

The Inclusive Organisation

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THE INCLUSIVE ORGANISATION



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Do you have the courage to change?

Sia, *Courage to Change*

Preface

“Go back to your own country.”

I am 21 years old and have just landed a great role as a financial advisor at a bank. The post arrives at the bank office, and there’s an envelope for me. There is no sender on it, just my name. I open the letter and read: “Go back to your own country.” What an idiot, I think to myself, and put the letter away.

Not long after, my manager Cees comes to see me. He’s heard what happened and takes me aside. He apologises, saying that this should not and cannot happen. Cees is taken aback that I am not affected by the letter. I explain that I have heard these kinds of statements before, that it doesn’t affect me much, and that there’s nothing I can do about it as a person.

This was one of those moments I would experience in my career, moments that would emphasise that I am different and not part of the norm. Was this what my father meant when he said that I am different and always have to make sure I work harder than others? For the first time, I felt like I *really* understood what my father was talking about. It certainly would not be the last time that something like this happened, not just to me but also to other talents around me.

Slow changes

My parents came to the Netherlands after Surinam gained independence in 1975. They met on a tram in The Hague. I grew up with my brother and sister in The Hague. Hinduism, the Hindustani culture at home and the Dutch culture at school have been instilled at an early age. Partly due to my bicultural background, I can easily adapt to a situation and I have great empathy.

Now, almost 20 years after I received the letter, not much has changed. Besides the various jobs I have had, I have always been committed to promoting more diversity and inclusion in the workplace. The intrinsic motivation was already there, and it got a big boost when I became a mother. My daughter is now 15 years old. My wish for her is that she can be who she is and become who she wants to be. It sounds so simple and logical. In practice, however, it is not so simple.

Do we really need quotas to achieve change in terms of diversity? Many people still think that they have to choose either talent *or* diversity. Due to unconscious biases, we make certain choices that result in the right people not being in the right positions, opportunities being taken away, insufficient representation in the organisation, and the biases that exist being perpetuated.

The feeling that I had to prove myself crept up on me more and more during the course of my career. Comments like “I can’t see you doing that,” “you are still too young for

that,” and “you are too inexperienced” were all too common. Or, during my time as a single parent: “If you have a partner, you’ll be challenged more.” Why did it feel like I had to work harder, like my father had warned me about?

For a long time, I wondered, why does this keep happening? What am I doing wrong? It took me a long time to realise that in various situations, it mainly had to do with other people’s perceptions of me. Or perhaps I should say, the perceptions they didn’t have of me. If I am experiencing this, there will be many more people who are experiencing it too. That’s why I started my own business. I can fight for change, but I can’t change people. What I can do, however, is provide insight. Truly changing is something they will ultimately have to do themselves.

Writing this book was enlightening, but also confronting and painful at times. The realisation that the past still determines the opportunities of people who are not considered the norm. And that someone’s skin colour, gender, sexual preference, and/or disability plays a role in how we perceive them. Or rather how we don’t perceive them. It’s time to remove our own obstructive filters and allow others to be themselves. Without pigeonholing people.

Imagine not fitting the norm, being a victim of the institutional racism because of your non-Dutch last name, having fewer opportunities because you’re a woman, being bullied in the workplace because you are ‘different’, or because an organisation has a limiting view of your physical or mental ability. How can this happen? How can we let this happen? Do we stop and think about how this affects the people it happens to? About their feelings, frustrations, and powerlessness, which all have an impact on their motivation and job satisfaction. This can lead to lower engagement, more absenteeism, and burnout symptoms.

We are already a diverse country, but I see many opportunities and possibilities to increase inclusion within the business world. What does that mean in concrete terms? That organisations truly start utilising diversity, the differences between employees! This book is part of my mission to make the Netherlands more inclusive.

Together we can make the Netherlands more inclusive. We, because we all have a share in this. A share to see it, to listen to it or to make changes. What is your share?

I wrote this book for anyone who wants to learn more about diversity, equity, and inclusion, and what you can do to put it into practice. So that we can have hope that things can be different, and that we turn this awareness into action. Small actions, big actions, it doesn’t matter – anything that can help towards equity.

I could not have written this book without the loving people around me. This book is for my daughter Fayza. So that she can be whatever she wants to be and can be who she is, without a limiting environment. I want to thank my partner Robert for creating space and

support, so that I could work on this book and towards making the Netherlands more inclusive based on my passion and drive. Many thanks to the co-readers Mala Paltoe, Hans van Bussel, Marion Lamouri-van Moorsel, Ferdy Karto, Madhavi Ramdhiansing, and Francis van Zwieten. Your sharp eye and motivating words have contributed to this result. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

With my company BE(E) Top of Mind, I work towards more inclusive organisations. I help them get started with diversity, equity, and inclusion. To recognise, acknowledge, and embrace this. In this way, I connect the differences between employees and align them with the organisation's vision and strategy.

An inclusive organisation leads to better decision-making and results, employees who feel heard and valued, and therefore are more engaged. It also reduces absenteeism. Doing nothing means regressing. If you want to be and remain relevant as an organisation, it is necessary to make diversity, equity, and inclusion part of the organisation's DNA.

