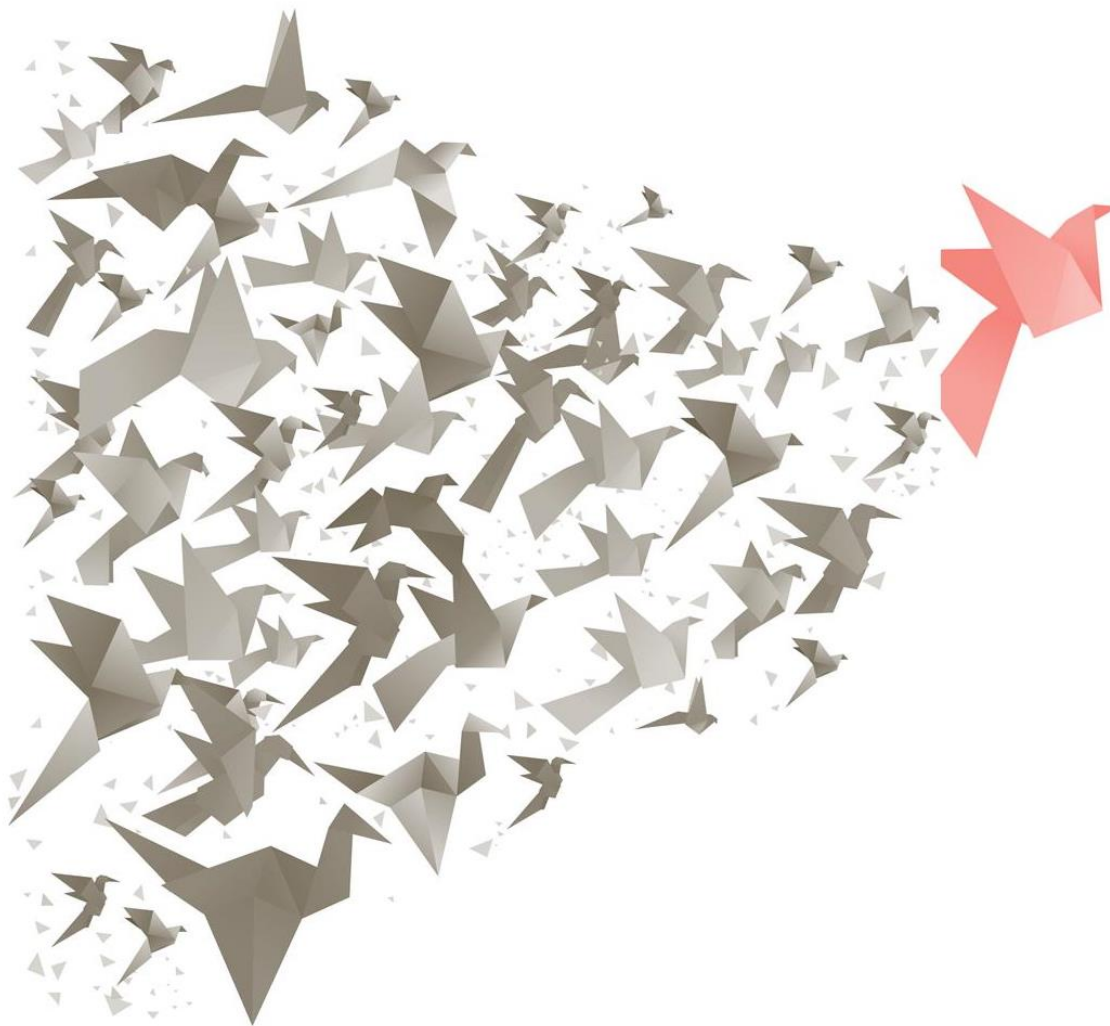Ei World

bates

Helping leaders shape the world.

BATES EXPI TOOLS
THE INCLUSION CONTINUUM

About the Inclusion Continuum

The Inclusion Continuum is a helpful model for those leaders struggling with how and when to include others in the decision-making process.

We find that leaders who score low in Inclusiveness typical believe that:
1. There is not enough time to include others.
2. No one else can do it as well as they can.
3. They believe it is easier, faster, and better to do it by themselves.
4. They will lose control of decision making if others are involved.

These beliefs can be common among highly successful leaders who have been promoted because they have been relied upon to deliver quick results. However, as leaders move onto a bigger stage and have to manage a much larger scope of responsibility, trying to do it all themselves can lead to major issues.

