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U2C4L1

# Celebrating Differences – Cultural and Individual Diversity

## Key Words:

Culture

Discrimination

Ethnic

Impartial

Inclusionary

Minority

Synergy

Stereotype

## What You Will Learn to Do

Employ strategies for neutralizing the impact of personal prejudices and stereotypes on your relationships with others

## Linked Core Abilities

- Take responsibility for your actions and choices
- Do your share as a good citizen in your school, community, country, and the world

## Skills and Knowledge You Will Gain Along the Way

- Define how people display prejudice toward others
- Identify reasons for discrimination and stereotyping
- Describe ways a leader can guide diverse groups to work together as a team

## Introduction

Captain Kirk, Lieutenant Uhura, Lieutenant Sulu, Ensign Chekhov, Mr. Spock, Worf, Data, and Geordi La Forge—what a cast of characters! The *Star Trek* crewmembers were international, interplanetary, half-human/half-vulcan, and blind (with a sight visor)! Yes, *Star Trek* and *Star Trek: The Next Generation* raised some issues about diversity. Yet, no matter the interplanetary problem they faced, they succeeded thanks to incredible group synergy!

**Synergy** is when you and your team members cooperate together and create better results than working alone. Each individual is unique and must be valued for that uniqueness, just like Captain Kirk valued Mr. Spock. Real synergy involves celebrating differences, teamwork, and open-mindedness, while finding new and better ways of doing things.

On July 26, 1948, President Harry S. Truman signed Executive Order 9981. This order called for the integration of the armed forces and an end to **discrimination** against soldiers because of race, color, or creed. Although the Army completed its desegregation in the 1950s, the assignment of whites and members of **minority** groups to the same units did not ensure total equality, racial harmony, or a fully integrated Army. The Army, similar to society at large, began to address the questions and challenges of the race issue seriously in the 1960s. Today, every Army element is expected to have an active race relations and equal opportunity program. Laws and regulations provide guidelines to ensure the execution of these programs.

Employees of private organizations as well as members of the military come from all walks of life, different geographical areas, and numerous racial and **ethnic** backgrounds. They bring with them their own challenges and prejudices. The leader's challenge is to direct members of these diverse groups in a way that will cause them to work together as a team. It is not an easy task, but it is one that can be accomplished through informed, fair, and **impartial** leadership and educational awareness.



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## Values and Attitudes

Values and attitudes are important to the daily functioning of our lives. They help form the basis of how you see yourself and those around you as individuals, how you see others, and how you interpret the world in general. As a leader, you will often be involved with individuals who have different values and attitudes from your own. Perhaps you have already experienced many of these differences? Some may be due to religious or cultural backgrounds, while others may have stemmed from racial or ethnic differences.

In your role as a leader, you will also be a counselor and helper. To communicate well with others, it is necessary for you to understand the dynamics involved with the value and attitude differences within each human being. Those differences in values and attitudes can come between people.

### Values

Values impact the daily interaction between individuals. That's why a clear understanding of one's own value system helps in understanding others' values.

There are cultural differences and similarities in assigning levels of importance to values. In a study that evaluated the levels of importance in five cultures, of 29 values, none of them were shared by all five cultures as primary values (values that are most important to an individual and worth dying for, such as one's country, patriotism, freedom, religion, etc.) or secondary values (values that are important but not worth dying for, such as money). Other values evaluated by the study, included respect for youth, human dignity, hierarchy, authoritarianism, education, and frankness.

## Attitudes

As a member of society, you are involved daily with attitudes and behavior. So, you must understand how one affects the other. As you can see below, there is a continuous chain relationship between the two:

- My attitudes affect my behavior
- My behavior affects your attitudes
- Your attitudes affect your behavior
- Your behavior affects my attitudes



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Attitudes can have positive or negative implications. Although they help make sense out of life experiences, individuals cannot change their attitudes easily. Furthermore, you may not always be aware of the extensive influences your attitudes have on other people, jobs, and situations, or how they can affect a person's learning, personality, prejudices, and productivity.

## Self-image/Self-concept

As a leader, you deal constantly with people. It makes your job simpler if you really know who you are and how you relate to others. You also need to know how others perceive you!

