

It's Like a

JUNGLE

Sometimes...

By Lamar Oglesby and Chea Smith

Implementing inclusive practices in a traditionally non-inclusive workplace can be a difficult and complex process, much like navigating a jungle. Just as a jungle is filled with unpredictable dangers and challenges, a non-inclusive workplace can be fraught with systemic oppression, prejudice, and discrimination, making it difficult to feel psychologically safe. While the dangers of a jungle are more physical in nature, the thought of constantly being in social or professional danger makes creating an inclusive workplace environment a very challenging situation. However, with strong and supportive leadership, it is possible to make progress and create a more inclusive workplace.

A ranger is a safari guide with extensive experience and knowledge of the land and the animals inhabiting the land. Just as a ranger might use a map and compass to navigate their way through the jungle, strong and supportive leaders can use their knowledge and resources to help guide their organization towards greater inclusiveness. They can start by understanding the sources of systemic oppression and prejudice, and work to dismantle them. This might involve reviewing policies and practices, conducting diversity, equity, and inclusion training, and promoting diversity and representation at all levels of the organization.

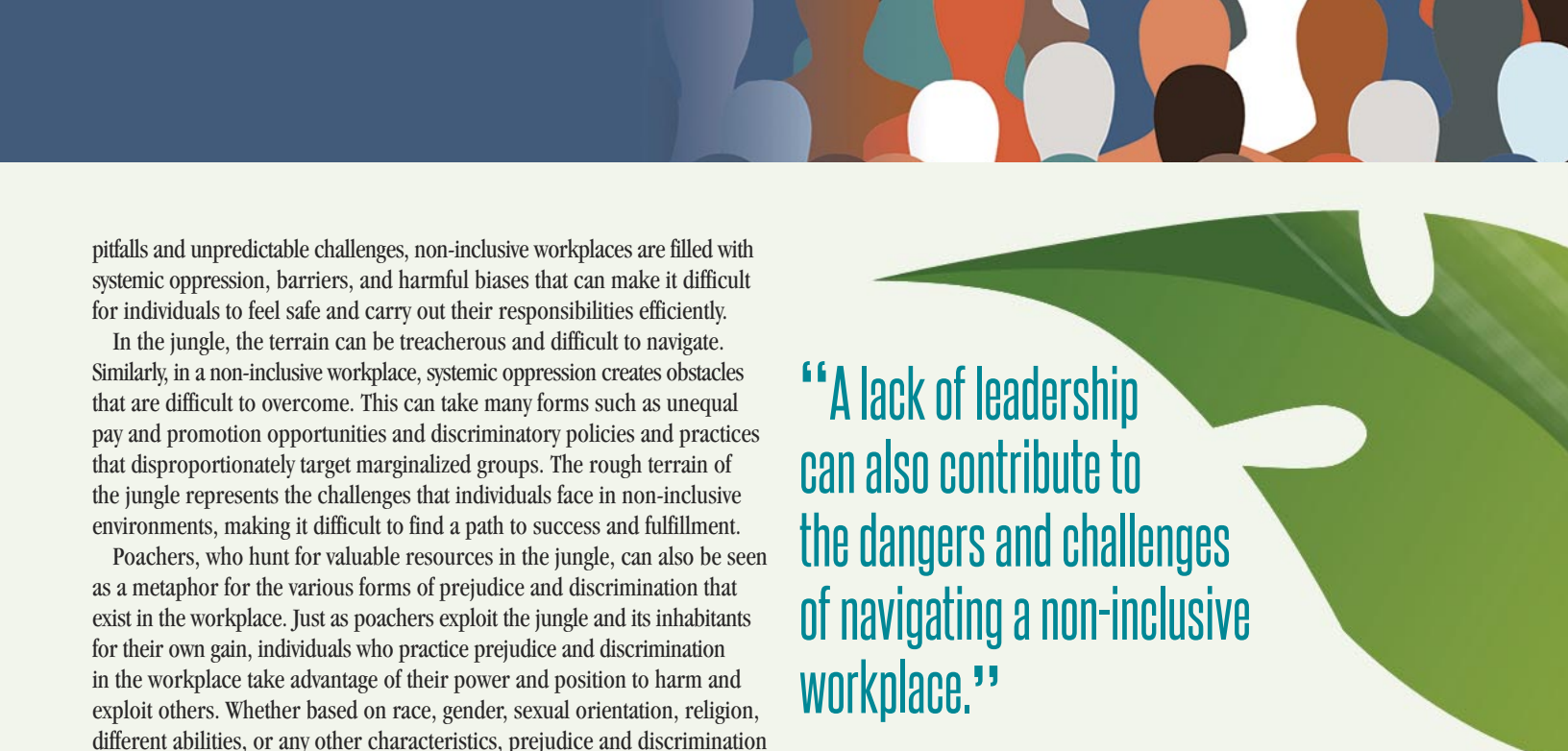
Leadership can also provide support for individuals who are working to create change, just as a ranger might provide support and guidance to tourists and other guides. This might involve creating safe spaces for individuals to share their experiences and concerns and taking steps to address the impact of prejudice

