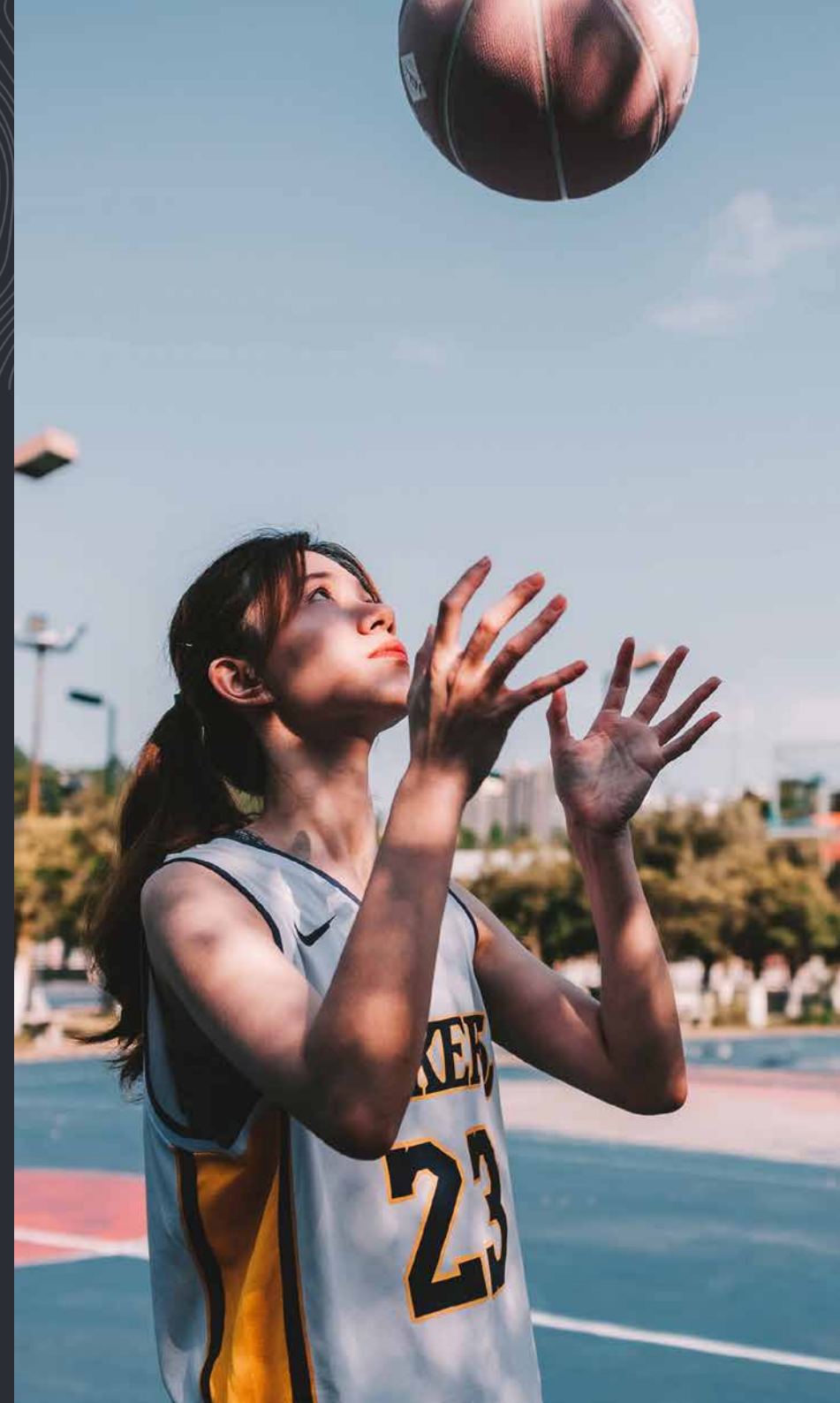


Cranlana
Centre for
Ethical
Leadership

Navigating inclusion dilemmas

A roadmap for sporting organisations to foster inclusive environments while managing conflicting views and beliefs within their communities





A test of leadership

Australia's sporting landscape has become a key battleground in society as a desire for greater inclusion and diversity is balanced with maintaining the key democratic pillars of freedom of speech and beliefs.

Despite leaders of sporting organisations attempting to champion inclusion, instances of hostility and division linked to race, religion and sexuality have increased over recent years.

Whilst the conflicts which manifest in sport are a by-product of a broader set of problems in society, the reality is that leaders of sporting organisations need to take responsibility to understand the cause and potential impact of inclusion dilemmas and how they can be managed within their particular community.

Inclusion dilemmas can take various forms but at their heart lies deep moral differences between people which make it hard for them to feel like they belong in the same community at the same time.

