Cranlana
Centre for
Ethical
Leadership

Changing the Game: Rethinking Sport's Inclusion Dilemma

An independent paper on how sporting organisations can build inclusive communities recognising freedoms including those relating to race, religion and sexuality.

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Introduction

In recent years, sporting organisations have faced a growing number of 'inclusion dilemmas' - where deep moral differences between people make it hard for them to all feel included in the same community at the same time.

The rising frequency of inclusion dilemmas has not made them any easier to deal with. They generate hostile, aggressive and divisive debate, competing rights claims and usually end with everyone feeling less included than they were previously. At the same time, the division, tension and distrust remains. Something is broken and nothing is fixed.

At the heart of the issue is the way inclusion dilemmas are framed. They are seen as problems that need to be fixed, rather than the ordinary tensions that come with pluralism, democracy and human relationships. Sporting organisations must not frame these as crises, but as an ordinary part of life. They don't need to be 'solved' with debates over people's rights, they need to be understood with curiosity, collaboration and trust.

Our current approaches to inclusion dilemmas are inherently divisive. They begin with the assumption that they are a zero-sum game. They assume someone has to compromise on their values or identity. They assume that inclusion dilemmas are inherently divisive and hostile. We believe this view is false.

Inclusion dilemmas can be addressed differently if the process that addresses them is itself inclusive. The process of addressing inclusion dilemmas is the secret to building genuinely inclusive communities. It can enable them to better navigate deep moral differences and competing identities.

Moreover, people who strongly disagree and differ deeply in their moral beliefs can still navigate inclusion dilemmas productively and respectfully. Indeed, the process can build shared respect, group identity and trust in one another.

In order to do this effectively, sporting organisations need to work closely with the people at the coalface of the inclusion dilemma: those who are in disagreement. They must also develop key habits and behaviours that support inclusion, normalise disagreement and prioritise the process of addressing inclusion dilemmas. This report seeks to explain how this can be achieved.

> **"Genuine inclusion means that people with very different views on contentious topics are able to hear and see each other, and work together for the greater good of organisations, and the broader community."**

Sport, Pluralism and the Inclusion Dilemma

What led to this report

In October 2022, Andrew Thorburn was appointed CEO of the Essendon Football Club but he did not take up the role.

The circumstances surrounding this event prompted considerable community debate about complex issues such as freedom of speech, freedom of conscience and religion, cancel culture, hate speech, mental health and wellbeing in LGBTIQA+ communities, conflicts of interests and the relationship between a person's professional responsibilities and their personal beliefs and opinions.

In December 2022, Essendon FC and Andrew Thorburn issued a joint statement which outlined their shared goal to:

> **"…enable a wider community conversation on the importance of freedom of conscience, religion and belief and how to have respectful dialogue between people with different views and perspectives. All people should be respected and welcomed in workplaces and community organisations. No-one should have to choose between their faith or sexuality, and their employment."**

In order to enable this wider community conversation Essendon FC and Andrew Thorburn commissioned commission Cranlana Centre for Ethical Leadership to *"prepare an independent paper on how sporting organisations can build inclusive communities recognising freedoms including those relating to race, religion and sexuality."* [1]

This report attempts to answer that question by acknowledging, but not resolving, issues of free speech, religious freedom, irresolvable values conflicts, employee rights and cancel culture. Instead, it considers how sporting organisations might build inclusive communities despite them; or even see the tensions they generate as an opportunity to create a more inclusive community than would otherwise be the case.

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[1]   Joint Statement: EFC and Andrew Thorburn, 20 Dec 2022

What is an inclusive community?

For this report, we've started with the Diversity Council's definition of inclusion.[2] Inclusion happens when people of diverse backgrounds and identities:

1. Feel valued and respected.

2. Have access to opportunities and resources.

3. Can contribute their perspectives and talents to improve their organisation.

When inclusion involves deep values conflicts, we need to add a fourth criteria. Sometimes, people feel excluded because they need to hide parts of themselves to earn the kind of inclusion described above.

Ali Durham Greey is a former national boxer and PhD candidate who identifies as masculine, androgynous and non-binary. Ali argues sporting organisations should aim not just for inclusion, but a feeling of belonging. Greey calls this feeling "substantive membership," and likens it to full citizenship in a political community.

To explain this concept, Greey uses the example of a trans female athlete named Kelly.

> **"When Kelly was stealth, her membership on the team was unquestioned. She was treated like one of the girls. When university administrators, later coaches, and finally teammates found out she was assigned male at birth, however, members of her sporting community communicated to her, through iterative non-verbal and indirect signals, that Kelly was no longer a substantive member of the team."[3]**

Kelly's case demonstrates a missing element in the Diversity Council definition. Inclusion requires more than access and positive experiences for diverse people. These are important, of course. But Kelly's case shows they're not enough. Kelly was 'treated like one of the girls' before her teammates identified her as trans. But Kelly had to hide part of herself for her teammates to see her as equal. Can a group include someone whilst also asking them to hide?

At the heart of the idea of inclusive communities are two basic human desires:

- To feel a sense of belonging to a community, and to be part of something that is larger than oneself

- To preserve one's sense of self within the community. That is, to be accepted and included without needing to hide, sacrifice or compromise aspects of the self as the "price of admission."

Pluralism and difference: why inclusive communities are challenging

In a well-known philosophical thought experiment, the German philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein asked us to imagine a world in which every person carried around a beetle in a box. But in this world, no person could ever see the contents of another person's box. In this world, the word 'beetle' could only mean one thing: "the thing inside our boxes".

Wittgenstein uses this strange world of beetles and boxes to make a point about language. When we describe our private, internal experiences, can other people understand what we mean? When two people describe being in pain, it's impossible to know whether they mean the same thing. The same goes for being in love, or feeling offended, or included. It's difficult (if not impossible) to know from the outside what they're experiencing.

And our own experience is little help. Our own feelings of pain, love or offence don't offer much insight into anyone else's, because we're different from other people.

It's the differences between people that makes building inclusive communities so challenging. As philosopher John Inazu writes, "our differences pervade our beliefs, preferences, and allegiances. They affect not only what we think, but also how we think, and how we see the world."[4]

Australia is a pluralistic society. It's a smorgasbord of different ideas, values, practices and beliefs that express each individual's view of what it means to live a good life. This freedom is precious. It creates a space in which citizens are free to choose their own values, and their own path towards a meaningful life. It also creates a dynamic space in which those with different worldviews have the opportunity to co-mingle, cross-fertilise and co-exist. More than accepting pluralism, we celebrate the richness it offers.

But living the value of pluralism is also hard. Despite our open-mindedness, most of us would rather that everyone agree with us on matters of deep moral importance. British philosopher Simon Blackburn writes of our ethical beliefs that:

> **"We do not just 'prefer' this or that in isolation. We prefer that our preferences are shared; we turn them into demands on one another."[5]**

This is where the real challenge of building inclusive communities arises. When our commitment to pluralism clashes with other values, principles and identities, which should we choose?

[2] Dr Jane O'Leary, Dr Graeme Russell & Jo Tilly, Building Inclusion Synopsis: An Evidence-Based Model of Inclusive Leadership (Diversity Council of Australia: 2015)

[3] Ali Durham Greey, 'A part of, yet apart from the team: Substantive membership and belonging of trans and nonbinary athletes', Canadian Review of Sociology (60:1, 2023) p.157

[4] John Inazu, Confident Pluralism: Surviving and Thriving Through Deep Difference, University of Chicago Press, 2018 p. 4

[5] Simon Blackburn, Being Good: A Short Introduction to Ethics, Oxford University Press, 2002, p. 4

The inclusion dilemma

It's important to understand pluralism because it explains the tension at the heart of inclusion. We want to have our philosophical cake and eat it too:

1. We want people to find their own way in life. We respect their right to decide how they identify, what values they hold and how they want to live.

2. Our values, identities and lifestyles aren't static; they're lived. We want to advocate for them, speak up for them and defend them if they're threatened.

When these tensions arise within the same community, they create an inclusion dilemma.

Inclusion dilemma: When deep moral differences between people make it hard for them to all feel included in the same community at the same time.