and discrimination. By providing support and resources, leaders can help to create a more inclusive and supportive workplace, where individuals feel valued and respected. Understanding that prejudice and discrimination are closely tied to ignorance, providing learning opportunities for awareness (unconscious/implicit bias), sensitivity training, and the importance diversity, equity, and inclusion has on the environment and service/product your organization is providing is a great way to address them.

However, it is important to note that creating a more inclusive workplace requires continuous efforts and commitment, much like a ranger needs to constantly adapt to the changing terrain. Just as inhabitants of the jungle can be unpredictable and no two species are the same, creating an environment that addresses issues of inclusion that meet all the needs of a diverse workforce can be a challenge. Leaders must be willing to listen and respond to the varied needs of their employees and embrace fluidity to continuously improve their policies and practices. Leaders must understand that this is a marathon and not a sprint. Not all great ideas are approved or accepted right away. The word “No” can sometimes be a complete sentence, but great leaders understand that sometimes a no, is a not ready, not now, or a not yet. The commitment to serve those within your purview must not be deterred by those who are not willing to challenge themselves and their biases to create a more inclusive environment. Again, it is a marathon and you have trained for all 26 miles. Getting discouraged after two miles of no’s defeats the purpose.

Understanding the Environment

Navigating a non-inclusive workplace can often feel like a journey through a dense jungle filled with danger at every turn. Just as the jungle is full of hidden



pitfalls and unpredictable challenges, non-inclusive workplaces are filled with systemic oppression, barriers, and harmful biases that can make it difficult for individuals to feel safe and carry out their responsibilities efficiently.

In the jungle, the terrain can be treacherous and difficult to navigate. Similarly, in a non-inclusive workplace, systemic oppression creates obstacles that are difficult to overcome. This can take many forms such as unequal pay and promotion opportunities and discriminatory policies and practices that disproportionately target marginalized groups. The rough terrain of the jungle represents the challenges that individuals face in non-inclusive environments, making it difficult to find a path to success and fulfillment.

Poachers, who hunt for valuable resources in the jungle, can also be seen as a metaphor for the various forms of prejudice and discrimination that exist in the workplace. Just as poachers exploit the jungle and its inhabitants for their own gain, individuals who practice prejudice and discrimination in the workplace take advantage of their power and position to harm and exploit others. Whether based on race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, different abilities, or any other characteristics, prejudice and discrimination create an environment of fear and mistrust, making it even more difficult to navigate the jungle of the workplace. For a leader, it slowly erodes the credibility and trust of that individual.

A lack of leadership can also contribute to the dangers and challenges of navigating a non-inclusive workplace. Just as a misguided ranger can create more danger and hostility in the jungle, misguided leadership in the workplace can exacerbate the problems of systemic oppression and prejudice. Leadership must be intentional about diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) efforts and not just pontificate about issues with no real actions taken. Without strong, informed, and compassionate leaders, the jungle of the workplace becomes even more hazardous, as individuals are left to navigate the challenges on their own.

SAFETY WARNING!

Like most events or activities that can pose potential harm, there is a moment where things get a little serious about safety right before the fun commences. It can feel like just before the roller coaster takes off but there is the speech about keeping all hands, feet and objects in the car and properly making sure the seat belt is fastened. Another example is prior to lift off the cabin of the plane receives its safety instructions. If you are seated in the exit row it requires verbal consent that you can assist in the event of an emergency. You did not think those extra three feet of leg room came with no responsibility toward the souls on the plane who may need assistance exiting the craft during what could potentially be the scariest moment of their lives - did you?

Is there a safety warning or consent warranted for new leaders to ensure they understand the importance of the safety of their teams and environment or the responsibility to assist in the event of an emergency? The emergency could be the removal of predatory practices, policies and people in the workplaces that obstruct inclusivity or challenge the comfortability in doing things as they have always been done. Being a disruptor does not come without its own risks. But the rewards of achieving an inclusive environment make the risk worth the work.

There are several similarities between what can go wrong if university leaders and rangers fail at their roles.

Safety concerns: Both university leaders and safari or exploration leaders have a responsibility to ensure the safety of those in their care. If university leaders fail to provide a safe learning environment, students and employees

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may be at risk of physical harm, emotional harm, or discrimination. Similarly, if safari leaders fail to ensure the safety of visitors and rangers in the wilderness, there may be risks of injury or even death.

