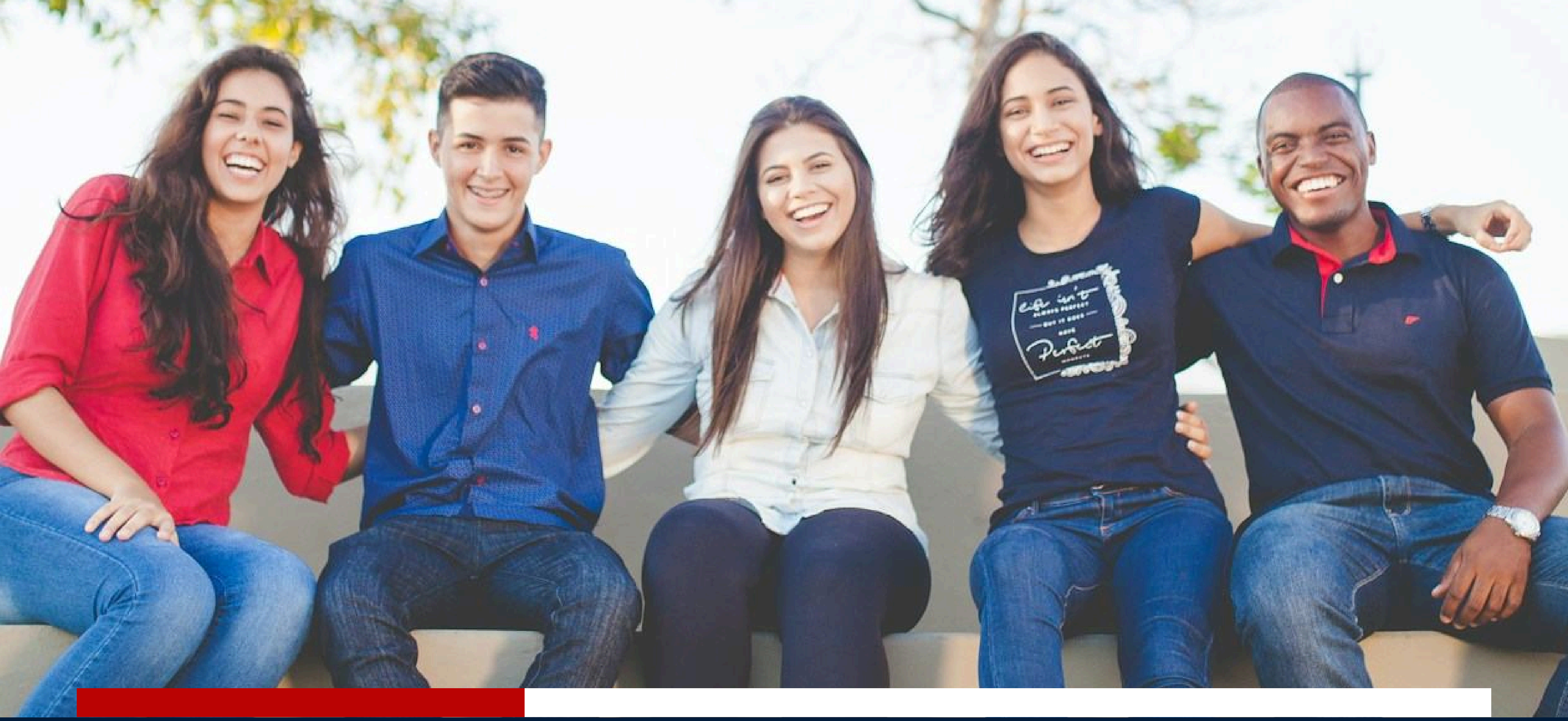

A PRACTICAL GUIDE FOR HR LEADERS

When DEI Gets Dropped, **Who Picks Up the Cost?**

A plain guide to diversity, equity and inclusion in the Irish workplace: the language, where bias hides, the real cost, and what to do next.

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HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Read it once end to end, then keep it beside you. Each part stands on its own, so you can come back to the bias guide before a hiring round, or the cost section before a leadership meeting.

01

Why this guide

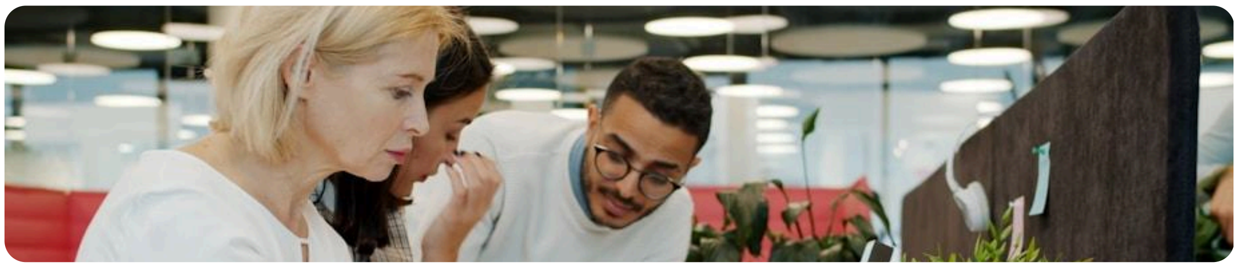
Most organisations in Ireland have a DEI policy. Far fewer have a DEI culture. The gap between the two is where the cost sits, and it is rarely on anyone's radar until it shows up as a resignation, a claim, or a hiring round that drags on for months.

