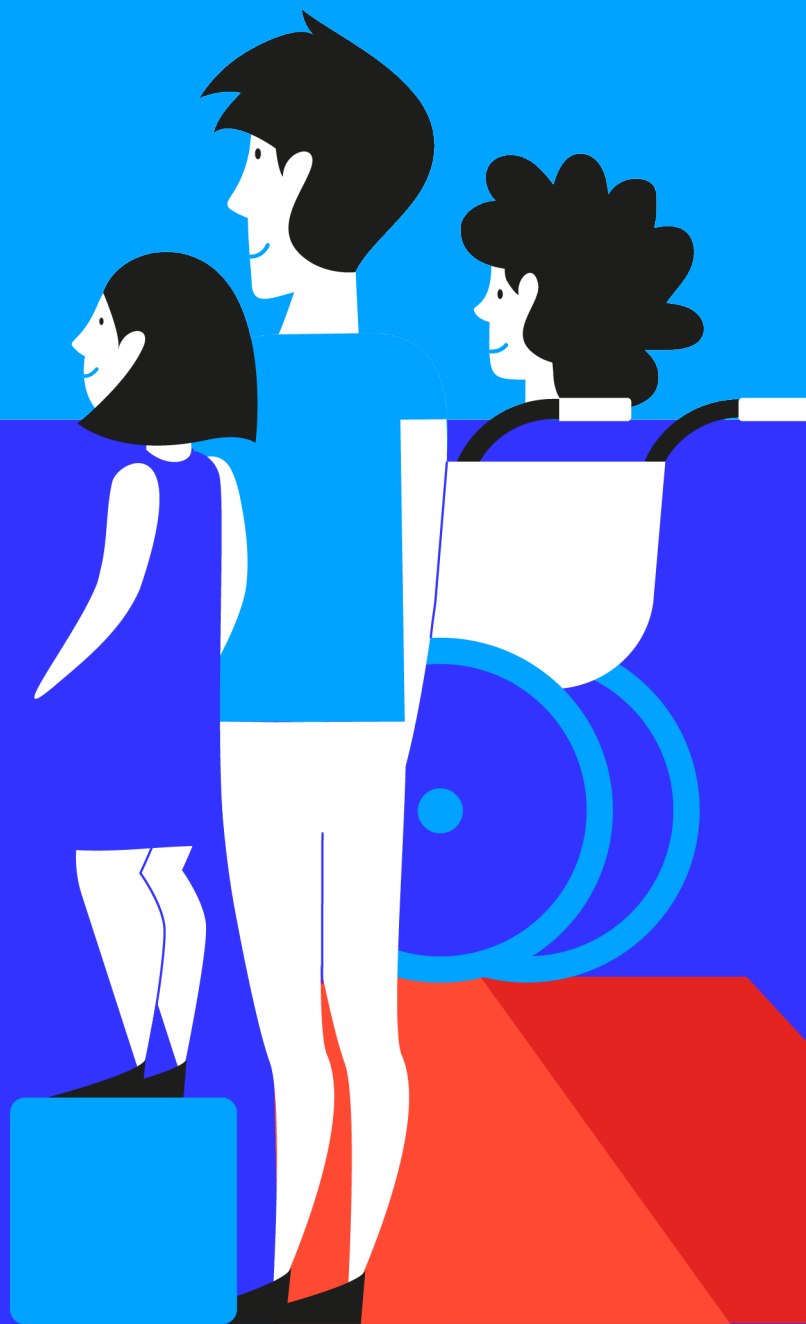




mildon

EQUITY LEADERSHIP MINDSET REPORT



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Executive Summary

Toby Mildon is a Workplace Inclusion Architect and founder of Mildon, an Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) consultancy. Toby has a wealth of professional experience as an EDI practitioner alongside his lived experience of disability. Toby authored the Amazon bestseller 'Inclusive Growth' which provides a practical framework with a set of best practices for the sustainable implementation of diversity and inclusion.

This Equity Leadership Mindset report is grounded in best practices in equity, diversity and inclusion and draws on a range of respected sources in the field. **The report provides an overview of how to integrate fair and inclusive leadership practices into everyday business.** It also provides a set of useful prompts to support leaders in developing an equity leadership mindset.

This report raises **awareness of how bias can influence decision-making.** It explains the **concept of privilege** and **highlights the importance of creating trust and psychological safety** to develop high-performing teams.

Adopting an equity leadership mindset means knowing that the foundations for diversity and inclusivity need to be laid for individuals through equitable business practices. It is only from this that equality will ultimately flow for all. **This report gives leaders the tools with which to succeed.**



About the author of this report

PROFESSIONAL AND LIVED EXPERIENCE OF DISABILITY

Toby Mildon is a Workplace Inclusion Architect Diversity and Inclusion Architect and founder of Mildon, a consultancy and advisory business. Mildon has over 100 clients, spanning 16 different industries. Toby has both professional and lived experience of disability. Toby works with businesses to devise diversity and inclusion strategies, re-engineer processes and systems to minimise the impact of bias and build a culture of inclusion.

FIRST-HAND EXPERIENCE OF DISABILITY PREJUDICE AND INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP

Before setting up his business, Toby worked as an in-house diversity and inclusion manager at the BBC and Deloitte. Toby also chaired BBC Ability (the disabled employee resource group), which represented the voices and careers of disabled employees and those living with long-term health conditions within the corporation. Toby has lived experience of disability having been born with a rare neuromuscular disability (Spinal Muscular Atrophy) and is a powered wheelchair user and requires 24-hour care. Toby has first-hand experience of disability prejudice as well as great examples of inclusive leadership having worked in businesses like British Airways, Accenture, Lloyds Bank, Cerner, the BBC and Deloitte.