Inclusion dilemmas happen when people with seemingly incompatible values, identities or lifestyles are part of the same community and all want to:

a. Stand up for their identities, values and lifestyles (which may mean passing negative judgements on the identities, values and lifestyles of members of the community); and

b. Feel they belong and are accepted - not judged - by other community members

The source of the dilemma, and the potential for tension, is clear. First, the values in tension often cut to a core aspect of a person's identity: their religion, race, gender or sexuality. Second, there's no easy co-existence between the people involved in the dilemma. A side-effect of one group expressing, practising or defending their values is that they alienate another. On top of this, every person in the dilemma has the same basic need - to feel included in their community. The stage is set for rapid escalation.

The rise of inclusion dilemmas in the Australian community and in sport takes place against a background of increasing political polarisation in Australia. We appear to be growing less tolerant, and the moral muscles which pluralism and inclusion require are at risk of atrophy. As Waleed Aly and Scott Stephens describe:

> The problem isn't merely polarisation. It's the contempt with which each side regards the other. Once that happens, political debate ceases to be an exchange, heated or otherwise. It ceases to be about persuasion. It becomes existential… We're caught in a cycle of deep mutual condemnation, uninterested in hearing each other's explanations, defences, counterclaims, hurling not just accusations, but convictions. In short, writing each other off. Contempt - more than just anger - is what's amiss.[6]

Contempt is the death knell of relationships and is, by its very nature, exclusionary. Philosopher Karen Stohr describes contempt as the belief that someone is unworthy of engagement.[7] By treating a person with contempt, we're excluding them from the moral community. Their views don't count as worthy of the usual respect pluralism requires.

> "One's opponents are not to be understood and then engaged, because they are not worthy of it - instead, each side sees the other as irredeemable."

The bottom line is clear. Contempt makes inclusion dilemmas inevitable and irresolvable. The people involved first have to see each other as worthy and deserving of basic respect and decency. Given the historical tensions between individuals and groups who've found themselves on opposite sides of inclusion dilemmas in Australia, this is no mean feat.

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[6] Waleed Aly and Scott Stephens, *Uncivil Wars: How Contempt is Corroding Democracy*, Quarterly Essay, 2002 , p.10

[7] Karen Stohr, 'Our New Age of Contempt', *The New York Times*, 2017

Equal needs, unequal history

Inclusion dilemmas don't happen in a vacuum. They each have complex histories of power, privilege, marginalisation, exclusion and discrimination. These different histories can change the way different groups experience inclusion dilemmas. Indeed, the concept of inclusion emerged specifically to support people with a history of exclusion, including:

- First Nations people
- LGBTIQ+ people
- People with disabilities
- People of colour
- Religious minorities

These groups have struggled to overcome various forms of legal and structural exclusion. Some of those struggles are ongoing. Even when legal forms of exclusion are removed, other forms of discrimination remain. Indeed, one way of understanding the demand for inclusion is as a response to the social prejudice that remains even after structural prejudice is gone.

This makes it difficult to separate inclusion from ideas of social power, oppression and privilege. Whilst every person wants to feel included, some people have more reason than others to fear exclusion.

As a result, organisations can feel a need to be "on the right side of history" by promoting inclusion initiatives that address historical injustices. In so doing, they can unwittingly cause others to feel disadvantaged, unseen and even marginalised. When these shifting feelings of inclusion and exclusion give rise to contempt, the stage is set for a volatile, divisive dilemma.

The costs of exclusion

Inclusion and belonging are more than something people want. They are a fundamental human need. The absence of inclusion can harm people in social, moral and psychological ways. These harms include:

- **Opportunity costs:** People are unlikely to continue to engage in communities that exclude them. This means they don't enjoy the benefits associated with participation. For example, the health benefits of involvement in an active sporting community.

- **Stress and burnout:** The continual fight for inclusion is exhausting. So is continuing to express your values in the face of exclusion, isolation or stigma. When people are excluded, they often have to advocate for their rights and needs alone. The benefits of belonging to their community are also diminished when it takes an emotional toll, which can cause psychological and emotional burnout.

- **Minority stress:** Psychologists David M. Frost and Ilan H Meyer use the term "minority stress" to describe the "excess exposure to social stress faced by sexual minority populations due to their stigmatised social status."[8] Further research has shown that intersectional stigma - for example, being black and from a sexual minority - increases the risks associated with minority stress.[9]

- **Fragmentation of self:** When people have to choose between their community and their identity, some may 'fragment' themselves. They might stay closeted, stop practising their religion, change the way they speak or dress, or remain silent on issues that matter to them. This fragmentation can be the source of significant stress, loneliness and psychological harm.[10]

- **Moral injury:** Exclusion, or the sacrifices made to one's identity or values to avoid exclusion, can cause moral injury. Moral injury is a psychological harm caused by the betrayal of deeply-held moral beliefs. Moral injuries can lead people to lose trust in themselves or the world around them as fair, just or reliable.[11]

- **Moral degradation:** Moral degradation occurs when a person stops caring about values or principles they used to hold sacred. This can include abandoning key aspects of their moral identity.[12] Consider someone with a strong commitment to integrity and honour who seeks inclusion in a group who habitually break with principle. Over time, this person might start to flaunt the rules, cheat and lie to gain advantage without any sense of guilt or remorse. They have been morally degraded.

- **Diminished representation:** Most sports want to increase diverse participation at grassroots levels. One strategy for doing so is to increase the representation of diverse athletes. When they don't feel included, they're unlikely to represent the sport in ways that would increase participation. This may further the perception people of certain identities are unwelcome in the sport. This, in turn, drives lower participation from people of those identities.

The benefits of inclusion

- **Better performance:** Researchers at Google found psychological safety is the best predictor of high performance teams.[13] Research suggests more diverse companies have above-average financial returns.[14]

- **Better decision-making:** Groups with diverse perspectives, experiences and expertise perform better in complex decision-making tasks.[15]

- **Ethical decision-making:** Groups who are able to frame a problem from a range of different perspectives are less vulnerable to "ethical blindness".[16]

- **Higher employee engagement:** Inclusive organisations have better morale, higher staff engagement and lower turnover. Accenture estimated the costs of exclusion in the US as over $1 trillion dollars a year.[17]

- **Stronger organisational resilience:** Inclusive approaches to leadership increased the psychological resilience of employees.[20]

[8] DM Frost, 'Minority stress theory: Application, critique, and continued relevance', *Current Opinions in Psychology, Vol. 53, 2023*

[9] F. A. Sattler & J. Zeyen, Intersecting identities, minority stress, and mental health problems in different sexual and ethnic groups, Stigma and Health, 6(4), 457-466, 2021

[10] Paul T. Berghaus & Nathan Categena, 'Developing Good Soldiers: The Problem of Fragmentation Within the Army', *Journal of Military Ethics*, (12:4), 287-303, 2013

[11] Matthew Beard, 'Conceptual Distinctions', in Tom Frame, *Moral Injury: Unseen Wounds in an Age of Barbarism*, NewSouth Press, 2015

[12] Ned Dobos, 'Moral Trauma and Moral Degredation', in Tom Frame, Moral Injury: Unseen Wounds in an Age of Barbarism, NewSouth Press, 2015

[13] Charles Duhigg, 'What Google Learned From Its Quest to Build the Perfect Team', The New York Times, 2016 [6] Dame Vivian Hunt, Dennis Layton & Sara Prince, 'Why diversity matters', McKinsey, 2015

[14] S. Page,, *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools and Societies*, Princeton University Press, 2007

[15] Guido Palazza, Franciska Krings & Ulrich Hoffrage, 'Ethical Blindness', *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 109, 323-338, 2012

[16] 'Getting to Equal 2020: The Hidden Value of Culture Makers', Accenture, 2020

[17] Li Xintian, Peng Peng, ' Does inclusive leadership foster employee psychological resilience? The role of perceived insider status and supportive organizational climate', *Frontiers in Psychology, Vol 14, 2023*

The inclusion dilemma in Australian sporting organisations

Inclusion dilemmas manifest in sport, but they don't start there. They are a byproduct of a broader set of challenges in Australian society. They can be found in almost every walk of life, including in religious communities, university campuses and the workplace.

But while inclusion dilemmas are not unique to sport, when they arise in the sporting context, they present unique complications.

Engaging new fans and participants

Sporting clubs are always seeking new funding, increased participation and broader brand recognition. This often requires them to appeal to people who haven't had any connection to the game before.