If you have any questions or would like to work with me to make your organisation more inclusive, please contact me. E-mail me your questions, ideas, and experiences (madhu@beetopofmind.nl). Together, we will make organisations more inclusive.

I wish you lots of inspiration, reading pleasure *and* change.

Inclusive regards,

Madhu Mathoera (she/her)

May 2022

Preface to the translation

May 17, 2022, was a significant day for me: my very first book was released, *The Inclusive Organisation*. With this book, I aimed to initiate a movement that would inspire organisations to work towards diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI). The past year has exceeded my expectations; I never imagined my book could have such a profound impact on so many different companies and organisations. People identified with my experiences and recognised the importance of making the Netherlands more inclusive, leading them to join me on this mission. The term ‘inclusive organisation’ is increasingly becoming a goal that organisations aspire to achieve. It is also being incorporated as a module in the educational curriculum.

Over the past year, I have been able to foster awareness among management and employees in organisations. At times, it involved small steps, while other times, it led to significant shifts towards greater equality and inclusion within the organisation. This gives me a sense of optimism because the lack of inclusion is not just my problem to solve; it’s a problem that affects us all. To work towards sustainable inclusion, we need everyone on board. The drive I encounter within organisations is truly remarkable. I don’t just see or hear it; I feel it.

Loading of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

Terms like diversity, equality, and inclusion (DEI) are more relevant than ever, and the awareness to work on them continues to grow each day. Every day, news reports make us aware of the inequality in our society. It’s far from good news, but it is creating a movement that propels us forward, toward the next step.

- › I am delighted with the increased awareness, partly thanks to my book. This goes beyond mere counterarguments; it involves concrete actions and initiatives that have been set in motion. Some actions I have encountered in practice include:
- › Employees who rise within organisations and create D&I groups to work towards a more inclusive organisation.
- › Employee representative councils (ORs) collaborating with management to address anti-racism within organisations.
- › Managers continuously expanding their knowledge on how to become more inclusive themselves and engaging in conversations with employees about their experiences within the organisation.
- › CEOs who show vulnerability and, alongside me, have explored how they can become more inclusive as individuals and in their roles. This doesn’t stop here; they also hold leaders and employees within organisations accountable.
- › Inclusion is now a standard part of onboarding to ensure that every new employee feels welcome, regardless of their diversity characteristics.
- › Rules and consequences have been established for unwanted behaviour.

These actions, along with many others not mentioned here, create impact and change. However, there is another side, where DEI is not seen or experienced as a problem. Where people are still excluded because they do not fit the organisation's prevailing norms. Or employees who advocate for this issue within their own organisation but encounter a lot of resistance and negativity. This is one of the reasons I felt it was important to make the book available in English. The more people we can reach with DEI, the greater the impact we can collectively achieve.

The Inclusive Organisation

The translation of *De inclusieve organisatie* will ensure that even more people can easily become acquainted with diversity, equality, and inclusion and translate this into practice.

The examples in the book are mainly based on events in the Netherlands. These are not isolated events; we see similar occurrences in various forms far beyond the borders of the Netherlands. Think, for instance, of various forms of exclusion, such as discrimination, racism, and boundary-crossing behaviour.

In the Dutch version of this book (*De inclusieve organisatie*), I chose to use the term “gelijkwaardigheid,” which most closely corresponds to “equity” in translation. The terms “equity” and “equality” will be explained in this book, but my primary focus is on equity. Only when we can view diversity in an equitable manner can we work towards an inclusive organisation.

A shared responsibility

Unfortunately, I cannot choose when to address discrimination or racism. When it happens to me (again), I have to deal with it, whether I want to or not. The feeling is there. For years, I tried to suppress this feeling because the pain was too much.

More and more, I realize that this is not just my pain or challenge. It is the responsibility of all of us. We can take responsibility by learning more about DEI and by being an ally. This way, we can work towards organisations that are free from racism and discrimination. Organisations that actively combat any form of exclusion and strive for inclusion every day. It is time to take on and continue to carry this responsibility together.

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to everyone who is working towards an inclusive organisation. Through your efforts, this movement can become a wave. Through your dedication, we create an impact that leads to lasting change.

With inclusive regards,

Madhu Mathoera

September 2023

Inhoud

Preface	VII
Preface to the translation	XI
Introduction	1
1. Diversity, Equity and Inclusion. A trend or a given?	7
2. The bigger picture	25
3. Good employership or inclusive employership?	35
4. DEI as a guiding principle	41
5. THE inclusive organisation	55
6. DEI policy	65
7. Unconscious biases	69
8. Microaggression	81
9. Allyship	85
10. Inclusive recruitment	89
11. Inclusive leadership	97
12. An inclusive culture	103
13. Connecting with the organisational external environment	109
14. Inclusive communication	113
15. Inclusive services	123
16. Inclusive collaborations	127

17. Measuring and adjusting the inclusive organisation	129
18. DEI in the DNA of the organisation	135
Intervention 1: Inclusion dialogue	141
Intervention 2: The inclusive organisation	143
Intervention 3: How do I become an active bystander?	145
Intervention 4: Inclusive leadership	147
40 times more DEI in the organisation	149
Glossary	157
Sources	165
About Madhu Mathoera	177