the support needed.





Source: *Equity versus Equality*. North Western Health Unit.

3.2. UNIQUENESS AND BELONGING

Employees experience a workplace as inclusive, or feel fully included in the organisation, when their **unique identity is known and valued**, while at the same time **belonging authentically to the group**. They experience social connection. There is simultaneous appreciation of individuality and attention to **group cohesion**. One does not come at the expense of the other.

Here, inclusion touches on the two universal human needs previously highlighted in Jitske Kramer's inclusion paradox. Each of us is born with the desire to express ourselves, to be unique, and at the same time to be part of a greater whole. This sets us the task of reconciling two opposing dynamics in our lives: 'be yourself' and 'adapt'. Buengeler et al (2018) also point to the tension between feeling 'unique' and 'wanting to belong':

"It is unlikely that people can score high on both points at the same time. They need to find a balance or 'optimal distinctiveness' between the two. This suggests that there are inherent tensions within this concept of inclusion as multifaceted, which are not easily resolved." (Buengeler et al, 2018).

A workplace that is attentive to this paradox and can adequately respond to it, is a workplace where employees are happy and motivated. Thus, the challenge in creating an inclusive workplace is to balance the two dimensions uniqueness and belonging (as in: we 'belong together').



DIMENSION 1 - Uniqueness - Humans, on the one hand, desire to stand out from others, to be a unique being. We satisfy this desire by comparing ourselves to others at the individual level (e.g. 'I am different from others') or at the level of the groups we belong to (e.g. 'our group is different from others').

We are all individuals. We want to be able to be 'ourselves'. We have different needs and priorities, and we like to be approached as individuals rather than as a group. We feel the need to be seen in that uniqueness and to be appreciated for it. We would like to be recognised for our unique contribution to the organisation.

DIMENSION 2 - Belonging (or connectedness, togetherness) - People also long to be part of a larger whole, to belong together with others. This expresses itself as the need to form and maintain strong, stable interpersonal relationships. People choose a social identity with certain groups and seek acceptance in those groups. So too in the team where we work.

THE INCLUSION FRAMEWORK

In any organisation, the dynamics between uniqueness and belonging/togetherness come into play. The extent to which the team succeeds in balancing both determines whether dynamics of inclusion arise, or dynamics of exclusion, assimilation or differentiation. The inclusion framework clarifies how this works.

If we plot the dimensions of uniqueness and belonging on two axes from low to high, a matrix with four possibilities arises. There can be a low or high rating of team members' uniqueness. There may be a low or high rating for team belonging/togetherness. On both dimensions, ratings must be high to create an inclusive workplace (Shore et al., 2011).

Below we give some more explanation and some examples for each possibility.

Inclusion Framework

| | Low Belongingness | High Belongingness |
|--------------------------|---|---|
| Low Value in Uniqueness | <p>Exclusion</p> <p>Individual is not treated as an organizational insider with unique value in the work group but there are other employees or groups who are insiders.</p> | <p>Assimilation</p> <p>Individual is treated as an insider in the work group when they conform to organizational/dominant culture norms and downplay uniqueness.</p> |
| High Value in Uniqueness | <p>Differentiation</p> <p>Individual is not treated as an organizational insider in the work group but their unique characteristics are seen as valuable and required for group/ organization success.</p> | <p>Inclusion</p> <p>Individual is treated as an insider and also allowed/encouraged to retain uniqueness within the work group.</p> |



EXCLUSION

An organisational culture with little appreciation for the uniqueness of employees and little focus on togetherness will generate dynamics of exclusion. The employee who deviates from the prevailing norm will not be treated as an insider who can bring unique value to the team. On the contrary, the employee will rather be seen as an outsider. The employee will not feel included in the team. This reduces the chances that the colleague will perform optimally and enjoy staying in the organisation for a long time.