To do this, they often need to adopt or alter their values to better align themselves to a broader community. This can alienate traditional fans, audiences and players who do not relate to the new changes. Their identity - tied up with the sport or club as they knew it - can feel threatened by these changes. What the club experiences as a gain can feel like a loss to these individuals.

At best, both old and new members find a renewed, shared sense of belonging, purpose and community. At worst, these initiatives can breed cynicism and resentment toward the very project of inclusion. This, in turn, can increase the likelihood and severity of inclusion dilemmas.

Athletes as role models

Australian society affords professional athletes enormous visibility and social capital. These (mostly young) athletes often have large social media followings and influence. Alongside this, athletes from diverse backgrounds in particular are sensitive to the importance of representation. As a result, diverse athletes can be among the most visible representatives of their communities. This can create pressure on them to advocate for issues that are important to the communities from which they identify.

This creates another side to the inclusion dilemma for some athletes:an expectation that they use their role as an athlete to "represent" certain community values, beliefs or identities. The failure to advocate publicly for a particular issue can be enough for an athlete to face significant criticism on social media. This, in turn, increases the likelihood of deep moral differences within sporting organisations. It also raises the stakes around the dilemma, making it harder to respond with curiosity, open-mindedness and mutual understanding.

Sport's role in the national psyche

"We're a sporting nation" might be the most common of Australia's cliches. Sport - whether amateur or elite - is seen to play a formative role in the lives of individuals, communities and the nation itself. In mid 2023, the Matildas World Cup semi-final match against England became the most-viewed program in Australian history. Prime Minister John Howard once described his role as the "second-most important job in Australia." The most important? The Australian Cricket Captain.

These observations reflect a more general reality: for many Australians, sport plays a key role in their identity, values and in the nation's moral character. Consider, for example, talk of 'national shame' following ball tampering by the men's Australian Cricket Team in 2018. Or the frequent statement that athletes are role models for Australian kids, often followed by the demand that they act like them.

Because of this, the broader public tends to have strong opinions on the decisions made by sporting organisations. Sport is no stranger to becoming a battleground in the broader culture wars.

This increases the scrutiny, heat and stress surrounding inclusion dilemmas in sport. It makes it more difficult to investigate issues closely, to allow parties to change their minds or to protect those at the heart of the issue from the outrage, polemics and contempt that so often defines public debate.

This was perhaps never more evident than in the case of Israel Folau. Journalist Malcolm Knox colourfully described the case as "a chunk of red meat thrown in the shark pool of Australia's free speech debate."

Public discourse surrounding Folau's social media posts and Rugby Australia's response was a smash-and-grab. Different groups scrambled for the singular argument that would defeat all arguments. Employment law, legal judgement, moral principle, the right side of history or public opinion - only those that agreed with you were important to the debate.

In reality, the hunt for the one unbeatable argument is a wild goose chase. The inclusion dilemma is just that - a dilemma - and no such argument exists. The legalities of cases like Folau's are still unresolved and subject to change. Each of the values and principles in dispute are all important and hard to dismiss. And that's a good thing, because dismissing any as unimportant would defeat the goals of inclusion by achieving its opposite - dividing the community.

Fortunately, leaders of sporting organisations have other options. Not those provided by additional rules or tactical shifts, but by playing a different game. Solutions that involve a winner and a loser don't exist and won't work. **Instead of asserting contract or moral rights, the focus must shift to responsibilities and relationships**. In particular, a relational approach to building shared solutions. According to Associate Professor Sarah Josephs, an expert in human rights law at Griffith University, such an approach is "the only way through this".

The next section of this report turns to how this might occur.

From Inclusion Dilemmas to Inclusive Communities

We need a new approach

Rev. Dr Martin Luther King Jr argued that "the end is pre-existent in the means." By this, he meant that the way we achieve our goals should reflect the goals we're trying to achieve.

> **"The means represents the ideal and the making and the end in process. In the long run of history, destructive means cannot bring about constructive ends, and it is a marvellous thing to have a method of struggle which says that means and ends must cohere. The means that we use to get to the noble end of integration and brotherhood must be as pure as the end that we seek."** [19]

Leaders confronting inclusion dilemmas should heed Dr King's advice. To create inclusive communities, leaders need to address inclusion dilemmas inclusively.

Two things follow from this.

1. How a community addresses inclusion dilemmas tells us how inclusive it is.

2. No leader can address inclusion dilemmas alone.

Rev. Jennifer Bailey is a social change leader in the USA. She founded The People's Supper, which hosts dinners in towns and cities around the country. They aim to address the harms of political polarisation by repairing relationships on a community level. The core lesson she's learned is that "relationships are built at the speed of trust, and social change happens at the speed of relationships." [20]

To address the challenges of inclusion, leaders first need to build trust between the people who feel they are at risk of exclusiaon. They will also need to re-orient their goal.

Leaders should stop trying to *resolve* inclusion dilemmas, and instead embrace them as an opportunity for real connection, understanding and growth. Rather than seeing inclusion dilemmas as problems in need of solutions, leaders must help their communities embrace inclusion issues as a normal, healthy part of belonging to a vibrant, diverse, authentic and expressive community.

[19] Dr Martin Luther King Jr, Speech at Illinois Wesleyan University, 1966

[20] Rev Jennifer Bailey quoted by Jennifer Blatz, in 'Social Change Happens at the Speed of Relationships', Strive Together, 2019

Our approach: steering into the skid

Starting from these assumptions, we invited a diverse group of people to two roundtable discussions. These people all have personal, professional or academic experience with inclusion dilemmas. Many of them work within the sporting community. Others have experience with inclusion issues in other contexts. The one thing they all share is frustration about the way sporting organisations address inclusion at present. A list of the roundtable participants is set out in the Appendix at the end of this report.

The roundtables (held in Melbourne and Sydney) had two goals:

1. To hear what a broad, diverse group of Australians see as the causes, challenges and potential solutions to inclusion dilemmas.

2. To test a process by which such a broad and diverse group could engage on issues of inclusion in ways that deepen connections and trust between group members or at least don't increase division and distrust. Are groups who understand, trust and respect each other able to address inclusion issues in a more inclusive way?

The process involved three stages.

1 Building connection and understanding

Discussions around inclusion, exclusion and identity are fraught with strong emotions and beliefs. People who are already at loggerheads with one another aren't likely to deal with them well. This made the rountables risky. They invited people with deep moral disagreements to talk about very polarising issues. How could we avoid the polarisation, contempt and divisiveness that usually defines these debates?

Groups began by connecting over their different, diverse and multifaceted identities. It was important that people did not identify only with the identities that seem most relevant to the central issue of inclusion (e.g. as queer, Christian, Black, Muslim, trans, Wurundjeri, etc…).

This can create pressure for people to 'represent' a particular identity, and act as spokespersons for those groups. It also risks erasing the diversity of beliefs and values that often exists within different identity groups.

When we define ourselves - or others - only with reference to one part of who they are, we do everyone a disservice. We misunderstand each other, miss points of commonality between us and are less likely to engage with good faith and respect. By having participants render themselves - and each other - three dimensional, we sought to build a sense of connection and inclusion before introducing disagreement.

Groups were also empowered to develop their own rules for engagement.This agreement set out what each member of the group could expect from others throughout the process. This process deepened the sense of shared norms and commitments within the group and trust between the members.

2 Scaffolding the dilemma

Most strong moral disagreements suffer from a lack of shared language. The same terms – for example, freedom of speech – mean different things to different people. . As a result, the challenge of mutual understanding and reasonable compromise over contentious moral issues is increased. We addressed this risk by scaffolding both the skills and the concepts necessary for shared understanding. The groups engaged in a variety of activities around:

- Their habitual conversational approach when dealing with moral disagreement.
- The range of conversational approaches other people might use when disagreeing, and how to engage with them.
- Key concepts at the heart of inclusion dilemmas. These included pluralism, tolerance, humility, respect and democracy.
- Listening for understanding rather than rebuttal.
- Strategies for finding consensus in a lower-stakes conflict while building trust and respect.

It was important to also reduce the discomfort people feel when disagreeing with one another. We wanted to remind the group that disagreement doesn't have to be divisive. Rather, it can enable connection, understanding and a sense of inclusion. So, before raising the stakes by presenting genuine inclusion dilemmas, we first lowered them by encouraging playful and artificial forms of disagreement. These built confidence that the relationships in the group could handle strong disagreement. It also revealed a range of helpful strategies for building respect, trust and consensus in the face of disagreement.