As a result of the dilemmas, people believe that their inclusion in a community is conditional, where belonging requires them to be silent, hide parts of themselves or forgo certain civil liberties.

Inclusion dilemmas typically generate hostile, aggressive and divisive debate, competing rights claims and usually end with everyone feeling less included than they were previously.

The challenge to avoid and overcome such hardship is a true test of leadership.

Sport and society - why values collide

- A sense of responsibility or pressure on sporting organisations to lead on social inclusion
- A need to create a welcoming environment for groups under represented within their community, which also increases supporter numbers, and/or participants
- Growing acceptance and empowerment of minority groups
- Pressure to align with sponsors and key stakeholders

VS

- A decline in general social cohesion
- A growing movement against political correctness or a rejection of being told what to think and how to act
- An increased ability for individuals to voice views via their own platforms
- A media environment that seeks out polarisation and amplifies it
- A society-wide move away from respectful debate to 'contempt' where sides are taken, opinions dismissed and rights ranked or prioritised.

Equal needs, unequal history

Leaders of sporting organisations need to understand that groups within their communities each have complex histories of power, privilege, marginalisation, exclusion and discrimination. These histories can change the way different groups experience inclusion dilemmas.

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 and religious minorities.

Many of these groups have struggled to overcome various forms of legal and structural exclusion. Some of those struggles are ongoing and even when legal forms of exclusion are removed, other forms of discrimination remain.

Examples of inclusion dilemmas have occurred across all codes, from the termination of Israel Folau's rugby contract, Australian netballers refusing to wear sponsor logos in support of a First Nations teammate, to players in NRL and AFLW competitions choosing to stand down from playing in Pride Rounds.

Following their own well-publicised case, the Essendon Football Club and Andrew Thorburn combined to commission an independent report to help sporting organisations re-think their approach to inclusion dilemmas. We recommend leaders take the time to read the full report to inform their approach when following the recommendations laid out in this roadmap.

The report, *Changing the Game: Rethinking Sport's Inclusion Dilemma* was written following a series of roundtables involving leaders and interested people from across the sporting landscape, alongside leaders and people with personal or professional experience with inclusion dilemmas.

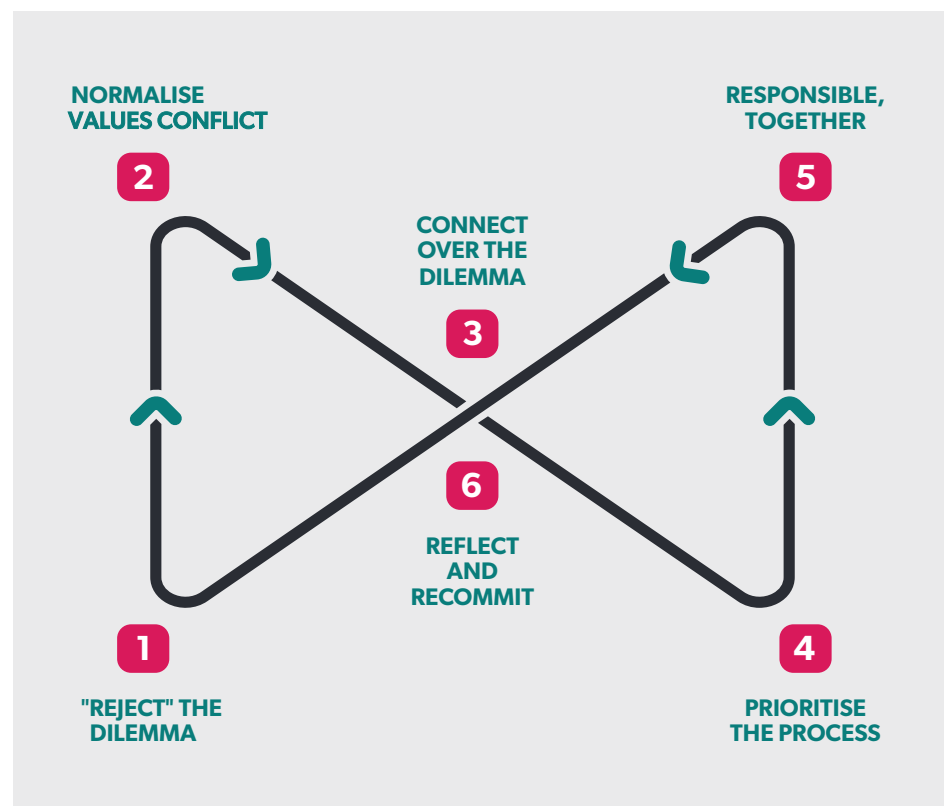
Changing the Game recommends that sporting organisations adopt a series of proactive steps (or habits) to lay the foundation for normalising disparate views, fostering genuinely inclusive environments and effectively responding to values based conflicts when they (inevitably) arise.