At some point, as your scope expands, you need to get work done through others. Doing it all yourself becomes impossible. In addition, doing it all yourself can make peers and direct reports feel micromanaged. They may stop trying to do things on their own. Why bother when the leader is "the smartest person in the room" and wants it his or her way anyway? Of course, when direct reports are reluctant to participate, this only confirms the leader's belief that his or her team members are unable or unwilling to contribute.
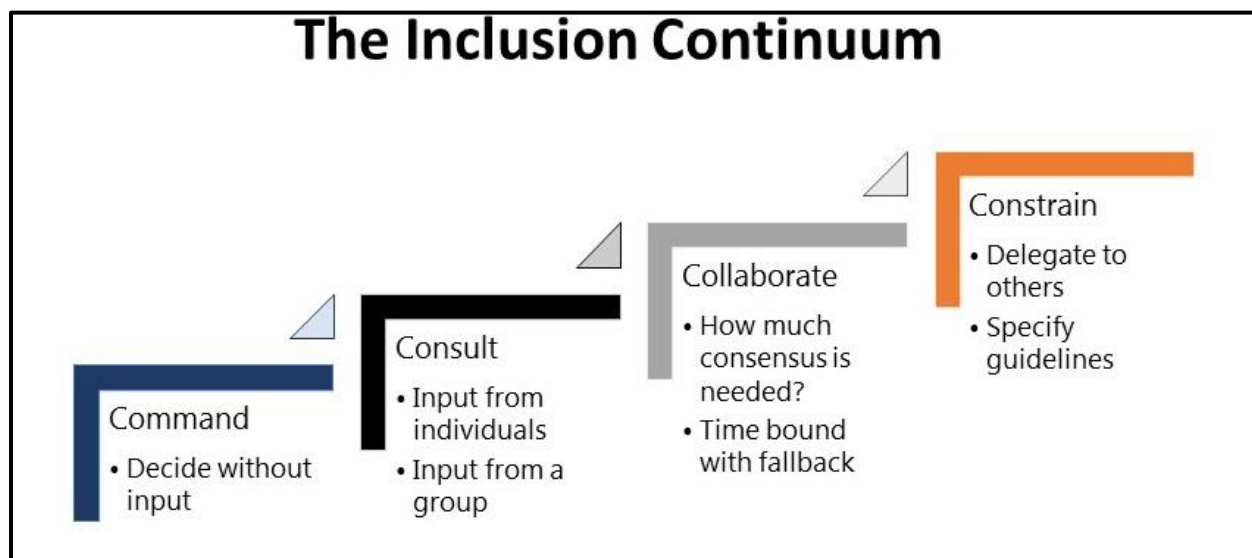
However, if done properly, delegation can be a means of freeing up a leader's time to work on more "big picture" issues, while at the same time improving results, increasing morale, and helping develop new skills in others.

It's important to point out that sometimes it's inappropriate to delegate decision making to others. It's also important to mention that making the decision by yourself or delegating the decision to others are two extremes (totally do it yourself, or totally remove yourself from the process).

We find it is helpful to view the involvement of others in decision making along a continuum. The Inclusion Continuum, based on the work of Victor Vroom and described in detail on the next page, allows for different levels of involvement in the decision-making process according to the situation and your goals.

Understanding the Inclusion Continuum

Let's take the example of a leader making a decision about the budget for a team project.

Command Mode (left side of the continuum): You determine the budget for the team and announce it with no opportunity for debate. There is no doubt what the budget will be, but people may wonder how you got to that decision.

Consult Mode: You make the final decision about the budget, but you get input from the team first. Maybe the team has valuable information that you don't have. You can use the team as consultants to help improve your initial budget idea. That is, you will still make the final decision, but you want and get input from the team or other key stakeholders, either individually or as a group.

Collaborate Mode: You let the group, as a whole, make the final decision. In this case, you would facilitate a healthy debate about what the budget should be. It is important to determine how you will decide (2/3 agreement, consensus, etc.) before the debate to avoid appearing that you are putting your thumb on the scale when it comes time to make a final decision.

Constrain Mode: Here you could say, "I would like the three of you to come back to me in two weeks with a budget for this project. Give me your best option, but it cannot exceed $100,000 and you must get input from Bob in marketing and Sarah in finance." In other words, you delegate, but you also provide clear guidelines and parameters so that when the three people come back with their work, you don't say "Your budget is too expensive," and the team feels they were set up to fail.