EXAMPLES OF EXCLUSION IN A DIVERSE TEAM

- The existing team is mainly a 'group of friends'. Pedro, a new colleague is of an older age and cannot join in on the same topics as his younger colleagues. He does have a lot of experience, but it is not used. The leader is absent due to the high workload and cannot counter this exclusion. Moreover, the latter himself has been friends with the informal leader of the group of friends for years.
- Annelies is a childcare worker and works only a few hours a week in the school. She is not invited to the meetings or informal moments. She does not know what the preschool teachers agree on or what the school's vision is. She feels alone, disconnected, excluded.
- Noor has recently started working in childcare. She is committed and has learned at school that responding to children's signals is important. She shares her job with the babies with a colleague who is a few years older than her. There is often a somewhat unpleasant atmosphere between her and the colleague. When children weep, Noor takes the babies in her arms and comforts them. Her colleague would shout loudly and tell the children to be brave now and stop crying. This does not stop there, as during the next few weeks it also remains quiet in the staff room when she enters. One of the older colleagues tells her "not to be so soft for the children. There is no time for that and it is not customary in this child care!" Noor is in a dilemma, will she adapt to the prevailing culture or stay involved with the children?

ASSIMILATION

An organisational culture with little appreciation for the unique individuality of employees and much focus on togetherness will generate dynamics of assimilation. The employee who deviates from the prevailing norm will be assimilated into the group only when he or she conforms to the dominant standards of the team culture. The colleague's unique identity is minimised or trivialised. This can lead to a 'facade of conformity' when that colleague suppresses personal values and pretends to embrace organisational values. It requires constant energy from the colleague to conform. Also in this dynamic, the colleague will find it difficult to give his best and will have little attachment to the organisation.

EXAMPLES OF ASSIMILATION IN A DIVERSE TEAM

- Colleague Jef is someone who is rather introvert and tries to adapt to the rest of the team. He is alert to doing some small talk, but this requires a lot of energy from him.
- Pete is the only male member of the team. He tries to adapt to the informal and formal styles of interacting, talking to and about each other, meeting, taking decisions that are common in his organisation. He tries to hide his own talking and meeting style.
- Nuria works in a preschool and is highly valued in the team she is part of. She is the only one in the team wearing a headscarf, but no one makes an issue of it. In the team, however, people speak rather negatively about people of 'other origins': "It's always the same with those Poles,



they never come on time, and when they are addressed, they suddenly no longer speak Dutch.”. Nuria just goes along with everyone and confirms the idea that this is indeed often the case with people of other origins.

DIFFERENTIATION

An organisational culture with a high regard for the uniqueness of employees, but little focus on togetherness, will generate dynamics of differentiation. The employee's unique characteristics are recognised and seen as a valuable contribution to the team's success. Yet the employee is not treated as an insider. Employees are given great independence. Everyone has a different job content and there is little consultation with colleagues. There are few attempts to make it a dynamic collaborative group. Although the employee gets appreciation for their unique contribution, a feeling of 'being an odd man out' continues to surface. This comes at the expense of attachment to the organisation. The threshold for seeking a better workplace is small.

EXAMPLES OF DIFFERENTIATION IN A DIVERSE TEAM

- In some schools, teachers prefer to be alone in their classroom and like to keep the door closed. This feels safe and so the teacher can 'do his thing'. In those schools, there are staff meetings and consultations, but teachers endure them, without too much enthusiasm.
- The large out-of-school team is divided into six locations. Each team works independently and with permanent staff during the year. During holidays, they work together in one location. Fierce discussions regularly erupt between the staff from the different locations during the holidays, and there is a lot of gossiping about each other. The dispute is different each time, but the common denominator is that each speaks from their knowledge and expertise about what is going on at the own location, which is very different from the other locations. Each time, the manager is asked to act as a referee.

INCLUSION

An organisational culture with a high appreciation for the uniqueness of employees and a strong focus on togetherness will generate dynamics of inclusion. Every employee is encouraged to retain and bring individuality to the team. At the same time, each employee is seen as a full member of the group. One's own identity does not have to be given up in order to belonging to the group. There is great independence and appreciation for the employees in this kind of organisation, and the manager puts a lot of effort into teamwork, joint projects, etc. Every colleague has the feeling of being authentically allowed to be him- or herself and at the same time feels fully included in the organisation. As a result, motivation is high, as is attachment to the team and the desire to do their best there for many years to come.

EXAMPLES OF INCLUSION IN A DIVERSE TEAM

- The preventive family support service has several locations across the city. There is an engaged contact with parents and children. Team meetings provide space for expressing difficulties and successes. A tight agenda is maintained. The first 15 minutes are reserved for 'venting', as they call it themselves. Everyone gets a chance to tell how they are feeling. There is listening and acknowledgement. Together, the team considers what theme emerges for the next part of the meeting. Often there are common issues and yet they also dwell on what is urgent. If a



colleague is having a difficult time, it may be that, despite the common ground, it is decided to let that colleague speak. When evaluating the meeting structure, it keeps coming up that it is the combination of a fixed structure with the open concern for each other, which is experienced as very binding. Everyone is allowed to be who they are.