AUTHOR OF THE BOOKS "INCLUSIVE GROWTH" AND "BUILDING INCLUSIVITY"

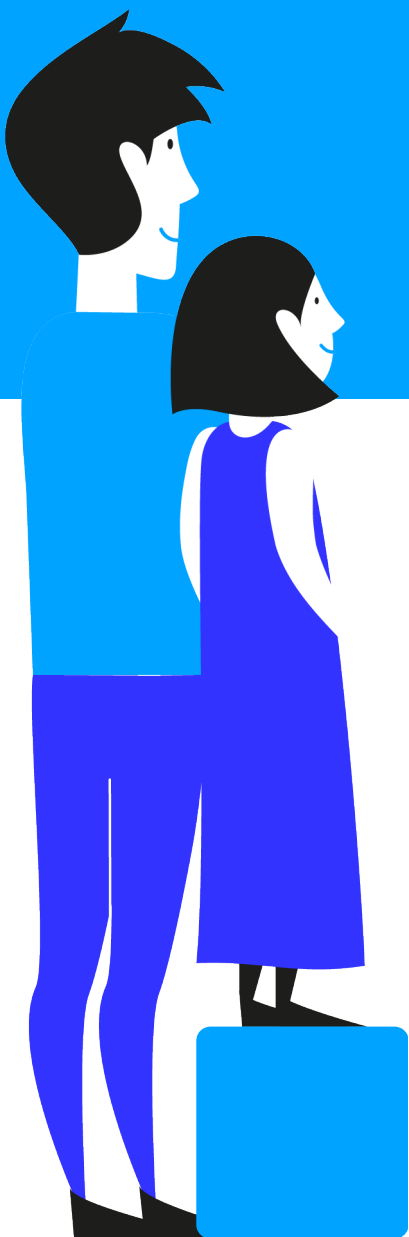
Toby is also the author of two books. The Amazon bestseller '[Inclusive Growth](#)' provides a practical framework with a set of best practices for the sustainable implementation of diversity and inclusion within an organisation. His second book '[Building Inclusivity](#)' provides a step-by-step guide to transforming your workplace into an inclusive environment where everyone thrives.

Introduction

Having the skills and knowledge to handle equity challenges is a must for every effective leader today. **This report provides an overview of how to integrate fair and inclusive leadership practices and develop an equity leadership mindset.**

The report covers the difference between equity and equality and provides leaders with clear **takeaways to shape a personal action plan that will help in creating inclusive and equitable organisational cultures** for all employees.

What's the difference between equity and equality?



Equality can be seen as splitting things equally, for example giving everybody an equal share of something. On the other hand, **equity is thinking about what people need to make things fair. Equity understands that everyone's needs are different.** Seeing the individual, recognising that everyone has a different starting point, and providing people with tailored support and resources all help to create equality, enabling everybody to compete on a level playing field.

One of the analogies that highlights the differences between equality and equity is to think about running a race. Equality would be giving everybody the same type of shoes to run the race but that doesn't necessarily enable everybody to win the race on a level playing field. Giving a wheelchair user the same pair of shoes as other runners isn't going to help them in the slightest if they can't physically run the race. However, if you gave them a racing wheelchair then they would have a far better chance of being able to compete in the race.

