

Back-Pocket Exercise

The Impact of Exclusion

VisionSpring
Inclusion Learning Loop

Back Pocket Exercise: The Impact of Exclusion

Introduction

What is the Impact of Exclusion Exercise?

The Impact of Exclusion Exercise is an interactive exercise designed to help participants explore the emotions associated with exclusion. It provides a safe and fun experience to build awareness and understanding of how exclusive behavior and conversely inclusive behavior can impact coworkers.

Who is it designed for?

This tool is designed to be used by DEI practitioners, L&D professionals, facilitators, and trainers. Some facilitation skill is required to lead a successful conversation.

How can you use it?

This exercise could be used as a standalone exercise or incorporated into a DEI training program.

This exercise can be effectively executed in 20-30 minutes.

Exercise Objectives:

The purpose of this exercise is to help participants see firsthand how, as individuals, we can choose to exclude or include others, and the impact that exclusion/inclusion has on individual well-being and group dynamics.

Materials:

Flip chart and markers

Name tags (depending on audience)

Several Different Types of Stickers

Impact of Exclusion Exercise

Instructions:

For this exercise you will need several different types of stickers, for example, circles of different colors, squares of different colors, triangles of different colors, one green star. Participants will be instructed to form groups based on “like” stickers. Some group formations will be obvious—for example all blue circles are an obvious group. But the group can decide to include circles of other colors or other blue shapes. Make sure you are creating large groups with many obvious matches and groups with no or only one obvious match. Watch what happens and see if/how the larger groups choose to include these individuals on the outskirts.

Ask participants to stand in a circle facing inward.

Trainer will place a sticker on everyone’s back. Be strategic about how you place the stickers based on the outcomes of the exercise. Purposefully create larger groups by placing a higher number of one type of sticker on participants’ backs. Make sure that you create two-three groups that have just one or two stickers.

Example for group of 25:

- Give 8 people blue circles
- Give 5 people red circles
- Give 5 people blue squares
- Give 3 people yellow squares
- Give 2 people a blue triangle
- Give 1 person a green star
- Give 1 person a brown heart

Instruct participants to get into groups of matching stickers. Allow 5 minutes for groups to find their matches.

Be creative!

Debrief

Using the following questions, debrief the experience by asking participants to talk about their groups and how the groups were formed. Continue the dialogue in areas where further discussion is merited.

1. Please describe in what way the members of your group are matching.
2. For people in the larger groups, did anyone try to join your group who you felt did not belong? If so, describe what happened and what the people in your group did.
3. Did any larger groups welcome individuals with no group or smaller groups to join your group? What was your rationale or criteria for inclusion?
4. How did it feel to be included in a group?
5. How did it feel when you were rejected by a group? Or found it difficult to find a group? Make sure to get input from your green star and brown heart.

Notes / Potential talking points: Most of us have experienced something similar at some point in our lives and still remember exactly how it felt in that moment. Neuropsych studies reveal that the part of our brains that process our reactions to social exclusion is the same part that processes physical pain. We are actually hard-wired to avoid the experience at all costs.

6. What are some examples of how individuals can be excluded in our workplaces? Or examples of those organizational rules or norms that detract from inclusion?
7. Working in a virtual or hybrid environment can make it even more difficult to form connections with our coworkers. What are some of those unique challenges and what can we do to foster belonging in a virtual work environment?
8. What are some things we can do in our workplaces to ensure all employees feel included and believe they can bring their whole selves to work?

What did we learn as a result of this exercise?

Summarize responses and share following learning points.

Learning Points

- Most people have a need for belonging and will seek membership to a group in which they feel welcome and included.
- When people are excluded from a group, they may feel alienated, unhappy or resentful.
- Overtime this can erode self-esteem or self-confidence. And ultimately lead to lower productivity and higher turnover rates.
- When we act in a welcoming or inclusive manner and embrace people's individuality, they tend to feel a sense of belonging and look for opportunities to contribute or add to the group in positive ways.
- Simple actions like inviting someone to lunch, asking for their opinion and input and treating them with respect can help create that sense of belonging.
- When we open ourselves up to difference, we can achieve more as individuals, as teams and as an organization.