Access the published report:
Changing the Game: Rethinking Sport's Inclusion Dilemma

The 6 habits of inclusive communities

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

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



Habit 1: "Rejecting" the inclusion dilemma

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 sport resulting in zero sum thinking. This approach awards inclusion to whoever's rights are deemed most important and others can either self-censor or find another community.

By contrast, to create inclusive communities leaders shouldn't actually frame values conflicts as inclusion dilemmas. Genuinely 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 individual or group 'rights'. Instead, emphasise care, responsibilities and relationships. Ask what behaviours would be present in a caring and responsible community.

Habit 2: Normalising values conflict

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.

Sporting organisations can normalise values conflicts and the accompanying discomfort 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.

A potential blindspot for sports leaders to look out for and combat is that for a range of reasons familiarity can sometimes lead to the assumption of consensus – and subsequently result in bypassing strategies which assist with achieving genuine inclusion in the community.

Inclusion is a skill

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.

Guidance for leaders

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

Deliberate steps to foster respect and meaningful connection must be taken and not overlooked in the rush to arrive at a solution.

Avoid reductive labels and assumptions

The tendency to reduce people to their disclosed or visible identities (religious, queer, straight, male, white, Indigenous...) is a challenge for inclusive dialogue.

It is important to not assume someone's beliefs, values or character based on their identity. Recognise that people coming to the table might be carrying the following fears:

1. That my identity will count against me in some way in this conversation (because I am white, straight, male; because people will label me and interpret me through their own biases; because I lack the academic expertise others possess).
2. That my identity increases my investment in this conversation, and this makes it more emotionally costly, less psychologically safe and increases my sense of responsibility to make progress.
3. I am reluctant to be seen as representing an entire community/identity rather than my own experience, interests and expertise.

Build 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.

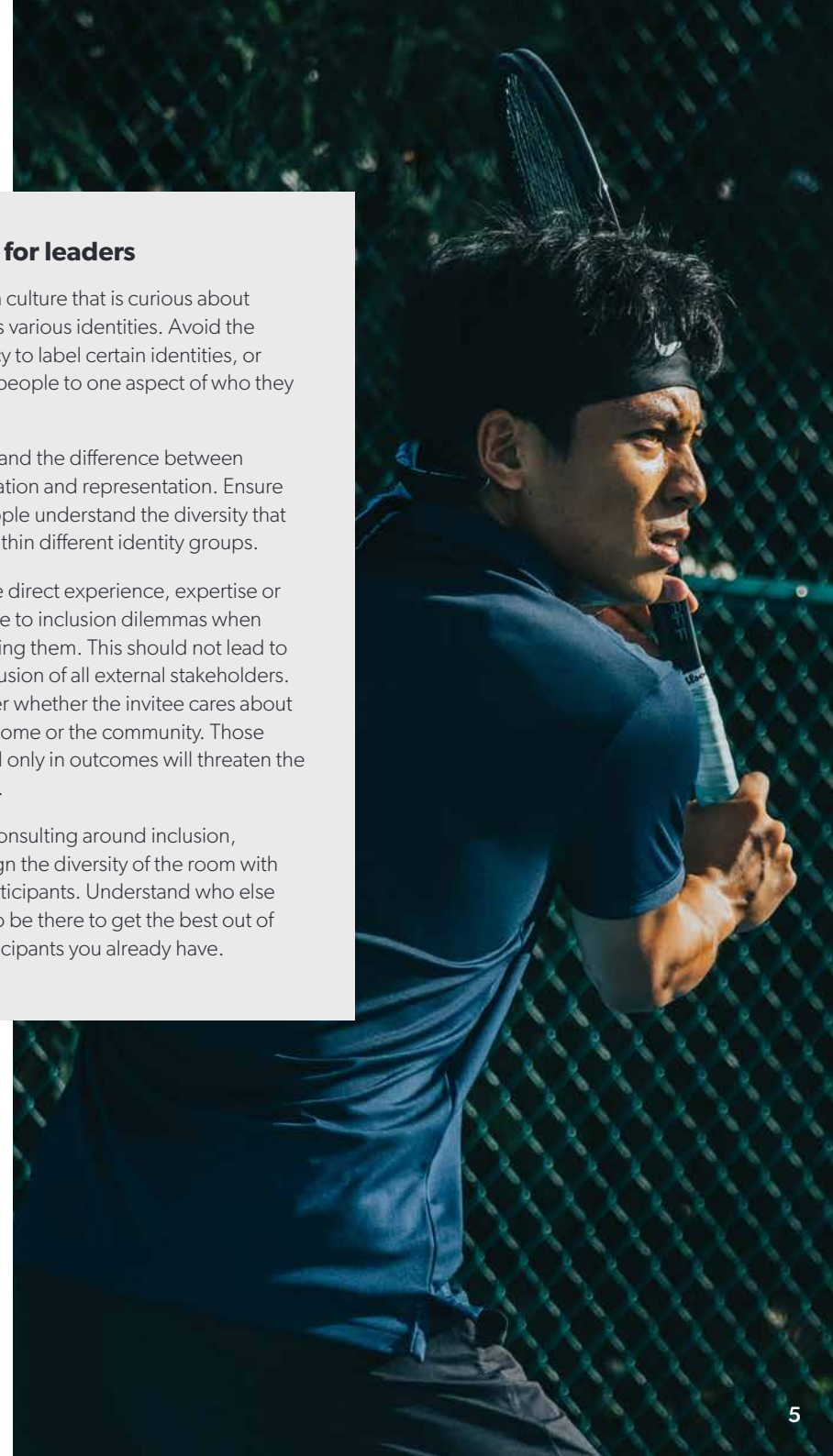
Leaders can solve this by asking participants who else needs to be involved. This provides another safeguard against organisational blind spots and unintended exclusion.

