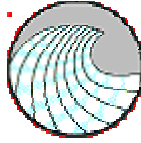




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World of Diverse Perspectives

EXPANDING DIVERSITY: WHY DO I CARE IF SOME OF MY ATTENDEES ARE GAY  
OR LESBIAN?

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**Abstract**

Though a facilitator might believe he/she is inclusive and open-minded, the facilitator and the facilitator's techniques may be "shutting down" many session participants - particularly gays and lesbians. This article is to help each facilitator:

- understand embedded perceptions and biases;
- discover how the facilitator may be unintentionally offending certain participants;
- and
- learn techniques that helps the facilitator become more inclusive in sessions



The presentation shows a diversity of techniques and then ties them together as a way of education. While this article is focused on gays and lesbians, all of the techniques could be utilized in other forms of diversity training and awareness.

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this article is not to discuss whether it is right or wrong to be gay or lesbian, nor is it a persuasive dialog. The reality is that there are gays and lesbians in one's sessions. Through the techniques discussed here, one will learn about gays and lesbians and what a facilitator should and should not do differently to assure inclusion and participation of gays and lesbians.

The article only addresses gays and lesbians – not bi-sexual or transgendered individuals. While they are also important groups that are often excluded, they are not addressed here.

This is an experiential approach. There are many different techniques utilized here to help one understand personal perceptions, understand how one may be non-inclusive and how to move toward being more inclusive.

The various techniques described here are:

Pictures as Mirrors

Singing

Icebreakers

Pantomime

Venn diagrams

Change management approach

Make a representation

Secret ballot

At the conclusion of this article is a description on how individuals learn and how the diversity of techniques presented here complements the eight different ways of learning.

### **Pictures as Mirrors**

The most obvious difference between most minority groups and gays & lesbians is that one can't readily tell by looking at an individual whether the person is indeed gay or lesbian. Or can one?

We placed 20 pictures of different people on wall. Above the pictures were the words: "CAN YOU TELL?" Each session participant was given 20 dots and asked to walk around to each picture and vote whether they believe the individual(s) in each picture to be: gay/lesbian (homosexual) or straight (heterosexual).

This quickie survey brings out participant's pre-conceptions of people. Discussion around this exercise results in the discussion of stereotypes and the reality that one cannot just look at a person and determine whether the individual is lesbian or gay. Since this is true, a facilitator should always be inclusive because one can never be sure – in any group.

### **Singing**

The use of song is another technique/approach to share information or elicit ideas. Besides the fact that singing will get everyone's attention, it changes the mode in how people listen. It creates a common basis to launch a discussion.

In this session a couple of verses of the song: "I AM WHAT I AM" (from "La Cage Aux Folles") were sung. Then the text of the song was discussed. With this particular song, the words trigger the discussion on 'letting people be themselves.' This carries forward into each session one leads. Gays and lesbians should not be forced to conform to other norms but should be allowed to be who they are. The facilitator is not in a session to judge the participants. The



facilitator wants to create an environment where the participants are not judging each other and taking focus away from the purpose of the session.

### **Icebreakers**

All facilitators are used to doing icebreakers – it is an introduction of most of our sessions. Common icebreakers that many facilitators use can potentially be “shutting down” participants because of fear or offense to the question. Does each facilitator consciously consider whether the icebreaker that is being used could be offensive or non-inclusive to gay and lesbian participants?

In the session we formed small groups and each group was given a different icebreaker for getting acquainted. Then the groups reconvened. The session leader listed the different icebreakers and each group expressed their opinion of the icebreakers. The session participants were asked why these icebreakers were inclusive to gays and lesbians. After this discussion, each group was asked to think of examples of icebreakers that were not inclusive and why. The exclusive (non-inclusive) icebreakers were discussed and suggestions made on how the icebreakers could be changed/modified to be inclusive.

Examples of exclusive (non-inclusive) icebreakers include:

- Tell us what you did this weekend (this can be embarrassing if they were “gay or lesbian” activities)
- Tell us about your family (family is a whole different definition for gays and lesbians – trying to talk about your partner if you are still in the closet is difficult and making something up puts you on the defensive)

Examples of inclusive icebreakers include:

- What aspect of your work do you most enjoy?

- What are some of your interests or hobbies?

The important message is that almost any icebreaker can be made inclusive – the facilitator just has to focus on inclusion when selecting what will be used and how it will be used.

### **Have You Ever Felt Like An Outsider?**

Utilizing pantomime and/or role-playing techniques help people see others and see themselves. This approach can be done in many different ways. To help people experience and understand how gays and lesbians might feel, we used an exercise called, “Have you ever felt like an outsider?”

The session participants were divided into small groups. Each group was given the task of thinking of one situation where they had felt like an outsider. Once the group agreed on the situation, they needed to prepare a 30-45 second pantomime / role-play of this situation. The groups reassembled and each group pantomimed their situation for the rest of the session participants. The session leader captured the situations and observations made about being an outsider. After all the presentations, the session participants discussed the characteristics that make one feel like an outsider.

