

Activity: Identity Circles

Objectives:

1. Explore labels central to our identities and how our identities are constructed.
2. Demonstrate the fluidity and centrality that our identities can hold.
3. Discuss the challenges that come with being identified in particular ways.
4. Identify ways in which diversity can be valuable.

"Knowing yourself is the beginning of all wisdom."

– Aristotle

Duration: 30 minutes

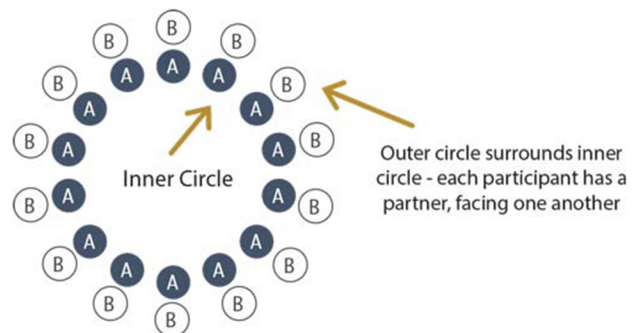
Materials:

- a. Flashcards - 10 per participant (less can be used if there are time constraints)
- b. Pens/markers - one per participant

Instructions:

Provide 10 flashcards to each participant.

1. Ask the participants to write one identity descriptor about themselves on each of the 10 flashcards. Encourage them to write the descriptors in large font so they are clearly visible. Provide example descriptors to the group to help participants get started and demonstrate possible characteristics they might write. Descriptors may be a role individuals play in their lives, a demographic label or a characteristic or personality trait. Potential examples include: Asian, Puerto Rican, Mother, Coach and Determined.
2. Next ask the participants to form two circles. One should face outward and one inward so that each participant has a partner to whom they are facing. Additional circles should be formed for larger groups.
3. Participants then will discuss with their partners for two minutes per person what is written on each card and how these words represent their identity. Encourage participants to elaborate on their chosen words, discussing why the words they selected are important to their identity.
4. After four minutes, bring the participants back together and ask for volunteers to share examples of their identity descriptors. Use the suggestions below to support the first round debrief.
 - a. Discuss the diversity participants have within themselves - everyone used a variety of words to describe themselves.
 - b. Ask participants whether their set of 10 identity descriptors could be an exact match with another person's 10. Emphasize the uniqueness of each individual. Diversity should therefore be celebrated.
5. Ask participants if they encountered words similar to their partner. This occurrence highlights similarities across people.
6. Next, instruct participants to rip one of their cards in half. Give them the opportunity to make their own determination for which card they will rip. Explain to participants that this process is representative of getting rid of a component of one's identity, no longer being able to identify in a certain way. This process may be difficult for some participants. Be mindful of participants' emotions and experience as they rip this card.



7. Ask the outer circle to rotate one place to the right. The new pairing will now discuss why they ripped the card.
8. After four minutes, bring the participants back together and ask for volunteers to share the card they ripped and why. Use the suggestions below to support the second round debrief.
 - a. Are some identity descriptors or labels more or less relevant to your sense of identity?
 - b. Ask how participants felt when ripping up part of themselves. For some participants, it may have been traumatic to do so. This is especially true for participants experiencing transition, such as an athlete leaving sports ripping up a card reading athlete, or someone who has had a person close to them die ripping up a card representing their relationship with that person. In what situations do we find ourselves in each day where we have to give up a part of ourselves?
9. Next, instruct participants to rip all but one card in half. This final card should be the descriptor that is most core to the person's identity.
10. Ask the outer circle to rotate one place to the right. The new pairing will now discuss their final card and why it is core to their identity.
11. After four minutes, bring the participants back together and ask for volunteers to share their final card and why it was chosen. Use the suggestions below to support the final round debrief.
 - a. What makes this card the best descriptor of you? Be mindful of participants' feelings during this sharing process and provide encouraging, validating feedback when appropriate.
 - b. Is it a demographic label or is it a value? Highlight the reasons some might select a demographic label vs. a value and why it is more likely for minorities to select demographic labels. Identifying as a minority typically impacts one's day-to-day life more significantly, making it more likely for that identity to be meaningful to individuals. Additionally, for those who select demographic labels as their final card, the label often has a deeper meaning. For instance, a person selecting Black might speak about how to them being Black represents qualities such as strength or beauty or resilience.
 - c. Usually participants end up with value-based descriptors; that points to a desire to be known for more than just the way we appear physically.

Suggested Discussion Points:

1. What identities might be applied to us regardless of whether we accept them or not? How does it feel when someone else defines your identity?
2. Is African American a race or an ethnicity? Is Hispanic/Latino a race or an ethnicity? Academically, African American is an ethnicity, interconnected with being Black, a race. Hispanic/Latino is also an ethnicity. Consider discussing examples of white, Black and multiracial Hispanic/Latino people. It is true that in day-to-day conversations and other contexts, terms like African American and Hispanic/Latino are used to indicate race. Reference the RISE Glossary for definitions of Race and Ethnicity.
3. An understanding of who we are and how we represent ourselves (values, characteristics, beliefs) helps us to understand how and why we may differ and, more importantly, how we do not. Share with participants that all should strive to be leaders who can help others feel comfortable bringing all components of their identity, all ten cards, to the table.

Key Takeaways:

1. It is important to reflect on who we are, our values and the multifaceted nature of our identities.
2. A great way to bridge our differences and leverage our similarities is to know who we are and gain an understanding of the identities of others.
3. Diversity benefits teams as it expands our skill base and broadens our perspectives.