Importance of authenticity

Brené Brown, research professor of social work at the University of Houston, noted a particular tension in her research (Brown, 2018). We all feel a deep human desire to belong somewhere, but that 'belonging' has to be unconditional. When people can belong to the group and at the same time be allowed to be completely authentically themselves, then people feel connected. Authenticity is thus an important condition, Brown discovered in her research. It sheds interesting light on how the dimensions of uniqueness and belonging relate to each other, how the dynamics between the two needs play out.

Brown asked her respondents what it meant to them to truly belong, and the answer was surprisingly complex. They wanted to **be part of something** - to experience real **connection** with others - but not at the expense of their **authenticity, freedom or power**. They did not want to have to choose between **loyalty to the group and being loyal to themselves**. 'Belonging' should not be conditional or fake, or something to be constantly negotiated. When that fails, or in other words, when an employee can only be part of the group by putting on a mask or hiding parts of the unique identity, then participation in the group will not fulfil the desire for 'belonging'. The employee's attachment and motivation in the organisation will then deteriorate.

3.3. COMMITMENT TO THE COLLECTIVE STORY

An organisation does not just bring people together. It does so to best fulfil an organisation's mission. In other words, inclusion does not just touch on the basic needs of employees, which are mainly at the individual and relational level. There is also a **collective** aspect. Employees of a team can also define themselves: *"(...) by the extent to which they identify with the collective identity of the organisation. This can result in feelings of commonality, a collective self-concept, that transcend individual differences (personal self-concept) and relationships (interpersonal self-concept)."* (Buengeler et al. 2018).

Thus, a third element of inclusion is inspect and relationship in the collective story. In an inclusive workplace, employees have the confidence to speak their minds and feel the motivation to contribute to achieving the **organisation's mission**. This is the final ingredient to take full advantage of the richness of diversity to maximise service quality.

The need for a **collective identity** consequently encompasses the personal (uniqueness) and the interpersonal (togetherness) and has to do with the shared mission of an organisation. shared through means: the organisation radiates explicit values and norms, real for both internal employees and the target group it addresses. Employees derive satisfaction from belonging to an organisation in which they can fully identify with, whose values and standards are authentic and practised as such. This manifests itself in the idea they 'belong' to this organisation. They experience a sense of **commonness**. To achieve inclusion at this collective level, it is important that the organisation creates space for



participation and involvement, and that the collective identity also reflects the values of equal opportunity, respect, appreciation of uniqueness, attention to belonging.

4. INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP IN THE INCLUSIVE WORK CONTEXT

In the previous section, we unravelled the elements of an inclusive workplace. But what makes a workplace inclusive? How does a work context grow in which every employee feels fully included? What makes each employee feel treated fairly and respectfully, feel appreciation for their uniqueness, and at the same time feel authentically part of the bigger picture, contributing to the collective story? Many factors come into play, including the organisation's mission, policies, practices, and the behaviour of colleagues. An inclusive workplace implies a shared responsibility of every stakeholder who shapes the organisation.

The impact of the leader in creating an inclusive work context should not be underestimated. Bourke and Espedido (2020) find that 70% of the extent to which an individual employee says they feel included is determined by what leaders say or do. So, the leader has a lot of influence, because the more the team members feel included in the team, the more they speak up, put in extra effort, cooperate - all of which contribute to the facility achieving higher service quality.

Translating the elements of inclusion to the role of the leader, we see that **inclusive leadership** is about:

1. Treating people and groups **fairly** - that is, based on their unique identity rather than stereotypes.
2. **'Personalising' individuals** - that is, understanding and valuing the **uniqueness** of different team members, while accepting them as a full member of the team.
3. Being able to **leverage diversity in thinking** to improve thought processes and decision-making, reducing the likelihood of unpleasant surprises.

