

inclusive meetings

Organisational culture and leadership expert, coach, leading voice on diversity, equity and inclusion and Moving Ahead faculty, Holiday Philips, shares her advice on how to make meetings as inclusive as possible.



WHY INCLUSIVE MEETINGS?

Meetings are a regular and necessary feature of our lives – especially at work...



The average organisation spends **15%** of its time in meetings



Executives can spend up to **23** hours a week in them



Meetings are **key** to business success and employee engagement.

But there's something even more profound - meetings are where we build connection, create shared understanding, and generate collective wisdom.

If our meetings exclude or silence people, that reflects how we work together as a whole. But if we create environments where every voice is valued, we cultivate a culture that says, "Everyone matters."

Ensuring that meetings are as inclusive as possible is a powerful shift that can unlock greater productivity, creativity, engagement and performance.

WHAT IS AN INCLUSIVE MEETING?

Inclusivity isn't just about equal airtime - it's about the structure beneath the surface. An inclusive meeting is one where;

- ▶ **All participants**, regardless of their background, role, or identity, **feel valued, heard, and able to contribute meaningfully**
- ▶ **Diverse perspectives are welcomed**
- ▶ **Participation is encouraged** from everyone
- ▶ **Barriers** - like unconscious bias or dominance - **are actively addressed**



HOLIDAY'S THREE STEP FRAMEWORK FOR

inclusive meetings

01

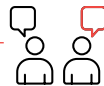
CREATE A SAFE, WELCOMING ENVIRONMENT

Start by setting the emotional tone. This is about more than encouraging people to speak—it's about showing, through your actions, that their contributions are valued.



Set expectations upfront

Clearly communicate that everyone's perspective is valuable. For example, "This is a space where all contributions are welcome, no matter how big or small."



Acknowledge contributions

Make it a point to validate people's input with phrases like, "Thanks for sharing that perspective."



Be mindful of time and space

Choose a meeting time that suits different energy levels and ensure the space—whether virtual or in-person—is conducive to focus and collaboration. In virtual meetings, make sure everyone has a stable connection and is visible to others.

02

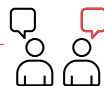
FOSTER DIVERSE PARTICIPATION

Recognise that not everyone finds it easy to contribute. Structured formats help balance this and bring out different voices.



Set an agenda

Always share the meeting agenda and expected outcomes ahead of time. This gives people time to prepare, especially those who process information differently.



Experiment with different formats

Try round-robin discussions where everyone gets a chance to speak, or silent brainstorming where participants write down ideas before sharing. This ensures that everyone has an opportunity to contribute without feeling pressured.



Ask open-ended questions

Avoid yes/no questions. Instead, ask, "What other perspectives haven't we considered?"

03

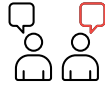
ELIMINATE BARRIERS TO ENGAGEMENT

Actively dismantle barriers like power dynamics or unconscious bias that might prevent full participation.



Diversify communication methods

Offer multiple ways for people to contribute, beyond just speaking up in the meeting. Use tools like collaborative documents, polls, or chat features. This helps include people who process information differently or prefer written communication.



Acknowledge and address power imbalances and call out bias gently

Be conscious of hierarchical or social dynamics that may prevent certain people from speaking up, especially those from marginalised groups or junior team members. As a facilitator, actively create space for those who may feel less empowered by saying, "We haven't heard from some of our quieter voices—[Name], I'd love to hear your perspective if you're comfortable sharing." Also, monitor for any patterns of exclusion, like certain people consistently being interrupted, and intervene by gently calling it out.



Check in with participants

Regularly pause during the meeting to ask if anyone has additional thoughts or questions. This creates space for those who may feel hesitant to jump into the conversation, ensuring they have an opportunity to share without feeling rushed or overlooked. It's also a chance to gauge if anyone is struggling with any aspect of the meeting environment or format.

Start implementing these steps today and you'll be amazed at how much more energised and productive your meetings - and your team - can become!



Do you learn better from watching?

View Holiday's film on how to have inclusive meetings [here](#)

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10 years