



EVERYDAY ~~EXCLUSION~~ INCLUSION

A study into our
everyday behavior
and how we could
do better.

DEVELOP



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A different view on what is normal

The core of inclusive behavior is admitting that what we are doing now might not be enough. That even though we are good people, we sometimes think and act in a way that excludes others, makes them feel less safe. The change starts within ourselves.

In this collection of short episodes, we'll be following a team in three situations, which are fairly brief, yet loaded with interesting information.

We'd like to invite you to **examine what you find "normal"** and whether there are some norms that you'd like to revisit.

Whether you are an HR professional tasked with advancing the DEIB agenda in your organization, a manager hoping to understand what you can do better in your team so everyone feels included, or an employee searching to expand your horizons - you will find food for thought - and action - in the following pages.



EPIISODE 1:

George is a nice person



Meet George and his team and dive into an everyday situation in their office. See if you can spot some problems.



“Elena, wow! Your new hair is awesome, it makes you look 15 years younger!” compliments George (49, Project Lead) as Elena (47, marketing) enters the meeting room at 9:02.

It is the Product Launch regular meeting scheduled for 9.00. Four senior male team members are standing around the coffee corner, loudly discussing the results of the football match last night, while two ladies sit around the conference table with their laptops open.

Elena mumbles a “Good morning” and unpacks silently. She doesn’t feel like approaching the coffee stand now. At 9:11 two more team members enter the room.

“Hooray, now that the country train is in, we can start” shouts George cheerfully and gestures everyone to take their seats. Steve (28) and Joe (39) have suggested before to start the meeting at 9:15, as their commuter train hits the nearby station at 9:05, but it has been rejected with words “We always start meetings at 9.00.”

The meeting starts by reviewing sales results and statistics, then turns into a discussion on how they can improve the performance.

“We should simplify our benefit messages, maybe?” suggests Steve (28) silently. Elena thinks it is a great idea, but she remains silent. Some of the seniors throw loud opinions. “The thing is the clients in the region don’t have enough knowledge to choose...” ... and the discussion goes on in varying directions for about 15 minutes.

“We should simplify our benefit messages!” declares George confidently. “Yes, yes, that is the solution” - the seniors agree and pat George on the shoulder.



Let's examine the project meeting

*Microaggressions and
unconscious bias in the office*

George is a nice person. He is probably **unaware** of the damage he causes with his behaviors. **Unconsciously**, he alienated the two female members - letting them be excluded from the small talk on football; insulted and attacked Elena's age **identity** with his "compliment", so Elena remained silent throughout the meeting; **unintentionally** attacked the countryside **identity** of the two latecomers, while trying to be funny; and unintentionally let everyone ignore Steve's idea. He is even **unaware** that he has simply repeated Steve's idea, which has been uttered 15 minutes earlier in the meeting and he does not recognize that the appreciation of the seniors should go to Steve rather than to him. He does not know that this has happened. All the affected, however, noticed and felt uncomfortable, resulting in less productivity.

Diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging is a very sensitive topic and faces a lot of resistance due to the unconscious nature of a lot of the behaviors, which are alienating, discriminating, intimidating, or hurting other people; thus resulting in lower engagement, lower creativity, and lower productivity.

In DEVELOR's approach, we focus on **identity** first. Identity encompasses the qualities, beliefs, and personality traits that define a person.

"My identity is what prevents me from being identical with anybody else." Amin Maalouf, Lebanese French Author



Identity is my gender, age, ethnicity, religion, values, and a lot more...

Identity is a very powerful manifestation of who I am and it helps me navigate the world by looking for the company of people who are similar to me in one way or another. This results in a **positive unconscious bias** towards people, who are similar.

The challenge that if I have an identity element of what I am, I am also indirectly defining what I am not. If I am stating that I am Brit, I am also stating that I am not a Pole. This results in **negative unconscious bias**. I will seek differentiators to prove that I am different, resulting in an "us and them" culture. Instead of an inclusive culture, we focus on the differences.

Positive unconscious bias creates positive stereotypes and can lead to **favoritism**. Negative unconscious bias leads to negative stereotypes and microaggressions.

Microaggressions - frequently unintentionally - are words or behaviors that **attack the other person's identity** (like George's comment on Elena's new hairstyle). As a result, the mental energy will automatically turn to strengthen the identity, and healing the wounds, instead of being in peace and focusing on work. This is why Elena remained silent at the meeting. It is not difficult to logically conclude that an **inclusive culture will enhance psychological safety and directly contribute to the productivity of any team or venture - as research proves.**

So, we see why inclusion is crucial. But what about diversity?

