

Hello, my name is Nancy. I am a third-year student of the International Human Resource Management at Saxion UAS. I am excited to share with you my mini-action research project on Diversity & Inclusion. I conducted this project in 2021 in the Honors Program Creativity in Finance and Management.

My motivation to start the project

"Since every person has its blind spot, what we see may be different from what others see. Being aware of that fact considerably helps us take the best values out of a diverse team" - a thought-provoking lesson about diversity from my Honors Program professor - Christoph Hinske. Since I will probably always work in diverse teams, I will remember our HP project for many years to come.

As a 20-year-old woman, I am grateful for having had many exposures to the many different forms of diversity, be it gender, generation, nationality, personality, and even thinking styles. Through this exposure, I learned to appreciate the power of diverse teams. I am also mindful that the individual's sense of belonging is essential and that fostering Diversity and Inclusion (D&I) is a treasure to organisational effectiveness and achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (Anuwa-Amarh E. & Hinske, C., 2020, Anuwa-Amarh, E., & Hinske, C. 2020, June 1).

Therefore, I explored the question: " **What is needed so leaders can leverage Diversity & Inclusion in the organisation for the sake of its ultimate performance?**". I conducted qualitative research with four professionals to gain their different perspectives on the research question using System Thinking (Wikipedia, 2021) and Causal Loop Diagramming (Wikipedia, 2020) to understand and integrate their complex reasoning what I am asking with my question. With this, I tried to map their "mental model", which is their assumptions, generalising about the topic at hand (*The Importance of Mental Models in Your HR Future*, 2013).

The Outcome of the Mini-Research Project

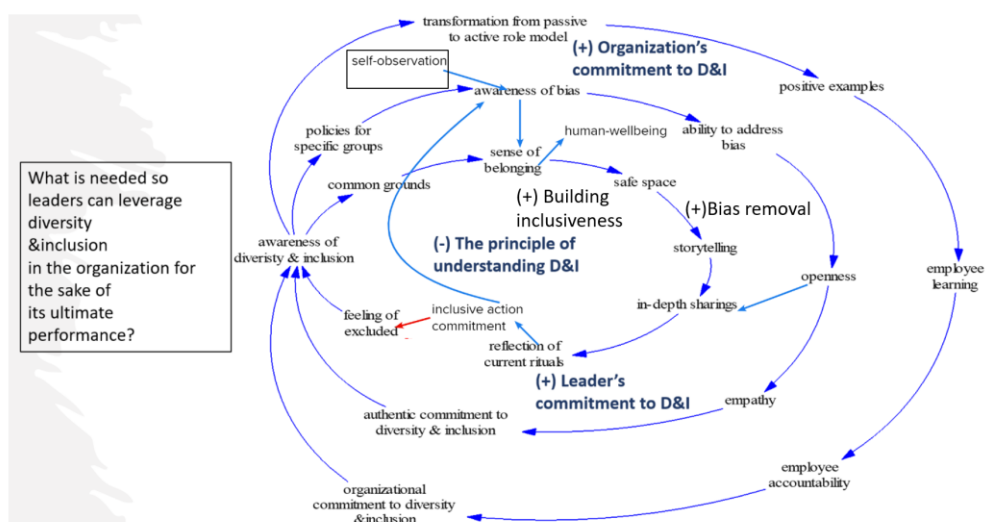


Figure 1: The integrated model as a Causal Loop Diagram, the outcome of the four conversations

Methodological Approach

To answer my central research question, I developed a Causal Loop Diagram by interviewing four persons who have outstanding knowledge, experience, and passion for the theme of Diversity & Inclusion. I conducted these online conversations by following the semi-structured interview approach (Doyle, A. 2020, June 27).

I structured the conversation around a central question: *What is needed so leaders can leverage Diversity & Inclusion in the organisation to increase its performance?*. Based on their answers, I created several individual Mental Models and asked follow-up questions to gain deeper insights. Right after the interviewees validated their Mental Models, I started “playing” with the data/integrating them into the model shown in figure 1.

Detailed Description of Results

The five dynamics are (a) Bias Removal, (b) Building Inclusiveness, (c) The principle of understanding D&I, (d) Leader’s commitment to D&I, (e) Organization’s commitment to D&I. They are explained in more detail below:

Bias Removal

First and foremost, leaders need to start with their observation to be aware of personal bias (Gurchiek, 2017). The more leaders can observe themselves, the likelier it is for them to identify and acknowledge their unconscious preferences/biases. According to the interview partners, this can help them to address or even overcome them. So, when leaders can address their bias, they tend to become more open to seeing reality as it is and not as they believe it be.

Gaining a deeper view of the existing patterns of the group or company may drive leader's commitment to inclusive action, which enhances their awareness of bias. With this step, we can wrap up the 1st loop.

Building inclusiveness

According to the Global Diversity Week of PwC in 2015, carrying out inclusive actions makes people more aware of their blind spots and enhances their sense of belonging (PwC, 2015). An increased sense of belonging is an essential aspect of a more positive work culture, which, according to Seppälä & Cameron (2015) leads to higher productivity. Furthermore, people that are working in a psychologically safe environment are more courageous to tell their stories and perform better. As you can imagine, people share more openly and have a chance to gain in-depth sharings from their partners. This is the moment when individuals build a thorough understanding of why people think and act in different ways. Hence, they become more active in reflecting on current routines that unconsciously exclude people. This heightened awareness leads to more inclusive behaviours, understanding of bias and finally, performance (Delizonna, 2017). Now, we can close this second loop.

The principle of understanding D&I

As inclusive action plays a vital role in elevating the sense of belonging, it is fair to say that it leads to a decrease in exclusion. But, since people start feeling less dismissed, they risk building less awareness of the importance of diversity. The fewer people are aware of existing diversity, the less they can create common grounds, leading to a lower sense of belonging.

Nevertheless, a greater understanding of belonging is built by aligning oneself and the group's purpose (Brower, 2021).

As mentioned earlier, the sense of belonging influences one's commitment to inclusive action. In this context, experiencing lower levels of belonging leads to decreased commitment to inclusive action, which causes an increase in feeling excluded. But, it seems that when people feel excluded, they are more aware of diversity & inclusion. We can finish this 3rd loop.

Leader's commitment to D&I:

More awareness of diversity & inclusion can contribute to having policies that help leaders further develop their understanding of biases. At this stage, leaders become more open to seeing things around them and embrace differences. Thus, they are better able to put themselves in other's shoes, which fosters their empathy. As a result, leaders can reach authentic commitment on D&I, generating more awareness about it. We can close this 4th loop.

Organisation's commitment to D&I:

Besides developing common grounds and policies, the intensified awareness of D&I also helps leaders to be more vital role models. Once leaders can act as role models, they can give more positive examples to their teams. Accordingly, employees are more aware of situations and can hold each other accountable. Therefore, employees can better contribute to the organisational commitment to D&I, which raises the awareness of D&I on the corporate level. The last loop came to an end.

Conclusion and Recommendations

In response to the research question, leaders need to learn to remove their blind spots and build inclusiveness. However, it is worth noticing that people might feel safer but tend to be less aware of the importance of D&I if inclusiveness is strengthened, which affects them to commit to inclusive action, resulting in feeling excluded.

Furthermore, I would recommend decision-makers monitor the employees' awareness about Diversity & Inclusion, ensuring authentic commitment. They need to understand the "alarm" that the feeling of comfort and inclusiveness does not mean that they should stop building up their awareness about Diversity & Inclusion in their environment.

Let me end this research with a thoughtful perspective from George Dei:

"Inclusion is not bringing people into what already exists; it is making a new space, a better space for everyone."

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