This guide is for HR leaders who already believe inclusion matters. You are not here to be convinced. The harder problem is moving from a policy on paper to behaviour in the building, and getting your own leadership team to back that work. This guide is built to help with both.

Ireland has changed

In a single generation, Ireland has gone from a largely homogeneous workforce to one of the more internationally mixed in Europe. Roughly one in five people living here were born abroad. Add the range of age, gender balance in management, disability, neurodiversity and background, and the picture is broader again.

The point for HR is simple. Inclusion is no longer a special-interest topic. It is how you manage the people you already employ. Treating it as a side project is the first place cost leaks in.



The rollback, and what has not changed

There is a visible global pull-back on DEI, led by some large international firms, and it is reaching boardroom conversations here. Some leaders are quietly asking whether to ease off.

It is worth being clear-eyed about that. Irish employment law has not rolled back. The Workplace Relations Commission has not rolled back. Your workforce has not become less diverse. Quietly dropping inclusion does not remove the cost, it just stops you managing it.

> *You already believe in this. The hard part is getting the room upstairs to act.*

So this guide does four things: it sets out the language plainly, it shows you where bias hides, it names the real cost in terms your leadership team will recognise, and it gives you practical steps you can take without adding to an already full workload.

02

DEI without the jargon

Three words get used a great deal and defined rarely. Here is what each one actually means, and why the distinctions change how you manage.

Diversity is the mix

Diversity is all the ways people differ from one another. Some of it is visible, such as age, gender or ethnicity. Much of it is not, such as background, education route, religion, neurodiversity, caring responsibilities or how someone prefers to work. Diversity is simply a fact of your workforce. It is what you do with it that matters.

Equity is not the same as equality

This is the distinction that changes how you manage. Equality means giving everyone the same support. Equity means giving each person the support they actually need to take part fully and do their best work.

A simple example. Sharing every meeting agenda in advance costs you nothing and treats everyone the same. For the new joiner, the person whose first language is not English, and the colleague who processes better by reading than by listening, that same small act removes a real barrier. Equality is the same door for everyone. Equity is making sure everyone can actually get through it.

Inclusion is whether people can take part

Inclusion is the felt experience of being valued, heard, and able to contribute fully as yourself. Diversity is who is in the room. Inclusion is whether their ideas make it onto the table, whether they get a fair hearing, and whether they would tell a friend this is a good place to work.

THE ORDER THAT MATTERS

Inclusion is the part you control day to day. Prioritise inclusion and you hold on to a more diverse team, because people stay where they feel they belong. A more diverse team, managed fairly, is what drives equity in who gets hired, heard and promoted. Inclusion first is not the soft option. It is the practical lever.

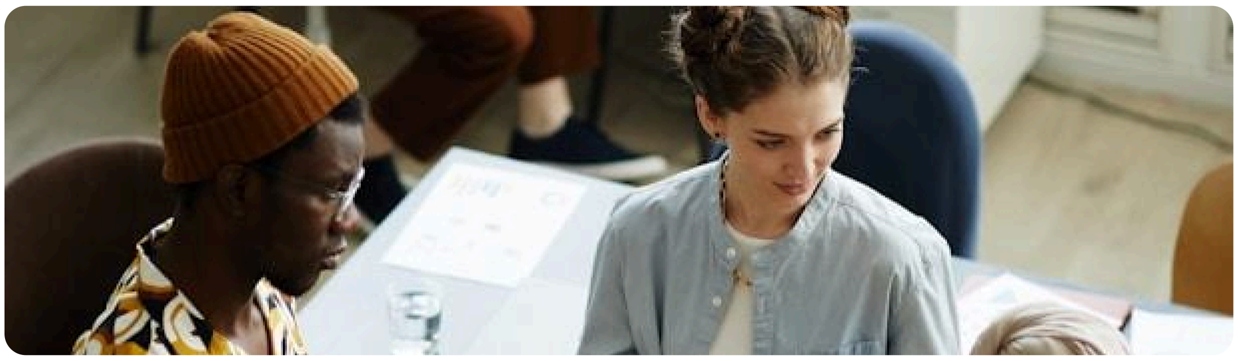
Two words worth knowing

INTERSECTIONALITY

People hold several identities at once, and they overlap. A younger woman returning from maternity leave is not experiencing age, gender and parenthood separately, she is experiencing all three together. This is why one blanket policy rarely fits everyone, and why listening beats assuming.

BELONGING

Belonging is what inclusion feels like when it is working. It is the quiet confidence to speak up, disagree, ask a question or admit a mistake without fear. It is also the single best predictor of whether your good people stay.



Identity is more than one thing

Every person on your team is shaped by several dimensions at once: their social identity such as nationality and language, their role and life stage, their abilities and ways of thinking, their age and generation, and their values and goals. Good managers do not need to map all of this. They simply manage from the assumption that the person in front of them is more than the box their job title puts them in.

