

2.1 Group process: inclusion

A cornerstone for facilitators is to understand what happens to people in groups. To do this, we need to look both at what people set out to achieve, the task, as well as how they get along – the processes of group activity.

People often behave quite differently in groups and teams from one-to-one settings. Some people become quiet, others turn into bullies or tormentors, some become jokers. For the facilitator who has to rely on others for getting the job done, this can be daunting. Why is it that a meeting feels electric one moment and awkward the next? Why do some people refuse to communicate while others do all the talking?

It becomes easier to understand the process level if we take a practical example. Imagine that you are in a team meeting and two people start arguing. Do you feel embarrassed? Do you try and stop it? Do you join in? When people work together in groups all sorts of things go on – allegiances are made, cliques are formed, feelings are acknowledged or overlooked, reactions are triggered – and this all makes up the group dynamic or process. If we try to pretend it doesn't happen, doesn't matter or doesn't belong in the workplace we are fooling ourselves. Such behaviour is the lifeblood of the group or team and the facilitator who develops an understanding of such activity is in the best position to help the team overcome any difficulties.

As facilitators, it is useful to have a theoretical map to navigate through this minefield of group behaviour. A useful model here is that provided by Will Schutz who used three simple words to sum up what takes place in team or group dynamics at a deep level – inclusion, control and openness (see model overleaf).

This section and the following two sections explore these issues in more detail and give ideas for interventions that will help facilitate the group process in the arenas of inclusion, control and openness.

Inclusion

Schutz's first dimension in his model is inclusion. This concerns whether group members feel significant, or to what extent they feel included or excluded by colleagues. In teams where, for example, scapegoating takes place, inclusion issues involve a person either being shut out by colleagues or excluding themselves in some way. Another example where inclusion issues can be seen is when new members of a team are excluded for lengthy periods. This can occur if they are perceived as being a threat to the status quo or when they are quietly resented for daring to replace someone who has left.

Inclusion and exclusion issues are typically unspoken and form part of a hidden agenda that may not even be in the consciousness of the people involved. For example, in one training group a new member joined the course and appeared to be welcomed by his peers – lots of introductions and smiles – but the group then proceeded to make witty asides and share in-jokes which served to exclude the new member. In this kind of situation, a facilitator may well choose to draw attention to the group of its behaviour.

The difficulty you may often have, however, is of sensing that something is wrong but not knowing what the problem is or where to begin to address it. This happens because a great deal of group behaviour occurs 'out of awareness' or in covert ways. It is the skill of the facilitator to heighten their own awareness so that they can raise to the surface the unconscious behaviour of group members that is impacting on the whole group.

There is a maxim for facilitators that suggests 'you will always experience what a group cannot tell you about itself'. You may experience this as feelings, thoughts, body sensations or as an intuitive insight. This level of communication is part of the magic of facilitation and requires practice, trust and non-attachment. The focus is about using all our resources, wherever they come from, and putting them to use in order to serve the group, typically by making interventions about the ongoing process.

It is also useful, when it comes to inclusion and exclusion issues, for the facilitator to notice and to be aware of the variety of behaviours people use in groups to attract attention or interest and, in so doing, make themselves more prominent. The group joker, for example, typically adopts this approach both to stay safe (hiding behind humour) as well as to gain recognition. The underlying interpersonal fear here might well be that of being ignored, and the personal fear is of being insignificant, unimportant or worthless. Although their external behaviour is very different, the same underlying fears can apply to silent, withdrawn group members who are defending against being ignored by maintaining their distance, privacy and self-sufficiency.