4.1 THE PROFILE OF THE INCLUSIVE LEADER

The extensive research by Dillon, Bourke, Espedido et al. (Deloitte. 2016, 2020 onwards) shows that the leaders who succeed in creating inclusive workplaces possess six signature traits. Together, these six signature traits form a powerful knowledge to deal with diversity. A leader who internalises these traits is better able to deal effectively with a diverse society, connects better with a diverse target group, has greater access to a broad spectrum of diverse ideas, and can better support a diverse workforce in reaching their full potential.

1. **Visible commitment:** They articulate authentic commitment to diversity, challenge the status quo, hold others accountable and make diversity and inclusion a personal priority.
2. **Humility:** They are modest about capabilities, admit mistakes, and create the space for others to contribute.
3. **Awareness of bias:** They show awareness of personal blind spots as well as flaws in the system and work hard to ensure meritocracy.
4. **Curiosity about others:** They demonstrate an open mindset and deep curiosity about others, listen without judgment, and seek with empathy to understand those around them.



5. **Cultural intelligence:** They are attentive to others' cultures and adapt as required.
6. **Effective collaboration:** They empower others, pay attention to diversity of thinking and psychological safety, and focus on team cohesion.

It was also investigated which of these traits is most important in creating an inclusive context for collaboration in a diverse team. The answer to what is most important depends on who you ask. If you ask the leader himself, he or she will put commitment first and foremost, but if you ask the people working with the leader, then awareness of bias is placed first. Dillon and Bourke (2016) report from the same study the results of a survey of more than 4,000 employees across more than 400 leaders, that - although the six traits are important and work as a cluster - there is still one trait that is seen as most important among surveyed employees: the leader's awareness of bias in himself and in the organisation. This contributes most to employees feeling fully included in the organisation.

However, employees are not looking for a simple acknowledgement of bias, topped with a fatalistic sauce that there is simply little that can be done about it. They value awareness of bias, coupled with two additional behaviours:

- **Humility** - Employees want to see that their leaders are willing to address their bias. Fatalism is akin to: "Hey, I know I have this bias, but who cares, I am who I am". In contrast, leaders who are humble acknowledge their vulnerability to prejudice and ask for feedback on their blind spots and habits. The research shows that when knowledge of bias is combined with high humility, it can increase employees' sense of inclusion by up to 25%.
- **Empathy and curiosity about others** - Employees do not want their leaders to try to understand their point of view and experience as a dry intellectual exercise, but to be empathetic. That means: understanding others deeply and making them feel heard. For example, one employee noted: "The leader's empathy in dealing with others makes the leader approachable, trustworthy and shows his eagerness to cooperate with and/or support colleagues and superiors." When knowledge of bias is combined with a high level of empathy and perspective taking, it can increase employees' sense of inclusion by up to 33%.

So you recognise the inclusive leader by a cluster of six signature traits, being visible commitment, humility, awareness of bias, curiosity, cultural intelligence, and effective collaboration.

4.2 Models for inclusive leadership

In what follows, we reach out to two models that provide a leader with tools to achieve inclusive leadership. These models provide guidelines, a way of working, that strengthen the professional actions of the leader in growing towards inclusive leadership.

4.2.1 EIGHT INCLUSIVE PRINCIPLES (Jitske Kramer)

Jitse Kramer states in her book "Wow, what a difference. Let the mix work. Diversity works" (Boom, 2019) eight inclusion principles that can guide inclusive leadership. These are principles that help to achieve an open, inclusive work environment. In doing so, one piece of advice runs like a thread throughout her story: **actively seek out the similarities and the differences. Both matter.**

1. **Seek the difference** - Seek out people who are different from you, even though it might be more pleasant to work with people who are very similar to you. Broaden your



preferences. This does not mean that you should stop following your intuition, but rather broaden your view.