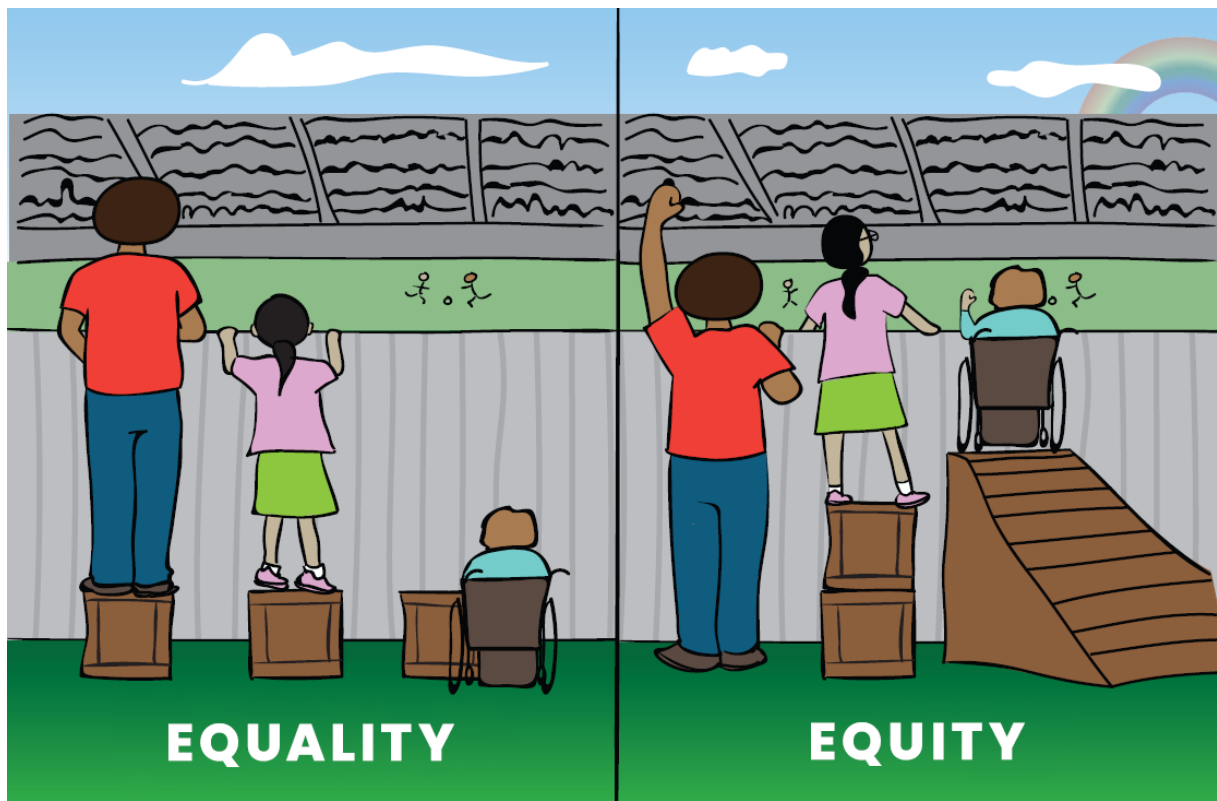


Illustration credit: The Second Line Education Blog

Another way of describing the difference between equality and equity is depicted in the image above, in which three individuals need to be able to see over a fence to watch a game of football. Equality would mean that each person is given the same size box to stand on. But as the image shows, this approach would mean that not everyone could see over the fence comfortably and watch the game. Equity is about giving individuals the personalised resources that they ultimately need to see over the fence.

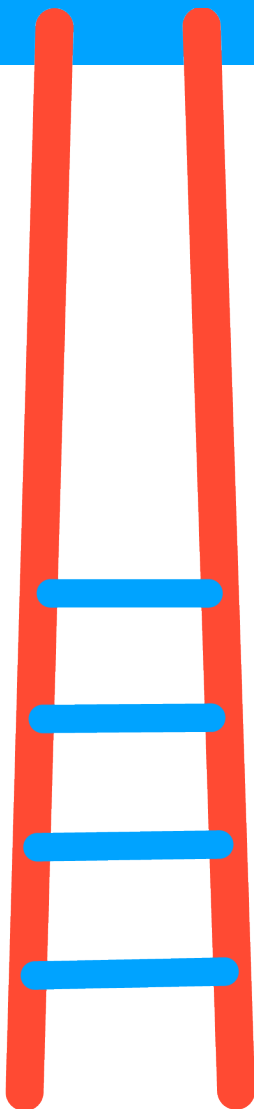
The ultimate goal of equity is to give everyone an equal chance. Whether that's winning the race, looking over the fence to watch the game or getting promoted in your organisation, it means giving everybody the same opportunity to succeed.

Building on equity for diverse teams?

Diverse teams are more effective at making decisions. Diverse teams are more creative and innovative. What a lot of leaders might not realise though, is that diversity is an outcome that is only achieved by traversing several other steps first.

A diverse culture needs to be built from the bottom up.

That means leaders should be thinking about how they deliver equality to their team members by **providing equity that will create a level playing field as the foundation for everything else.** Once the foundations of equity and equality are in place, that's when leaders can focus on ensuring that people feel included within the team and that they have a sense of belonging in the team or the organisation. Only when these fundamentals are in place is the organisation better positioned to be able to attract diverse talent into the business. Additionally, this also helps to retain the diverse talent that's already within the organisation.



