



“Start with Self”. Inclusive Training Proficiency

A competence model for business trainers and educators who care

Part 5

Promoting fair and equal participation



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Promoting fair and equal participation

In every group, some voices are louder, some quieter, and some unheard. Promoting Fair and Equal Participation is about ensuring that every perspective has room to emerge. It invites trainers to notice who is speaking — and who isn't — and to create structures that level the playing field. This competence helps you balance group dynamics, encourage quieter participants, and build collective ownership of learning, where equality and respect guide every conversation.

From this e-book, you will learn:

1. What is Promoting fair and equal participation competence?
2. What might hold you back?
3. How to identify excluding behaviours?
4. How to do it differently?
5. What good practices will help you develop this competency?
6. How to begin?

Grow your inclusive competencies!

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INCLUDE Project Team





5 Promoting fair and equal participation

1. What is Promoting Fair and Equal Participation?

1.1 Definition

Promoting Fair and Equal Participation is the art of fostering an environment where every individual feels empowered to contribute, regardless of their background or personality.



It's about actively creating a level playing field so that a session's success is truly a reflection of the collective wisdom of the group. This includes creating group agreements focused on respect and inclusion.

It involves encouraging "I" statements and watching for group dominance to ensure balanced participation. It also means promoting open sharing of intentions so every voice is heard and valued.

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

- Group Dynamics and Social Loafing: Social psychologist Kurt Lewin is widely recognized as a founder of the scientific study of group dynamics. One of the challenges to fair participation is social loafing, a phenomenon where individuals exert less effort when working in a group than when working alone. (Resolving Social Conflicts: Selected Papers on Group Dynamics [1935-1946], 1948)
- "I" statements or "I" messages: this communication technique, popularized by psychologist Thomas Gordon in the 1960s, shifts the focus from blaming others to expressing personal feelings and experiences (Parent Effectiveness Training (P.E.T.), 1970)
- Social Identity Theory: Developed by Henri Tajfel and John Turner, this theory explains how individuals' sense of self is derived from their group memberships. It helps to understand in-group and out-group biases, where people may subconsciously favor those within their own group (Human Groups and Social Categories, 1981)
- Psychological Safety Coined by Amy Edmondson: psychological safety is the belief that one will not be punished or humiliated for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns, or mistakes (The Fearless Organization: Creating Psychological Safety in the Workplace for Learning, Innovation, and Growth, 2018)



1.3 By working on this competency, you will:

- Increase your credibility: a trainers who can skillfully manage group dynamics and ensure fair participation are seen as more competent and professional. This builds trust and respect from the participants
- Reach higher quality feedback: by promoting open sharing, trainers receive more genuine and constructive feedback. This helps them better understand the impact of the session and make necessary adjustments
- Make more innovative problem-solving: when diverse voices are heard, a greater variety of ideas and solutions emerge. This leads to more creative and robust outcomes for any problem-solving activities within the training.

2. What might hold you back?

2.1 Common thinking traps



Beliefs	Possible consequences
<p>Quiet people are just shy; they just don't want to speak up</p>	<p>This assumption can cause you to miss out on valuable insights and perspectives. Often, those who don't speak up are deep thinkers who need a different kind of prompt or space to share. Ignoring their silence can reinforce their feeling of being invisible and rob the group of their unique contributions.</p>
<p>My role is to be an expert and deliver information, not to be a group therapist</p>	<p>This view narrows the scope of a trainer's role. A trainer's job goes beyond just dispensing knowledge. It includes creating an environment where that knowledge can be effectively absorbed and applied. Ignoring group dynamics can make participants feel like they are in a lecture, not an interactive learning experience, which limits the potential for deep learning and skill development.</p>
<p>Group agreements are a waste of time, everyone knows how to be respectful</p>	<p>Assuming a shared understanding of respect and inclusion can be a major pitfall. Group agreements provide a clear, co-created framework for how the group will operate. Without them, you leave it up to chance, which can lead to misunderstandings, unintentional exclusion, and a lack of accountability when issues arise</p>

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.