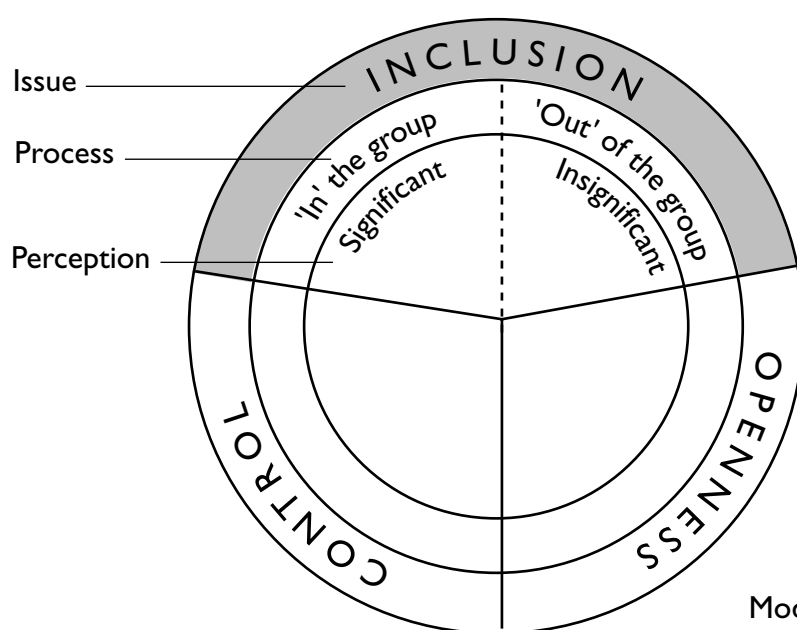
Inclusion has to do with interacting, seeking attention, acknowledgement, recognition, status, identity and individuality. It is unlike openness in that it does not involve strong emotional attachments to any individual; and it is unlike control in that the preoccupation is with prominence not dominance in groups.

Activity 27 Understanding inclusion

Facilitator intent

This is an approach to inclusion which will best suit people who, from a learning styles perspective, are theorists or reflectors. It provides participants with a framework for understanding inclusion, before asking them to consider and share their own experiences. Use this activity to help teams understand team performance issues, to provide insight into group dynamics or to develop strategies to deal with inclusion/exclusion problems.

1. Introduce the theory and the model below. (10–15 minutes)
2. Draw out the need for confident interaction in, for example, all teamworking scenarios, sales meetings, appraisals, consultancy interventions, customer service situations, and so on. (5 minutes)
3. Discuss the reality of people feeling 'in' or 'out' of a team. Does it really happen? (5 minutes)
4. Consider the issues and outcomes for people who might feel significant or insignificant in a team or group. Likely topics to surface here are trust, need for attention, feeling valued, sense of belonging, safety, communication, under-achievement. Prompt if necessary. (10 minutes)
5. Ask the group to consider the case of a team that loses one or two of its key players. Get the group to brainstorm examples of how such a team might include or exclude new employees – for example, not introducing themselves, not sharing information, making in-jokes. (10 minutes)
6. Ask people to discuss in pairs one or two experiences they have had when they felt excluded from a group or team and what impact this had on them. If they can't think of any experiences for themselves, ask them to share their observations of other people who they've seen being excluded from a group or team. (10–15 minutes)
7. Draw together the whole group for discussion. The point here is to raise awareness in people of inclusion/exclusion as an important reality of team behaviour. If people are excluding others or themselves this will impact on team performance. Consider, with the group, appropriate strategies for dealing with people who are either being excluded or who exclude themselves. Such strategies could include making an appropriate challenge, valuing people, drawing attention to the issue. (10–20 minutes)



Model adapted from
Will Schutz

Activity 28 Rope tricks

Facilitator intent

This is an experiential exercise which will best suit people who, from a learning styles point of view, are activists or pragmatists. It uses the theme of space and boundaries to illuminate how much contact people like, need or are used to. Use this activity to help team players understand what they bring into teams, to highlight the dynamics of contact between people, as well as to build awareness about effective team performance.

Materials required: For this exercise the facilitator will need to use lengths of thick string or thin rope (one 6–8 foot length for each participant) and a flipchart.

