Book review

**Shah, S. (2022) Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging in
Coaching: A practical guide. Kogan Page.**

Nancy Maher
United Kingdom

How often do you speak with people whose cultural identity and background are different from yours? This a simple yet deceptively powerful question that drives home one of this book's central premises: understanding the lived experiences of people from different backgrounds and enhancing our ability to reflect on how we interact with others in our daily lives are essential leaders and coaches who want to learn how to be radically inclusive in their lives. Her call is for practitioners and leaders to increase awareness of their biases and contribute to creating a diverse, equitable, and inclusive society.

Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging in Coaching: A Practical Guide is a hands-on, engaging book that reflects the crucial role of coaches, mentors, leaders, and organisations driving a diverse, equitable and inclusive society. Shah's book provides readers with practical tools to coach inclusively with a wide systemic lens. The book has 12 chapters. The first chapter invites readers to explore the lived experience of those from a diverse background, whilst exploring the issue of identity. These two topics are at the heart of Shah's Mastering Your Power(MYP) framework. Among other elements of the MYP framework discussed in later chapters are: inclusion, belonging, authenticity, equity, identity, thriving, and psychological safety. The remaining chapters are designed to be read in any order, making this a useful handbook for practitioners to dip in and out of as needed.

Succinct and well-written, each chapter is consistently presented with individual case studies of diverse clients alongside Shah's observations, powerful coaching questions, and reflective prompts. While the MYP framework and her model R.I.S.E.N© are not empirically tested, Shah's approach is underpinned by her extensive experience in public, private and voluntary sectors, and draws on research relating to coaching, psychology and diversity, equity, and inclusion literature. Her approach provides an accessible and intuitive framework for novice or advanced practitioners alike. Vital topics, including intersectionality, code-switching and allyship are clearly explained and will appeal to new and well-versed readers. The MYP framework, for example, can be used by coaches as a compass to compassionately navigate coaching relationships, systemic forces, and personal biases, when coaching individuals with different lived experiences than Themselves.

Have you ever had a coaching relationship where you have felt that your client was holding back, or you are struggling to support them through a feeling of stuckness? Counter to traditional views that coaches should limit the exploration of clients' past lived experiences, Shah invites us to sensitively consider factors including gender, race, culture, class, neurodiversity, and religion impacting the client's needs. This does not mean wading in

and making assumptions. Nor does it mean acting as counsellors trying to fix past traumas. Instead, Shah makes a compelling case for the power of listening hard to lived experiences different from ours, with a trauma informed mindset, and in fact dedicates a chapter to exploring trauma. Clients' stories help form an appreciation of the impact of individual loyalties, including familial and cultural which may be incongruent with the majority culture within a workplace. Moreover, she reveals systemic and unconscious biases that lead to exclusion, entanglement, and tensions between an individual's survival self and healthy self. For instance, being authentic at work can be career limiting if an individual's sharing their experience of being on the receiving end of racism or sexism is met with micro-aggressions from colleagues.

I was struck by Shah's convincing argument that coaches need to be more than thinking partners. Through gradually revealing her own story, Shah skillfully recreates a coach-client journey where stories are shared incrementally. I found myself moving from curious to empathetic as Shah shared her story. I concur with her assertion that patience, presence, and compassion trumps rushing ahead with potentially surface-level goals that may be issue-based rather than context-based. Shah gifts the readers with a practical toolkit to help gently tune into potential stuckness that could be due to systemic forces.

Not only does Shah's approach encourage a systemic lens when coaching, but she also turns that lens on the coaching profession itself. This builds on recent literature concerning democratising coaching, that is making coaching available for broader populations and contexts. Though Shah touches on the coaching professions' privileged white, middle-aged men and women as gatekeepers and powerbrokers, an exploration of recent discussions on decolonising coaching could have been a welcome addition. For example, the theme of anti-racism as it relates to the coaching profession.

Exploring allyship in the final chapter, her consideration of elitism in coaching is refreshing. Human resource leaders rolling out a coaching culture would benefit from reflecting on Shah's checklist in this chapter. If, as an organisation, you want to attract and maintain a diverse talent pool, then ask yourself, do you have well-trained and supervised diverse coaches or mentors available to all? Shah's helpful questions are worthy of serious reflection by organisational leaders. Additionally, Shah's reflections on the rise of the emerging area of coaching for social change are noteworthy. Specific examples of coaching for social change could have been helpful to inspire readers—for example, climate change coaching, coaching homeless clients, coaching clients in prisons, or unpaid carers. That being said, the challenge of writing about diversity, inclusion, and belonging are the subject's immense breadth and depth. Shah packs her 232-page book, written during the Covid pandemic, with practical gems in a way that lives and breathes her notion of 'radical inclusiveness'. Shah writes concisely with sensitivity to readers identifying as part of a marginalised or majority group, backed up with evidence-based research.

Shah's book makes a powerful contribution to the growing body of work advancing diversity, inclusion, and belonging in organisations. Her message, "it's ok to be clumsy," is fundamental. Educating ourselves to be better advocates is a journey, and we learn through not always getting it right. I found myself inspired by Shahs' coaching questions and reflective prompts as a leader and practitioner. Whether a coach, supervisor, mentor, leader, or trainer, you will find nuggets of wisdom that are concrete, empathetic, insightful, and thought-provoking. Recognising privilege and embracing discomfort is non-negotiable for our growth as coaches, leaders, and organisations.