

INCLUSIVE

#3

Amplify Hidden Voices

Loud noises

Are easy to hear

Just as the obvious

Is plain to see

The future

Is found in the whispers

Listen carefully

Before the volume becomes

Deafening

The answer is obvious.

When the answer seems obvious to you, it can be a signal that you have indeed arrived at the best solution. It can also signal that you are simply blind to greater possibilities.

New possibilities that exist beyond the boundaries of your personal perspective and lived experiences. Which you have no way of knowing, without exploring further.

This is an important dynamic in life. The tension between the status quo and innovation. Often the phrase status quo is used to imply an existing state of affairs that has stagnated, risking becoming irrelevant. Needing to be challenged and improved. However our lives depend on the majority of our decisions being made following predetermined patterns – following along with the status quo.

From putting the milk back in the fridge to stopping for red lights, we go along with the status quo for very sound reasons. Yet our ability to mindlessly follow along with the rules also diminishes our ability to mindfully question existing conventions.

This dynamic also exists in meetings and discussions, where groups fall into predictable patterns of behaviour.

With the leaders and other dominant personalities doing most of the talking, while quieter more introverted members of the group do more of the listening.

Overlooking the fact that given their ability to listen and reflect more deeply, often less vocal people have greater insight that other more extroverted personalities miss.

Making conventional meeting dynamics an important example of a status quo that should be challenged.

It is critical to also keep top of mind that more vocal contributors frequently are not reflective of the diversity of opinions across the group. So when facilitating meetings apply a range of techniques to amplify diverse ideas from across the group. Ask questions of the wider team to help shift the imbalance.

Remember that inevitably our personal experiences also create unconscious bias. Otherwise regardless of what people share with us, the risk is we might not hear it.

So listen carefully. To what you cannot hear.

INCLUSIVE HABIT

Reflection: In meetings and conversations how dominant is your voice? Regardless of your position or role in the group, what proportion of the available time are you talking for? Is it more or less than an equal share? How much is the difference? Assess honestly, looking at yourself from the perspective of others in the group. Now think about the others in the group. Who does not have the opportunity to contribute as much and how might you rebalance this?

Conversation: Have a group conversation taking extra care to create an environment that does not require introverts to become extroverts to be heard. In an in-person environment use tools such as sticky notes to visually encourage everyone to contribute. While keeping in mind it is not about the notes, it is about the conversation created – so encourage everyone to speak to their notes.

Action: In an online environment use the meeting chat and other collaboration apps to frame questions, giving everyone space to respond. Keep in mind people might miss the verbal question, so also type focusing prompts in the chat. When working across hybrid environments, enable those in the room to also contribute to the chat on mobile devices. Use a mix of small breakout groups and times with cameras off to give more introverted members of the team time and space to form their thoughts.