Inclusion is a daily behaviour, not an annual event

The most common mistake is to treat inclusion as a once-a-year training session or a line in a handbook. Inclusion shows up, or fails to, in ordinary moments: who gets invited to the meeting, who gets interrupted, whose idea gets credited, who gets the stretch project, and how feedback is given. It is built or eroded one interaction at a time.

What it looks like when it is missing

Two short, familiar examples.

THE QUIET EXPERT

A capable younger team member on a busy remote team rarely speaks in meetings dominated by a few strong voices. She has ideas that would improve the work, but the format never gives her the room, so the organisation simply never hears them. Nobody intended to exclude her. The meeting did it for them.

THE OVERLOOKED HAND

An experienced technician who came up through an apprenticeship, rather than university, is quietly passed over for the projects that involve clients or presentations. The assumption is unspoken and probably unconscious. The cost is real: his skill is under-used, and he notices.

> *Assumptions lead to blind spots. If people feel they can't, they won't.*

What it looks like when it works

Inclusion in practice is not complicated, and it is not expensive.

OPEN DIALOGUE AND ACTIVE LISTENING

Every voice gets heard and weighed, not just the loudest, and people feel safe enough to speak.

ACCESSIBLE AND FLEXIBLE APPROACHES

Communication and tools adapt to different needs and working styles, rather than forcing one mould.

FAIR GROWTH AND DEVELOPMENT

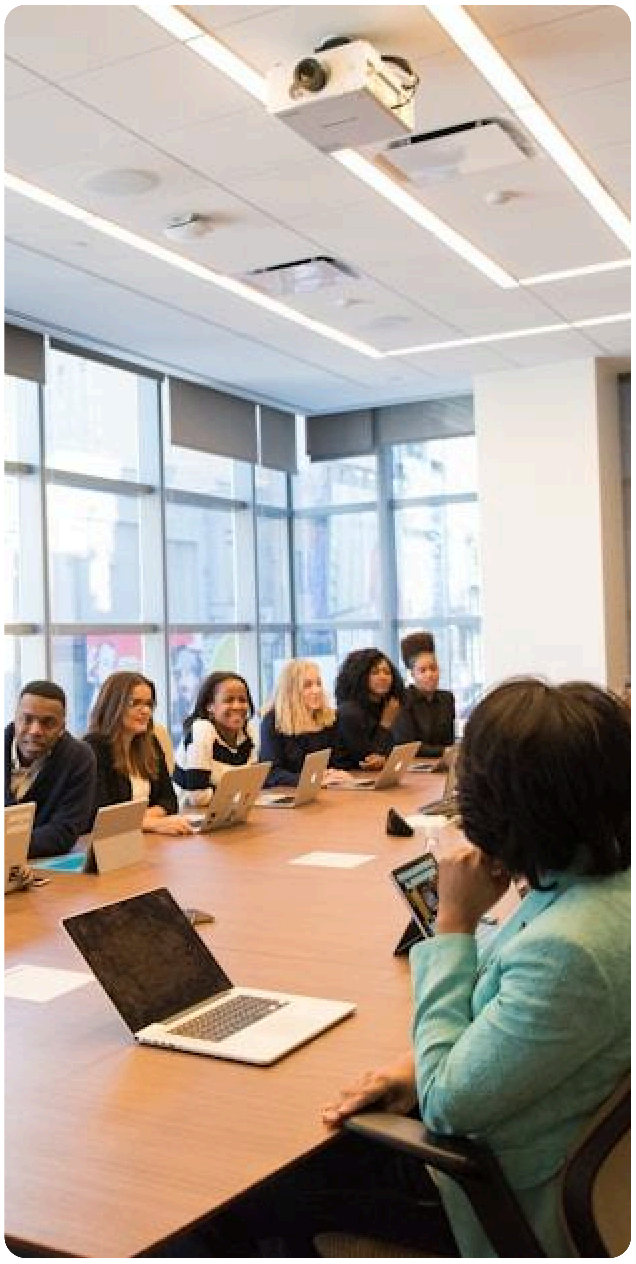
Opportunity, mentoring and stretch work are open to everyone, not just the familiar few.

PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY

People can take a risk, ask a question or disagree without fear of being punished for it.

03

Where bias lives in your organisation



Bias is normal. Everyone carries it, because the brain takes shortcuts to make quick decisions. The problem is not having bias, it is leaving it unmanaged. Bias does its most expensive work where judgement is frequent, informal, and based on past experience rather than evidence. That points straight at the everyday decisions HR oversees.

The five bias types worth naming

UNCONSCIOUS BIAS

Automatic judgements based on patterns we are not aware we hold. In practice: assuming the younger colleague is the one who can fix the laptop.
The cost: weaker decisions, and the occasional wrong hire.

AFFINITY BIAS

Favouring people who are like us in background, school or interests. In practice: warming to the candidate who went to your college.
The cost: a narrower talent pool and a team that all thinks alike.

