



“Start with Self”. Inclusive Training Proficiency

A competence model for business trainers and educators who care

Part 7

Emotional Awareness and Mindfulness



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Emotional Awareness and Mindfulness

Training is emotional work — for both participants and trainers. Emotional Awareness and Mindfulness teaches you how to notice and regulate your emotions while remaining present and attuned to others. It's about creating a calm, responsive, and empathetic atmosphere that allows authentic expression and learning to unfold. By developing this competence, you learn to “read the room,” respond with compassion, and sustain your energy and well-being over time.

From this e-book, you will learn:

1. What is Emotional Awareness and Mindfulness?
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!

Check out other competencies from our model!

INCLUDE Project Team





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1. What is Emotional Awareness and Mindfulness?

1.1 Definition

Emotional Awareness and Mindfulness is the ability to recognize, understand, and manage one's own emotions in the moment, as well as to empathetically perceive and respond to the emotions of others. It's the practice of being fully present and non-judgmental.

This competency transforms a trainer from an information provider into a skilled facilitator who can navigate the complex, unspoken dynamics of a training session.

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

- Emotional Intelligence (EI) was popularized by psychologist Daniel Goleman. He proposed that EI is a crucial factor for success and leadership effectiveness, and it can be developed over time. Goleman's theory breaks down EI into five key components: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and social skills (Emotional Intelligence: Why It Can Matter More Than IQ, 1995)
- Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) developed by Jon Kabat-Zinn in the late 1970s, MBSR is an evidence-based program that combines mindfulness meditation, body awareness, and yoga to help individuals manage stress, pain, and illness. Studies have shown that MBSR can significantly reduce stress, anxiety, and depression while improving overall psychological well-being (Full Catastrophe Living: Using the Wisdom of Your Body and Mind to Face Stress, Pain, and Illness, 1990)



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1.3 By working on this competency, you will:

- Navigate difficult conversations with confidence: instead of being caught off guard by a participant's strong emotional reaction, you'll be able to recognize it as valuable feedback. This allows you to respond constructively, addressing the underlying issue directly and preventing it from derailing the session
- Make participants' experience more relevant: your ability to read the room and respond to emotional cues ensures the training meets their real-time needs. They won't feel lectured at but will experience a dynamic session that adapts to their energy and understanding,
- Foster a resilient and open learning environment: by modeling curiosity and openness to all emotions (including your own), you create a psychologically safe space for the group. This helps participants feel secure enough to take risks, ask difficult questions, and engage honestly, which deepens learning.

2. What might hold you back?

2.1 Common thinking traps:

Beliefs	Possible consequences
My job is to be an expert, not to manage emotions	This belief can lead to a rigid, one-way delivery of content. You might miss crucial signs of participant disengagement, confusion, or resistance, causing the training to fail to meet their needs and ultimately be ineffective
I can't read people's minds, so I can't know what they're feeling	While you can't read minds, you can observe non-verbal cues. If you believe this, you won't be looking for signs of emotional withdrawal (e.g., slumped shoulders, lack of eye contact) or overwhelm, leaving participants feeling unheard and unsupported
If I acknowledge a negative emotion, it will make the situation worse	Ignoring tension or frustration can actually allow it to fester and grow. What was a minor issue could escalate into a full-blown conflict or passive resistance, creating a hostile or unresponsive learning environment



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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?
Reacting defensively to a difficult question or critical feedback	A defensive reaction (e.g., getting flustered, becoming sarcastic) can shut down honesty. It creates a hostile environment where participants feel unsafe to challenge ideas or offer constructive criticism, leading to disengagement and resentment.
Telling participants how they should feel or what their emotional experience is	This dismisses a person's lived experience and can come across as condescending. Phrases like, "You shouldn't be worried about that," invalidate their feelings and prevent an authentic conversation
Ignoring or dismissing non-verbal cues (e.g., someone sighing, crossing their arms, or looking confused)	This behavior shows a lack of awareness and makes a participant feel unheard and invisible. It can signal that their feelings don't matter and discourage them from engaging further.



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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?	Inclusive behavior
Reacting defensively to a difficult question or critical feedback	A defensive reaction (e.g., getting flustered, becoming sarcastic) can shut down honesty. It creates a hostile environment where participants feel unsafe to challenge ideas or offer constructive criticism, leading to disengagement and resentment.	Thanking participants for their feedback and curiosity. For example, "That's a really important question. Thank you for bringing that up." This models professionalism and shows that you value their input, regardless of whether it's positive or negative.
Telling participants how they should feel or what their emotional experience is	This dismisses a person's lived experience and can come across as condescending. Phrases like, "You shouldn't be worried about that," invalidate their feelings and prevent an authentic conversation	Acknowledging and validating emotions without judgment. Use empathetic phrases like, "I can see why that would be frustrating," or "It sounds like you're feeling a bit overwhelmed." This shows you understand and accept their feelings as valid.
Ignoring or dismissing non-verbal cues (e.g., someone sighing, crossing their arms, or looking confused)	This behavior shows a lack of awareness and makes a participant feel unheard and invisible. It can signal that their feelings don't matter and discourage them from engaging further.	Pausing and checking in with the group. For example, "I'm noticing a few frustrated looks. Is there something we need to clarify here?" This validates their feelings and gives them a safe way to express their concerns.



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5. Good practices

Practice Self-reflection

- Before and after a training session, take a moment to check in with your own emotions. Ask yourself, "How am I feeling right now?" or "What was my emotional reaction to that question?" This builds your personal emotional awareness.

Read the room

- Make a conscious effort to observe the emotional climate of the group. Look for non-verbal cues like changes in body language, facial expressions, or energy levels. Use this information to guide your next steps.

Use a "Parking Lot" for emotional reactions

- If a participant has a strong emotional reaction or a difficult question, acknowledge their feelings and offer to discuss it during a break or after the session. This validates their emotion without derailing the group's progress.

Normalize all emotions

- Create a space where participants feel safe to express a full range of emotions. Let them know that it's okay to feel confused, frustrated, or excited and that these feelings are a natural part of the learning process.

Encourage and acknowledge bravery

- When a participant shares a difficult emotion or a vulnerable thought, acknowledge their courage. A simple, "Thank you for sharing that, I know it can be difficult to talk about," validates their feelings and reinforces a safe learning environment





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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 Emotional awareness and mindfulness.

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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