What is your self-concept? That is, how do you see yourself and your situation? Did you know the single most important factor impacting communication between people, is their self-concept? Although situations may change from moment-to-moment or place-to-place, people's beliefs about themselves affect their communicative behavior. People hold thousands of concepts/perceptions of themselves, including who they are, what they stand for, where they live, what they do and do not do, what they value, and what they believe.

Self-concept, then, is how you view yourself. It's a picture as seen through your own thoughts, development, perceptions, and feelings.

**Self-concept includes:**

- Development  
The way you feel about yourself, which is directly related to your upbringing. It includes values and attitudes
- Perception  
Interpretation and amount of "emotional charge" attributed to past events and present situations
- Feelings  
The positive or negative, indifference or intensity, of emotions

Unfortunately, you cannot buy self-concept/personality attributes from a store. Your personality is a combination of heredity and life experiences. To gain a better understanding of self-concept, where it comes from, and how it develops, look at the main ingredients—heritage and needs fulfillment/emotional development.

**Heritage**

As soon as you came into this world, society classified you in terms of the following:

- Gender, such as male, female
- Race, such as White, Black, Hispanic, Asian
- Nationality, such as American, German, Irish, Swedish
- Religion, such as Catholic, Jewish, Muslim
- Family status, such as lower, middle, upper class
- Legal status, such as legitimate, illegitimate
- Environment, such as from country, suburbs, inner city
- Physical status, such as a cute or ugly
- Parentage, such as married, single, divorced

**Needs Fulfillment/Emotional Development**

Your personal, psychological, emotional, and physical needs define your self-concept.

As you grow older, you define your own needs (what is important to you). How you feel about yourself has a direct relationship on others around you.

Remember, the way you view yourself impacts how you view others, and how they view you! Some differences exist because each person places different importance on different needs. Generally people want to be better people. But, no one else can make you change for the better, but you! Only you can fight to remove inappropriate or incorrect perceptions, prejudices, and discriminatory attitudes and behavior.

## Prejudice and Discrimination

You live in America—the most democratic (and free) country in the world! Why, then, is there still prejudice and discrimination in this land of opportunity?

You might ask yourself, "Am I prejudiced?" It has often been said that everyone is prejudiced to a certain degree. Everyone operates on pre-judgments and makes discriminating distinctions every day. For example, if you had good luck with one type of car, you can be expected to be prejudiced in favor of that model. Or when voting, many people discriminate between Republican, Democrat, or another party's candidates.

These examples illustrate the frequency in everyday life that people make decisions based on their prejudices or discriminatory practices. But, it is the negative forms of prejudice and discrimination that have adverse impacts on leadership and unit cohesion.

### Prejudice

Prejudice is defined as a feeling — favorable or unfavorable — toward a person, object, or group that may or may not be based on actual experience(s). It is generally agreed that a racial prejudice is a negative attitude toward a racial or ethnic group that is maintained through **stereotypes**.

In looking at the norms, values, beliefs and attitudes developed through socialization, you may have said to yourself that each of those concepts may impact positively or negatively on how you view the world around you. Indeed, these concepts are the sources of bias or prejudice that unquestionably can distort how you make sense of reality.

If you agree with the idea that norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes do exist within each of us (and that they do influence our ability to perceive, and that influence can also be called prejudice), it would seem then that all humans are capable of being prejudiced.

### Culture

Another factor that is closely related, if not interwoven, with the norms, values, beliefs, and attitudes is one's culture. A **culture** is the total of the learned behaviors of a group of people that are a tradition of that people, and are transmitted from generation to generation. These learned behaviors include language and nonverbal norms, including body language and facial expressions, and color consciousness.

### Color

Many people confuse color with culture. You can share aspects of a culture, but not color. Color is genetic; culture is learned. In many cultures, skin color differences take on a measure of importance, status, or value. The color of one's skin in certain cultures may dictate how that individual is treated within that culture. Color has a tremendous impact on perceptions in the United States because many Americans respond to color by making assumptions and treating people based on skin color.

Not convinced? Then ask yourself this question: Do you behave differently around people who are of a different color? You may not want to behave differently, but you may recognize that you do from time to time. It largely depends on the environment you are in. If you are in control, or think you are, your behavior is pretty constant. After you become the minority, so to speak, you may become suspicious or feel threatened. A feeling of distrust may set in, and your behavior may change.