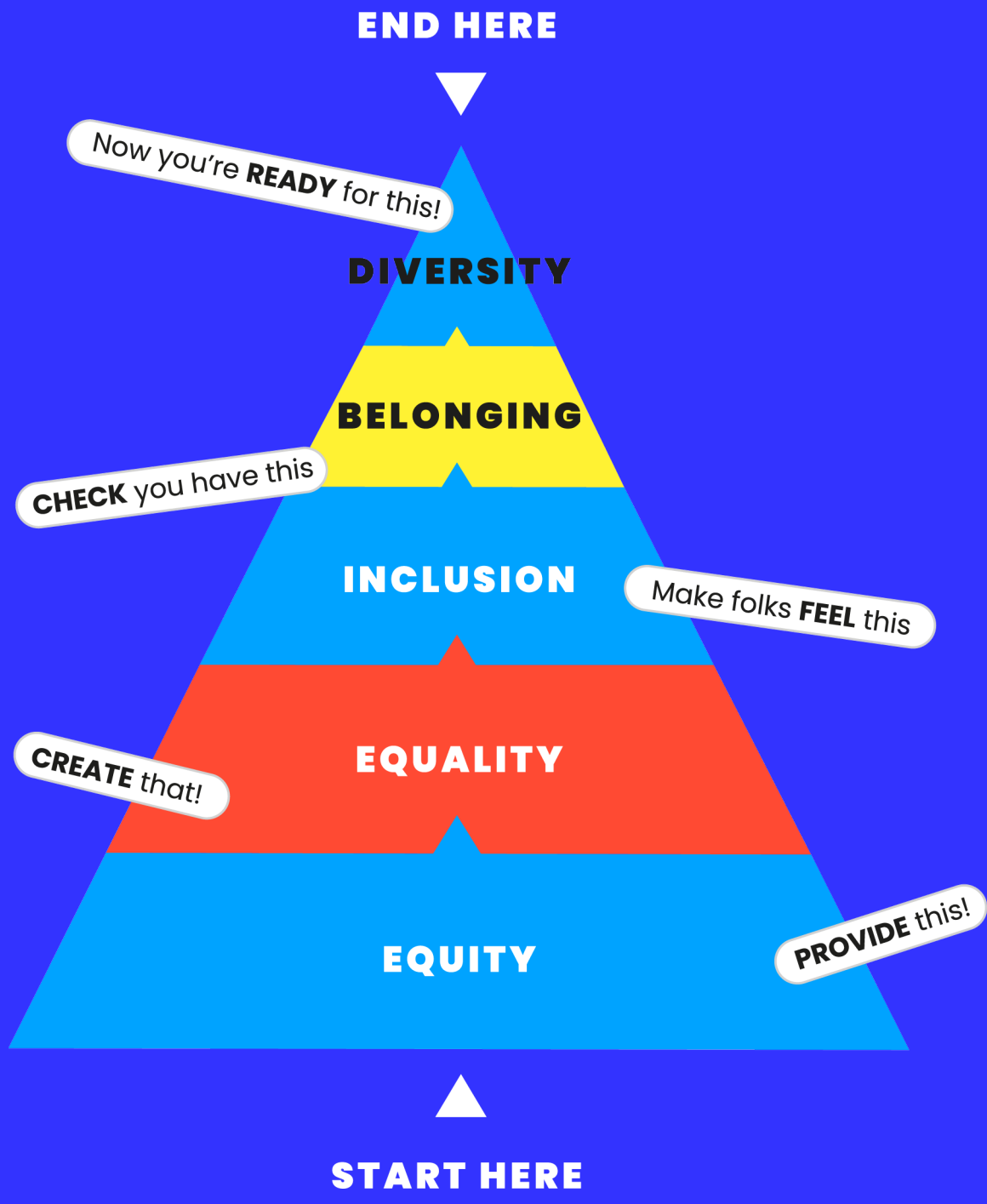


Illustration Credit: Jo Major, Diversity in Recruitment



Equity for disabled employees: an example

It's important to recognise that organisations delivering on equity are doing this **work against a backdrop of many inequalities within society, often stemming from the past.** In the UK, the types of inequalities that disabled people still face today grew worse around the Industrial Revolution when we saw a significant shift from agrarian societies to industrial powerhouses, which profoundly impacted social and economic structures.

We started to see greater inequality for disabled people because of:



A Shift to Factory Work

The Industrial Revolution marked a major shift from agrarian economies to industrialised ones, where factory work became the norm. These factories often required physical labour that was fast-paced and standardised, which **excluded many people with physical impairments.**



Urbanisation

As industries grew, they spurred rapid urbanisation. **Cities expanded quickly and often without the infrastructure to support accessibility and an inclusive built environment.**

Crowded and poorly designed urban spaces made it difficult for disabled people to navigate and live independently.



Economic Marginalisation

The economic structure shifted dramatically, prioritising productivity and efficiency above all. **This labour market was less accommodating to disabled individuals whose impairments might limit their output,** leading to higher rates of poverty and unemployment among the disabled community.



Lack Of Legal Protections

During this era, there were few, if any, legal protections for workers with disabilities. **Discrimination was rampant and socially acceptable,** both in employment practices and in broader societal attitudes.



Medical model of disability

The Industrial Revolution coincided with the rise of the **medical model of disability, which treated disability as a problem to be fixed or cured rather than a societal issue requiring accommodation.** This perspective led to increased institutionalisation and marginalisation of disabled people (like segregated education), rather than integration and support.

During the Industrial Revolution, the medical model of disability gained prominence as part of broader shifts in scientific and medical understanding. This model views disability primarily as a problem of the body, an illness or abnormality that needs to be cured or managed through medical intervention. The rise of modern medicine and the institutionalisation of medical practices gave physicians unprecedented authority over defining and treating disabilities.

Contrasting with the medical model, the **social model of disability, which is more widely accepted today, emphasises that disability is caused by the way society is organised, rather than by a person's impairment or difference.** It looks at ways of removing barriers that restrict life choices for disabled people. According to this model, if a society is structured to include disabled people, they can participate fully and on an equal footing. This model focuses on adapting the environment and attitudes, such as making buildings accessible, providing information in different formats, and challenging discriminatory attitudes.

The social model seeks to shift the responsibility for overcoming barriers from the disabled individual to society, highlighting the need for systemic change to accommodate all citizens equally. This perspective supports the notion that disability is a social construct; it is society that disables people through designing environments and practices that exclude individuals with various impairments.

Unfortunately, the legacy of the Industrial Revolution is still with us today. For example, if you take the London Underground, about 1/3 of the system has got step-free access onto the train. This means that wheelchair users who are working in the city face additional barriers getting to work in the first place.



Access to Work
Making work possible

Thankfully, the UK government has a **funding scheme called Access to Work.** This is a pot of money employers with disabled employees can tap into. The funding **can be used for a range of things to support employees to access work.**

One example is that Access to Work can help pay towards the cost of taxis to and from work for a disabled employee because it might be a more accessible option than taking the London Underground. However, a lot of countries around the world don't have this level of governmental financial support that employers can draw on.

How to avoid reproducing social inequalities in the workplace



1 / **Raise Awareness Among Leaders**

The challenges described in the previous section are some that today's workplaces still face. To tackle these challenges, it's important to **raise awareness** of them first. The more that leaders can become consciously aware, practise inclusive behaviours and be an ally the better.