3 Moving past the inclusion 'dilemma'

Framing inclusion issues as dilemmas makes them feel impossible to manage. This leads to 'black hat' thinking, where people focus on the reasons why a particular option won't work and reinforces the belief that there are no good options, which can lead to "solutions" that lead one or another group feeling excluded.

To address this, roundtable participants engaged in a back-casting exercise. Back-casting is a technique used to by-pass the binary thinking that typifies inclusion dilemmas. It works by asking people to think about their challenges from a point of view in the future, when they are already solved. This helps encourage creativity, open-mindedness and moral imagination, which improve ethical decision-making.

The use of backcasting helped avoid the more predictable and unproductive arguments that derail conversations about inclusion. Both the decision process groups went through, and their goals, changed in the following ways:

1. The process became an exercise in considering what was possible, agreeable and plausible as a narrative. It didn't treat inclusion dilemmas as unsolvable, or take the easiest solution as the best one.

2. The goal changed. It is not about determining who was right and who was wrong, or who was most worthy of inclusion. Rather, it was to address the dilemma without dividing the community in which it is happening.

Section Three

The Six Habits of Inclusive Communities

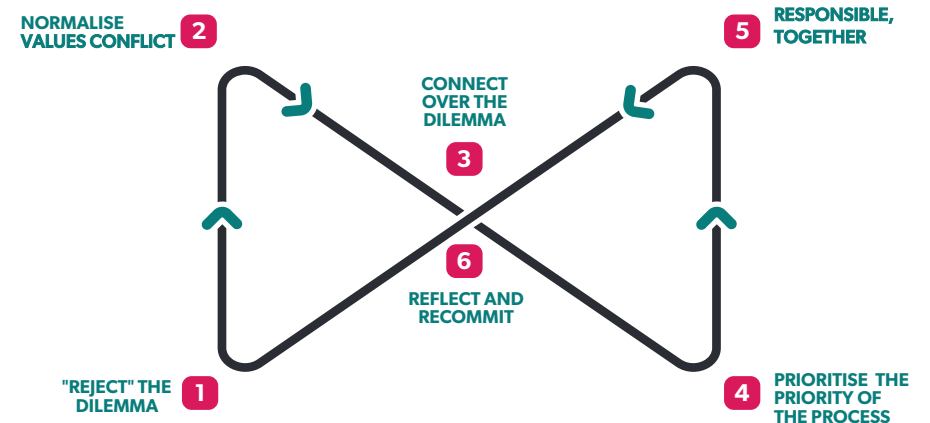This paper aims to answer the following question:

How can sporting organisations build genuinely inclusive communities that recognise individual freedoms such as those relating to race, religion and sexuality?

We recommend that they do so by adopting the following inclusive habits:

1. "Rejecting" the inclusion dilemma
2. Normalising values conflict
3. Building connection around the dilemma
4. Prioritising the process
5. Win early, win often, win together
6. Reflect and recommit

These habits support two separate (but related) activities that inclusive communities engage in:

1. Taking proactive measures to strengthen inclusion in the community. In so doing, developing the community's resilience and unity when facing inclusion dilemmas
2. Responding effectively and inclusively when inclusion dilemmas arise.

NORMALISE VALUES CONFLICT **2**

RESPONSIBLE, TOGETHER **5**

CONNECT OVER THE DILEMMA **3**

REFLECT AND RECOMMIT **6**

"REJECT" THE DILEMMA **1**

PRIORITISE THE PRIORITY OF THE PROCESS **4**

Habit 1: "Rejecting" the Inclusion Dilemma

To create inclusive communities, leaders shouldn't frame values conflicts as inclusion dilemmas. Inclusive communities aren't built by solving or avoiding moral disagreement. They learn to accept the tension that comes with pluralism, and find ways to co-exist despite it.

To support this, leaders should:

- Reframe the goal as living with the dilemma instead of working out how best to resolve it.
- Avoid framing inclusion dilemmas around 'rights'. Instead, consider what behaviours a caring and responsible community would expect of its members.

Discussion

Public discourse usually frames inclusion dilemmas as clashes of rights. For example, rights to free speech, personal identity, and self-expression. These rights are often positioned in opposition to inclusivity initiatives in sports organisations.

> **"Intractable views in public don't easily coalesce. Both religious groups and LGBTIQ+ groups feel under pressure."**

The result of these rights-debates is zero-sum thinking. It awards inclusion to whoever's rights are deemed most important. Others can either self-censor or find another community.

When this thinking appeared during the roundtables, it was usually as an initial response to an inclusion dilemma. Some participants' first instinct was to establish an 'ethical hierarchy' among the parties. If they could determine who had ethical priority, the dilemma became easy to solve.

For example, one case concerned a dilemma between a player's ethnicity and a sponsor's religious (in this case, Christian) expression. One group spent considerable time debating two very different starting points:

1. Irrespective of a person's beliefs or identity, they should not face exclusion.
   Thus, any party to an inclusion dilemma deserved equal concern and treatment.

2. Not all beliefs, values and identities are morally equal. People don't choose their sexuality, gender or race. But they do have control over their religion and political beliefs. Those who can't change who they are deserve priority.

> **"Are all opinions valid in this conversation? Does religion belong anywhere in sport? Religion to many is not based in fact, so why is it given consideration among social issues that are fact-based?"**

> **"[We shouldn't be] equating LGBTIQ+ and faith as if both are beliefs. One is an identity. Theyare not the same."**

> **"We differ in what we consider is intolerable. We differ about which groups are considered to be most vulnerable."**

Another method participants used to prioritise different groups was through power and privilege. Some participants tended to assign greater responsibility to those with more power or privilege. This enabled them to prioritise the needs of more vulnerable parties in the dilemma. But it also led to a circular process of claim and counter-claim. Those who wanted to defend one group highlighted their vulnerabilities and the power of the opposing party. And vice versa.

This circular engagement mirrors many public discussions of inclusion dilemmas within sports organisations and was quickly identified by the group as unproductive.

What was more productive was a second strategy.

Instead of trying to resolve the dilemma, participants tried to recognise it and still proceed. This required them to resist making moral judgements about the different parties to the dilemma.

Whilst in some cases, leaders have to pass judgement. Not all beliefs and identities deserve standing (for instance, homophobia, racism or anti-semitism). However, successful groups were careful not to over-extend the category of 'intolerable beliefs', and treated exclusion as an absolute last resort.

Indeed, this second strategy was far more prevalent during the roundtables. In most cases, groups prioritised curiosity, shared understanding, care and responsibility. This helped them avoid framing the dilemma as a 'clash of principles'. Instead, they focussed on establishing a 'third space' between individual and group identity. Here, individuals were:

- Free to express and exercise their identities, values and beliefs and to feel included
- Expected to do so in ways that recognised and responded to the right and need for others to do the same.

Tips for Implementation

» Resist the tendency to frame inclusion challenges as 'dilemmas' to solve. This invites identity politics, trade offs, competition, antagonism and fear.

» Be prepared to act on the feedback. Communicate how you are doing so, as a way of demonstrating the value of the contribution.

» When framing the issue, emphasise care, responsibility and relationships, rather than individual or group rights. Rights are important, but focussing on them alone can be unhelpful.
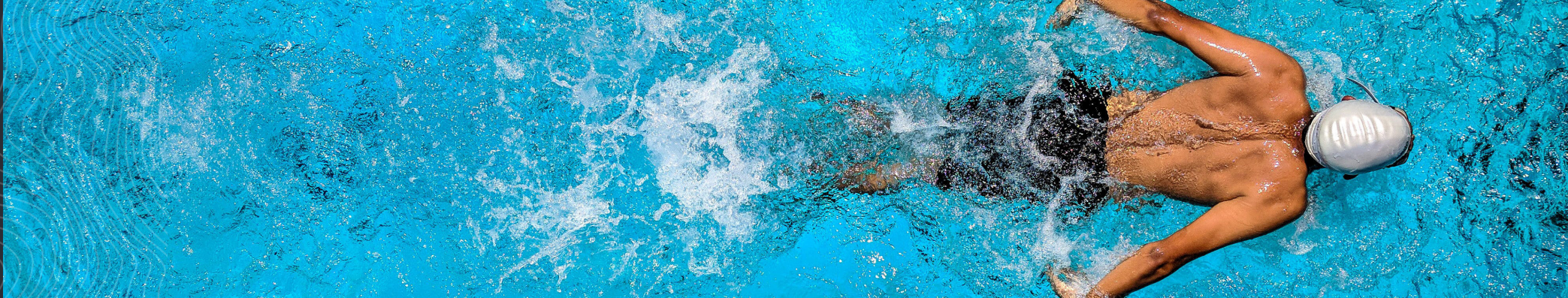
Habit 2: **Normalising values conflict**

Inclusion often sits alongside concepts like psychological safety, cultural safety and belonging. This can lead to the belief that discomfort, challenge and compromise are incompatible with inclusion.