Explanations for prejudice, include:

- A dominant group avoids the feelings of sympathy for "dominated people" through over-exaggerations of negative qualities. A dominant group is the one in control of the major positions in a society, and sets the standards for that society.
- The belief that one's own family and society are unique and correct. You might feel that your group is the natural one and judge others based on this standard.
- Prejudice is a natural outgrowth of the "we-they" contrast. After an opponent is present, prejudice can be expected. Loosely scattered members of a group then come together to face a common opponent.
- The transfer of internal personal problems to external objects. People who have a distorted need to feel superior to others use scapegoats in this way.
- A particularly negative experience with a member of a particular racial or ethnic group in the past, might bring up memories that can cloud your judgment in the present. You may also tend to judge the whole society by your own experiences. If you have not been a victim of prejudice, you may not see it in others.
- The "earned reputation" approach means that members of society shift the justification for prejudice to a target group — "if only they would mend their ways, prejudice would go away."

Unfortunately, people with negative attitudes generally tend to express themselves with action, and they act out their prejudices in various ways. The most common ways are:

- Openly talking about their prejudices with like-minded friends and expressing their dislikes freely.
- Avoiding members of the disliked group, even at the cost of considerable inconvenience.
- Actively making detrimental distinctions about a group, to the extent of excluding all members of that group from certain types of employment, educational opportunities, politics, and so on.
- Committing acts of violence, especially when under conditions of heightened emotions.

Now that you have explored prejudice and learned explanations for its existence, turn your attention to discrimination.

## Discrimination

**Discrimination** is defined as the actions or practices carried out by members of dominant groups, or their representatives, that have a differential and harmful impact on members of subordinate groups. The actions may be open or hidden, direct or indirect,

intentional or unintentional. The actors in these events may be individuals, groups, or organizations.



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It is crucial to understand the direct link between discrimination and power. Without power, discrimination is passive and ineffective. With power, discrimination maintains the dominance of one group over another. The term “power” in this context means the expenditure of energy to get things done. The groups in power are those that can effectively discriminate: they can pass laws, make rules, and decide who belongs in and who remains on the outside.

## Discrimination Causes

There are many things that commonly spark discrimination, including:

- **Group Size**  
Dominant groups often fear subordinate groups because of their size. For example, a racial group that continues to increase in size, might cause a dominant group to discriminate against them and try to increase “control” over them.
- **Social Distance**  
Dominant groups maintain distance between subordinate groups by limiting access and intimacy. For example, in order to join a golf club, members must earn at least \$250,000 per year.
- **Competition**  
A dominant group will limit competition with a subordinate group. This can include eliminating a subordinate group from competing in an athletic competition or gaining access to critical economic resources.

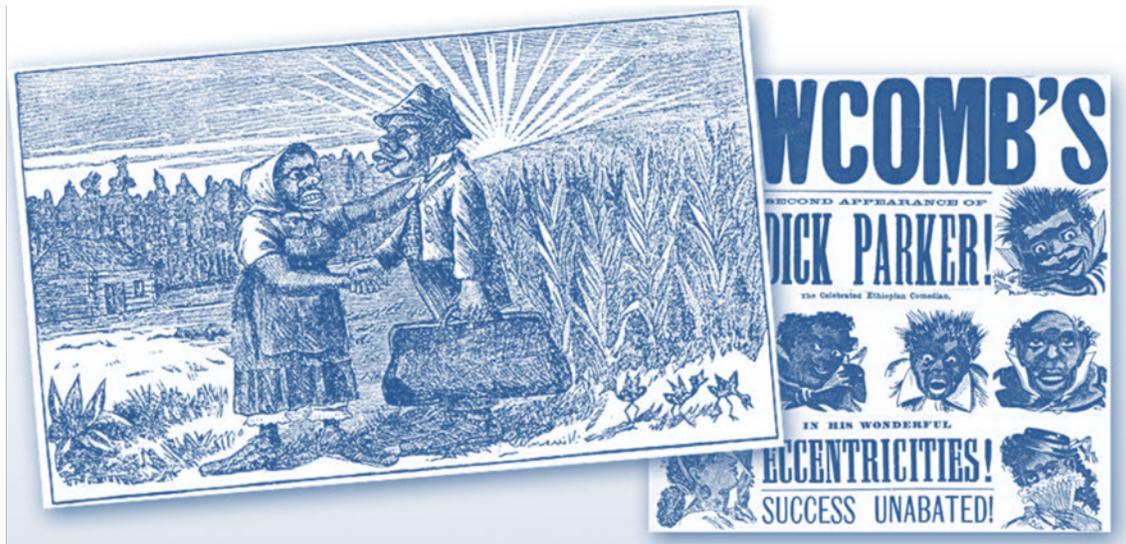
- **Status Consciousness**

Minority groups occupy a generally low status in American society. For example, status-conscious whites avoid lower-status people due to their prejudicial perceptions.