CONFIRMATION BIAS

Noticing what fits what we already believe and skipping

what does not. In practice: only clocking the lateness of the colleague you already think is unreliable.
The cost: good people written off early.

ATTRIBUTION BIAS

Judging the same action differently depending on who did it. In practice: a familiar operator's error is blamed on faulty kit, a newer colleague's on competence.
The cost: unfair, inconsistent calls.

HALO EFFECT

Letting one strong trait colour the whole view of a person. In practice: a well-liked employee's shortcuts go unquestioned.
The cost: risks and corners that go unchecked.

A WORD ON PRIVILEGE

Privilege is simply unearned advantage that comes from how the system is built, not from anything a person did. It is often invisible to the person who has it, and it changes from one situation to the next. The point is not guilt. The point is that those with more room to manoeuvre are best placed to widen the door for others.

Where it shows up, and what it costs

Bias rarely announces itself. It hides inside four ordinary processes.

Process	Where bias shows up	What it costs
Hiring	CV screening and interview judgements	Narrowed pool, wrong hires, slower fills
Feedback	Different standards for different people	Disengagement, quiet attrition
Promotion	Who gets stretched and sponsored	Under-used talent, claims risk
Team dynamics	Who speaks, who is cut off, who gets credit	Lost ideas, weaker results

The thousand papercuts

Microaggressions are the small, often unintended slights that chip away at people: a name repeatedly mispronounced after correction, surprise expressed at someone's competence, a person interrupted or spoken over, an idea quietly re-credited to someone else.

No single one of these ends up in an exit interview. The pattern does. People absorb a steady drip of small slights and then, one day, take their experience and their training to a competitor. It is one of the most expensive and least visible losses an organisation carries, because the people it drives out are often the capable ones who had options.

An honest self-check

None of this is about intent. It is about what your process actually rewards. Three questions worth sitting with:

- Who tends to get hired, heard, stretched and promoted here?
- How would that pattern read to a high performer on their way out?
- How would it read to a tribunal?

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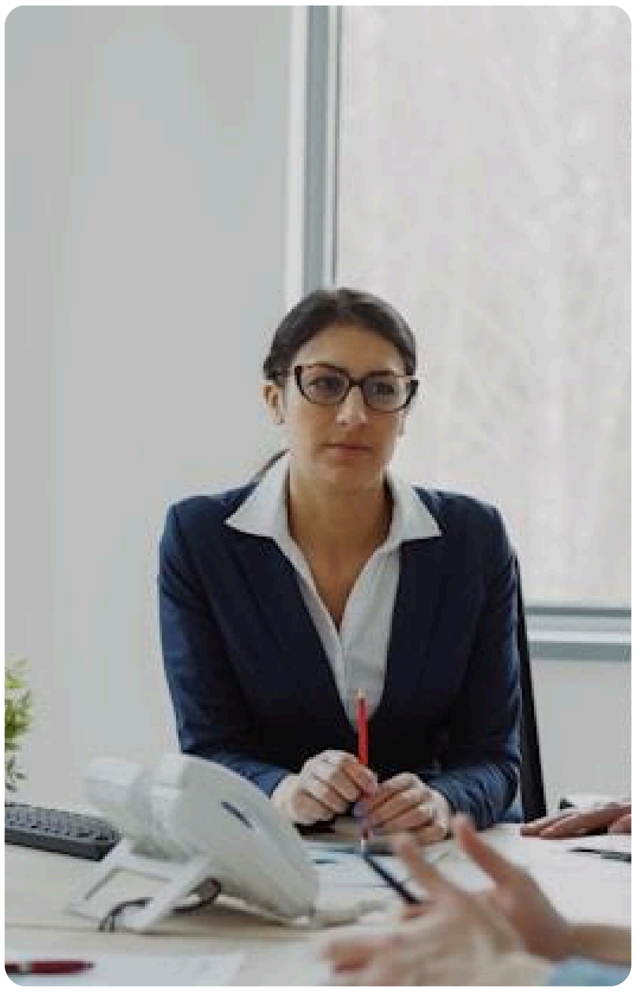


The cost when inclusion fails

When inclusion fails, the cost does not arrive with a label on it. It shows up as four ordinary line items that are already sitting in your numbers this year.

The cost

TURNOVER

You replace trained, experienced people you have already paid to develop. Recruitment, lost productivity during the gap, and the time it takes a replacement to get up to speed all add up to a multiple of salary, every time.

LOST EFFORT

Disengaged people do not resign, they just give less. You carry the same wage bill for a fraction of the discretionary effort that engaged colleagues bring.

LEGAL EXPOSURE

Decisions in hiring, promotion and feedback that are not consistent and evidence-based create claims risk under the Employment Equality Acts and at the Workplace Relations Commission. The defence, and the management time it consumes, is a cost on its own.