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

Guidance for leaders

- 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 goodwill. They also need people to believe that decision making processes have integrity.

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

To prioritise the process, sporting organisations should:

Seek agreement about how the conversation should be had

Leaders 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.*

Determining the process and principles for addressing inclusion dilemmas before diving in to solution mode helps ensure that the process does not disadvantage any one party. If one group distrusts the process they're unlikely to accept the outcome, which only exacerbates the dilemma, making it harder to manage.

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.

The value of developing a charter isn't in the final product but 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.

Own and defend the process

When inclusion dilemmas occur or spike, media interest and public discourse can place pressure on sporting leaders to act quickly and decisively.

Groups at the centre of the inclusion dilemma also feel under pressure, resulting in a heightened sense of conflict that needs to be solved.

Notwithstanding the heightened (and often febrile) tension this can create, leaders need to normalise both the dilemma AND the process of addressing it. Leaders must demonstrate the strength of conviction to progress the matter at a pace that is appropriate to the conversations which need to occur but at the same time be transparent in explaining the process and timing to external stakeholders.



Guidance for leaders

- Build confidence in the decision-making process by co-designing it with key 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

The environment sporting organisations operate in is prone to inclusion dilemmas occurring. Leaders need to be proactive and aim to address them before they escalate.

Building relationships with key groups prior to conflict arising is imperative and also an important step in identifying the possibilities of inclusion dilemmas occurring within their community.

Embrace care and context over politics and principles

When conflicts occur within communities, opposing groups often see outcomes as either a victory for their rights or a defeat.

Leaders need to identify and call out a different set of objectives such as:

- Building 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.

Sporting organisations already prioritise relationships. Teams, coaches, support staff, supporter communities are all key components of the organisations. They prove that organisations are already capable of care, even in challenging times.

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 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.

In order to foster a shared understanding and suspend moral judgements, sporting organisations should:

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.

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

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.

However be aware that this approach can also be insensitive to historical power imbalances, and thus undermine inclusivity.

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.

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.

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.

Guidance for leaders

- 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's behaviours continue to threaten inclusion, 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 but the ongoing commitment of groups within a community to navigate inclusion dilemmas without resorting to exclusion.

It is essential that sporting organisations ensure the following are part of their approach.

Conduct inclusivity post-mortems

Debriefing or completing a thorough review of the organisation's responses to inclusion dilemmas supports continuous improvement and an inclusive culture.

Reviews of inclusion dilemmas also enable people to dissent, challenge outcomes and to feel accepted in doing so which reinforces that a person's contribution is welcome.

It is the organisation's responsibility to be genuine, open and responsive to feedback, and take steps to address any issues that arise.

Support 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.

It is important that this support is contextually appropriate and developed in consultation with the people involved but may include:

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

Identify and deconstruct structural and systemic barriers to inclusion

Reviewing a response to an inclusion dilemma, and learning from the response of other organisations, can help leaders understand and remove barriers.

Leaders need to identify and address the following potential risks often inherent in sporting communities:

- 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 in an exclusionary way.
- 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.
- A gap in understanding of the values of donors and partners
- A lack of alignment between key stakeholders with the organisation's vision and commitment to genuine inclusion.
- Insufficient clarity within social media policies
- "Senior leaders are not sufficiently connected with diverse community groups to build an understanding of different perspectives to their own"

Show what's possible

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.

Guidance for leaders

- 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 roadmap 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.

The experience of participants in the roundtable discussions which informed this roadmap 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.

The exploration of values conflicts which informed this roadmap demonstrates 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.

[Access the published report: Changing the Game: Rethinking Sport's Inclusion Dilemma](#)