## Stereotyping

**Stereotyping** is related to just about all of the factors discussed above. A stereotype, whether favorable or unfavorable, is an exaggerated belief associated with a category.

Its function is to justify (or rationalize) our conduct in relation to that category. People naturally seek to understand or make sense of their environment. Because you cannot possibly analyze or respond to all of the information that you receive, you may tend to narrow your focus on subsets of that information. You will usually select the subset that you believe to be most important. People then categorize (stereotype) this information to serve a useful function, depending on their group (religious, racial, ethnic, cultural, and



so on) affiliation.

## Stereotyping and Categorization

The problem with stereotyping and categorizing groups, is that the idea you hold of a specific group cannot possibly apply fairly to all members of the group.

- Categorization simplifies your environment. It allows you to generate expectations about, and guides your behavior toward, a person or an object based on those expectations.
- When you categorize a person as a member of a group, you may assume that he or she has a variety of characteristics that you believe members of that category have. You then look at persons as a group based on a variety of factors (such as age,

religion, gender, race,) and whether they are part of the in-group (most like you) or the out-group (most different from you). The people that you tend to categorize (stereotype) most are the out-group.

- Stereotypes are fixed, rigid ideas associated with a category. They are not identical with the category, but are overgeneralizations or oversimplifications about a category. Because stereotypes can be either favorable or unfavorable, they can lead to love-prejudice or hate-prejudice relationships.
- Stereotypes allow you to justify, or rationalize, behavior to categorically accept or reject a group, and to selectively maintain your perception and thinking about a group.
- There may be examples of behavior by members of a group that support the belief offered in an expressed stereotype of a given group. For example, one can find a few people in groups who are dishonest, but those examples do not warrant that all within the group are dishonest.

## Sources of Stereotypes

Stereotyping sources develop, support and sustain stereotypes. In fact, there is very little chance of anyone not being exposed to at least one of the following sources of stereotypes:

- Hearing and/or telling ethnic, racist, or sexist jokes.
- Reading the literature of a culture or society, whether fact or fiction, has a powerful influence on our thinking and behaving processes.
- News coverage by the media, movies and television all carry powerful messages that create and support stereotyping.
- A male-oriented society creates and sustains stereotypes. Even the pronouns you use when you speak sometimes have profound effects.

## Racial Tension

Racial tension within an organization is often the result of poor leadership. The major reasons for racial tension include:

- Insensitive leadership. Leaders must realize the effect their actions and comments have on subordinates' attitudes, behaviors, and perceptions
- Racial prejudice and discrimination
- Unfair administration of rewards and punishment, promotions, and duties
- Limited recognition and awareness of minorities

So far, you have investigated factors that impact perceptions and attitudes, and their relation to prejudicial and discriminatory behavior. As a result, you now know that when you judge a person's worth based on a perception or an attitude, your effectiveness as a leader diminishes. Your communication will falter and trust will not be nourished to its fullest potential within an organization.

## Creating Change to Eliminate Prejudices

So, now that you have some awareness about factors and causes that negatively impact race relations and equal opportunity, what can you do about it? How can you remove or change some of your negative attitudes, behaviors, perceptions, or stereotypes? This section offers some strategies for change, but they will require some work and risk on your part.

### Leaders Can Create Change

As a leader, you need to be aware of discrimination and prejudices before they impact minority groups, and more important, people's feelings within those groups. By taking these strategies to heart – and working to change – you can effectively develop unit cohesion, trust and mission accomplishment. If you don't work to change your prejudices, you will not accomplish unit success.