2. **See the power of power** - Formal and informal power is present in every organisation. We constantly tune in, consciously and unconsciously, to the position people hold in the team's ranking. Not wanting to see this creates exclusion. Therefore, it is important to consciously think about who decides what is 'normal' and how we want to deal with that power.
3. **Challenge the truth** - Nothing has a meaning of its own. We humans give meaning. And when we are with a group that gives the same meaning, we start thinking it is 'true'. We then call that 'culture', where each does what is 'normal'. Inclusion means that we are allowed to question each other's truths: "Why do you do this the way you do?" That starts by questioning your own truth.
4. **Enjoy the unknown** - How can we become comfortable with the fact that we don't know exactly what is going to happen, that we are still searching for answers? Diversity takes us and our employees out of our/their comfort zone. We get into the stretch zone. When we get too far out of our comfort zone, panic sets in. The trick is to stay in the stretch zone.
5. **Not or, but and/and** - Differences are not a problem until someone claims the truth. Either/or thinking is about figuring out who has the best answer or who should be right. Then we start rolling our muscles and get into competition. It gets more interesting when we ask the question: "How can we use the best of all the good ideas to make something even better?"
6. **Actively search for alternatives** - We love to seek affirmation from other persons. How often do you ask: "Is there someone who has a completely different idea?" A minority voice will not easily be heard by itself; it will not easily make itself known. You have to actively invite it and give it a place, because we can only reach the full potential of our team if we combine all the perspectives present.
7. **Vary in rhythm** - At the heart of this principle is that we should not adapt people, but adjust ways of working. People and groups have their own rhythms and with each rhythm come specific qualities. A team needs the different rhythms. Try to create a jam session with your team with a few basic agreements so that employees can tune into each other, but otherwise have the freedom to dance to different rhythms.
8. **Do it together** - Being inclusive on your own does not go smoothly. How do we create an inclusive culture in the organisation? Know what you have in mind. Know why you want it. And ask your people to join you.

4.2.2 THE DIVERSITY & INCLUSION COMPASS

A second model that provides direction in developing inclusive leadership is found in the Diversity Academy. Marijke Cornelis, diversity coach, developed the Diversity & Inclusion Compass in 2017 as a navigation tool that uses **8 key to connection in diversity** to give direction towards inclusive living and working together in a team. The compass offers a practical, step-by-step method to harvest the added value of diversity in the team and bring colleagues to quality collaboration.

We invite you to join us for a moment in the following metaphor ...

Through a concurrence of circumstances, you and your colleagues have completely landed in the same ship ... You have a lot to offer each other and you need each other, in order to be able to develop your talents and achieve the organisation's mission together. That is why it is important that your ship does



not turn adrift in circles, but that your crew works together towards the common goal. The more your colleagues differ from each other, the more you will need to beware to connect.

The Diversity & Inclusion Compass helps you sail smoothly with the ship towards the common goal, in such a way that everyone feels optimally included and can contribute optimally.

But before you set sail, two preparation steps are important :

- Clearly formulate the common goal or interest of the team. We call this: find the **north star**.
- Commit to sailing the ship within three landmarks; they are the conditions for connection. What are those three landmarks? The recognition that **every person is unique**, that every person is **equal** and that every person is **free**, and as such makes autonomous and independent decisions. That makes every form of collaboration also a form of negotiation.

EIGHT KEYS TO CONNECTING IN DIVERSITY

KEY 1 - EXPRESS DIVERSITY AS SOMETHING NORMAL.

It is normal to have different views among your colleagues on how things should be at work. After all, each team member starts from their own unique position. Education, view of people, culture, etc. play an important role in this. Connecting in diversity goes more smoothly when we approach difference as a normal given. Try to see 'normalising' as a basic attitude. In a free society, people are allowed to differ from each other. The resulting diversity is just part of it.

KEY 2 - INTERPRET YOUR OWN TRUTH AS RELATIVE.

There are no absolute truths, no absolute certainties and no immutable rules. What was once taken for granted may no longer be so now or may disappear in the future. Similarly, each team member's opinion is relative. It is not 'the' truth or the only right way. Connecting in diversity is smoother when we calmly consider different perspectives. Try to relativize your own or the 'dominant' point of view. Leave room for doubt, for search, for critical questions. Team cooperation can be shaped in more than one way.

KEY 3 - MEET THE OTHER WITH AN OPEN HEART.

Opening our hearts to the other does not always come naturally. In contrary, by nature we tend to avoid differences. The confrontation with difference is a trigger: should we flee, fight or freeze? Connecting in diversity goes more smoothly when we give ourselves a push beyond that first primal reflex. Try to open your own heart and that of colleagues by instilling self-confidence and creating safety in the team. Avoid sowing panic. Keep a cool head and radiate calm.

KEY 4 - OBSERVE BROADLY, WITHOUT BIAS OR CLICHÉ.

