

## INSIDER CREATING AN INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP TEAM

### Why is it important to your business that you have an inclusive leadership team?

Having an inclusive leadership team is crucial for a business because it fosters diverse perspectives, which can lead to better decision-making and more innovative solutions. When a leadership team includes people from different backgrounds, experiences, and viewpoints, it enables the organization to understand and meet the needs of a wider range of customers and stakeholders. It also promotes a more positive company culture, where employees feel valued and empowered, which can improve retention, productivity, and employee satisfaction.

In addition, businesses that prioritize inclusion often see better financial performance because they can tap into diverse markets and respond more effectively to challenges. Inclusive leadership also sets the tone for the broader organization, encouraging all employees to embrace diversity and collaboration, which can ultimately contribute to the overall success of the company.

### What's the best way of assembling an inclusive leadership team?

Assembling an inclusive leadership team involves both intentional actions and creating an environment that values diversity and inclusion. This is a suggested approach:

1. Start with a clear commitment to diversity and inclusion: Leaders should establish and communicate a strong commitment to inclusivity as a core value. This signals to the entire organization that diversity isn't just a trend, but a long-term priority.
2. Broaden the recruitment process: Cast a wide net when searching for leadership talent. This can involve:
  - Engaging with diverse talent pools (e.g., through partnerships with organizations supporting underrepresented groups).
  - Writing job descriptions that are inclusive, avoiding language that may unintentionally discourage certain groups from applying.
  - Ensuring diverse interview panels to minimize bias in candidate selection.

**Employment law and people management experts.**

Bond Legal Limited is incorporated and registered in England and Wales, number: **11723699**

Registered Office: **19A The Nook, Anstey, Leicester LE7 7AZ**

VAT registration number: **349 9841 39**

3. Use data and metrics: Track diversity and inclusion data across all leadership levels, identifying gaps in representation and taking steps to address them. Regularly measure progress to hold the organization accountable.
4. Focus on diversity of thought and experience: Diversity is not only about gender, race, or age, but also about bringing in leaders with different perspectives, professional backgrounds, and life experiences. A mix of different industries, educational paths, and leadership styles can enrich the decision-making process.
5. Build an inclusive culture from the top: Leadership should model inclusive behaviours, showing respect for diverse viewpoints and encouraging open dialogue. This helps build trust and sets a positive example for the entire team.
6. Offer mentorship and sponsorship: Ensure that diverse talent has equal opportunities for mentorship and career development. Sponsorship, where senior leaders actively advocate for high-potential individuals, is particularly effective for fostering upward mobility among underrepresented groups.
7. Foster an environment where everyone can thrive: Inclusion is about more than just assembling a diverse team—it's about making sure all voices are heard, and that people feel comfortable being their authentic selves. This means creating policies and practices that support work-life balance, equitable pay, and a culture of respect.
8. Encourage continuous learning and feedback: Inclusive leadership is a skill that requires ongoing development. Encourage leaders to engage in training around bias, cultural competency, and empathy, and ensure there's space for honest feedback about how inclusive the leadership team is in practice.
9. Align with the business strategy: Make sure that diversity and inclusion goals are aligned with the overall business strategy, ensuring that diverse leadership supports the company's objectives and vision.

By prioritizing these strategies, organizations can build leadership teams that are not only inclusive but also more effective, innovative, and reflective of the diverse world in which they operate.



## **What should an inclusive leadership team look like in terms of balance of gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation etc?**

An inclusive leadership team should reflect a balance that mirrors the diversity of the broader population and the community or market the organization serves. The goal is not to rigidly define quotas but to create a team that fosters a range of perspectives, experiences, and ideas.

An inclusive leadership team should strive for a balance where multiple identities—gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, and beyond—are represented. The team should not only reflect the diversity of society but also foster a culture where diverse voices are heard, respected, and can thrive. Importantly, it's not just about numbers but about creating a truly inclusive environment where everyone can bring their full selves to the table, contributing to better decision-making, innovation, and overall business success.