EMPLOYER BRAND

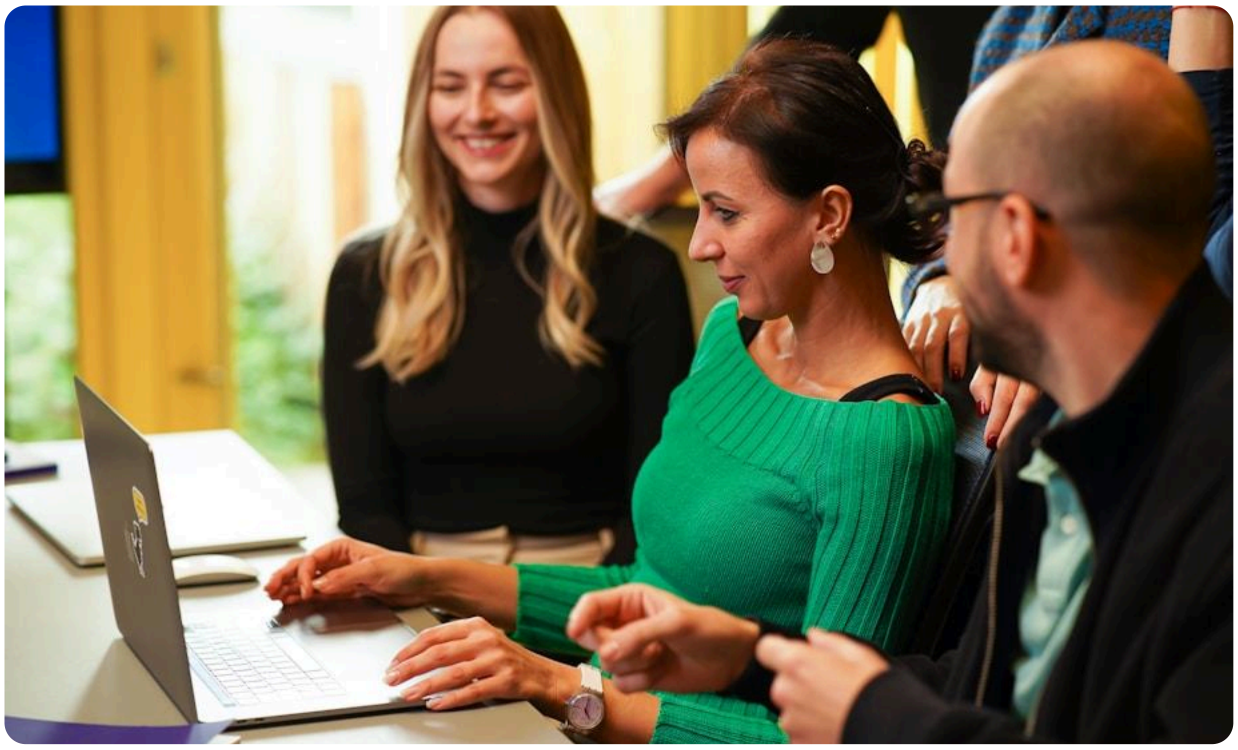
A reputation as a place where some people do not get a fair run makes hiring harder, slower and dearer, in a market where good candidates already have choices.

> *It is already in your P&L. It is just not labelled inclusion.*

This is why the case for inclusion so often stalls. Leadership is already paying these costs, but nobody sees a line called inclusion, so the work to reduce them looks optional. The job of an HR leader is to attach the real costs to the real cause.

And the upside is real

This is not only about avoiding cost. International research, including long-running work by McKinsey and Harvard Business Review, consistently links more inclusive and more diverse organisations with stronger retention, better decision-making, more innovation, and better financial performance. Diverse teams reduce groupthink and catch errors sooner. Inclusive cultures hold on to talent longer. The right thing to do and the profitable thing to do point in the same direction here.



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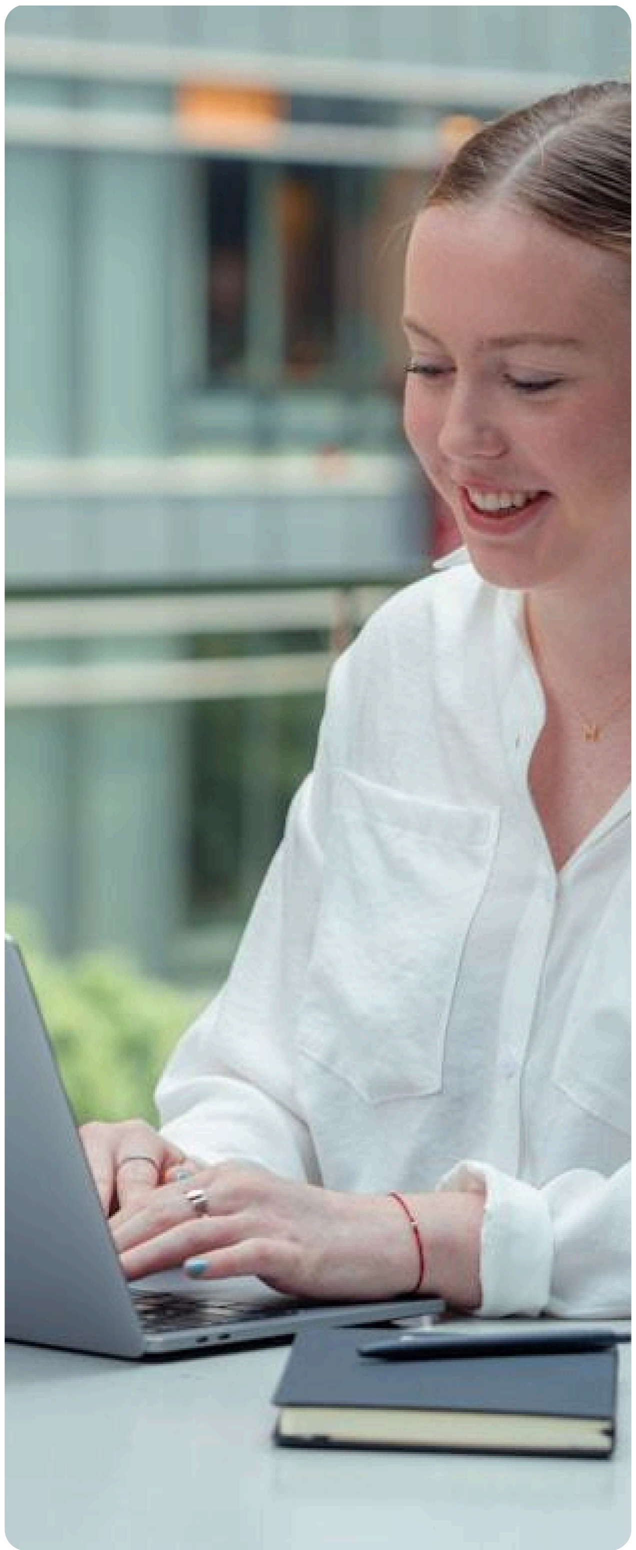
From HR language to business language