Negative impacts on the environment: University leaders and rangers both have a role in protecting the environment. If university leaders fail to teach about environmental stewardship, students and employees may not understand the importance of protecting the environment. Similarly, if rangers fail to protect the wilderness areas, there may be negative impacts on the ecosystems and wildlife.

Loss of trust and reputation: If university leaders fail to live up to their responsibilities, there can be a loss of trust and reputation. If students, faculty, or staff do not trust university leaders, there may be a negative impact on enrollment, retention, and funding. Similarly, if visitors do not trust rangers, there may be a negative impact on tourism and conservation efforts.

Financial implications: If university leaders or rangers fail to meet their responsibilities, there can be financial implications. If students do not receive a quality education, they may not be able to compete in the job market, which can have long-term financial implications. If staff and faculty are being discriminated against or systemically devoid of opportunities, it can lead to legal recourse. Similarly, if visitors do not have a positive experience on a safari, they may not return and may not recommend the experience to others, which can have financial implications for the safari company and for conservation efforts.

Overall, the failure of university leaders, or rangers, to meet their responsibilities can have serious consequences, including safety concerns, negative impacts on the environment and culture, loss of trust and reputation, and financial implications. It is important for leaders in both roles to take their responsibilities seriously and work to create a positive and inclusive environment.

Rangers and university leaders also have several similarities between them when it comes to creating an inclusive environment. Here are a few examples:

Both need to be knowledgeable and informed: Rangers need to have a deep understanding of the wildlife and ecosystems they are responsible for protecting, while university leaders need to be knowledgeable about the subjects they are teaching, researching, or administering. In both cases, having a deep understanding of the subject matter is crucial for creating an inclusive environment. When rangers and university leaders are well-in-

“What do you think?” A Commentary on Inclusive Practices in Research Administration

Research administration is a collaborative profession. No project is the same and the administration of each project is inherently unique. That is one of the reasons why the phrase “it depends” is a research administrator’s marching call. While we can establish business processes and build know-how, there will always be a certain amount of spontaneity and critical thinking required in this challenging, yet beloved career. Add to that a fast-paced environment and countless stakeholders, and you quickly discover that inclusivity in research administration is a practical necessity.

When research administrators carry out their due diligence, they cast a wide net. From pre-award to post-award to research compliance, each decision made has countless implications. What can we do to ensure things run smoothly and projects are compliant, desirable, and fundable? By embracing inclusivity in research administration, you will serve not only the individual, but the success of your projects as well. By asking our teams one simple question, we can capture all necessary inputs. In essence, “What do you think?” may just be the most valuable query in research administration.

Consider what it takes to reach the level of synergy where vital information can flow and inform critical decisions. Logic tells us that to achieve this state, we need to create spaces to engage our teams. One-on-one check-ins, team meetings, and ad hoc huddles are opportunities for information exchange. By promoting a culture of collaboration and creating a space for information sharing, everyone can feel valued and empowered to contribute. Inclusivity in research administration recognizes that knowledge is dynamic and to compound knowledge, it is imperative we ask each other one simple question: So, what do you think? ■



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formed, they can create an environment where everyone feels welcome and culture is transparent. However, university leaders must have a clear vision and understanding of the environment they want to create. While rangers are knowledgeable of the wildlife and ecosystems, unlike the university leader, they are not in the position to create the environment. University leaders should not only be concerned with what they know and how they will serve but the environment they wish to create while in service.

Both need to be excellent communicators: Rangers need to be able to communicate effectively with visitors, fellow rangers, and conservationists, while university leaders need to be able to communicate effectively with students, faculty, staff, and other leadership. Both roles require strong, effective communication skills to ensure that everyone is on the same page, the messaging is concise, and that everyone feels heard and understood.

Both need to be able to adapt to different audiences: Safari rangers may encounter visitors from all over the world with different cultures, languages, and backgrounds, while university leaders may have students and staff from diverse backgrounds and with different learning needs. Both roles require the ability to adapt to different audiences and create an environment where everyone feels welcomed, valued, and included.

Both need to be passionate and committed: Safari rangers and university leaders both need to be passionate and committed to their work. They need to believe in what they are doing and be willing to go the extra mile (or 26) to ensure that everyone is included and supported. Insincere gesturing and illusions of grandeur will not get far either.

Overall, both safari rangers and university leaders play a vital role in creating an inclusive environment. While their roles may be different, both hold a tremendous amount of responsibility, and the skills and qualities they need to possess are remarkably similar. The undertaking of the charge to implement a diverse, equitable, and inclusive culture is not for the faint of heart. Sincere belief in the positive outcomes that can translate into a culturally respectful university community should drive leaders to commit the time, finances, and resources to achieving the ultimate goal...Inclusivity & Respect! ■



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