Roundtable participants generally viewed this idea as unhelpful and unconstructive. They acknowledged that part of what they wanted from an inclusive community was:

1. To express their views, challenge and question other ideas.

2. To feel seen and appreciated for what they contribute.

They were also sceptical of communities who avoid inclusion dilemmas rather than addressing them. It is easy to think that the best way to create a 'safe space' is to prevent difficult ideas from being raised or discussed. However, such a space is not safe in the way people need. It doesn't allow people to feel recognised and included in their full identity. At best, they might feel tolerated despite it.

The term tolerance was particularly challenging for many participants. Several rejected the idea of 'tolerance' as an acceptable standard for inclusion.

For them, tolerance implied that it was OK for someone to find another person intolerable. If others don't tolerate someone's identity, some participants felt meaningful inclusion was impossible.

Participants preferred philosopher John Inazu's model of 'confident pluralism'. Confident pluralism prioritises:

> **"Respecting people, aiming for fair discussion, and allowing for the space to differ about serious matters. [It also] differentiates between the inevitability of offending through judgments about beliefs or actions, and a stigmatizing of other people."**[21]

The key lesson is this: inclusion must be respectful, but it may not always be comfortable. Respecting people means allowing them to express their values, beliefs and identities. It also means allowing them to challenge others when there are disagreements. Guaranteeing comfort to some people usually means excluding others from full inclusion. Inclusive communities don't do this.

The discomfort is normal

Giving Voice to Values is a model for developing values-driven leadership. Mary C. Gentile, who developed the approach, argues that when we normalise ethical challenges, we make them easier to manage.

> **"If we approach our business careers with the expectation that we will face values conflicts… we will likely find ourselves framing attempts to speak about these issues in a less alarmist or emotional manner and more as a matter of course."**[22]

Normalising values conflicts also helps make them less divisive.

> **"If values conflicts are a normal part of our work lives, then those who present these conflicts don't have to be seen as villains. They may well be just like us."**[23]

The roundtables normalised disagreement, debate and tension within the group. We did this by:

- Naming the task (we're here to disagree).

- Acknowledging the tension (this is going to feel challenging, what can we do about it?)

- Learning and rehearsing strategies for constructive disagreement.

- Building a culture of responsibility and care to counterbalance challenge and disagreement.

As a result, most groups adopted inclusive strategies when facing inclusion dilemmas. For example, before discussing a dilemma, some first co-designed the decision process, before rushing to making a decision. This took the sting out of any later disagreement: they had planned for it and felt ready to face it.

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[21] 24 John Inazu, *Confident Pluralism*, p. 88

[22] Mary C Gentile, *Giving Voice to Values: How to Speak Your Mind When You Know What's Right*, Yale University Press, 2012, p. 110

[23] Gentile, *Giving Voice to Values*, p. 113

Avoiding the discomfort is unproductive

The core challenge of building inclusive, freedom-respecting communities is about engaging with difference. We therefore thought greater group diversity would lead to lower levels of inclusion.

However, our roundtable experience suggested that familiarity and homogeneity can undermine inclusivity. Familiarity leads to the assumption of consensus. It can thus lead people to bypass the strategies that assist with inclusivity identified above (e.g. designing the process).

The more diverse roundtable demonstrated greater challenge and resistance. They were also less open to the initial activities designed to build trust and intimacy. But this group was also more comfortable later on in the process, where the stakes were higher.

By contrast, the more homogenous roundtable struggled with challenge. Groups from this roundtable exhibited less inclusive behaviours when facing inclusion dilemmas. For example:

- Participants assuming other members of their groups shared the same basic values.
- Believing the group had achieved consensus despite some participants still disagreeing.
- Some participants dominating the discussion at the expense of equal participation.
- Failing to use the strategies we had introduced to them earlier in the roundtables.

There are a few possible explanations for this.

1. Disagreement is often seen as a threat to relationships. Presuming consensus may enable people to avoid engaging in disagreement. Where there are pre-existing relationships, this can seem safer.

2. Social psychology research shows that people tend to conform as a way to avoid exclusion. Moreover, they tend to prefer inclusion to acting on their values. People who already feel part of a social group may be less inclined to risk their standing by challenging others.

3. Familiar groups are more likely to maintain existing power structures. People with significant power, influence or authority tend to be challenged less often. The greater familiarity might have increased the social power of certain people within the roundtable.

Each of these explanations is likely to feature within sporting organisations. This highlights the need for sporting organisations to normalise disagreement and discomfort. Communities who see disagreement as threatening or risky are unlikely to be inclusive.

Inclusion is a skill

Almost all participants were eager to tackle the issue of inclusion in sport head-on. Some reported impatience at the pace of the roundtable. They wanted to go straight to the core issues.

By the end most participants recognised that the process was valuable. Many had used the tools and ideas they'd learned to address dilemmas. Most participants also committed to using the process, techniques, and ideas when facing future disagreements.

Athletes spend the majority of their time in training. They prepare for critical moments, developing skills, muscle memory and situational awareness. In the same way, leaders and members of sports organisations can train, rehearse and prepare for inclusion dilemmas. Normalising challenge and discomfort enables them to plan and prepare. Then, they can be more confident when it comes time to execute under pressure.

Tips for Implementation

» Avoid creating the expectation that inclusion entails the complete absence of discomfort or challenge. Instead, normalise these tensions and challenges. They are manageable, safe and beneficial parts of inclusive, pluralistic communities.

» Do not substitute substantive inclusion for tolerance.

» Be wary of relying on internal stakeholders when responding to inclusion dilemmas. Create structural ways of incorporating diverse, independent, external perspectives. Familiarity and homogeneity can lead to assumptions and false consensus.

» Develop staff capability to feel confident in values disagreement and difficult conversations. Provide opportunities for professional development and staff training where possible.

Habit 3: **Building connection around the dilemma**

People on opposing sides of an inclusion dilemma are capable of finding ways through. But to do so, they need to feel a mutual sense of respect, and a shared concern for each other's wellbeing. This is best created through a strong, personal connection.

To build inclusive communities sporting organisations should support respectful, meaningful connection. To do this, they should:

1. Avoid reductive labels and assumptions
2. Prioritise participation above representation
3. Build diversity within your community

Avoid reductive labels and assumptions

The tendency to reduce people to their disclosed or visible identities is a challenge for inclusive dialogue. Participants expressed concerns with being 'labelled'. They did not want others to assume their beliefs, values or character based on their identity.

When asked what made them nervous when talking about inclusion in sport, participants gave answers like:

❝ **I need a complete understanding of those directly impacted by these topics [and I don't have one].**

❝ **I have a position of privilege. I'm nervous about [thinking I] understand when I haven't experienced it.**

❝ **I don't represent everyone. I don't want to misrepresent anyone.**

❝ **My privilege disqualifies me from being able to effectively speak for DEI in sport.**

❝ **People assume my beliefs based on my background.**

❝ **These conversations can be extremely harmful to marginalised groups and communities.**

❝ **These conversations are deeply personal to me because of my identity.**

❝ **I won't be understood as I intend, because people will interpret what I'm saying through their own lens because of the work that I do."**

Inviting participants to discuss these concerns helped to normalise them. It also allowed the groups to take active steps to manage these risks. Participants agreed that assumptions undermine the possibility for open discussion. They named 'labelling' and 'assumptions' as unwelcome behaviours during a group agreement-setting activity. By contrast, they named "curiosity" a desirable behaviour in the roundtables.

The roundtables were also structured to support a less reductive approach to identity.