2 / **Talk About Equity, Diversity and Inclusion**

It is important that leaders get comfortable with talking about the subject of **equity, diversity and inclusion**. There's often a lot of fear around using the wrong language, which might unintentionally cause offence or embarrassment. Sharing this report (and organising supplementary workshops) with your colleagues will help raise awareness, create a shared understanding and vocabulary.

3 / Focus on the Hiring Process

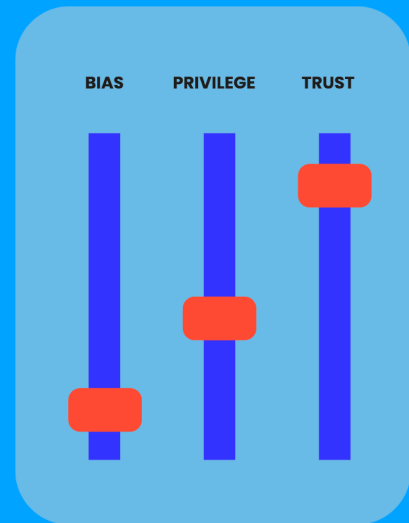
Another area where leaders can prevent inadvertently embedding social inequalities is to **look at the hiring process**. Are the CVs on the table all from people with similar backgrounds? Are you perpetuating a Similarity Bias where we have a preference for what is like us over what is different? Do they represent people who had the same access to education and healthcare and enjoy a particular social status? Or the Safety Bias where we prefer to protect ourselves from the downside rather than seek out the gain? It might seem hard to bring in someone different – who cannot hit the ground running – because, for example, recruitment criteria might drive expectations of a particular level of education or experience.

When organisations set certain parameters or standards around hiring practices, they're also limiting the talent pool they can tap into. For example, when firms only work with a handful of universities to recruit talent, this practice limits the diversity of entry level (yet, our future leaders) talent into the business.

4 / Have a Diverse Supply Chain

Looking at the **diversity of partners within the supply chain is important** too. Prioritising this helps increase the opportunities for businesses to support and work with suppliers that are run by or owned by people who are from a minority background.

Three levers for an equity leadership mindset



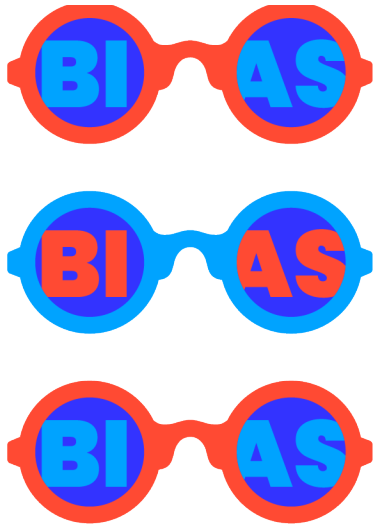
As a leader there are three levers to pull that can help create an inclusive work environment.

LEVER 1

Checking Bias

First, is checking bias. Consider this definition of bias from ‘[How to overcome our biases?](#)’, a TED talk by Vernā Myers, DEI Advisor and Strategist. In her TED Talk, Myers simply puts, **“biases are the stories that we make up about people before we get to know them”**. This is an excellent definition because of its simplicity and accessibility.

Bias has been studied extensively by academics and researchers and it’s worth considering taking the [Harvard Implicit Association Test](#) online for free to better understand one’s own biases. But to unpack the definition from Vernā Myers a little more, we all make assumptions and presumptions and frequently rely on stereotypes to quickly make sense of the world around us and the people that we interact with.



Biases are formed in part by the culture that people grow up in and the experiences they have, but also through the ways human brains are designed and engineered. **Bias is something that everyone has** and is simply part of the human condition. **It's difficult for humans to change their biases** because they're so ingrained into our psyche. On a cultural level, it's because of exposure to different sources of influence and media in formative years which ranges from books, TV programmes and movies to the influence of role models. These role models could include parents, teachers and other people that have got positions of power and authority, like visible business leaders and politicians.

Biases are also formed because of the way our brains are wired. At the last count, researchers propose there are somewhere in the region of 140 different types of cognitive bias. Common biases to be aware of include: the halo and horns effect, the stereotyping bias, similarity bias, confirmation bias and the safety bias. The safety bias has evolved as a protective mechanism. It is the tendency to want to side with caution or play it safe in order to protect ourselves and keep us safe.

Cognitive biases manifest on different levels, meaning everyone can rely on stereotypes that may actually be unhelpful. Because biases may shape feelings about other people or behaviour towards them, **biases can lead to making prejudiced decisions or choices.** Cognitive biases (the way we think) are harder to change, so **focus should be on behaviour change.** It's a lot easier to focus on changing behaviours and actions as a leader than it is to change thinking habits.

An equitable leader will be aware of their biases and blind spots, accepting that it is a natural human phenomenon to have them. Leaders don't beat themselves up about this, instead, they learn how biases impact their perceptions and decision-making and consider how these could have a downstream impact on inclusivity for people around them.

A useful framework to raise awareness of bias is the [NeuroLeadership Institute's SEEDS Model](#)[®]. This model sets out five groupings of biases that are common in the workplace.

S

Similarity Bias

People prefer what is like them over what is different. This means people subconsciously create in-groups and out-groups. This leads to an over-appreciation of the skills, abilities and experiences of people inside the in-group while overlooking or undermining the skills, experiences and abilities of those in the out-group. A common similarity bias is that people tend to more readily click with those who went to the same university or have had a similar career background.

