

GROUPS IN OUR LIVES

Introduction to the exercise

Origin

Developed by Intercultural Business Improvement, this exercise is based on social identity research that shows how group identification affects interaction and communication patterns and thus creates biases.

Objectives

To sensitize participants to the negative and positive effects of group identification and the development of related stereotypes.

IRC Competencies

Intercultural Sensitivity: Understanding the development and perpetuation of stereotypes about outgroups.

Managing Uncertainty: Experiencing the effects of in-group identification and the need for belonging as a mechanism to manage uncertainty.

Intercultural Communication: Experiencing the positive effects of counteracting one's biases and actively seeking common ground with people perceived as belonging to one's outgroup.

Coordination

Group size: 4 - 40

Materials: Whiteboard/Flipchart, markers, and handout (see below)

Time: The exercise consists of three parts and takes approximately 30 minutes. You may want to conduct it at the beginning of your training program as it then also invites people to introduce themselves.

Instructions

Ask participants to work in pairs with the person sitting next to them (or triads if uneven number of participants).

Part One

Ask participants to identify five groups they are both a member of and five groups neither one of them is a member of. The groups may be both formal (e.g., golf club) or informal (e.g., dog lovers). Allow five minutes to complete the task.

Part Two

Ask participants to find properties for both sets of groups (example: enjoy spending time outdoors; enjoy nurturing). They may list one or more properties for each group; a property may also apply to more than one group. Allow 10 minutes to complete the task.

Part Three (large group)

Ask participants to name properties of groups they are both a member of (do not name the groups, only their descriptors); list properties for both groups in separate columns on flip chart; review list and ask participants for positive and/or negative connotation of properties; underline perceived positive and negative properties in different colors. If connotation is unclear, leave unmarked.

Discussion

Start out by asking participants what insights they have gained. In most cases, it will become clear from the list that the in-group descriptors have a tendency to be positive whereas the out-group properties have the tendency to be negative. Use this insight to explain the necessity of in-group affiliation and belonging as part of social identity; explain the emotional nature of in-group vs. out-group distinctions, the development of stereotypes and the need for positive self-image.