We did not give the group an opportunity to introduce themselves in the context of their profession, organisation or role. This meant the group needed to find another basis on which to relate.

Participants undertook a self-reflective exercise about their different identities. They also shared stories about how it has felt for them to identify with different groups. This invited participants to see each other - and themselves - as more than their most obvious identity.

We encouraged participants to own their statements - substituting phrases like "people say" for "I think". This technique supports inclusion in conversations where there are implicit hierarchies. For instance, a mix of academic experts and people with lived experience. Encouraging ownership reminds the group of the value - and limit - of each person's insight and experience.

This three-pronged approach helped the roundtables avoid the usual division inclusion dilemmas. It also enabled greater openness and vulnerability. People admitted to being unsure, changing their mind or feeling conflicted. These emotions are rarely safe during more hostile discussions of inclusion dilemmas.

Prioritise participation over representation

Participants knew the roundtable was risky. So many conversations around these issues devolve into an unproductive form of identity politics. The roundtable process identified one significant reason why. Some of the loudest voices around inclusion dilemmas aren't open to changing their views. They're engaging in bad faith.

Released (for now) from their community or professional obligations, participants loosened up. They focussed more on establishing a process each of them could accept, even if it didn't lead to their preferred solution.

This suggests a helpful rule of thumb when addressing inclusion dilemmas. Only those with skin in the game can have a seat at the table; and those with skin in the game deserve to have a seat at the table.

The real world is irrational, polarising, toxic. Twitter.

The idea of bad faith actors was a recurrent concern in the roundtables. When some of the people at the table have no interest in building an inclusive community, the entire process is jeopardised.

This isn't because these bad faith actors are bad people. Rather, it's because they feel a strong sense of accountability to their organisation, community or identity. One of the reasons some participants felt able to engage was because they weren't asked to speak behalf of their employer or community.

When push comes to shove and people have skin in the game, is unity in diversity a pipe dream or a genuine reality?

Build and identify diversity within your community

Processes that address inclusion dilemmas aren't immune from existing social inequalities and trends. As such, "inclusion gaps" can arise among even well-intended groups. These gaps can reduce both the effectiveness of the process and the confidence of other participants in the outcome.

Some participants expressed concern about privilege and blind spots. They worried about whose perspective was missing, and they doubted the validity of their decisions as a result.

Organisers can solve this by asking participants who else needs to be involved. This provides another safeguard against organisational blind spots and unintended exclusion.

It also increases the openness with which people will engage. When some stakeholders are absent, participants feel obligated to fill the inclusion gap. This can involve imagining (sometimes inaccurately) the experience of those stakeholders. It can also lead to paralysis, where the fear of getting it wrong for one stakeholder stifles the group's ability to develop responses.

Given diversity increases the group's self-confidence, leaders addressing inclusion dilemmas should:

- Be aware of the various forms of diversity present within their community.
- Build meaningful, strong relationships with those people and groups.
- Ensure the venues, online platforms and decision processes used are accessible. Consider how a person with a diverse background or different experiences might struggle to engage.

Tips for Implementation

» Create a culture that is curious about people's various identities. Avoid the tendency to label certain identities, or reduce people to one aspect of who they are.

» Understand the difference between participation and representation. Ensure that people understand the diversity that exists within different identity groups.

» Prioritise direct experience, expertise or exposure to inclusion dilemmas when addressing them. This should not lead to the exclusion of all external stakeholders. Consider whether the invitee cares about the outcome or the community. Those invested only in outcomes will threaten the process.

» When consulting around inclusion, co-design the diversity of the room with your participants. Understand who else needs to be there to get the best out of the participants you already have.

Habit 4: **Prioritise the process**

Inclusive communities need more than interpersonal trust and good will. They also need people to believe that their decision-making process has integrity.

It can be easy to prioritise making the right decision. But when it comes to managing inclusion dilemmas, it's more important to make the decision in the right way.

To support the habit of prioritising process, sporting organisations should:

- Seek agreement about how the conversation should be had.
- Own and defend the process to the public.

Seek agreement about how the conversation should be had

Sporting organisations should be designing for a level of inclusion such that:

> **One or more parties to a dilemma might disagree with the outcome but still feel included in the process that led to the decision.**

The purpose of adopting this as a standard is to create what political philosopher John Rawls described as "the veil of ignorance". Rawls argued that to design principles for a just society, individuals should imagine themselves behind a 'veil of ignorance'. The veil conceals a person's personal attributes and circumstances - such as their social status or wealth. From this position of ignorance, people should establish a system that ensures the best outcome for the least well-off.

Determining the process and principles for addressing inclusion dilemmas before directly addressing one has a similar effect. It helps ensure that the process does not disadvantage one party. If one group distrusts the process, they're unlikely to accept the outcome. This exacerbates the dilemma, making it even harder to manage. This is why the roundtables involved developing a co-designed charter. It emphasised how people should behave and feel during debate and disagreement.

There can be a tendency for organisations to want to formalise these kinds of charters. For instance, to have one 'code of conduct' that would apply to all those helping them resolve inclusion dilemmas. But the value of developing a charter isn't in the final product. The magic is in having a group of people acknowledge that things might go wrong if they're not careful. It's a first step toward shared investment and trust in one another. It is a signal of intent as well as a safeguard of process. A formalised charter undermines the very process it seeks to uphold. It has to come from the group.

Own and defend the process

Several participants described the importance of leaders showing public support for prioritising process. It was important to protect it against external influences - media or time pressure, for example.

This requires leaders to normalise inclusion dilemmas to the wider public. Instead of meeting demands for fast, decisive action, leaders need to normalise both the dilemma and the process of addressing it. This not only 'bought time' to take heat out of the dilemma, it also creates a model for other organisations to follow.

Inclusive communities need the strength of conviction to move at a pace that is appropriate to the conversation. By explaining this to the public, sporting organisations:

- Signal genuine commitment to inclusion.
- Help to shift the media-fuelled narrative that fast decisions are good decisions.
- Further enable other organisations to make better decisions around their own inclusion crises.

Tips for Implementation

» Build confidence in the decision-making process by co-designing it with other stakeholders

» Formalise the process by which co-design happens. Do not formalise the principles that emerge from the co-design. Allow these to be different for each group.

» Give the process the time it requires to be successful. Explain the process and timing to external stakeholders.

» Use the expectation of a fast decision as an opportunity to show leadership around inclusion. It is an opportunity to challenge assumptions and articulate your values and process.

Habit 5: **Responsible, together**

Most organisations see inclusion dilemmas as a threat to their community. Given the current climate, this is understandable. But it's also unhelpful. Inclusion dilemmas don't have to threaten inclusive communities. In fact, they can help create them.

By prioritising inclusion during an inclusion dilemma, sporting organisations can strengthen their communities. During the roundtables, participants favoured relational approaches to problem-solving. They sought to address inclusion dilemmas by:

- Building connection between opposing parties.
- Increasing shared understanding of the different needs, issues and beliefs.
- Learning how to co-exist despite their values differences.

To help manage inclusion dilemmas and create inclusive communities, sports organisations should:

1. Address inclusion dilemmas before they escalate.
2. Use inclusion dilemmas to set a precedent.
3. Prioritise care and context over principles and politics.
4. Include the aggrieved parties in addressing the dilemma.
5. Continue to support all parties through the work of building inclusive communities.

Anticipate the crisis

The roundtables tested whether participants' commitment to inclusion would survive complex inclusion dilemmas. These dilemmas escalated into crises with a range of complicating factors. These included:

- Financial pressure.
- Risk to on-field performance.
- Pressure from powerful external stakeholders.
- Social media outrage.
- Relentless media scrutiny.
- Competing community expectations.
- Participants found these externalities frustrating. They undermined their ability to de-escalate and address the dilemma.

The lesson here is that inclusion dilemmas are best addressed at their point of origin. If ignored, they can escalate into crises, where it becomes more difficult to avoid division and exclusion.

Use inclusion dilemmas to create a precedent others can follow

Participants found back-casting a helpful tool in reframing inclusion dilemmas. Sporting organisations can also reframe inclusion dilemmas they face in similar ways.

The roundtables presented dilemmas as part of the foundation story of an inclusive, respectful and diverse club.

This helped participants consider options that would help create that legacy. They avoided safer, easier solutions in favour of those that were more courageous, creative and inclusive.