E

Expedience Bias

This one particularly occurs when people are under pressure to meet deadlines or have a high cognitive load. This means people are more likely to act quickly and take shortcuts. An example of expediency bias is repeatedly going to the same person on the team to get a job done because they can complete the task well, quickly and with minimal supervision. However, there might be somebody else on the team who would benefit from working on that task. This bias exposes the organisation to risk because if the person who is always depended on to do the job leaves, this can lead to a skills shortage.

E

Experience Bias

This occurs when people take their perceptions to be the objective truth. One saying that explains this well is, 'We falsely think that we accurately see the world, and then we make decisions based on what we falsely think is true' (otherwise known as confirmation bias). For example, if a colleague says, 'That's just the way that we do things around here,' or 'I tried that ten years ago. It didn't work. We won't be doing that again,' it signals that experience bias is kicking in. Experience bias appears regularly in creative and problem-solving situations, limiting creative thinking because it is reverting to what people know works well or the way that things are normally done. Inclusive leaders are fantastic at challenging the status quo.

D

Distance Bias

This happens when people prefer what's closest rather than what is further away in time and space. This bias can be found in distributed or remote teams, or organisations with offices around the world. This bias can occur online, too, where preference is shown for someone quicker to answer emails or messages than others. Another example is the difference between candidates meeting face-to-face or online for a job interview.

S

Safety Bias

This is found when people hold the preference to protect themselves from the downside rather than seek out potential gains. Human beings tend to play it safe since the brain is wired to protect us. Whilst this is a good mechanism to protect the survival of the human race, it's not always helpful in the workplace. For example, when dealing with a project that is failing, that has already cost a lot of money and time, people can suffer from the 'sunk cost fallacy'. This means people tend to put in even more effort, money and time to salvage it, whereas the best thing might be to simply stop and cut any further losses.

LEVER 2

Psycho- logical Safety

Managing diverse teams is harder than managing a homogeneous team. In homogenous teams, members come from similar backgrounds, work experiences and educational histories. When there is diversity in the team there will be a diversity of lived experiences, skills, thoughts, opinions and perspectives meaning there can be greater potential for a degree of conflict within the team. However, if a diverse team is managed well, they outperform homogenous teams.

In the Five Dysfunctions of a Team framework by Patrick Lencioni, the foundation of a high-performing team, is said to be ensuring a high degree of trust. Without trust, there can be a perception of invulnerability. Yet, vulnerability is considered to be a key trait of being an inclusive leader. Therefore, **being open about sharing experiences and perspectives with the team and showing vulnerability will help build levels of trust within an organisation.**

Another foundational level is the fear of conflict, which leads to creating an artificial harmony. On the surface, everybody can appear to get along, but teams are not having those difficult or raw conversations that might be needed to progress.

As a leader needing to encourage teams to overcome a fear of conflict, **it is important to promote constructive disagreement.** This means colleagues can talk openly and constructively challenge one another without the fear of any backlash.

The five dysfunctions form a pyramid and are, from the bottom:



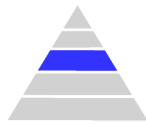
Absence of trust

Team members are unwilling to be vulnerable and open about their mistakes and weaknesses, which prevents building trust within the team. High-performing teams are open and build relationships.



Fear of conflict

Teams that fear conflict are incapable of engaging in unified, passionate debate about key issues, leading to an environment where back-channel politics and personal attacks thrive. High-performing teams promote constructive disagreements.



Lack of commitment

This makes it difficult for team members to commit to decisions, creating an environment where ambiguity prevails. High-performing teams seek clarity and closure.



Avoidance of accountability

Without commitment, team members avoid holding their peers accountable for their actions and behaviours, leading to deterioration in the quality of work. High-performing teams confront difficult issues.



Inattention to results

The ultimate dysfunction of a team is the tendency for its members to care about something other than the collective goals of the group. Here, at the top of the pyramid, inclusive leaders need to be aware of these issues when they are driving the EDI agenda. High-performing teams focus on outcomes.

Once the foundational levels of building trust and getting over any fear of conflict are established, buy-in can be created so teams can work towards a common goal.



Graphic inspired by [Overcoming the five dysfunctions of a team](#), based on the concept by Patrick Lencioni by BiteSize Learning

LEVER 3

Checking Privilege

Privilege is something not everyone can take for granted. Privilege could stem from family background and wealth.

Privileges are often down to the circumstances that people are born into that they have no choice or control over.

They are the gifts that might mean some are afforded the kind of support that gives them an advantage in life.

Going back to the definition of the equity concept, privilege represents the gifts or the advantages that help people begin the race from a starting point that's further ahead of others. For example, by being born in the UK, people have benefited from having access to free healthcare at the point of need, which others from different countries may not have enjoyed.

CASE STUDY CHECKING PRIVILEGE

Toby Mildon of Mildon says



The free National Health Service (NHS) has saved my life on more than one occasion. Compare my experience to that of my colleague who's got the same disability as me, but because he was born and raised in South Africa, he had a very different kind of access to healthcare. He hasn't benefited from the same level of medical support or healthcare support that I have when growing up.

Being born in the UK also meant that I had access to free education. I was born into a family that had the financial means to support me to go off to university. Not everyone has that kind of family or financial support to go and get a higher education.

Being able to go off to university then allowed me to move to London and start my career in the City. I've been able to work for well-known brands like British Airways, Lloyds Bank, the BBC and Deloitte. These are several advantages or some of the privileges that I've been given that have helped me in my career.



