



“Start with Self”

Inclusive Training Proficiency

*A competence model for business trainers and
educators who care*

Part 3

Communicating Inclusively



Co-funded by
the European Union

Communicating Inclusively

Communication is the bridge between intention and impact. Communicating Inclusively is about choosing words, tone, and body language that welcome difference, foster trust, and make everyone feel heard.

It's not just about avoiding stereotypes or microaggressions — it's about cultivating empathy and curiosity in every interaction. This competence helps trainers recognize how language shapes belonging, and how conscious communication can transform a training room into a space of mutual respect and authentic dialogue.

From this e-book, you will learn:

1. What is Communicating Inclusively competence?
2. What might hold you back?
3. How to identify excluding behaviours?
4. How to do it differently?
5. Good practices that will help you develop this competency
6. How to begin?

**Grow your inclusive
competencies!**

Check out other competencies from our model!

INCLUDE Project Team





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1. What is Inclusive Communication?

1.1 Definition

Inclusive Communication is the intentional practice of creating equitable dialogue environments where all participants feel valued, respected, and able to contribute authentically. It involves consistently using language that avoids stereotypes and excludes no one, while actively addressing communication barriers from different cultural backgrounds, identities, or styles.

Inclusive communicators demonstrate sensitivity to both verbal and non-verbal interactions, including spatial awareness and cultural communication differences. They constructively clarify misunderstandings and respond directly when exclusionary language, inappropriate humor, or discriminatory behavior occurs, fostering environments where all voices are heard and respected through proactive bridge-building across differences.





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1.2 If you're interested in expanding your knowledge about research and sources:

- Linguistic Relativity: This concept, explored by linguists Edward Sapir and Benjamin Whorf, suggests that the language we use influences how we think about the world (Language, Thought, and Reality: Selected Writings of Benjamin Lee Whorf, 1956)
- Non-Violent Communication (NVC) by psychologist Marshall Rosenberg, NVC is a powerful tool for empathetic communication. It focuses on expressing feelings and needs without blame or judgment, and it emphasizes listening to others with compassion (Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life, 1999)
- Psychological Safety: researched by Harvard Business School professor Amy Edmondson, refers to a shared belief that a team or group is safe for interpersonal risk-taking (Psychological Safety and Learning Behavior in Work Teams, 1999)



1.3 By working on this competency, you will:

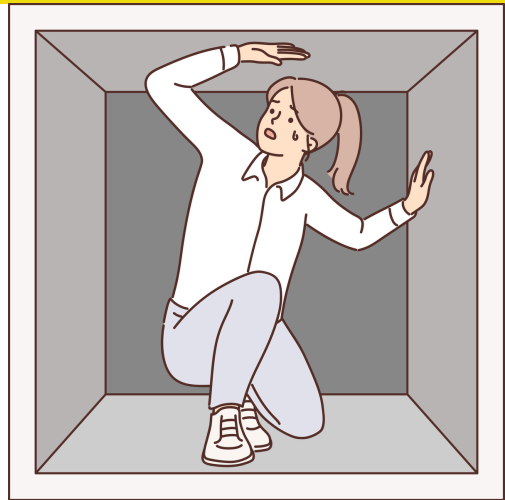
- Increase training engagement - participants feel safer to ask questions, share experiences, and practice new skills without fear of judgment or exclusion;
- Reduce conflicts and complaints - equip learners with tools to address microaggressions and miscommunications before they escalate into post-training questionnaire or other formal HR issues;
- Model the behavior change you're teaching - demonstrate real-time inclusive communication, showing participants exactly what it looks like in practice rather than just talking about it.



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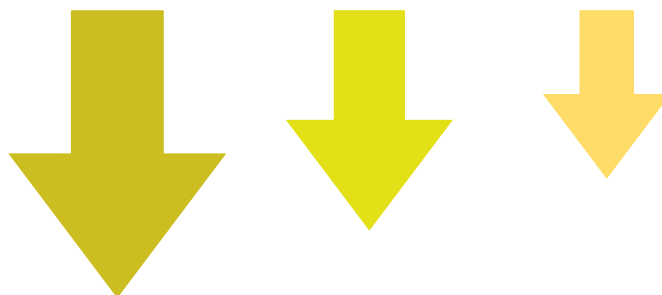
2. What might hold you back?