After this discussion, the small groups reconvened and thought of one situation where they think gays and lesbians might feel like outsiders. Each small group brought this back to the larger session to share the situation and why it might make gays/lesbians uncomfortable. All session participants made suggestions how each situation could be changed/modified so that the gays/lesbians would not feel like ‘outsiders.’ These situations bring up further discussion and reinforce areas of awareness. It also brings out the concept that gays and lesbians can feel like outsiders most of the time.



## **Gays And Lesbians Are Like You . . . But Different?**

Part of being open and inclusive is to be aware of one's perceptions and knowledge. This exercise, while it appears totally pragmatic, was a great opportunity to learn where each facilitator may have been uninformed, had a misconception or even just given time to focus on thoughts in this area. The area is: how are gays/lesbians (homosexuals) different than straight people (heterosexuals), how are straight people (heterosexuals) different than gays/lesbians (homosexuals), and how are the two groups alike.

Utilizing a huge Venn Diagram (one circle - gay/lesbian, one circle – straight; the 2 circles have a large overlapping area), give each session participant a stack of colored post-its (yellow, pink and white). On each post-it put a single item. Each participant may use as many post-its of each color as they desire.

Instructions for the session participants: On yellow post-its, write an item/trait about heterosexuals that you believe they possess, feel, and/or do that homosexuals do not. On pink post-its, write an item/trait about homosexuals that you believe they possess, feel, and/or do that heterosexuals do not. On white post-its, write an item/trait you believe both heterosexuals and homosexuals possess, feel, and/or do. When you complete your post-its, place them on the Venn diagram: yellow post-its in the area of the circle that is exclusively straight/heterosexual, pink post-its in the area of the circle that is exclusively gay & lesbian/homosexual, and white post-its in the area where the 2 circles overlap. (No one should move anyone else's post-its).

Afterward all session participants placed their post-its, the session leader helped the group go through the items – first the homosexual-exclusive area, next the heterosexual-exclusive area and finally the overlapping area. While going through the exclusive areas, the post-its were moved as it was determined they had been placed in the wrong area. The

discussion is the true learning here. Many of the exclusive items moved into the overlapped area. The colors help point out what initial impressions were and what reality actually is. This is a good participative activity that educates much more effectively than a lecture.

At this point in the session the original 20 pictures were again referenced – revealing the answers. Based on the knowledge of the Venn diagram exercise, the incorrectness may be obvious. If not, it allows another chance to discuss perceptions versus reality.

### **Understanding Symbols**

During the break, the room was “redecorated.” As the session participants re-entered the room, they noticed a distinct décor. Various types of symbols and representations have been put up around the room. Music by Tchaikovsky is playing. This section opened with the reading of a Walt Whitman poem.

What was the purpose? To show people, places, things and ideas that are special to gays and lesbians. Facilitators and educators often utilize examples that represent a heterosexual bias. This section gave awareness to gay and lesbian affinity.

Some of the examples used were:

- specific symbols (10%, the rainbow, pink triangle, male/male symbol, female/female symbol, etc )
- icons (Judy Garland, Barbra Streisand, Bette Midler)
- role models (Martina Navratilova, Harvey Milk, k.d. lang, Philip Johnson, Ellen DeGeneres, Leonard Bernstein, Stephen Sondheim, etc)
- historical roles (Michelangelo, Walt Whitman, David & Jonathan, Tchaikovsky, Oscar Wilde)
- movies/television (Boys in the Band, Ellen, Will & Grace)



- significant events (Stonewall, gay olympics, election of gay/lesbians to political office)
- myths (all gays want to be a woman, all lesbians want to be men; all gays sashay)
- own language/mother tongue (Mary, out, closet, etc)

### **Change Management of Opinions**

Almost everything in our life involves change. Change management is important to help people move from one place to another whether physically, emotionally, mentally and/or figuratively. So each person needs to deal with the reality that everyone goes through changes and some changes are easier to assimilate than others are. But to change, one has to know where one is moving from.

A brief exercise was done in front of the entire group to gradually create increasing discomfort among session participants. Finally a point was reached where all participants have some level of discomfort. At this point, the session leader stopped the exercise and questioned the group: 1) At what point did you become uncomfortable/frustrated/angered; 2) Why did these feelings come up for you; 3) What could have been done differently that would have made this more comfortable to deal with?

This understanding is important. The session participants were then asked, “at what point do gays and lesbians start making you uncomfortable?” This elicited a range of answers such as: ‘when they dress like the opposite sex’; ‘when they hold hands’; when they have a picture of their partner on their desk’; ‘when they kiss,’ etc. These comments lead to discussion similar to the above exercise (making one uncomfortable). Once there is awareness of what can make change personally difficult and what one’s own hang-ups are, then change can occur.