If you have ever taken a sound case for inclusion to your leadership team and watched it stall, this part is for you. Most of the time, the case does not fail because leadership disagrees. It fails because it arrives in the wrong currency.

HR tends to lead with fairness, belonging and values, because those are real and they matter. Leadership teams, doing their job, allocate against risk, cost, performance and growth. Both languages are true. Only one tends to get funded.

> *The fix is not to drop the values. It is to lead with the business case and let the values land second.*

You do not need new arguments. You need to translate the ones you already have. Here is the same point, said two ways.

What HR usually says	What the leadership team will act on
We need to improve psychological safety.	We are losing ideas and trained people we have already paid to develop. Here is the retention cost.
There is bias in how we promote.	We are under-using talent already on the payroll, and every contested promotion carries WRC exposure.
People do not feel they belong here.	Our employer brand is costing us in a tight market, and disengaged staff give us less for the same wage bill.
We should run inclusion training.	We can inclusion-proof the hiring and review processes we already run. No new headcount, lower risk.
This is the right thing to do.	This protects revenue, talent and reputation at once. The right thing and the profitable thing point the same way.

DEI and MEI: not a versus

You will hear the debate framed as DEI against merit, sometimes called MEI. It is a false choice. Merit and inclusion are not opponents.

A leader who frames it as a choice is usually assuming the current process is already fair and already rewards merit cleanly, which is exactly the assumption this guide questions. For an Irish business the workable answer is both. You want the most capable people. Inclusion is how you stop bias quietly deciding who gets counted as capable in the first place.

06

What to do next

The most common objection HR hears is that there is no capacity for another initiative. Good. The answer is not another initiative.

> *Embed, do not add. Inclusion-proof the processes you already run.*

Hiring, onboarding, performance reviews and team meetings already exist. Making them a little fairer is a change to how you run them, not a new programme on top of a full workload. The business framing protects you in the leadership meeting: no new headcount, lower risk, a better return on processes you already pay for.

Three changes you can make this month

HIRING

Agree your criteria and your questions before you see the CVs, and use a panel rather than a single decision-maker. This alone removes a large slice of affinity and confirmation bias, and gives you a defensible record. Fewer wrong hires.

REVIEWS

Calibrate ratings across managers before they are finalised, so the same bar applies to everyone rather than drifting by who their manager is. Fairer, more consistent calls.

MEETINGS

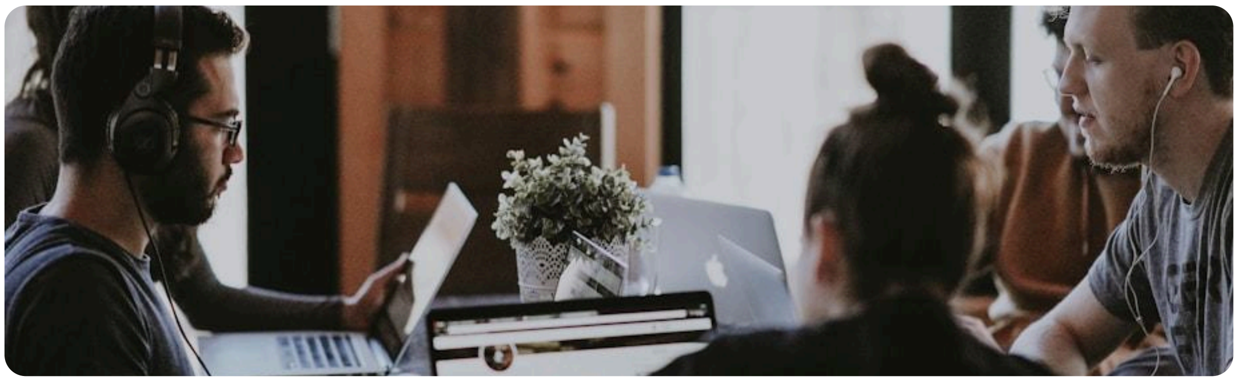
Use a simple round so quieter voices are heard, and credit ideas to the person who raised them. You capture the ideas you are currently losing.

