

Allyship Seminar

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in Collaboration with LMP

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Terminology

- **Equity:** same access and opportunities for everyone
 - differential treatment of groups based on their average life experience
 - (vs. equality: same treatment for everyone)
- **Diversity:** extent of heterogeneity x-population w.r.t. various dimensions
 - presence of individuals from different groups
 - who's present
- **Inclusion:** involvement and empowerment of different groups
 - how do the various people who get in get treated
 - who gets listened to/promoted/awarded
- **ally:** one who takes action to lessen the (future) negative effects of bias displays
- **bystander:** one who witnesses the bias display without acting

Unconscious bias

- Heuristics are invaluable: careful deliberation is expensive and time-consuming
- Overreliance on heuristics tends to lead to poor outcomes/decisions when complexity at hand is significant
- Some of the time, heuristics-based stances/decisions lead to outcomes that do not align with our values – “prejudice”
- Measurements of unconscious bias are not easy; evaluation of how their presence shapes action is harder still *on individual level*
- How do you fight it:
 - Increase self-awareness: do implicit association test, seek feedback everyday
 - Exposure to /embrace of diversity of perspectives: it will compel you to work harder and make more nuanced arguments
- “The unexamined life is not worth living” Socrates

Becoming a better ally: What's holding us back

- Clinging to a **narrowly defined moral identity** vs. accepting fallibility and skepticism about self – growth mindset:
 - That's a ridiculous accusation: I'm not a sexist/racist/misogynist/homophobe...
 - vs.
 - I wonder what may have triggered that reaction: I will examine this feedback for potential value
- **Blind spots**, typically in those dimensions that we belong to the “in group,” so not speaking up along those dimensions where we're in the “in group” and thus have influence
- **Hard-knock life effect**: privilege notwithstanding, we too faced obstacles (our accomplishments are *not* illegitimized by tailwinds we experienced)

What's holding us back

- **Confirmation bias:** seeing/hearing what we want/are expecting to see/hear
- **Bystander effect:** we're less likely to help a person in need if there are other people present
- **Savior mode:** it's all about me & I will save the day; anything short of a resounding success & I won't engage

What's holding us back

- **Sympathy mode:** from the bleachers, we feel sorry for the person and shed "white tears"; we're less attuned to their needs and more to our own; we downplay being sympathetic to increase perceived competence
- **Difference-blindness:** if we allow for no differences, then we tend to blame inequalities on the minority group
- **Type casting** (ie blindness to the individual):
 - Women are communal/nurturing;
 - Asians are hard working/smart/docile/wealthy;

What's propelling us

- **Willful awareness:** once we see something, we can't unsee it
- **Difference cognizance:** do acknowledge the difference and consider it, but only when relevant
- **Focus on individuals,** not groups they belong to:
 - question the “personality penalty” comments raised in face of preconceived dissonance (e.g. agentic woman):
 - “What makes you think <name> is abrasive? I have found her to be assertive but fair.”
 - “What do you mean by that?”
- **Active listening:** ask follow-up questions – try to find out what we've got in common with the person, de-otherize them
- **Accredit carefully and use meetings to shape the culture/define social norms/practice inclusion**

Use meetings to build an inclusive culture

- **Track** who has spoken, where ideas originate, who wanted to contribute and did not get to, and provide cues so you can adjust the dynamics of the meeting on the fly
- **Intervene** when someone is being interrupted or not getting credit
 - “I think <name> was commenting on that...”
 - “<Name>, could you finish your thought? I am interested in that perspective.”
- If others are uncomfortable being in the spotlight, consider **restating the opinions being voiced in neutral terms**:
 - “So what I am hearing is that some feel <X>, while others are more convinced that <Z>, can we walk through these ideas?”
- Practice freedom of speech in inverse proportion to your positional power

What's propelling us

- Exercise our privilege to **stand up** for the minority (along the dimension we're "in group" members)
- Consider the **readiness for change** of the person we are speaking to:
 - distribution: 20% on board/60% neither here nor there/20% unmovable
 - promptly disengage the 20 % who're stuck & stay calm;
 - focus on education of the mid-60% who've got high external but low internal motivation
- In our own speech, try the **law of reversibility**: would we still be thinking/saying this is the person we are talking about were:
 - F instead of M, white instead of black, cis-gender instead of trans-gender...

What's propelling us

- Provide **support** by:
 - Offering assistance, but not speaking for people
 - Learning to sit with pain
 - Asking follow-up questions: How did you know what to do? Were you expecting that response? How often do you hear it?
- Build **psychological safety** for the ones we're confronting by:
 - Using humor
 - Telling stories not dictums
 - Losing the argument, but breaking the norm
 - Speaking to different perspectives and seeking to refine our understanding of them
 - Signaling our own **growth mindset**/learning needs/behavioural ineptitudes

Encourage “growth mindset”

- Question language like “natural talent,” “born leader,” “not leadership material,” or “either you’ve got it or you don’t” (vs. success to the successful)
- Encourage people to think about **evidence of growth** in the record; and about the types of abilities that can be learned/mentored
- Question whether speakers are confounding prior experience with ability: individuals who are less adept at a particular skill may just have **less experience, not less potential**:
 - Eg: “It is true that name has not had that type of experience yet, but their accomplishments in <X, Y and Z> show they have a lot of potential.”
 - “They have never had the opportunity to do that, so I think we need to concentrate on what we know their track record says about their potential, and decide whether there will be good mentorship in place to learn the other parts of the job”.
- Highlight when **mistakes were used as opportunities for learning and improvement** rather than considering them to be signs of inadequacy or a lack of natural talent
 - Eg: “It is true that was not the best approach, but they were clearly reflective after that happened and changed their practices.”

Interrupt bias collegially

- Assume positive intent - that the person means well
- Rephrase problematic comments using neutral language and distinguishing between facts and inferences
- Monitor source: ask for specific evidence in support of opinions or assessment
- Directly seek input from quiet participants
- Encourage a thorough discussion of strengths and weaknesses of candidates before comparisons are made
- Redirect focus of committee to predefined criteria
- Avoid discussions of personal information about candidates/co-workers
- If intervening in the moment does not seem appropriate/possible, address the issue later:
 - in private (ask to meet with the person) or
 - in a more general manner (that doesn't single out a particular speaker) in a later meeting or
 - have a private word with the (committee) Chair to highlight concerning dynamics without pointing fingers