EQUITY LEADERSHIP MINDSET REFLECTION

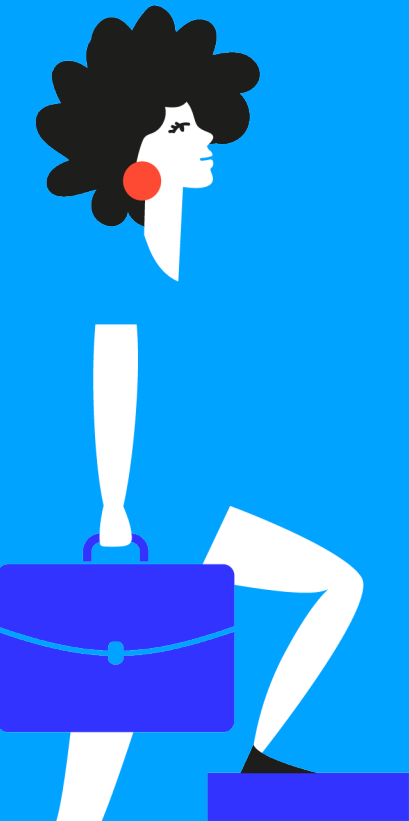
- What are some of the earned and unearned advantages or disadvantages that have either helped or hindered you in your career?
- How do you think that the types of advantages or disadvantages that you've experienced impact an equitable work culture?
- How do you as a people leader address any inequities that may have arisen from the advantages or disadvantages that we've been afforded?
- If you think about colleagues that you've worked with, either at your current place of work or another organisation. What do you see as some of the advantages or disadvantages that these colleagues have been given?



EQUITY LEADERSHIP MINDSET GUIDANCE

One advantage is the ability to speak English well. If you speak multiple languages, it can help you greatly depending on your role.

A disadvantage could be having a young family. It could be that somebody has got the resources or the means to pay for childcare. Some roles might require overnight care, for example, travelling overseas for business. If somebody doesn't have the means to pay for extensive childcare or doesn't have access to alternative care arrangements, in terms of a family network, that might also restrict their role somehow.



Developing inclusive leadership skills

Leaders must now focus on their own inclusive leadership skills and behaviours. Since they are the custodians of the company's culture, how can they model behaviours that create the inclusive environment that you ultimately want? The team at Mildon works with the occupational psychologists and talent management experts at Talogy, who develop assessment tools for employees throughout the entire employee lifecycle. Perceptions is one of these tools and measures inclusive leadership behaviours. Although there are other models worth mentioning, such as Deloitte's Six Signature Traits of Inclusive Leadership, **the Perceptions model is the best set of inclusive leadership behaviours** the Mildon Team have found so far.

The six Perceptions leadership behaviours are:

1 / Empathy

Understanding and showing sensitivity to other people's viewpoints, concerns and backgrounds regardless of their circumstances

2 / Relationship building

Connecting with people from a variety of backgrounds, **establishing rapport and trust**

3 / Learning orientation

Being open to new experiences and information while seeking to **learn and develop**

4 / Open-mindedness

Avoiding assumptions, presumptions and preconceptions by treating each individual and situation individually

5 / Composure

Controlling responses when faced with a challenge

6 / Flexibility

Maintaining an adaptable approach, style and behaviour and identifying solutions based on particular needs

Use the above behaviours as a checklist to measure your senior leaders against. What would be your score out of 10 for each behaviour? Which areas do you feel least confident in and want to invest time and energy in developing?

There are other behaviours inclusive leaders need, such as **open communication, being open to feedback, believing in the EDI business case** and **being accountable** for that business case. Senior leaders must also proactively champion diversity initiatives and get involved, **becoming advocates and allies for under-represented groups**. This might include acting as a sponsor, which is a powerful role.

How to lead high-performing equitable teams



There is a structural power dynamic within workplaces that – as an inclusive leader – **you need to be aware of.** These can be created by policies and procedures, organisational structures or benefits and rewards that create inequality. **A certain policy might create a kind of systemic disadvantage for some people** in the organisation. For example, an organisation might have a very rigid recruitment policy, which means that it's difficult for certain people to be able to get through the recruitment process and get a job offer the same as other colleagues. There's the disciplinary power dynamic, which is down to formal rules and informal practices that operate in an organisation. For example, it might be how talent or performance management processes are executed.

There is also the interpersonal power dynamic, which plays out on the personal one-to-one level. Examples of the interpersonal power dynamic include **microaggressions**, which are small behaviours, often unintentional and unintended, but they undermine an individual in the team. A microaggression might be mixing up two colleagues with one another because they come from a similar ethnic minority background.

Another example of a microaggression – often experienced by women – is being spoken over in meetings. Unfortunately, such microaggressions can be very common within the workplace.



SCENARIO: APPLYING POLICY EQUITABLY

Your team informally agrees to work from home on Fridays and organise their client visits earlier in the week. Due to caring responsibilities, a team member is frequently rushing on a Tuesday to see clients in person and get back home on a tight schedule. You notice they are regularly stressed on that day and they tell you that they will struggle to meet business needs if they always work from home on a Friday.

- What inequalities do you observe?
- What actions can you take in support of equity?



SCENARIO: EVERYDAY PRACTICES

Team meetings are conducted using a hybrid format. Most of the team members are present together in a conference room in your office with you, with others on Zoom.