From respectful curiosity, we step beyond clichés and suspend our judgement. We look for the other person's arguments. We suppress the tendency to pigeonhole the team member who thinks differently, even before we have properly engaged in a conversation. Connecting in diversity is smoother when we broaden our view and zoom out to a broader perspective. Encourage your colleagues to invite each other and cultivate learning from each other. This creates space to look for new solutions. Avoid 'labelling'. Block out swearing.

KEY 5 - MAKE AGREEMENTS, SYMBOLISM AND LANGUAGE FLEXIBLE.



You may find more support for a tailor-made approach than for a one-size-fits-all. Every team member has their own boundaries, wishes and concerns; sometimes these are too far apart to determine the common denominator. Flexibility in rules and agreements (within certain limits) can then offer a solution. Connecting in diversity goes more smoothly when we allow code switching and are flexible. Try to add nuance and shifts in the way you use rules, agreements, language and symbols. Attention to multilingualism also belongs here.

KEY 6 - TALK TO EACH OTHER IN A CONNECTING DIALOGUE.

With this sixth key, we focus on the power of connecting communication. We choose dialogue as the standard form of conversation. We do not turn our team into a battleground by engaging in debate with each other. We set aside time - a little is enough - to actively listen to each other. Connecting in diversity goes more smoothly when boundaries, wishes and interests are made visible through dialogue. Try to make all arguments in the team visible to each team member. In open dialogue, we strive for a balance between understanding the other and making yourself clear. We postpone the decision for a while.

KEY 7 - ACCORD DIVERSE INTERESTS INTO A SUPPORTED OUTCOME.

Just as in an orchestra the various instruments are tuned into each other to create a harmonious melody, we also strive for alignment in our team. As a manager, you don't have to be the smartest to do this... With this seventh key, we opt for co-creation as the standard form of cooperation. Connecting in diversity goes more smoothly when you 'make solutions together'. With co-creating, give all team members influence over the process and the result. Especially with complex challenges, this gives the best guarantee of a supported result.

KEY 8 - WHEN CONFLICTS ARISE, PRE-SET A WIN-WIN PERSPECTIVE.

Learning to argue better is the last key to sailing our ship full of diversity straight to our north star ... There is a chance that despite your fine connecting efforts, conflict will still arise. That too is part of the journey. In that case, avoid having 'winners' and 'losers'. Connecting in diversity goes more smoothly when we 'learn' to argue. At a quiet moment, discuss with your team how you can handle conflicts. In doing so, adopt a strategy that leads to a win-win solution.

There are many common elements in the above models that can guide an inclusive leader towards inclusive working. We list them below:

openness - respect - commitment - togetherness - open view - modesty - humility - awareness of bias - no prejudice - respectful curiosity - cultural intelligence - connecting communication - embrace the unknown - look for alternatives - difference as a given and as a strength - ...

4.3 Positive effects of inclusive leadership

We mentioned it at the start of this inspiration framework: inclusive leadership is 'the way to go' precisely because the workplace is characterised by a diversity of employees. But in addition,



inclusiveness also potentially generates positive characteristics. The study by Shore et al (2011) lists the following positive effects of inclusive leadership:

- high-quality relationships among employees and managers;
- high job satisfaction;
- the intention to stay (long) in the organisation;
- quality performance (employees do their work well, deliver quality);
- responsibility for the organisation;
- commitment to the organisation's mission;
- high well-being (low stress-related complaints and illness);
- high creativity;
- career opportunities for all employees based on merit rather than identity.

This list shows that inclusive leadership can lead to possible positive 'outcomes' that benefit all employees, the organisation and thus children, families and society.



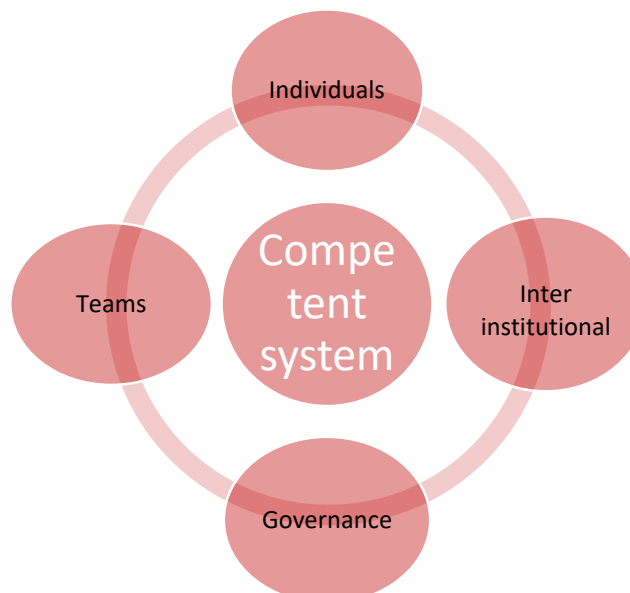
5. INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP IN A COMPETENT SYSTEM

After reading this inspiration framework, it is clear that inclusive leadership is not just the responsibility of that one leader.