Inclusive communities don't happen by accident. They are built by leaders with courage of conviction and clarity of vision. When addressing inclusion dilemmas, sporting organisations should think about their legacy. What course of action would build resilience to similar challenges in the future?

> **"There is a harder right. People often choose the easier wrong."**

Embrace care and context over politics and principles

Strong moral disagreements in sport are usually characterised by conflict. By framing dilemmas this way, we force communities to choose between competing values, principles or people. Opposing parties see a successful outcome in incompatible ways ('my rights, not your rights'). This makes an inclusion response impossible.

Participants at the roundtables adopted a different framing. They measured success in ways that enabled shared investment from different groups:

- A strong, respectful and inclusive community.
- People feeling connected, respected in their identity.
- Greater mutual understanding and trust.
- People who can better navigate strong moral differences with respect, curiosity and care.
- An environment where people aren't harmed or attacked for their identity, or silenced because of it.
- These goals are consistent with an ethical theory known as 'the ethics of care'.

The ethics of care holds that:

- Responsibilities come from relationships between people, not abstract rules and principles.
- We should make decisions through empathy rather than duty or principle.
- That personal relationships matter. They shouldn't always be 'trumped' by ideas like the common good, justice or other values.
- It is not enough to make once-off, caring decisions. We have to develop caring attitudes, practices and behaviours.

The ethic of care is, in many respects, a natural fit within sporting organisations. Sporting organisations already prioritise relationships. Teams, coaching, support staff, supporter communities are all key components of sporting organisations. They prove that organisations are already capable of care, even in challenging times.

Indeed, participants provided many examples of this transpiring within their organisations. But the antagonistic framing of inclusion dilemmas often means these skills are forgotten.

Sporting organisations should highlight their caring, relational skills and commitments. By creating a strong narrative of connection through challenge, they will be better prepared if divisive crises arise.

❝ **I used to think the way I thought about certain topics was the best/most logical way to go about it. But then I realised that people approach topics in different ways that are emotional, relational [and] moral. So now I will always consider more than one approach when thinking through problems.**

❝ **I used to think that "getting to an outcome was the priority, but then I realised that taking time in the process is vital.**

❝ **I used to think that most issues are best resolved rationally from a point of neutrality. But then I realised that this is a privileged position. So now I will place greater weight on people's emotional responses when deciding on a course of action… It was good to recognise the power of relationships in guiding this process.**

No villains or victims

Like any ethical challenge, inclusion dilemmas invite moral judgement. It's easy to look for victims and villains; wrongdoers and those who they have wronged. And in some cases, there are genuine wrongdoers in inclusion dilemmas.

Even so, moral judgement should be a last response to inclusion dilemmas. Moral judgment leads to the competitive, zero-sum thinking described earlier.
It leads to outcomes that don't address the issue: disconnection, resentment and misunderstanding.

Sporting organisations should instead prioritise truth telling and shared understanding. Parties should have the chance to address the dilemma themselves. In this way, they might be able to co-exist despite the dilemma, with a clearer sense of one another's needs, values and commitments.

During roundtables, participants adopted this approach first. Several different responses demonstrated the same basic structure:

1. Engage the people who caused offense and those who took offense without taking sides.
2. Ensure they are all engaging in good faith.
3. Allow each party to explain their experience of the dilemma. Enable truth telling about the history of the dilemma, its effect and what a successful outcome would look like.
4. Co-design the terms of an inclusive, respectful environment based on mutual understanding.
5. Have each party take responsibility for creating and supporting that environment.
6. Be explicit about what those responsibilities are.
7. Identify the consequences of failing to meet their expectations.

This process led opposing parties to take responsibility for their shared need for inclusion. The result was a 'third space' between conflicting, incompatible values and identity claims. In this space, people with strong moral differences were:

- Free to express and exercise their identities without fear of attack or exclusion.
- Expected to do so in ways that recognised and responded to the right and need for others to do the same.

Accountability: to grow, learn and do your share of the moral heavy lifting

This kind of relational solution carries two related risks.

1. Some people may see it as a failure to hold people to account for their behaviour. If someone does or says something exclusionary, shouldn't leaders hold them accountable?

Sporting organisations must hold people to account if they have done something exclusionary. But they should use accountability first as a tool to encourage people to re-engage and grow. By suspending moral judgement, people receive the benefit of the doubt. The community doesn't infer racism, intolerance or anti-religious sentiment from their single action. Instead, they offer an opportunity to learn and grow.

The community must match this opportunity with care for those who have been excluded, offended or hurt. Exclusion is a blow to people's sense of respect and dignity. That sense must be restored. If not, any attempts to support the perceived wrongdoer will likely increase their sense of exclusion.

Sporting organisations can use accountability as a tool to support inclusion and growth. But it must be paired with a strong care and support framework, or it will undermine inclusion.

This brings us to the second risk:

2. This approach can be insensitive to historical power imbalances, and thus undermine inclusivity.

It can overlook the power imbalances that inclusion dilemmas often entail. Groups with a history of marginalisation or injustice may not want to coexist with people whose identity, beliefs or values caused their marginalisation in the first place. It is difficult to forgive or co-exist with worldviews in the face of a ledger that still feels imbalanced. Indeed, one participant described the process as asking marginalised people to "eat shit" so the community could get along.

This is an important reminder for sporting organisations. Often, one party to an inclusion dilemma has to do most of the moral and emotional work necessary to move past it. Often, they are the party with a long history of exclusion and marginalisation. This is unsustainable and threatens the inclusiveness of the community. If sporting organisations are to adopt this kind of approach to inclusion dilemmas, they must:

- Acknowledge the emotional and moral toll that it can have on disenfranchised and marginalised groups.

- Develop methods of ongoing support for the challenges of co-existing with strong values conflicts.

- Ensure that the work of maintaining an inclusive community is equitably distributed. Those who feel most threatened by exclusion should not be doing the lion's share of the work.

This requires sporting organisations to adopt a strong care-based support framework. Rejecting the inclusion dilemma as a genuine dilemma means it doesn't ever go away. Thus, leaders need to sustain dialogue with and between the different parties. They need to know:

- Whether the different parties are meeting their responsibilities.

- Whether anyone needs further support.

- Whether the dilemma is continuing to escalate.

Leaders need to acknowledge the risk of escalation. A relational approach is less likely to lead to division and exclusion, but it isn't a magic bullet. If problems persist, leaders will need to make a moral judgement about whose inclusion to prioritise. During the roundtables, most groups included a 'fallback option' of last resort.

Inclusive communities must be clear about the consequences of continued exclusionary behaviour. Otherwise, people won't trust the process to respect their needs and concerns. They will have no reason to believe that they won't be subject to similar behaviour in the future.

Tips for Implementation

» Be proactive in identifying tension, exclusion and deep moral differences within your community. Aim to address them before they escalate.

» Be aware of inclusion dilemmas arising in other organisations and sectors. Use them as opportunities for professional development, skill rehearsal and to audit for similar risks.

» Meet exclusionary behaviour with care and openness rather than moral judgement.

» Develop a culture of care and curiosity. This enables the community to de-escalate and understand deep moral differences. This will help build resilience against external pressures that encourage moral judgement.

» Make your organisation's behavioural expectations around inclusion clear and specific. Be clear about the consequences for people who do not meet these expectations.

» Provide opportunities for people to restore their standing in the community if they cause harm or offense. Support those who were harmed or excluded as well.

» Continue to check on the parties to the inclusion dilemma. Ensure everyone is still comfortable with the situation, and that they have the support they need.

» If people continue to threaten inclusion with their behaviour, don't allow them to remain in the community. Be clear about this throughout the process.

Habit 6: **Reflect and Recommit**

The work of building an inclusive community is never done. Inclusive communities are not the consequence of an inclusion dilemma well-resolved. Rather, the ongoing work of addressing inclusion dilemmas is what makes an inclusive community.

Inclusive communities work to navigate inclusion dilemmas without resorting to exclusion. For them, co-existence, respect, understanding, connection and belonging are activities, not outcomes. They seek to practice them on a daily basis.

