

Skills for Creating and Working Successfully in a Multicultural Workplace

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Listening for information about other's experiences and truths

This skill asks that you be able to listen carefully to the people you work with and hear what they are saying, especially when it is different from what you have experienced or believe. You know that you are able to do this when, after repeating what someone else has said, they tell you that you heard what they said accurately. This skill also requires you to be willing to ask others, "Is that what you said? Did I get that right?" which leads to the next skill.

Asking questions to increase my understanding of another person's experience and point of view

While this skill may sound simple and easy, for some people, it is quite difficult. Some people don't ask questions, but share their thoughts and wait for the other person to respond. Or, they ask questions for which the answer is either "yes" or "no," (for example, "Do you think that this is the best way to do it?") or questions that invite the responder to choose one of two options ("Do you want to do it this way or that way?") The kind of questions required for this skill are open ended questions such as, "What's your sense of this?" "How might you deal with this problem?" or "How can I help?" An indicator that you have this skill is that the people you work with, especially those who seem reluctant to share information with you, regularly share information with you when you ask for it, including information that you might not want to hear.

Affirming other people's experiences, and their interpretations of those experiences, even though they are different from my experiences and how I might interpret them

An assumption underlying this skill is that different people draw different conclusions from similar experiences. Therefore, there is no "single truth." If this is true, then the skill you need to develop is to find ways to support the conclusions of others and find "the truth" in others' conclusions. One way that you know that you are able to do this is when the people you work with genuinely feel that you have heard and understood them, and that you have modified your conclusions and decisions based on what they have told you about themselves.

Moving at another person's pace

Many people process information at a pace that is different from you. This skill asks that you be patient with those people who take longer than you do to process a particular piece of information, knowing that there are times when you take longer to process information. You know that you are able to do this when you are feeling impatient with someone's pace and yet you are able to simply wait for them to finish without appearing to fidget or look impatient.

Identifying and exploring the meaning of my membership in groups that have been traditionally or are currently excluded from full participation in my organization or society, for example, women, ethnic minorities, and people with temporary permission to stay in my country

An assumption underlying this skill is that people's ability to participate fully in an organization, and therefore be fully included in an organization, is based in part on their group identities. And, if you are going to help others feel included in the organization, then you need to be able to first recognize the excluded groups they belong to and then explore the impact of their membership in those excluded groups.

Identifying and exploring the meaning of my memberships in groups that have been traditionally or are currently full participants in my organization or society, for example, men, white people, and citizens

Similarly, a person skilled at inclusion is able to recognize their membership in groups that are included as full participants, and see the impact of that membership.

Recognizing the presence of institutional barriers that result in the exclusion of some members of the organization from fully participating in the life of the organization, because of their status or gender or ethnic identity or language or some other factor

Underlying this skill is the assumption that there are institutional barriers that negatively impact some members of the organization. Therefore, you need to be able to recognize these barriers or be able to ask others about the barriers they experience because of who they are and the identities they bring to the workplace. One way to know that you are able to do this is when the people you work with are willing to share their identities with you and tell you about the barriers they face, and you are willing to accept what they say as true.

Recognizing how some members of the organization get included in aspects of organization life because of the organizational privileges they derive from their identities as men or white people or managers or some other factor that matches the dominant groups in the organization and society

Similar to the previous skill, this makes the assumption that certain identities lead to privileges. A person skilled at inclusion is able to recognize how his or her identities lead to certain privileges in an organization, and is able to articulate those identities and privileges to the people he or she works with.

Appreciating others' contributions

An assumption underlying this skill is that people are more able to change their behavior when they know that they are valued for what they can do and who they are. Therefore, a critical skill in helping people feel valued and included is the ability to tell them what you like about who they are and what they do. You know that you can do this when you can easily and comfortably tell people what you like about them and their skills.

Appreciating my contributions

Simply put, if someone is unable to appreciate their own contributions, they may be unable to appreciate others' contributions. You know that you are able to do this when you can openly say in the presence of others, "I am good at"

Noticing what could be, or are, cultural differences between myself and others

Some people are comfortable noticing similarities; an assumption underlying this skill is that noticing differences between yourself and others is an important skill at helping others feel included and valued. One way to know that you are able to do this is when you can talk openly about how people who are different from you on some dimension seem to have different values and ways of doing things .

Noticing all six feeling families in myself

Underlying conflict, and the sense that someone feels excluded or devalued, are usually feelings of sadness, anger, or fear. And, when people feel included and valued, there are usually feelings of joy, peacefulness, and confidence. Although many organizations seem to have a "rule" that says, "Don't talk about feelings at work," people who are skilled at inclusion have the ability to recognize their own feelings. You know that you can do this when you are able to articulate which of the six feelings (sadness, anger, fear, joy, peacefulness, confidence) you are experiencing in any situation.

Noticing all six feeling families in others

The skills here include the ability to sense what others may be feeling, the ability to ask others what they are feeling, and the ability to accept whatever they say are their feelings, even if it doesn't quite make sense to you that they would feel the way they do. And you know that you are able to do this when others tell you their feelings and it matches what you suspected.

Using feelings as data about myself and others for problem solving

Since feelings give us important information about others' sense of exclusion, feelings can be used for problem solving. Using this skill means that feelings are a part of the conversation when you are engaged in problem solving with the people you supervise.

Exploring and admitting my mistakes

We all make mistakes, and we will make mistakes when we are learning new skills. The ability to admit mistakes when working with others is critical because it reveals our humanness and our willingness to include our colleagues in the difficult parts of our lives. Doing this increases the trust that they have in us. Although it may require some courage to admit mistakes, you know that you are able to admit your mistakes when you can say directly to someone you work with, "I made a mistake. What I regret doing is"

Exploring and admitting my prejudices

We all have prejudices, despite our best intentions not to be prejudiced. Therefore, exploring and admitting our prejudices is a critical skill for working with people who are the "targets" of prejudice. If we can admit our prejudices, then we can know when we might be operating from a prejudice rather than accurate information about who the other person really is and what they are able to do at work. One way to know that you have this skill is by thinking about a group that has been historically excluded from full participation in the organization or society and noticing the prejudices you hold about that group.