To avoid being seen as a “micro manager”, you keep these meetings relatively casual and unstructured. A trend begins to emerge whereby all the “in-person” team members in your office take up 90% of the airtime in the meetings. The remote team members rarely speak up and stay on mute and cameras turned off for most of the meeting time. Moreover, the employees in person engage in personal conversations and socialising in the conference room before the meeting begins.

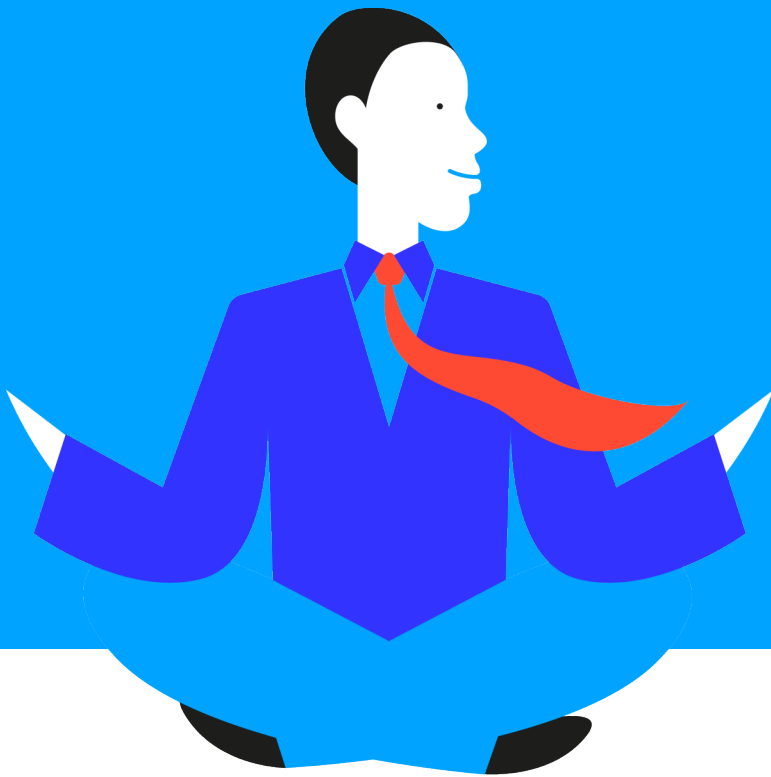
- What inequalities do you observe?
- What actions can you take in support of equity?



EQUITY LEADERSHIP MINDSET REFLECTION

- What could you do at an individual level?
- What could you do at a team level?
- What should happen at a corporate and policy level?

Being a mindful leader



The Drama Triangle

There's one final framework that is worth keeping in mind when taking an equity leadership mindset. It's helpful to be aware that leaders can sometimes operate from what's described as the drama triangle (Karpman, 1968). **When working under stress and pressure, people can sometimes fall into this drama triangle which is made up of three roles of persecutor, victim and rescuer.** Some people might act in the persecutor role by adopting a win-lose mentality or trying to take control of a situation. These behaviours might then translate into apportioning blame or criticism onto colleagues.

Alternatively, there might be a victim mentality at work where people step away from taking accountability for a situation that has occurred. This can show up as a general lack of responsibility for taking charge of a situation. Finally, someone might act as a rescuer. In this role the person feels there's a need for them to go and rescue an individual or salvage a situation. However, used too often that behaviour can lead to building resentment or co-dependencies.

THE VICTIM

Poor me...

THE RESCUER

I can help you



THE PERSECUTOR

It's all your fault

The Empowerment Triangle

The best place to be is in the empowerment triangle rather than circulating around the drama triangle. A leader who

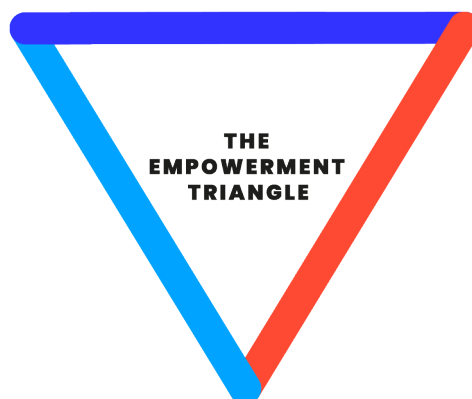
is operating out of this domain will be providing constructive challenges whether that be challenging assumptions or presumptions that other people might be making. A leader with an equity mindset will be a creator, focused on what the future desired state looks like. This sort of leader will be guiding people towards that vision, coaching and empowering people.

THE CREATOR

What can I do to help myself

THE COACH

Would you like me to help you?



THE CHALLENGER

Have you considered this instead?

Summary

This report has covered a range of topics that are important for developing an equity leadership mindset. There are the differences between equity and equality. Consider taking a step back to analyse where the focus lies in the organisation. Equity leadership means knowing that the foundations for diversity need to be laid for individuals through equity practice, from which equality flows for all.

The report reflects on how echoes of the past or injustices in society influence people's decision-making today and how biases can impact decision-making. It's also highlighted the importance of creating psychological safety and trust to develop high-performing teams.

Recognising personal privilege and different power dynamics helps shape how leaders with an equity mindset might reflect and apply these ways of thinking to a more inclusive work environment.

Finally, to start embedding an equity leadership mindset from today, anyone reading this report is recommended to identify at least one equity leadership action from this report to take forward and start to implement in their organisation.

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Thank you for reading this report today
and I hope you got immense value from it. If you need
any further assistance with your diversity and inclusion
journey, please contact me and my team.



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0161 883 7929

toby@mildon.co.uk

www.mildon.co.uk