Diversity means the presence of a high variety of identities in the team. How is that beneficial for the business? Simple. All identities live in different bubbles, they see the world from different perspectives, and therefore a diverse team benefits from multitude of viewpoints combined into solution, while a non-diverse team simply misses hundreds of viewpoints and opportunities.



In any given society, social construct gives **privileges** to certain identity groups. Privileges are unearned advantages. Men are favored over women, healthy people have benefits over people with disability, dominant religious groups have advantages over minorities, same with race, ethnicity, and even age.

A conscious organization focuses on providing equity, which is a correction of the societal construct to provide equal access, opportunities, or chances to those with fewer privileges.

In our example, the commuting members of the team have the disadvantage - they lack flexibility in arriving time. It would be a simple solution to start the meeting at 9.15, so all have equal chances and can be equally included.

In conclusion, if diversity, equity, and inclusion are in place, it leads to belonging. **Belonging** is a feeling that “you are at home”, psychologically safe, your opinion is valued, your creativity is flourishing and you can deliver your full potential. That is what a productive organization needs.

So, how can we help George and his team? By supporting them to discover their distinctive identities and making them aware of their biases and privileges. Moreover, by supporting them to avoid microaggressions and start their journey toward a diverse and inclusive culture. Bringing the natural unconscious to the conscious, holding a mirror, and then having a plan to make the world a better place.

P.S. Do not forget, George is a nice person!



EPISODE 2:

Family day



George and his team are meeting again. This time George wants to do something nice for the team, but does it work out? Let's see.



At the usual project meeting, George was addressing a new topic: *“Guys, you know we aim to be a family-friendly company. HR is organizing a family day with some activities for the kids and a reception for all of us and our spouses after that, so...”*

Elena thought: *“I am not a guy, you idiot. If you call me a guy, pay me a guy’s salary.”*

Steve and Joe looked at each other with anticipation. They sensed that this was not their day.

Steve was educated at Emlyon Business School in France. There he met his lovely bride, Michelle, a cheerful French lady of Senegalese descent. He didn’t talk about her to anyone but Joe, while they were sharing that commuter train. He found that, after a beer or two, some people tend to make fun of people of color - last time, they joked about how they talk, and move, their accent... He felt that neither Michelle nor him would feel comfortable on a family day.

Joe went through a stormy divorce recently. Not only did he lose his wife, but also his two daughters. He could not process that yet and he anticipated that if he would share, George and others would be saying *“Oh, poor boy, what a disaster, how can I help you?”* All this with good intention, as George is a nice person, but this is the least he wanted!



Let's examine the family day discussion

Language of exclusion and covering in the workplace.

The importance of using **inclusive language** is frequently ignored or not even accepted. Referring to the entire team as “guys” or “girls” might seem friendly, but indeed it is a microaggression.

In the case of Elena, **George unintentionally attacked her female identity**. We already know that if a person's identity is **under attack it becomes stronger**.

Elena went further thinking: “*If you call me a guy, pay me a guy's salary*”, which leads to another socially known phenomenon that women earn less than men in the workplace. Although it is “normal” across society, it is widely challenged. This is another demonstration of how **the society is biased towards men**, as their role of providing family income.

How is this socially accepted bias handled in your company? How do you make steps towards equity in the workplace, to guarantee people the same opportunities as well as rewards regardless of their identities, like gender, age, physical abilities, and other identity elements?

In the second part of the Family Day story, we see Steve and Joe, two closest friends, looking at each other with empathy, as they both know they are covering some parts of their life in the workplace.

Covering occurs when you do not reveal certain elements of your identity, because you would feel uncomfortable or maybe even bullied if others would know about it.



In the case of Steve it is the skin colour of his bride, as he already sensed the insensitivity of some team members, he would rather not mention it, as it would be uncomfortable for himself, or also because the other team members would have to retrospectively apologize for some of their earlier jokes. It is better to keep it covered.

In the case of Joe, he would expect some unwanted sympathy or even some unsolicited advice - both are indeed forms of microaggressions -, which just would make the situation and the feelings even worse. We all cover some of our identity elements at the workplace to blend in. Only 100% psychological safety would guarantee a stressless, comfortable, inclusive, and open workplace, where the atmosphere of “I can be, whomever I want to be” is created.

Some people go even further in covering. Indeed, they so much so are not safe in revealing elements of their identity that they are demonstrating the opposite. You might know female leaders who dress like men or demonstrate strong - socially accepted - male behaviour, like being super-tough, using swear words and the like. We might know people telling Jewish jokes after their prayer in the synagogue, our ladies of African descent straightening their hair to look a bit less African.

Covering is not comfortable. It requires continuous attention, all the time being alert to ensure I am not discovered. **What elements of your identity are you covering at the workplace? How much of your energy goes into it?**

So why does it matter business-wise?