Watch the words you use

Inclusive communication is one of the cheapest and most visible places to start.

SMALL LANGUAGE SHIFTS THAT LAND

- Use person-first language where it fits, for example a person with a disability rather than a disabled person, and follow each person's own preference.
- Drop the gendered default. Everyone or team works better than guys, lads, or ladies and gentlemen.
- Check the assumption before you voice it. Ask rather than guess at someone's role, background or circumstances.
- Make meetings usable for all. Share materials in advance, describe what is on the screen, and turn on captions where you can.
- Keep written materials clear. Plain language, readable type and good contrast help everyone, not only those who need it most.



Lead by behaviour, not by memo

Inclusion is modelled, not announced. Teams copy what leaders actually do in the small moments, who they interrupt, who they credit, who they bring into the room, far more than they follow what a policy says. If you want one change to ripple, change a leader's habit, not the handbook.

Three commitments to carry out the door

1. Put a number on one inclusion issue before your next leadership meeting.
2. Inclusion-proof one process you already run, this month.
3. Raise one inclusion item with leadership in business language: cost, risk or performance, not values alone.

If three feels like a lot, pick one. One small, consistent change beats a single large initiative that fades.

07

How you will know it is working

Headcount diversity is the easy thing to count, and on its own it tells you very little. What you are really trying to move is whether people experience the place as fair and feel able to contribute.

Measure the experience, not just the mix

Alongside the demographic data, track how people perceive fairness, belonging and psychological safety, through short regular surveys and honest feedback channels. A team that looks diverse on paper but scores low on belonging is telling you exactly where your cost is building.

The signs of a genuinely inclusive workplace

These are practical markers you can look for and work toward, not lofty ideals.

EVERYONE HAS A VOICE

Meetings surface all perspectives, not only the loudest.

CAREER PATHS ARE TRANSPARENT

Advancement is clear and open to all, regardless of background.

LEADERS ARE ACCOUNTABLE

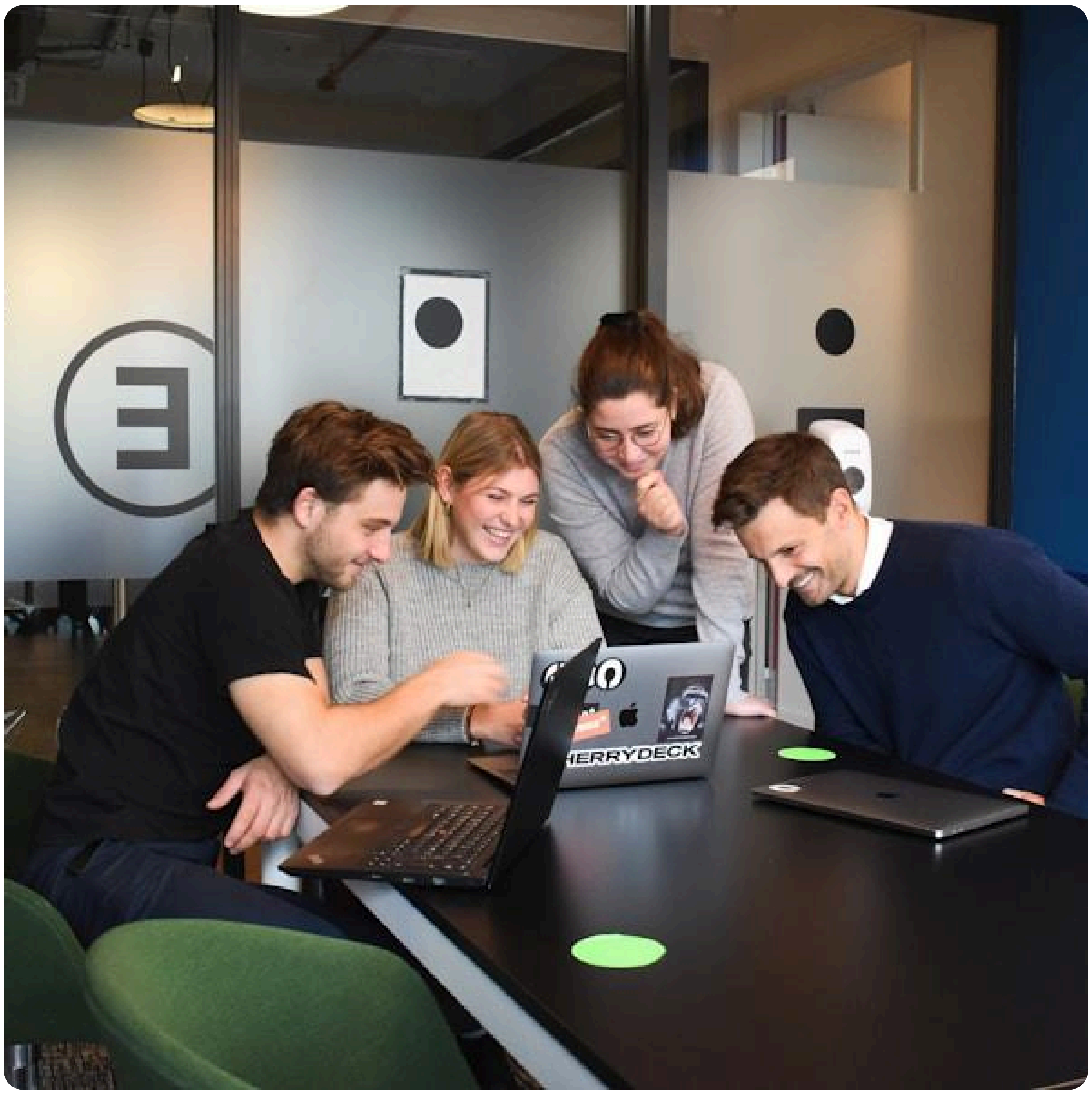
Inclusive behaviour and outcomes are measured, not just encouraged.

