

REFLECTION TOOL

Inclusive Leadership Reflection Prompts

20 questions for leaders to spot patterns,
check assumptions, and strengthen fairness.



*"Inclusive leadership is not about
perfection. It is about awareness,
and the willingness to adjust."*

Why reflection matters

Inclusive leadership is not about perfection. It is about awareness. Most leaders do not set out to exclude people or reinforce bias, but organisational habits, time pressure, and unconscious patterns can mean you are unintentionally giving opportunities to the same people, missing voices in decision-making, or reinforcing patterns that favour certain identities or styles.

These 20 prompts help you pause, notice patterns, and adjust. There are no right answers, just honest noticing.

How to use this

- Pick one prompt and spend 5 to 10 minutes reflecting.
- Use them before important decisions (hiring, promotion, project allocation).
- Review them weekly as part of your leadership practice.
- Bring them to leadership team meetings as discussion starters.
- Use them after something didn't go well (a meeting, a decision, a conflict).
- Write or voice-note your reflections, do not just think. Externalising helps.

Before making a decision

Use these prompts before decisions about hiring, promotion, project allocation, team structure, or resource distribution.

1 Who am I not hearing from?

- Whose voice have I heard most often in conversations leading up to this?
- Who has not spoken, or whose input I haven't actively sought?
- Are there people affected by this decision who were not in the room?

FOLLOW-UP: *What would change if I sought input from that person or group?*

2 Am I defaulting to 'people like me'?

- Am I picturing someone who looks, sounds, or works like me?
- Am I prioritising style (confidence, visibility) over substance (results, expertise)?
- Would someone with a different background or working style be equally capable?

FOLLOW-UP: *What assumptions am I making about what 'good' looks like?*

3 Who gets the benefit of the doubt?

- Do I give some people more grace than others?
- Do I assume good intent for some ('tough time') but not others ('not committed')?
- Are my standards consistent, or do they shift based on who I'm evaluating?

FOLLOW-UP: *If this were a different person, would I respond the same way?*

4 What's my evidence?

- What specific evidence am I basing my judgement on?
- Is it performance data, or is it visibility, confidence, or relationship with me?
- Have I given this person the same opportunities to demonstrate capability as others?

FOLLOW-UP: *Am I confusing potential with performance, or comfort with competence?*

After a meeting or decision

Use these prompts to review how meetings, decisions, or team interactions went.

5 Who spoke, who didn't?

- Who dominated the conversation?
- Who was interrupted, talked over, or didn't get a chance to finish?
- Whose ideas were dismissed, then praised when repeated by someone else?

FOLLOW-UP: *What will I do differently next time to create more balanced participation?*

6 Did I reinforce or disrupt patterns?

- Did I give more weight to voices I'm comfortable with?
- Did I interrupt anyone? Who?
- Did I credit ideas to the right people?
- Did I challenge assumptions, or let them pass unchecked?

FOLLOW-UP: *What's one small thing I could change in the next meeting?*

7 How did power show up?

- Who felt safe to challenge me or disagree?
- Who stayed quiet, even though they probably had something to say?
- Did junior or minoritised staff have the same freedom to speak as senior staff?

FOLLOW-UP: *What signals am I sending about who it is safe to challenge?*

8 What feedback am I avoiding?

- Is there something I should have addressed but didn't?
- Am I avoiding a difficult conversation because it feels uncomfortable?
- Am I holding back feedback for some people but not others?

FOLLOW-UP: *What is the cost of my avoidance: to the person, the team, and me?*

When reviewing team culture

Use these prompts to step back and look at broader patterns in your team.

9 Who thrives here, who struggles?

- Over the past 6 to 12 months, who gets opportunities, recognition, development?
- Who seems to be stalling, disengaging, or leaving?
- Are there patterns by gender, race, age, working style, or background?

FOLLOW-UP: *What conditions are making it easier for some people to succeed than others?*

10 What behaviours do I reward?

- What am I rewarding: results, confidence, likability, visibility, long hours?
- Am I rewarding the behaviours I say I value, or different ones?
- Do people succeed here by being themselves, or by performing a certain style?

