

Plan for Practice

August 2, 2004

Diversity Awareness

Insights gained:

- Racism is different from prejudice, bigotry, or stereotyping. Racism is a system of discrimination that operates at the personal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural levels in our society.
- Racism is hard to eliminate because it manifests itself using four elements: power, resources, standards setting, and definition of reality.
- Although many gains have been made due to the civil rights era, the elimination of racism has stalled and gone underground in many cases. Racist behaviors are not as overt (and thus susceptible to notice and change) and there is an erroneous perception that the “problem” has been solved.
- Multiculturalism offers a way to combat racism because when people become or are made aware of the differences as well as similarities that exist within different groups, there is the possibility of “...recognizing and unlearning one’s biases.” ¹

How can these insights/tools be used in my workplace?

- First, to acknowledge that encouraging diversity involves actively learning about and appreciating a number of “minority” cultures – from African-American to Asian-American, to Latino and Native American cultures. In the Library, we often do displays for Black History Month, Day of the Dead, and other ethnic and cultural celebrations. In addition to what we normally do: putting a few books in the display case and hosting a film night, I can invite speakers from our campus and from the community to address some aspect of diversity or their culture.
- I can collaborate with our Speech Department to organize a panel of student speakers who would address either of the propositions that “Racism is alive and well in the United States” or “Racism in the United States has largely been eliminated.”

- I can volunteer to sit on the interviewing committees of new hires with the aim of diversifying our professional as well as paraprofessional staff.
- I can purchase for the library the “Blue Eyed, Brown Eyed” video and discussion guide and promote it to our English, Sociology, History, and other instructors.
- I can assign topics in racism and/or diversity/multiculturalism to the students in my workshops and orientations.
- I can create a subject guide on the topic of diversity/multiculturalism for the Library Web site.
- In conversations with my work colleagues or in my personal life, I can resolve NOT to “go along to get along” – if I should hear a disparaging or racist remark. When I am aware of a person’s bias about a race or ethnicity, I can speak up and not collude or maintain the status quo.
- In conversations with my work colleagues or in my personal life, I can resolve to become a change agent. I can talk about the Diversity Workshop and the value I saw in it.

Effective Teambuilding

Insights gained:

- Introduction to the communication model that identifies four categories: Cooperate, Command, Support, and Retreat, and their associated strategies and/or styles of communication.
- Introduction to, and appreciation of, the part that *situational factors* play in our communication strategies. Often, the way we respond to others in our work group may change depending on the situational factors of information, authority, time, resistance, trust, and motivation.
- A simulation that allows you to practice new behaviors, followed by observing others practicing the same new behaviors is an effective learning strategy.
- Constructive listening involves many skills: to make eye contact, to suspend your own tendency to criticize or critique what you are hearing, to assume good intent in others, to put into your own words what another has said, and then state it back to confirm that you heard them correctly.

- To give and to get good feedback can be tremendously valuable. Judgment, criticism and blame are not feedback. Feedback is specific, timely, useful information.
- The *cooperative response* is an effective tool to use where there is disagreement, conflict, or a desire to change another's behavior. The basic structure is: **+++ AND a wish that...** For example, "I like the fact that you speak up at meetings, and that you come prepared to present your point of view AND I wish that you could sound more respectful when you disagree with someone."

How can these insights/tools be used in my workplace?

- I can try to replicate some of the exercises we did in the workshop with my work colleagues, substituting the generic organizational scenarios for situations that we as a group are dealing with.
- I can read the books that Allyn recommended, to gain more insight and tools.
- I can think about when a situation at work might call for some kind of fun role playing or structured activity (such as using an ice breaker before a major meeting, or as a fun thing to do toward the end of the semester) and then just try it out!
- I can volunteer to be on groups or teams that form to research and report back on various issues involving the whole campus community – i.e. do not limit my teambuilding experiments just to my own library situation.
- I can reflect on my predominant communication style and make changes where necessary – try not to react in a habitual manner or in my own comfort zone all the time.

Facilitating Participating and Collaboration in Groups

Insights gained:

- There are a number of group processes that a facilitator can use to effectively accomplish goals at work, such as brainstorming, clustering of ideas, synthesizing, etc.
- There are a number of techniques that can be used in group work, among them are setting ground rules, Open Space, the O.R.I.D. 'focused conversation', Whole System Change, etc.

- Being a good facilitator is not the same thing as being a good leader, but I would say that all good leaders are good facilitators. Some of the functions of a facilitator are to set the conditions for open and respectful communication, and to model behaviors that are inclusive and affirming of others.
- A facilitator checks in with the group and may move the process along, but does not “set the agenda” or direct the group members in a coercive or manipulative manner.
- The Open Space technique is a versatile tool that can be used with work groups to identify issues of interest to group members.
- “Less is more” but the fact remains that unless a group is composed of people who regularly meet and have a high level of trust, new people joining a group will expect some sort of direction from the facilitator in terms of setting the ground rules, acknowledging who will speak next, and other procedural matters.
- The facilitator helps the process by paraphrasing or repeating back what another group member has said in order to clarify what is being said.
- Not all conflict is “bad.” You can acknowledge that conflict is there, but agree not to let it impede the progress of the meeting, for example.
- Venting emotions and resolving conflicts are two distinct steps in managing conflict.

How can these insights/tools be used in my workplace?

- I can suggest the use of the Open Space technique to our Professional Development Committee at the college as an alternative to the traditional mini-session format that we use to launch each semester.
- I can propose that we use the “Whole System Change” model at some of our whole campus retreats. I believe that this model could really work well in that setting – where we go to the mountains for a weekend with a particular theme in order to intensively plan as a group of stakeholders.
- I can suggest that we use the Open Space technique in our library planning meetings. This would be particularly valuable as we are beginning to plan for a new library building for which construction will begin in 2005.
- I can do more reading on facilitation; possibly take a short course or workshop, to further my understanding and to practice the skills I have seen in this workshop.

- When I return to my position in the library, and if the conflicts between certain individuals that rob our staff as a whole of working together positively are still happening, I can attempt to facilitate discussion and venting among the parties involved. I think this could happen successfully IF: 1) we collaboratively set ground rules, 2) we agree to use the “cooperative response” (Yes AND, rather than yes, BUT statements) rather than just complaining, 3) we collaboratively identify those specific issues that cause conflict rather than have a generalized “bitching” session. I know that the personality conflicts will not be resolved, but at least we should be able to reach consensus on how to “be” with each other at work.
- I can observe and make mental notes of how the facilitator works in other groups that I may join when I return to work. I would like to keep my insights and “learnings” fresh, and not let this become just notes from summer 2004 only!