- It requires strong initial training of leaders and the team.
- It requires child-free hours, so that all team members can think, reflect, take action, and evaluate together.
- It requires ongoing forms of learning, so that leaders and team members can continue to learn about forms of coaching and support.
- It requires a local and Flemish policy that opts for sufficient staff on the floor, but also in leadership roles.

In other words, it calls for a **competent system**. A competent system involves several 'layers' that are important to work towards high quality for children, parents and society. So, a competent system is not the sum of all competent individuals, but also an interplay of things decided around and above the basic facility. A competent system has the following 4 'layers':

- individual competences;
- institutional or team competencies;
- inter-institutional competences: networks of basic facilities, links with education, research centres, training institutions, local authorities, etc.;
- competences at policy level: vision of ECEC as a public good, guaranteeing quantity and quality, ensuring child-free hours, workable work, ...



In this inspiration framework on inclusive leadership, we would like to highlight two issues: (1) professionalisation of every stakeholder, and (2) the importance of the structural level.



1 - Professionalisation of each person involved

Professionalisation of each individual employee, of the leaders and of the whole team is a first important 'layer'. It allows them to continue learning, enriching and nurturing themselves. Teams with a supported professionalisation policy and a culture of reflection among all, will grow in their practice, leading to more quality to children and families. So both individual practice - what the professionals actually do, how they interact with children, offer them rich play, learning and care opportunities ... - and the reflective culture of the team matter.

VBJK together with some colleagues (Eurofound, 2015) investigated which forms of professionalisation are really 'effective'. Effective forms are characterised by:

- active involvement of staff in the process of strengthening pedagogical quality within the service;
- focusing on learning in practice;
- the support of a pedagogical coach who guides the whole;
- child-free hours;
- a coherent pedagogical framework, based on research and responding to local needs.

2 - The structural 'upper' layers

Investing in the competence of the leaders and the team through professionalisation is a necessary but insufficient condition for quality. A competent level 'above' is also needed, e.g. a strong school board, a strong local policy that supports the leader and the team, a competent Flemish policy that makes clear choices that put children, families and society first, a policy that starts from a rights perspective, that provides sufficient resources, that ensures sufficient staff, workable work, and good working conditions for all staff, ...

Consequently, for an inclusive leader to work towards an inclusive workplace that leads to positive effects for the whole team, and quality towards children, families and society, a lot of structural 'preconditions' at the upper levels also need to be in place.



6. TO CONCLUDE

With this inspiration framework, we hope we have unravelled the concept of inclusive leadership for you. From the core concepts of inclusion and diversity, we have come to the conclusion that leadership in the current social context can hardly be anything else but inclusive.

However, shaping inclusive leadership is not self-evident. This became clear from, among other things, the **inclusion paradox**, which shows that there is need for finding a balance between the needs of all employees for **uniqueness** and for **togetherness**, belonging. Beyond this, there is also a level that transcends individual employees and plays out more at the team level: the **collective story**.

As this is not self-evident, we reached out to characteristics of inclusive leadership and two inspiring models that can provide tools to achieve inclusive leadership. These characteristics and models show that inclusive leadership starts from an open mind, an awareness of prejudices, attention to all employees (including the more invisible ones), a critical and reflective attitude, ... and shared forms of leadership where each employee can help to build a collective story from their own strengths, which puts quality for all children, families and society first. Of course, none of this is the responsibility of that one leader; it requires a competent system.

Curious about anchors to work on inclusive leadership in your own practice? Then be sure to take a look at the ILIAS tools at www.ilias.vbjk.be



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[De leider van morgen is in de eerste plaats inclusief \(?\) - #ZigZagHR](#)

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oczMZxC60W0&ab_channel=TEDxTalks

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