3. Identifying excluding behaviors

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.

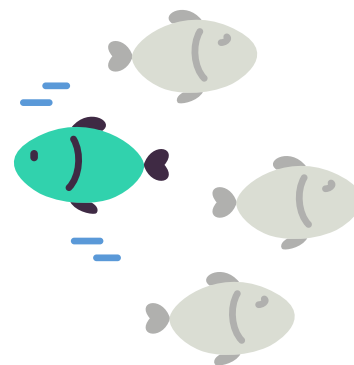


Behaviour	Why does it exclude?
Directing questions only to certain people or roles (e.g., senior leaders, extroverts).	This signals that only certain voices are valuable and that others are not expected to contribute. It can make participants who are not called on feel invisible and disengaged.
Finishing a participant's sentence or speaking over them.	This behavior is dismissive and invalidates the participant's voice. It sends the message that their contribution is not important enough to be heard in its entirety and can shut down future attempts to speak.
Dismissing or brushing over a participant's differing opinion or negative feedback	This action shuts down dissent and critical thinking, creating an environment where only positive or conforming views are welcome. It can make participants feel unsafe to be honest and can lead to resentment
Laughing at or making a joke about a participant's question or idea	Even if a joke is well-intentioned, it can be perceived as belittling. This creates a hostile environment and can cause the participant to feel embarrassed, preventing them and others from taking the risk of asking questions again.



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?	Inclusive behaviour
Directing questions only to certain people or roles (e.g., senior leaders, extroverts).	This signals that only certain voices are valuable and that others are not expected to contribute. It can make participants who are not called on feel invisible and disengaged.	Asking open-ended questions to the whole group and allowing for a "think time" before expecting an answer. This encourages everyone to formulate their thoughts and feel they have a chance to contribute
Finishing a participant's sentence or speaking over them.	This behavior is dismissive and invalidates the participant's voice. It sends the message that their contribution is not important enough to be heard in its entirety and can shut down future attempts to speak.	Actively listening and allowing participants to complete their thoughts without interruption. Use non-verbal cues like nodding to show you're engaged.
Dismissing or brushing over a participant's differing opinion or negative feedback	This action shuts down dissent and critical thinking, creating an environment where only positive or conforming views are welcome. It can make participants feel unsafe to be honest and can lead to resentment	Acknowledging and validating differing opinions. For example, "That's an important perspective to consider. Can you tell us more about why you see it that way?" This shows you value their honesty.
Laughing at or making a joke about a participant's question or idea	Even if a joke is well-intentioned, it can be perceived as belittling. This creates a hostile environment and can cause the participant to feel embarrassed, preventing them and others from taking the risk of asking questions again.	Treating every contribution with respect and professionalism. If you don't understand an idea, ask for clarification with a neutral and supportive tone.



5. Good Practices

1. Establish group agreements early: co-create ground rules with the group at the start of the session. This could include norms like "one person speaks at a time" or "listen to understand, not just to reply." This sets a foundation of respect and shared accountability.

2. Use a variety of participation methods: don't rely solely on open group discussions. Use methods like 'think-pair-share,' small breakout groups, written reflections, or polling. This caters to different communication styles and comfort levels.

3. Actively monitor airtime: pay attention to who is speaking and how often. Be prepared to gently interrupt dominant speakers by saying "That's a great point, let's hear from someone else now" or "Thanks for your input, I want to make sure everyone has a chance to share".

4. Affirm and paraphrase contributions: when a participant shares an idea, rephrase it in your own words to show you were listening and to ensure clarity for the group. For example, "So what I hear you saying is...". This validates their contribution and reinforces their value.

5. Call for specific voices: instead of just asking, "Does anyone else have a thought?", you can be more intentional. For example:

"We've heard from a few people on this side of the room, what about over here?" or

"I'd love to hear from someone who hasn't spoken yet"





6. First step

Great, you've got the theory down and probably have a good sense of what we mean by Promoting fair and equal participation.

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?**



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