2.1 Common thinking traps:



Beliefs	Possible consequences
After all, I already communicate inclusively	You stop noticing microaggressions you might unconsciously commit
Treating everyone the same equals inclusion	You fail to recognize that "same treatment" often favors those who fit the dominant communication style
They should adapt	The trainer misses opportunities to learn from different communication approaches and cultural perspectives

If you identify similar beliefs in yourself, don't worry. Below we'll discuss what to do to update them in the spirit of inclusivity.





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3. Identify excluding behaviours

Before you can change something, you need to notice it first. Here are some behaviors that might exclude people. Do any of these ring a bell? You might have seen them in yourself, participants, or fellow trainers.

In the second column, we explain exactly why these behaviors are excluding, so you can get a fuller picture.

Behaviour	Why does it exclude?
Using "guys" to address mixed groups	Linguistically erases women and non-binary people, suggesting male as the default and others as exceptions
Age-based exclusion, eg. At your age, it's probably too difficult	Reinforces ageist stereotypes about learning ability, dismisses capabilities based on assumptions rather than evidence, and discourages participation by creating self-doubt
Making assumptions about knowledge based on organization type, eg. It's obvious to people from corporations	Creates hierarchy between work backgrounds and makes people from nonprofits, small businesses, or other sectors feel inadequate or less valued
Designing activities that require specific physical abilities without alternatives	Excludes people with disabilities, mobility issues, or different physical capabilities from full participation



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4. How to do it differently?

The best way to learn? Get concrete and hands-on! Now that you know what excluding behaviors look like in reflective practice, let's flip the script. In the third column below, you'll find inclusive approaches for these exact same situations.

Behaviour	Why does it exclude?	Including behaviour
Using "guys" to address mixed groups	Linguistically erases women and non-binary people, suggesting male as the default and others as exceptions	Use inclusive terms like "everyone," "team," "folks," or "colleagues" when addressing the group
Age-based exclusion, eg. At your age, it's probably too difficult	Reinforces ageist stereotypes about learning ability, dismisses capabilities based on assumptions rather than evidence, and discourages participation by creating self-doubt	Ask What's your preferred approach for learning new concepts? - focus on individual needs rather than age assumptions
Making assumptions about knowledge based on organization type, eg. It's obvious to people from corporations	Creates hierarchy between work backgrounds and makes people from nonprofits, small businesses, or other sectors feel inadequate or less valued	Say For those familiar with this concept from any context... - acknowledge that valuable experience exists across all sectors
Designing activities that require specific physical abilities without alternatives	Excludes people with disabilities, mobility issues, or different physical capabilities from full participation	Offer multiple ways to participate: You can stand, sit, or move around as comfortable and provide alternative methods like verbal responses instead of physical demonstrations



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5. Good practices

- Consciously shift from gendered terms like "guys" to universal ones such as "everyone," "folks," or "team." This practice signals that the training space is for everyone, regardless of gender identity
- Avoid making assumptions about an individual's abilities or knowledge based on their age. Instead of using phrases like, "At your age...," ask open-ended questions that focus on their individual experience and learning preferences.
- While sharing personal stories can be powerful, avoid presenting your experience as the only valid perspective. Follow your stories with questions that invite participants to share their own diverse experiences.

When you witness a microaggression (a subtle, often unintentional comment or action that is discriminatory), address it calmly and constructively in the moment.

This protects the person targeted and educates the group on inclusive behavior.





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6. First step

Great, you've got the theory down and probably have a good sense of what we mean by Communicating inclusively.

Now we encourage you to tune into the emotions, thoughts, and reactions you had while working through this competency. You can take your first step right now!

No need to call anyone, set up meetings, or make any arrangements. Just stick around for a few more minutes and tackle one of the questions below.

Or go ahead and try all of them:

- How did it feel working on this competency?
- What behaviors can you start using immediately?
- Did anything bug you?
- What parts did you want to skip?
- What does your reaction tell you about yourself?



“Start with self” Inclusive Training Proficiency. A competence model for business trainers and educators who care.

This e-book is a part of “Start with self - a competence model for business trainers and educators who care” which is the product of the project

INCLUDE. Inclusive Competence Development & Evaluation
2024-2-PL01-KA210-VET-000277155

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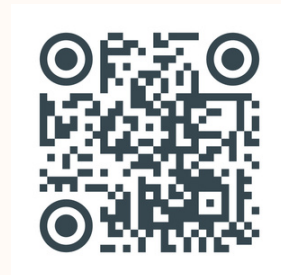
Editors: Hazel Nicholl, Joanna Zwolińska, Paula Pain

Layout & Design: Paula Pain, Joanna Zwolińska
Powered by Canva

Language editing and proofreading: EN - Hazel Nicholl

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Co-funded by
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