How These Tools Can Help with Executive Presence

The Inclusion Continuum can help in several ways in our model of executive presence:

Inclusiveness
Obviously, the Inclusiveness facet is the one we think of first with the Continuum. In the Bates Model of Executive Presence, Inclusiveness is all about getting the right people to the table when issues are being discussed and decisions are being made, and it also covers how well a leader empowers people to have a meaningful voice when they're at that table. The Continuum helps in both aspects of Inclusiveness.

Concern
When you include others in decision making, you will be perceived as letting others develop new skills and try new behaviors. By helping others develop their potential, you will be seen as caring.

Resonance
When you include others in decision making, you are acknowledging their ideas and concerns as well as helping them feel part of something bigger than themselves.

Confidence
By using the Continuum, you will show that you know when to be decisive when the situation requires quick action (the left side of the continuum) and when you are confident enough to include the ideas and opinions of others (the right side of the Continuum).

The Inclusion Continuum can also help you improve perceptions with specific items in other facets:

Integrity
'Walks the talk on values of honesty, promise-keeping, and fairness."

Humility
"Open to ideas and other points of view."

Intentionality
"Takes time to explain his/her rationale or the principles underlying his/her decisions."

Interactivity
"Encourages and expects frequent interaction to coordinate action and sustain alignment."

How to Use the Inclusion Continuum

There is no "right" place to be on the Continuum in all situations. The right place depends upon many factors including:

1. Past experience and quality of information available
    - Do you have the past experience and information to make the best possible decision by yourself? If so, then **Command** might be the best approach.
    - Do others have unique experiences, perspectives or information that could lead to a better decision? If so, then **Consult, Collaborate** or **Constrain** might be the best approach.

2. Time available to make a decision
    - In general, the less time there is available, the more likely **Command** or **Consult** are the best alternatives. Including or delegating to others generally (but not always) takes more time than making a decision by yourself.

3. The need for consensus, commitment, and developing others in executing the decision.
    - The greater the involvement people have in the decision-making process, the more likely they will buy into and support the final decision. The more that you need consensus and commitment from stakeholders rather than mere compliance, the more that **Collaborate** or **Constrain** might be the best approach.
    - Consensus means that people agree to support the decision and requires both a fair and open process and clear communication from the start of how a decision will be reached if consensus isn't possible.
    - Would including others give them an experience to help develop needed new skills without inappropriately sacrificing the quality of the decision? If so, then **Collaborate** or **Constrain** might be appropriate.

4. Tolerance for healthy debate
    - Are you comfortable with healthy debate? Are others skilled in having healthy debates and agreeing on a solution that is best for the team or organization? The less skilled people are in working through differences, the more likely **Collaborate** and **Constrain** will <u>not</u> result in an optimal solution.

5. Whether you're managing change
    - You often hear that people dislike change. We don't believe that's necessarily true: What people are more inclined to dislike and resist is *being* changed—

having change thrust upon them. If you're trying to lead a transformational change initiative, it's often wise to give at least some say to those who will be affected by the change.

The Do's and Don'ts of Using the Continuum.

All of the above five factors should be considered before you decide which approach to use. It might be necessary to consider various tradeoffs in deciding which approach is best. For example, you might be willing to sacrifice some quality of the final decision in order to gain more buy-in or to develop needed skills in others. There is no right answer. The best approach depends upon your goals and context.

Research has shown that the most effective leaders use approaches across the entire continuum. They don't use the same one or two approaches in every situation. They are also highly transparent about which approach they are using. For example, if the manager is in the **Command** mode, the manager explains why (not enough time to involve others, etc.). The manager needs the courage to let people know why they are not being included in the decision-making process.

The least effective leaders initially may be clear about which approach they are using, but switch modes without warning. For example, a leader may initially delegate a decision to others but ends up feeling that others are not working fast enough or are coming up with an unacceptable solution. Instead of explaining his/her concerns and helping support the others, the leader suddenly takes over and switches into the **Command** mode.

When a leader constantly pulls back authority when things aren't going well, others begin to become cynical. "Why even try to work on problems when the boss is going to do it their way anyway?" people may think. They feel jerked around. Eventually, they don't trust that the leader really means it when he or she says they are in the **Collaborate** or **Constrain** mode. They don't work hard because they feel their efforts will be undermined in the end.

If a leader constantly feels a need to switch modes, it's usually due to the fact they have not honestly evaluated the situation. For example, perhaps the others didn't have the skills or experience to do an acceptable job. In that case, the leader should have never delegated the decision in the first place.

