

CASE STUDY (12)

DIVERSITY ICEBREAKER APPLIED IN A PREJUDICE-REDUCTION TRAINING IN NGO

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Areas:

Team-building, CRM

Brief

In the present case the tool was used in a two-hour seminar session as part of a prejudice-reduction training for twenty-five members of a woman's NGO. The only common identity participants shared was gender identity; they diverged on ethnicity, religion, income levels, education levels, and age.

The followings were the aims of the two-hour session:

1. The main objective was to facilitate the participants to talk about their differences and similarities and realize that when they shift the emphasis to another identity that they have, they can easily adjust to the new group membership.
2. To realize that while they share a common identity (gender), they also have personal differences, which make organizational cooperation hard unless understood and respected.
3. To understand that our identities are shaped not only by how we perceive them, but also by how others see us, and how *we think* others see us.

In contrast to the common application of the DI exercise, we aimed to first make the participants aware of their differences by introducing diversity, and then move on to discuss the ways in which one learns to accept differences.

Action

Part 1

During the first half an hour questionnaires were distributed and the participants were asked to fill out the questionnaires. After all the participants filled out the forms, they were asked to turn the page and count the marks on each color group. At the end of this procedure, they were asked to split into 3 groups according to the highest score on their color groups.

This part of the workshop worked as energizer and it also gave a chance the participants to think of themselves in different positions and situations.

Time: 30 Minutes

Part 2

In the second part of the workshop, the participants were asked to go to another room with their group.

A. Work-in-one-color-groups: There were three groups, one for each color. The groups did not have equal number of participants (Blue with the highest number of participants, and Green the lowest). The purpose of this stage was to develop a group identity and determine the common characteristics of the group.

Task given to groups were as follows:

1. To write about the positive and negative aspects of their group characteristics,
2. To write about the positive and negative characteristics of the other two groups
3. To guess how other groups might perceive them.

Within half-an-hour, each group discussed these three questions. During the discussions, participants realized that even though there are some commonalities of being a certain color, the extent to which they internalized these characteristics also differed.

Time: 30 Minutes

B. Presentation of their thoughts on other groups: One leader from each group presented their thoughts on their group identity, other groups' identity, and what they think other groups think of themselves.

In this part of the workshop, participants elicited a great deal of humor and created a positive environment to discuss their similarities and differences. At the same time, they could find a chance to express their feelings about others and even to say that they were well aware of their flaws and some problems that they had been causing. There were several breakthroughs where some members of the different colors had short dialogues about how they now understand what it meant to work with a member of the "other group".

Time: 30 Minutes

C. Learning points and reflections: With the help of the discussion leader, participants shared how they felt during the workshop and how this workshop helped to understand themselves, group dynamics and 'others'.

Time: 30 Minutes

Results

During their presentations, every group said that it was hard for them to write about the negative features of their group and that the dominant tendency was to see only the positive features of their groups. They realized that before discussing the characteristics of the each group, they thought that they were the ones who were usually doing the most important contribution to the team, e.g. hard work (Blue), communication (Red), or creativity (Green).

Below are the examples of what some participants said as reflections of their feelings during the workshop:

“I realized that we could easily become a group and be separated from the others.”

“As humans, we can quickly marginalize other people.”

“I thought whether I was also a bit Blue or Green.”

“By splitting up into the groups we classified ourselves. And I felt like in a closed box.”

“If everybody had changed their groups, everybody would have seen some characteristics that they could fit into in their new groups.”

As indicated in the above quotes, DI helped created the diversity and realization that the group had differences that they rather neglected by over-emphasizing their similarity (gender). Participants realized that once another identity is introduced along with the gender identity, participants could shift alliances depending on the context.

The DI tool was an excellent instrument to be able to create this shift and be able to talk about it. In absence of such tool, participants rejected the fact that there were other identities that would create division, and that division is also richness for the organization.

About the author:

Ayşe Betül Çelik received her Ph.D. in political science from the State University of New York at Binghamton in 2002 and is an Associate Professor at Sabanci University in Istanbul, Turkey. She teaches political science and conflict resolution. She is an expert on inter-ethnic conflict resolution and dialogue. Her research areas include ethnicity, forced migration, gender, civil society and reconciliation. She has several articles and a co-authored book on Turkey’s Kurdish Question, forced Kurdish migration and role of NGOs in the conflict and peace processes.