FOLLOW-UP: *If I want to value collaboration, honesty, and care, what would I need to reward?*

11 What do I model?

- Do I admit mistakes publicly, or deflect blame?
- Do I listen when challenged, or get defensive?
- Do I follow through on commitments, or let things drop?
- Do I hold myself to the same standards I set for others?

FOLLOW-UP: *What's one behaviour I need to model more consistently?*

12 What's the gap between my intent and my impact?

- What did I intend to communicate or create?
- How did it actually land for others?
- Where's the gap, and what's causing it?

FOLLOW-UP: *What do I need to do differently for my intent to match my impact?*

When something goes wrong

Use these prompts after a conflict, complaint, mistake, or moment where trust was damaged. Focus on learning, not self-blame.

13 What did I miss?

- Were there signs I didn't see or chose to ignore?
- Did someone try to raise this earlier, and I didn't listen?
- What information did I not have, and why?

FOLLOW-UP: *What do I need to change so I see these signals earlier next time?*

14 How did I respond?

- Did I get defensive, dismissive, or avoidant?
- Did I centre my feelings ('I feel terrible') over the person harmed?
- Did I listen, or did I explain, justify, or deflect?

FOLLOW-UP: *What would a better response look like?*

15 Who was protected, who was exposed?

- Did I protect the person with more power, or the person with less?
- Did I prioritise the comfort of the person who caused harm, or the safety of the person affected?
- Did consequences apply fairly, or were some people shielded?

FOLLOW-UP: *What does this reveal about what, and who, I value most?*

16 What needs to be repaired?

- What trust was broken?
- What does repair look like for the person affected?
- What behaviour needs to change to prevent this happening again?

FOLLOW-UP: *What am I willing to do, not just say, to rebuild trust?*

Long-term reflection

Use these quarterly or annually to assess your leadership over time.

17 What patterns do I keep seeing?

- What issues keep coming up, even in different forms?
- What feedback have I heard repeatedly, from different people?
- What am I avoiding or not addressing?

FOLLOW-UP: *What's one pattern I need to break?*

18 Who am I developing, who am I neglecting?

- Who gets my time, attention, and investment?
- Who am I overlooking, even unintentionally?
- Are there patterns by identity, style, or seniority?

FOLLOW-UP: *Who needs my support that I have not been giving it to?*

19 Am I creating safety or performing it?

- Do people challenge me, or just agree?
- Do staff raise concerns, or stay quiet?
- Do people admit mistakes, or hide them?
- Do I respond well to feedback, or do I punish it (subtly or overtly)?

FOLLOW-UP: *What's one thing I could do to make it genuinely safer to speak up?*

20 What do I need to let go of?

- What's working well in my leadership?
- What's not serving me, my team, or the organisation anymore?
- What belief, habit, or pattern do I need to release?

FOLLOW-UP: *What support do I need to make that shift?*

Making reflection a habit

Reflection only changes leadership when it becomes a practice, not a one-off. Here's a simple structure for building it in.

Weekly practice (5 to 10 minutes)

- Pick 1 or 2 prompts.
- Write or voice-note your reflections. Do not just think.
- Identify one small action to take this week.

Before important decisions

- Use prompts 1 to 4 (decision-making section).
- Pause, reflect, adjust before committing.

After difficult moments

- Use prompts 13 to 16 (when something goes wrong).
- Focus on learning, not self-blame.

Quarterly review (30 minutes)

- Use prompts 17 to 20 (long-term patterns).
- Share reflections with a trusted peer, coach, or mentor.
- Set 1 or 2 intentions for the next quarter.

A final note

Inclusive leadership is a practice, not a destination. Noticing patterns is the first step. Changing them takes time, support, and consistent attention.

No leader gets this right all the time. The difference between leaders who build inclusive cultures and those who don't is not perfection. It is the willingness to pause, notice, and adjust, again and again.

"You cannot change patterns you do not see. And you cannot see patterns you never stop to look for."

About PhoenixRize Consulting

- I'm Adaku Oliver-Nnona, founder of PhoenixRize Consulting.
- I help organisations build workplaces where people are treated fairly, concerns are heard, and leaders are held accountable.
- My work spans culture risk advisory, anti-racism and bystander intervention programmes, inclusive leadership, and organisational culture change.
- To discuss how I can support your organisation, get in touch via phoenixrize.ie.

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