1. Introduce this exercise briefly. Tell participants it is an exercise to help people explore team dynamics and suggest to them that you will help to make sense of the experience afterwards. Give people permission to try things out, to experiment and to remember that there are no right and wrong answers. Then hand a length of string or rope to each person. (5 minutes)
2. Ask the group or team to split into two groups (A and B) and ask all the participants within their groups to arrange their lengths of rope around themselves so that it expresses how much space/contact they like to have with, or from, others. Give them time to try this out. (10 minutes)
3. Ask individuals to see what others have done and to respond to the group or team. Explain that it doesn't have to be a static process; it is appropriate for them to respond to others. As facilitator, you might want to pose some questions here, for example, what would it be like for people to make more or less contact? How do other group members respond to them when they move their string or rope closer? How do they respond when other people make moves towards them? Which people are easy to make contact with? Where are they most comfortable and most uneasy? How are they determining what moves to make? (15–20 minutes)
4. Next, tell the groups that there has been a team reorganization. Select a member from group A and ask them to join group B and vice versa. Ask both teams to rearrange themselves with their lengths of rope in response to this change. (10 minutes)
5. Draw up some questions on a flipchart for people to consider and get them to discuss these issues in their groups. Relevant issues for people to consider here could be:
 - What did you notice about your own and others' need for space and contact?
 - How significant did you feel in your group?
 - Did you experiment and, if so, what was the outcome?
 - What was your reaction to the change in group personnel? (15 minutes)
6. Help the group to make sense of the activity, by introducing key aspects of the theory. Use Schutz's model to highlight the issues of significance, encounter, feeling in and out – and make links between these and group effectiveness. Ask the group for comments, and see if there are any realizations.

Consider, with the group, appropriate strategies for dealing with people who are either being excluded or who exclude themselves. Such strategies could include making an appropriate challenge, valuing people, drawing attention to the issue. (15–20 minutes)

Coaching on inclusion

If, as a facilitator, you are coaching someone on how to manage groups, or coaching a team member who is having difficulty feeling part of a group, then by highlighting the issue of inclusion you can make a powerful intervention. Ask your coachee if they have come across this idea and, if not, offer it as a model which might provide some insight into team or group dynamics.

You might also ask the coachee to give their own insights into who is 'in' and who is 'out' of the team and ask them how they feel and react to people who they have identified as being 'in' and 'out'. Your aim here is to help the coachee become more aware of what they may or may not be doing to help the situation.

Remember, as the coach, it is your responsibility to support and value the coachee, not to take responsibility for them. With encouragement, most people can find their own answers and you can do this by asking them about their own personal experience of teams and groups and shedding light on those areas where they seem most stuck. Don't try to determine what is right or wrong behaviour, but do feel you are able to highlight what you see as the consequences of their actions. Remember that both genuine support and appropriate challenge lie at the heart of coaching.

Facilitator self-development

If you are facilitating others on the issue of inclusion you need to know your own history and patterns. The underpinning quality that the facilitator needs here is awareness. If you haven't explored your own 'past' then a group will find you out or will resist your suggestions. In effect, they won't trust you enough to share what their own issues are on this subject. The following suggestions can help you to explore your own issues of inclusion:

1. Write a story of your own experience of groups. Be creative if you want to be. Include photographs, pictures, family myths and/or write a straight biography about the most important groups you have been in, how you were when you joined them and what role(s) you found yourself taking. If possible take the time to explore this approach with your own coach, mentor or counsellor.
2. Read *Joy: 20 Years Later* by Will Schutz, *Truth or Dare* by Starhawk, *The Red Book of Groups* by Gaie Houston, *Group Counselling* by Keith Tudor.
3. Ask a friend or colleague, who is good at listening, to ask you these questions:
 - What roles do you normally take in groups?
 - How do you include and exclude yourself in groups?
 - Why do you facilitate groups?
 - What are the issues you like most to facilitate and why?
4. Ask for honest feedback from your partner, your best friend, your mentor or coach, or someone at work who has seen you operating in meetings and ask them to say what they thought when they first encountered you in a group setting and whether they saw you taking any particular role. Alternatively, ask them to describe with three adjectives how you are in groups, for example, Anna is challenging, domineering and clear-thinking.

Further reading

Houston, G. (1998), *The Red Book of Groups*, The Rochester Foundation.
Schutz, W. (1989), *Joy: 20 Years Later*, Jossey Bass.
Starhawk (1987), *Truth or Dare*, Harper & Row.
Tudor, K. (1999), *Group Counselling*, Sage.