If a significant percentage of my energy goes into defending my identity, ensuring my covering is safe, and healing my wounds after microaggressions, what happens to my productivity? How can I ever achieve working in flow?



EPISODE 3:

Diversity, equity & inclusion training



Corporate offered the teams to join DEIB training sessions. Let's look into the room with the team, who knows what will happen?



They entered the training room for Diversity, Equity & Inclusion course.

The session started with stunning facts about why DEI is so important for business results. Then came some models of what each of the words means, how identity develops and that we all have unconscious biases.

George and some seniors were not too keen on the topic. After the first coffee break, George expressed his resistance: *"We really don't need this. Everyone is equal here, we are all included in discussions. We really are like a family here."*

"You see George," Elena reacted, "this is really the problem - we are like a family indeed. A family where older members patronise the younger, even if the younger is 50+. A family where women have different roles just because they are women, where men must be strong and make money, and women should take care of everything else. All this with good intentions. We are a family, not a team. I would rather belong to a team, where we trust each other and respect each other as individuals for our individual strengths and values, not than age, experience or gender or whatever..."

There was an awkward tension in the room. It only lifted when they fully understood, that unconscious biases are unconscious by definition, and microaggressions are not intentional violence, but rather unconscious ignorance of the other's identity.

They had a retrospective meeting at the end of the course and planned a number of actions - feedback sessions, norms for team meetings, communication patterns to ensure everyone's opinion is heard, they changed a number of processes to ensure equity. They also decided to get more diversity into decision-making by inviting customers, and other teams into their operation.



Diversity, Equity & Inclusion is a sensitive topic. It is especially sensitive for more privileged team members to face how ignorant they might have been to the issue in the past. Frequently the topic faces resistance.

“I do not have biases, but I know a lot of people who do...”

It requires self reflection to acknowledge that **we all do have biases** - it is not bad, it is part of our survival strategy, as humans - we just need to learn to manage them consciously, make sure that we do not exclude people and create the state of **belonging**.

If a team is diverse, inclusive and equity is provided for all team members, the team member will feel they belong. They belong to a team, where team members trust and respect each other for their individual values and strengths.

Belonging is the answer not only to employee engagement and team performance, but also **the best tool to tackle of the two trends that we are facing** after COVID. We live in the era of the **“Great Resignation”**, where employees leave their jobs in unprecedented numbers, a lot of them simply not wanting to work, because they do not feel they belong, because they do not see the purpose of their daily activities. Or even worse: they stay. They quit and stay. A phenomenon that the HR World calls **“Quiet Quitting”**, they quietly stay, but do not take initiative, are not creative, are not engaged. Their body is in the workplace, there mind is elsewhere. They quit and stay.

As we have seen in George’s example, there is a solution. **The solution starts with building awareness.** DEVELOR’s Diversity, Equity and Inclusion training course might be a good first step.



Then follow up with culture change initiatives step-by-step, for example:

- **Examine your meeting culture.** Is everyone invited who shall be? ... or maybe are there any “prisoners” who sit on the meeting, but are not included, nobody is asking for their opinions?
- **Do you have diverse teams?** Or do you have people of the same age, same gender, who see the world from the same perspective, while being blind to other perspectives?
- **How do you manage microaggressions?** Do you have warning signals or feedback initiatives? Or do you just let them build up until they burst into an explosion?
- **What language are you using at meetings** and in any form of communication? Is it to include or - unwittingly - exclude others?

The list can be continued, priorities will vary from organization to organization, but the steps need to be taken.

In order to increase personal effectiveness, strengthen employee engagement, build psychological safety, create the feeling of belonging and at the end of the game, to increase the business performance of the entire organization.



A different view of you, me and us.

Just like George is a nice person who has some unconscious biases, so do we all. That doesn't mean that we are bad people. We are nice people AND we sometimes think and act in a non-inclusive way. ... what can we do about it?

Remember, inclusion starts with us, individuals.

Self-awareness, being aware of your own unconscious biases, is an essential first step in the process. But what happens when you recognise them in a certain situation? Well, why don't you just take a PAUSE?

Pay attention to what's happening behind your judgments. Are they based on fact or are they influenced by biases or stereotypes?

Acknowledge your reactions, interpretations and biases. Recognize and accept if your biases are lurking around in the situation, probably distorting your judgement.

Understand the relevance of different perspectives. Be consciously open to different opinions, preferences and perspectives.

Seek the most empowering, productive way to deal with the situation. Strive to find a solution, aiming at a win-win scenario.

Express your revised views or act accordingly. If you feel you have behaved or said something inappropriate, don't be afraid to apologise and express your changed opinion. Or, just simply act accordingly.

We wish you all the best in your journey to a more inclusive self and a more inclusive organization. [Contact us](#) - we can help open the conversation through workshops and training.

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