### Strategies to Change Prejudices

- Overcome prejudices by learning the facts and applying sound reasoning processes.
- Be prepared to detect and evaluate warning signs of possible unrest that may stem from racial issues in units and take immediate action to eliminate the causes.
- Know all you can about your subordinates — their values, attitudes, how they came to be the way they are, and what they want to be. This means knowing more about subordinates than just their names. Do not base this knowledge on unfounded opinions about the race or ethnic origin of a subordinate, but on the facts about each individual.
- Promote mutual understanding through effective communication. Realize that there will always be difficulties in the communication process and deal with the filters, barriers, and breakdowns as they occur. Although the difficulties may be complicated, when minorities lose trust in their leaders, the situation is out of control. Make communication effective by fostering an understanding that reduces racial tensions.
- Give fair and impartial treatment to all.

### Lessening Prejudice, Adverse Perceptions and Stereotyping

If members of society could accomplish the following conditions, the causes and effects of prejudice will be lessened:

- Make contacts with people on an equal status and under a spirit of cooperation.
- Share goals.
- Have people work on common problems.
- Create appropriate educational activities .
- Sanction contacts by law.
- Accept differences. Disagreement is okay, but rather than using statements such as

"you are wrong" or "that's your opinion," do not deny others their experiences.

- Be willing to explore others' experiences as you explore your own thoughts feelings, and experiences that brought you to your conclusion.
- Listen actively. Listen for understanding instead of agreement. Paraphrase back to the speaker the message you received. Listen with the same intensity to everyone.
- Provide feedback. Be behavior specific. Let others know what impact they have on you. Learn to separate intent and effect. Avoid using labels.
- Share behaviors/feelings. Honestly share with the group where you stand on subjects, and be willing to explore how you got there.
- Encourage feedback. Do not defend or rationalize your behavior; accept what others have to say. This is where active listening is imperative. Remember, agreement is not necessary.
- Use inclusionary language. Use terms such as "we" and "us;" do not use "they," "he," or "she." Plus, avoid using "isms."
- Avoid stereotypes. Learn to distinguish between characteristics based on factual evidence and characteristics based on overgeneralizations.

Recognize that thinking in terms of categories is a normal human function, and be aware when you are doing it. Recognize also that people consciously and unconsciously hold stereotypes as a result of their social conditioning. Because people distinguish by recognizing their existence and gathering factual information about different individuals, learn to look at people as individuals — not groups. Interacting with people who are different than you can help you see people as they really are.

## Creating Change from a Personal Level

### **Dialogue**

There are three ways you personally can create change. The most readily available tactic for change is dialogue. This tactic is particularly effective to change people who are on the fence, who need support for new thought, or who are seriously trying to make sense out of their deepest commitments. It is less effective for those whose minds are strongly made up in an opposite direction. Dialogue includes various methods for effectively presenting information, including conversation, debates, and panel discussions.

### **Confrontation**

Another stronger tactic is confrontation. This involves using the skills of effective feedback and active listening in a non-threatening way. For example, consider the following response to a statement you made to a group of people.

"When you made that statement, I perceived it as being racist and it made me feel uncomfortable because I sense a feeling of superiority on your part."

At this point, re-negotiation is in order. Confrontation involves no longer being silent. The silent majority of Americans — those who have never committed themselves either

to overt racism or to active involvement in the cause of civil rights — will now have to stand up and be counted.

## Education

The final tactic is education, from which comes understanding. Educate other people. Do not close your ears when you hear bigoted remarks. Racism becomes more respectable when it goes unchallenged. Most people are simply ignorant of the facts.

The education necessary to change existing perceptions will never work if it consists mainly of the same people lecturing to others. It must involve active participation by all types of people at all levels. Advice from well-informed members of other groups also helps.

Everyone must work to perform — or at least process information — on three levels at once (if need be). These levels are:

- Understand yourself and how you see the situation around you.
- Understand others because they will not be like you in many cases. Use intercultural communication.
- Understand your environment, where it is coming from, and the direction it is headed.

## Conclusion

Although all minorities and other groups are interwoven throughout every fiber of our society, racist, prejudiced, and discriminatory attitudes and behaviors still exist. Unless you have a firm grip on some of the "whys" behind these challenges, you may be prone to repeat them. Society has a choice. It can die clinging to its bigotry, or it can breathe freely in an atmosphere free of racism, prejudice, and discrimination. The choice really is one of survival, and every one of us has a responsibility to ourselves — and to our children — to keep this society alive by changing it.



discrimination.

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## Lesson Check-up

1. How can your self-concept influence the way you see others?
2. What would cause you to behave differently around individuals of another color, culture or religion?
3. Distinguish between stereotype, prejudice and