POLICIES ARE DESIGNED FOR EQUITY

Fairness is built into how systems and processes work, not bolted on.

TRY THIS TOMORROW

In your next meeting, notice one assumption being made about a colleague's role or background. Ask an open question and listen to the answer. That single habit, repeated, does more to shift a culture than most formal initiatives.



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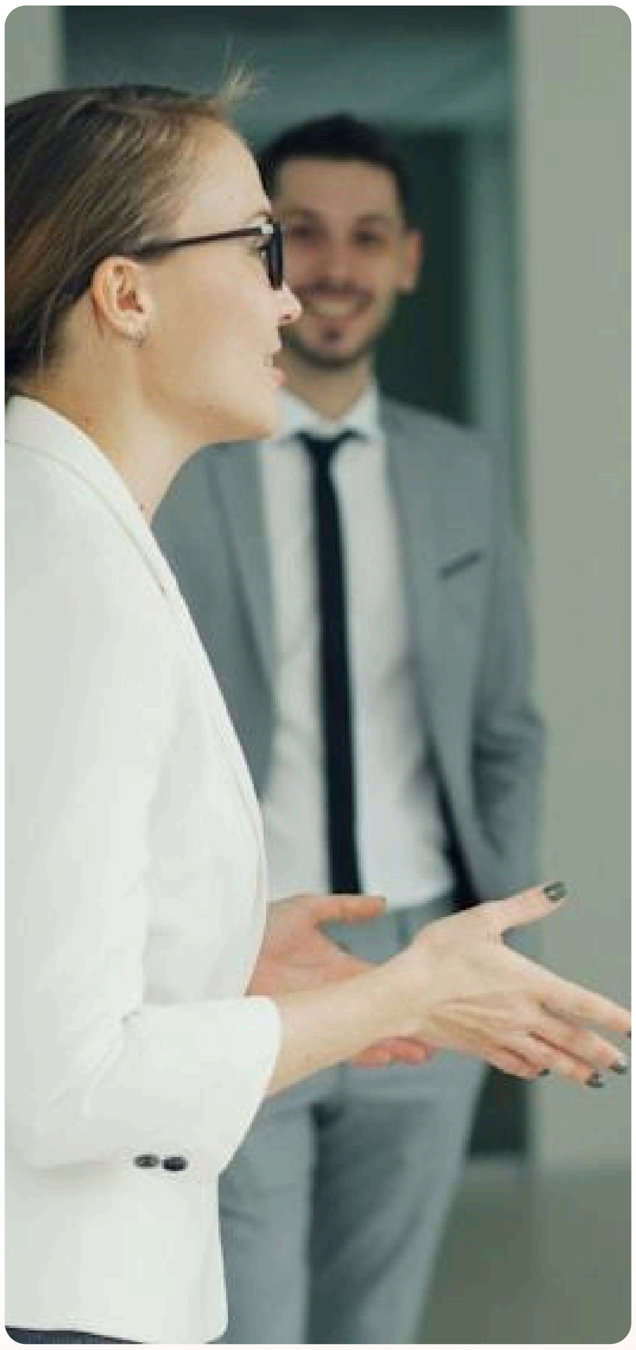
Where LEAP comes in



LEAP Leadership has spent 25 years helping organisations across Ireland build leaders and managers who get the best from their people. We work with SMEs, corporates, NGOs and public bodies, and we are based in Galway, working nationwide.

This guide is the why and the what. Our half-day workshop is the how, applied inside your own organisation.

ENABLING AN EDI CULTURE

A practical, in-house workshop for managers, HR and senior leaders. Through real frameworks, open discussion and your own workplace scenarios, it helps your people understand EDI in practice, recognise their own biases, and build the inclusive habits that change a team culture. We tailor it to your sector, your context and your specific challenges.

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