As the business world moves towards greater diversity and inclusion, teams should remain flexible and open to adapting to the changing needs of their workforce and customers.

## **Should you use specialist recruiters?**

Using specialist recruiters can be highly beneficial when forming an inclusive leadership team. Specialist recruiters often have networks that include underrepresented groups, helping ensure a broader and more diverse candidate pool. In addition, they understand best practices for reducing bias in recruitment, from crafting inclusive job descriptions to structured interview techniques.

Specialist recruiters are often well-versed in Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) strategies and can advise on how to attract and retain diverse leaders. Since they focus on inclusive leadership, such specialists can help identify the right candidates more efficiently than general recruiters.

## **What advice/help should you seek?**

Forming an inclusive leadership team requires strategic planning, expertise, and the right support. Such support and advice can be obtained as follows:

1. Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Consultants
2. Specialist Recruiters & Executive Search Firms
3. Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) & Internal Advocates
4. Mentorship & Sponsorship Programs



## Should you ever 'positively discriminate' to get the right balance in your leadership team?

"Positive discrimination"—hiring or promoting individuals based on protected characteristics (e.g., gender, race) rather than solely on merit—is a controversial practice and can be unlawful.

However, there is a distinction between positive discrimination and positive action (which is often legal and encouraged). Instead of "positively discriminating", a better approach is to focus on expanding the talent pool, removing bias in hiring, and ensuring fair progression opportunities. If two candidates are equally qualified, diversity can be a tie-breaker—but not the primary factor.

## How easy is it to create an inclusive leadership team?

Creating an inclusive leadership team is not necessarily *easy*, but it is achievable with intentional effort and strategic planning. Some of the challenges include:

1. Unconscious Bias – Leaders may unintentionally favour people who share their backgrounds or perspectives.
2. Limited Talent Pipelines – If hiring processes don't proactively seek diverse candidates, teams may remain homogeneous.
3. Resistance to Change – Some existing team members may resist shifts in culture or decision-making structures.
4. Tokenism – Simply adding diverse individuals without ensuring they have equal influence can be counterproductive.
5. Systemic Barriers – Structural inequities in organizations may hinder the recruitment and retention of diverse leaders.

Building an inclusive leadership team requires deliberate action rather than passive hope. While it may take time, the long-term benefits—such as enhanced innovation, better decision-making, and improved employee engagement—make it a worthy investment.

## What are the challenges organisations face in terms of resistance and scepticism about its benefits?

Organizations often encounter resistance and scepticism when striving to build an inclusive leadership team. These challenges can stem from individual mindsets, organizational culture, or systemic barriers. Below are some key obstacles:



## 1. Individual Resistance & Bias

- Fear of Losing Power – Some leaders may feel that inclusion threatens their status or influence.
- Unconscious Bias – Decision-makers might unknowingly favour people similar to themselves, questioning whether diversity improves leadership.
- Scepticism About Meritocracy – A belief that inclusivity efforts prioritize diversity over competence can lead to resistance.

## 2. Organizational and Cultural Barriers

- Change Fatigue – Employees and leaders may resist another “initiative,” especially if past efforts didn’t show clear benefits.
- Lack of Role Models – If leadership has always been homogeneous, it can be hard to see the value of change.
- Corporate Politics – Competing business priorities may sideline inclusion efforts, seeing them as “nice to have” rather than essential.

## 3. Misconceptions About Business Impact

- Short-Term Focus – Organizations driven by immediate results may struggle to recognize the long-term benefits of inclusion.
- Scepticism About ROI – Some leaders demand direct, quantifiable proof that inclusive leadership improves performance, ignoring research showing its impact on innovation and engagement.
- Perceived Complexity – Some believe fostering inclusivity requires too much effort or disrupts existing structures.

## 4. External and Systemic Factors

- Industry Norms – In sectors with historically homogeneous leadership (e.g., tech, finance), changing the status quo is harder.

Client or Market Expectations – Some worry that diversity in leadership might not align with traditional customer demographics.