In this spirit, sporting organisations should:

1. Conduct inclusivity post-mortems.

2. Support those who did not get the outcome they sought.

3. Identify and deconstruct structural and systemic barriers to inclusion.

4. Show what's possible.

Conduct inclusivity post-mortems

Despite the positive feedback, participants still had some frustrations about the roundtables. Some questioned aspects of the process; others felt unable to express themselves fully. These views would not have been evident from the visible behaviour of participants.

We only learned these things due to a deliberate, anonymous process of feedback and review. Participants were encouraged to express fears, concerns, frustrations and dissent. This enabled us to find ways to enable greater inclusivity.

Sporting organisations should debrief their responses to inclusion dilemmas. This process is important as it supports continuous improvement around inclusion efforts.

Moreover, post-mortem reviews of inclusion dilemmas support an inclusive culture. They enable people to dissent, challenge outcomes and to feel accepted in doing so. As the Diversity Council tell us, inclusion involves contributing to the community. The ability to question or challenge processes and outcomes is a vital test of whether a person's contributions are welcome.

Moreover, it is easy for organisations to assume they are more inclusive than they are. Providing feedback on their process is the best way to ensure they are hitting the mark. But to do this, they need to enable open and candid feedback by:

- Having a proven commitment to inclusive processes, decisions and communities.

- Being genuine, open and responsive to feedback. Take demonstrable steps to address any issues that arise.

Failing to do this would undermine substantive inclusion. It would gaslight people by lauding an inclusive process despite contradictory experiences. It would reveal a preference for comfort and silence to discomfort and challenge.

Asking for critical or constructive feedback is no guarantee that it will come. Moreover, the absence of this feedback is not a guarantee that everyone felt included. Those who feel excluded, devalued or upset may not feel comfortable saying so. In particular, not to facilitators who have already left them feeling unsafe. Asking for feedback cannot be the only source of critical reflection on the process. This again leaves too much work to those who are most at risk of exclusion.

Monitor and care for those who did not get the outcome they sought.

Part of feeling included in a community is knowing they'll support you when things don't go your way. This includes supporting you when inclusion dilemmas aren't resolved as you'd like. Sporting organisations should challenge the idea that inclusion dilemmas have winners and losers. Still, some outcomes may feel like defeat for some people involved. These people need to see the community caring for them as a reminder of their ongoing place and value there.

It is important that this support is contextually appropriate and developed in consultation with the people involved. However, some simple examples include:

- Develop safeguards against any blowback or future exclusion they might experience.

- Work with them to understand what kind of support they need in light of the outcome.

- Provide the community with opportunities to acknowledge and celebrate them in other ways.

Identify and deconstruct structural and systemic barriers to a more inclusive process or community

During the roundtable, participants identified systemic and structural drivers of division and exclusion. They included:

- A centralised, top-down approach from club leaders, sponsors or governing bodies.
- Lack of contractual protections for the club when partners or community members act exclusionary.
- Ambiguous social media policies or behaviour expectations.
- A fast-paced media cycle that fans the flames of division and exclusion.
- Over-reliance on unqualified and inexperienced staff to address or manage inclusion dilemmas.

Participants also identified measures to prevent or de-escalate inclusion dilemmas. They included:

- Ensuring the organisation understands the values of potential donors and partners. Making sure they share the organisation's vision commitment to inclusion.
- Having clear, specific social media policies. Ensuring they address issues of self-expression around polarising issues.
- Embedding senior leaders in diverse community groups to build understanding. Leaders with greater cultural literacy will be able to manage dilemmas more effectively.

These lists are far from exhaustive. The key lesson is that inclusion dilemmas are harder to solve than they should be. Sporting organisations should advocate for systemic changes to reduce tension around inclusion dilemmas.

Demonstrate what's possible

Participants at the roundtables were generally pessimistic about inclusion dilemmas. They saw them as divisive, exhausting, irresolvable and ultimately "hopeless".

By the end of the roundtable, the mood had become far more optimistic. The goodwill, collaboration and relationships left people feeling energised. Many wanted to re-engage with inclusion dilemmas using the new mindset and strategies they'd learned.

> **I used to think that people at the extremes could not genuinely come to an agreement. But then I realised with listening to one another a lot is possible. So now I will listen more intently.**

> **I used to think most people come to the dialogue with self interest in mind and influence by their own experience. But then I realised that people have more in common (shared values). So now I will open the opportunity for more collaborations and engagement.**

> **I used to think I couldn't tread lightly on matters relating to exclusion b/c I wasn't giving due weight to people's lived experiences. But then I realised that letting down my guard (my mask) and leaning into "play" was as powerful as being serious and I'm not letting marginalised people down. So now I will show up in a more constructively positive way.**

> **I used to think that this issue (the church v. LGBTQ) was binary, doomed and hopeless. But then I realised we are closer, more similar, more connected and more engaged in working through this than I thought. So now I will… continue to check my own biases and stories and encourage others to do the same and create more spaces to continue the facilitation of this conversation in the future.**

Sporting organisations have an opportunity to lead courageously around inclusion. By sharing their challenges and successes around inclusion, they can help shift the way people frame them from the outset. This creates a self-fulfilling prophecy: more people believe inclusion dilemmas are solvable. This belief, in turn, makes them more solvable.

Tips for Implementation

» Provide the opportunity for participants to offer their feedback on the process.

» Be prepared to act on the feedback. Communicate how you are doing so, as a way of demonstrating the value of the contribution.

» Do not rely on participant feedback alone for quality assurance. Develop other mechanisms for assessing the effectiveness of your processes.

» Support people who feel unhappy with the outcome of an inclusion dilemma. Develop systems of care and support to ensure their continued inclusion.

» Identify systemic factors that escalate inclusion dilemmas. Address them where possible.

» Show vulnerability and openness by sharing your successes and challenges around inclusion. Prove that addressing them is possible.

Concluding Remarks:
From contempt to curiosity

The recommendations in this report may be unsatisfying to veterans of the many inclusion dilemmas sport has faced in the last decade. We are in the habit of seeing inclusion dilemmas through the lens of argument, principle and judgement. Approaches that don't help people 'win' the argument may seem unhelpful.

That's why we need a different approach. New ways of 'winning' these dilemmas will only fuel the cycle of conflict, competition and contempt. We hope this approach can be part of the solution, rather than a long-form contribution to the problem.

Participant feedback confirms the value of this shift. They found the roundtables affirming, supportive, and constructive. Yet they also found them challenging, emotionally charged and intellectually rigorous. As inclusion dilemmas should be. They left feeling optimistic about a less confrontational approach.

> **I used to think that making all groups feel included in sport was hard. But then I realised that after talking to different minority groups that they are not asking for much and change can happen…**
> **Problem solving as a group is powerful.**

> **I used to think a diverse group of people/opinions would be near impossible to navigate and be highly volatile. But then I realised it can be a life-giving learning experience, where I further develop diversity of thought and respect for others. So now I will not baulk at future opportunities like this and open myself up to ongoing conversations that are difficult and potentially polarising.**

Australia has a long history of using sport as a vehicle for national values. Whilst this tendency creates a range of challenges for sport, it also creates an opportunity. If sporting organisations can manage inclusion dilemmas without toxicity and division, so too might the rest of us. Polarisation, division, exclusion and identity politics threaten our democracy, freedom and belonging. If there was ever a time for sport to lead a shift in national values, it's now.

This report is proof that another way is possible. We brought together people whose views led them to believe they would be at each other's throats. Yet, in less than two days, they were able to listen, understand and collaborate around polarising issues.

Challenge is not a threat to connection. Identity is not a threat to inclusion. Disagreement does not need to cause division.

Any relationship worth having contains all of these things. And so, sporting organisations need to realise that they are in the business of addressing inclusion dilemmas. It is part of the job: another aspect of high performance and community building.

A quote written by J. J van der Leuw in his 1928 novel, *The Conquest of Illusion* reads that "life is not a problem to be solved, but a reality to be experienced."

Perhaps we can say the same of inclusion dilemmas.

Roundtable Participants

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Nicholas Aroney, Professor of Constitutional Law, University of Queensland

Ron Issko, President, AFL Fans Association

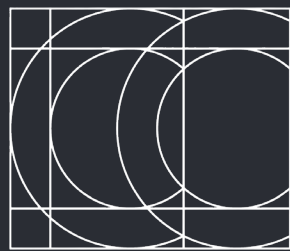**Sean Heldsinger**, Chaplain, Queensland Reds, Reverend/Chaplain

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