Finally, ineffective leaders delegate busywork. Sometimes it may be necessary to delegate menial tasks. But if all a leader does is delegate meaningless work that does not challenge others, delegation becomes a negative experience. Others should be included in the decision-making process when it takes advantage of their skills, ideas. and experiences, not when the boss is trying to unload unwanted work.

It's the leader's responsibility to ensure that the optimal mode on the Continuum is used.

When used properly, the Inclusiveness Continuum is a great tool for knowing when and how to involve others. However, its ultimate effectiveness depends upon the managerial skills of the leader.

The Inclusion Continuum: A Case Study

When "Mitchell" took the ExPI, he had been in his position for a little over a year. Hired to quickly turn around a failing business unit, Mitchell's marching orders were to stop the bleeding within six months. If he failed, the company was going to sell the unit.

His lowest-rated facet was Inclusiveness; his assessment included comments such as "Mitchell comes across as a know-it-all," and "He needs to tap into the vast knowledge and experience of the people who have been here for years and years."

It will not come as a surprise that he also scored low in other facets including Concern, Humility, and Interactivity. He was perceived as aloof and dismissive.

Mitchell successfully stopped the bleeding within six months of taking over the role. However, his manager felt that Mitchell was still too much "in the weeds" and needed to loosen up and take advantage of the talent in his unit.

Mitchell did not deny that he made almost all the decisions by himself. Justifying his behavior, he said, "I needed to turn this thing around quickly, and there wasn't time to get everyone's input. Besides, they were the ones who messed up this unit in the first place! Why should I hand off any decisions to them?"

Mitchell was making the classic mistake of seeing things as "either/or." He said, "Either I make all the decisions myself, or I take myself totally out of the picture and have them make the decision." It was as if he thought he needed to be either the supreme dictator or hand the lunatics the keys to the asylum.

When he was shown the Inclusion Continuum, he had an "aha" moment. He had never considered anything but the extremes. Now he had a model that gave him more options. He could now be more deliberate about the style he used instead of defaulting to calling all the shots. For example, when he felt buy-in from his team was important, he tended to use the "Collaborate" or "Constrain" styles on the continuum.

He was also sure to be authentic about which style he was using and why. For example, Mitchell's boss asked for his recommendations on a time-sensitive issue. He gave Mitchell until 3 p.m. that day to come up with best recommendation for a new vendor. Mitchell felt it was a great learning opportunity for his team to be involved in the decision making. He also felt some of his team members might have past experiences with vendors that might be helpful. However, he also felt the pressure of coming up with a recommendation quickly.

Continued on the Next Page

So, Mitchell called for a 1-2 p.m. team meeting. He announced ("Command") that he wanted everyone's opinion on the issue, but if they could not reach a two-thirds majority agreement ("Collaborate") on a solution by 2 p.m., he would have to make the decision by himself because his boss needed a recommendation by 3 and he needed 45 minutes to prepare for his meeting with his boss.

After telling his team that he needed to give his boss a recommendation on a vendor, he asked team members to each write down their top three criteria for picking a vendor. Then, he went around the room asking each person in turn to state their top criteria. He circled the room three more times, capturing everyone's ideas on a flipchart. The group then spent 30 minutes discussing a debating the criteria until they reached consensus on the top three criteria. Then, they repeated the process, but this time everyone shared their top pick for a vendor and why they were the best choice.

While everyone fully participated, and felt heard, they could not reach a two-thirds majority by 2 p.m. At that point, Mitchell let the team know that they had reached the time limit and thanked them for their input, telling them how helpful it was in informing him about the pros and cons of each vendor. He said he would let them know of his decision by 2:50 and meet with his boss at 3. When he informed them of his decision, he shared his rationale for his choice.

Mitchell was clear, authentic, intentional, and appropriately inclusive. While his team felt disappointed they could not come up with an agreement by 2 p.m., they truly appreciated the give and take and being a part of the decision-making process. They all felt their ideas were given a fair chance and that Mitchell listened to them.

Meanwhile, Mitchell felt terrific about the process. He learned a lot by hearing their ideas and was still able to make a decision quickly.

Part of Mitchell's insight was that when he first took the position it was appropriate to primarily lead in a "Command" style. He needed to stop the bleeding quickly. But once he stopped the bleeding, he needed to be more flexible in his approach. He needed to match his style to the situation. The Continuum was a simple tool that helped him decide which style to use. The model enabled him to be more intentional about the style he used and helped him avoid the extremes of just doing it by himself or dumping the decision on others.

Mitchell was happier because he didn't have to do it all by himself. His team was happier because Mitchell respected and took advantage of their experiences and ideas.