One fact needs to be clear: accepting others doing things that might make you uncomfortable is not an acknowledgement that one agrees with the practice. But it is essential in working with these individuals.

### **Make a Representation**

This exercise is to use a medium outside of ourselves (talking, listening, pantomiming) and try to represent understandings of what has been learned thus far. Using clay and/or construction paper and/or pipe cleaners (and various other materials), the session participants made something that they believe represents lesbians and gays. This was done individually, as pairs or in small groups – it was up to the participants. When completed each grouping shared what they had created and why they feel this represented gays and lesbians. This is yet another way to re-enforce the knowledge that has been gained in the session through a different learning approach.

### **Secret Ballot**

“What do you want to know about gays/lesbians but were afraid to ask?” People may still have questions about lesbians and gays they want to dialog but don’t want to say the thoughts out loud (because they don’t want to appear stupid or don’t want to reveal they may be gay/lesbian or just feel embarrassed asking). So having a secret ballot box is a safe way to anonymously ask a question. This box was available throughout the session and people were given one last opportunity to submit requests.

The panel of gays/lesbians then pulled out the questions randomly. The most effective way for the questions to be answered is for the session participants to answer them. So as each question was read, the session participants were asked to respond. This brings the learning from the session participants and re-enforces the information with them. If the answer is not known



within the session participants or is incorrect, one of the gay/lesbian panel members tried to better clarify an answer from their point of view. This technique allows openness where there is possibly fear.

### **Eight Ways Of Knowing: Multiple Intelligences**

This session was an experiential education session. The desire was to take advantage of a diverse group (gays and lesbians) presenting a diverse approach to learning. As a summary, we want to show how these exercises fit into the established understanding known as Multiple Intelligences. There has been a lot of study done on how people learn and how to teach others. Utilizing Howard Gardner's, "Frames of Mind: The Theory of Multiple Intelligences" and David Lazear's, "Eight Ways of Knowing", one can relate and relay information to others in the most effective way. The basis of this work states that all individuals have not one, single intelligence but at least eight. Further, we each have the ability to enhance and amplify our intelligence.

The eight intellegences are:

- Visual / Spatial – this intelligence, which relies on the sense of sight and being able to visualize an object, includes the ability to create internal mental images/pictures
- Logical / Mathematical – often called "scientific thinking," this intelligence deals with inductive and deductive thinking/reasoning, numbers and the recognition of abstract patterns.
- Verbal / Linguistic – this intelligence, which is related to words and language – written and spoken – dominates most Western educational systems

- Musical / Rhythmic – this intelligence is based on the recognition of tonal patterns, including various environmental sounds, and on a sensitivity to rhythm and beats.
- Bodily / Kinesthetic – this intelligence is related to physical movement and the knowings/wisdom of the body, including the brain’s motor cortex, which controls bodily motion.
- Interpersonal / Social – this intelligence operates primarily through person-to-person relationships and communication
- Intrapersonal / Introspective – this intelligence relates to inner states of being, self-reflection, metacognition (i.e. thinking about thinking) and awareness of spiritual realities.
- Naturalist – this intelligence relates to the environment around the individual and their relationship to it.

If one revisits the techniques displayed in this article, one will find that this presentation attempted to relate to the eight areas of multiple intelligences.

Going forward, remember that everyone learns in different ways. The goal of this presentation was to educate on how to be more inclusive of gays and lesbians in sessions and to give some building blocks for a more diverse learning environment.

### **Bibliography**

Lazear, David, “Eight Ways of Knowing, Teaching for Multiple Intelligences,” 1991, Skylight Publishing, Inc.



## **The Presenters**

### David L. Johnson, Jr.

David has over 20 years of experience with Shell Services International (Shell Oil Company). His work has been primarily with computer software systems development and maintenance. For the last 15 years David has worked in areas of quality and software testing services. This has included training in quality techniques and software engineering processes (requirements gathering, software inspections and testing). Facilitation work has ranged from a multitude of basic meetings, monthly 2-day planning/working sessions to week-long requirements gathering and verification sessions. While facilitator is not his title, he realizes the need of facilitation in all aspects of work and life and applies these principles continually.

David is former vice-president of programs for the Southwest Facilitators Conference. He has also made presentations at many international software testing conferences. He is a member of IAF.

### R. Bruce Williams

With thirty years of international consulting experience, Bruce is noted for his expert group facilitation and his skills in planning and team building methodologies. He has authored *More Than 50 Ways to Build Team Consensus* and *Twelve Roles of Facilitators for School Change* published by SkyLight Professional Development in Arlington Heights, IL. Just released is his co-authored book *Brain Compatible Learning for the Block*. His speciality is facilitating participative, interactive group workshops whether these are focused on strategic planning and consensus building or instructional methodologies for the classroom. Recently, his workshops on Block Scheduling and School Change Facilitation have been popular. In addition,

he frequently presents in the areas of co-operative learning, higher order thinking skills, and authentic assessment. He is a member of IAF.