

# CO-CREATING GLOBALLY INCLUSIVE LEARNING COMMUNITIES

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## ABSTRACT

*The purpose of this session is to demonstrate how we create a sense of inclusion in our consulting engagements, management classrooms, and at professional meetings where the diversity in the room is relevant. A sense of inclusion supports interpersonal and intrapersonal learning. This is most useful in educational environments that seek to help participants understand better themselves and others. As a guide, we utilize Smith & Lindsay's (2014) behavioral model of Ubuntu Inclusion to create an inclusive learning community. In this workshop, we will facilitate our three-part Co-Creating Globally Inclusive Classrooms (CGIC) workshop which quickly creates a basis for inclusion in a learning community. CGIC involves three short learning exercises focused on intrapersonal reflection, interpersonal communication, and assessment of learning. The three exercises are: "Navigating Identity: Voices from the Past," "Inclusion Peaks (and Valleys)," and the "Web of Inclusion."*

## UBUNTU AND UBUNTIC INCLUSION

In the classroom, inclusion optimally results in an engaging learning environment for all students, in which their collective diversity is valued. This creates an inclusive community within which a diverse population of students are able to contribute and flourish.

Smith and Lindsay (2014) sought to understand what makes organizational stakeholders feel included. After analyzing the peak inclusion experiences of nearly 7000 respondents across three multinational organizations they found that

Regardless of the country, the industry, the personal characteristics, or the identity group memberships of [their] clients, they all want one thing—to be fully included. In fact, when asked of the highlights of their organizational experiences, sometimes of their careers, it became resoundingly clear to us that employees thrived when they experienced glimpses of Ubuntu Inclusion in their work lives (p. 29).

We use this behaviorally focused model of Ubuntu Inclusion (Smith & Lindsay, 2014), as a framework for the CGIC workshop. It lists seven dimensions of inclusion that manifested among both internal and external organizational stakeholders. The seven dimensions are *Connection, Care, Communication, Intrapersonal Inclusion, Mentoring & Coaching, Fairness & Trust, and Visibility & Reward*. Each of these dimensions is relevant to creating an inclusive learning community.

- *Connection* involves feeling a bond with the learning community and its goals, with the facilitator, and with other learning community members. Such connection often comes through food or through fun.
- *Care* involves providing and receiving validation, help, empowerment, appreciation, and personalized interactions with the facilitator and members of the learning community.
- When the dimension of *Communication* is manifested in the learning community, participants know they are valued because they willingly participate in information sharing at the micro (dyadic), meso (team), and macro (classroom) levels.
- *Intrapersonal Inclusion* refers to a range of self-talk and assumptions about inclusion that impact including (or excluding) oneself within the learning community.
- The *Mentoring and Coaching* dimension is present when learning community members effectively provide and receive guidance, advice, and learning opportunities from each other.
- *Fairness and Trust* addresses the presence (or absence) of equitable treatment by members of the learning community, its norms, and evaluation procedures. Lack of fair treatment precludes trust from developing within the learning community—which is a necessity for inclusion.
- *Visibility and Reward* creates a sense of inclusion when learning community members receive favorable public feedback, rewards, and exposure to others based upon their efforts and performance.

## THE "CO-CREATING GLOBALLY INCLUSIVE CLASSROOMS" (CGIC) WORKSHOP

To create classroom inclusion, we designed the following three-part workshop, CGIC, based on the Ubuntu Inclusion model. Our goal is to elicit from participants ways to create classroom inclusion such that ingrained assumptions are challenged, entrenched thinking is disrupted, and existing frames of reference are broadened. CGIC has five learning objectives, enabling participants to, 1) grasp the importance of inclusion for classroom learning, 2) understand the model of Ubuntu Inclusion, 3) co-create a culture of inclusion, 4) learn best practices for creating an inclusive classroom, and, 5) understand ways to engage in deep discussions on identity, exploring cultural values.

Our workshop design is relevant for courses related to international management, diversity, inclusion, leadership, ethics, cross-cultural learning, organizational culture,

communication, decision-making, teamwork, and human resources. It is most beneficial in courses that require self-reflection, understanding others, identity, or group cohesion. For example, it is relevant in the helping professions, social work, precept training, management, leadership, or teacher education.

In each of CGIC's three parts, the facilitator is a participant-observer who fully participates in all activities. Part 1 of the workshop, "Navigating Identity: Voices from the past," provides a creative alternative to standard introductions and sets a tone for openness, depth, and explorations of values—from the first class meeting. "Navigating Identity" helps students gain insights into what drives themselves and other class members by considering key messages that they heard about others who were different from themselves from people influential in their lives. By reflecting upon and sharing the messages they've heard, students begin interacting in a powerful way, setting the tone for deeper discussions on identity and cultural values later in the academic term. What students' share is recorded on posters, which are posted in the classroom to be visible during sharing, and used later in the term to spur discussion or provide examples of relevant concepts.

Part 2 of the workshop, "Inclusion Peaks (and valleys)," helps participants surmise from their own and each other's experiences best practices for creating Ubuntu Inclusion in the college classroom. "Inclusion Peaks" contains a series of abbreviated Critical Incident Interviews that ask students to reflect upon and share times in the classroom when they felt most highly included, like they really belonged. This exercise encourages members of the learning community to understand what makes each other feel included. Most importantly, it enables its members to create a working list of behaviors that facilitate Ubuntu Inclusion in the classroom.

Part 3, the workshop with the "Web of Inclusion" exercise, concludes the CGIC workshop with an experiential, kinesthetically stimulating activity to provide a visual manifestation of participants' learning about inclusion during the workshop. In this exercise, with the class standing in an open circle, the first participant is handed a large ball of yarn. He or she is asked to share one thing learned about inclusion that s/he can apply. After sharing something he or she learned during the workshop, the student holds on to the string and tosses the ball of yarn to a second student. After the second student shares his or her learning, he or she tosses the ball of yarn to a third student. This process repeats until all students and facilitators have a segment of the yarn. After a while (typically amidst much laughter!) the class ends up with a visible "web of inclusion." When space permits, we ask students to place the web onto the floor to observe it. We then take a picture of the students with the web, to be reproduced and provided to class members. We provide detailed logistics of these exercises in Appendix 2.

Though the CGIC workshop has three interrelated parts, each part is designed to be a stand-alone exercise. This allows

flexibility for facilitators with different class schedules. For classes that meet for 50 minutes three times a week, we recommend facilitating one part of the exercise per class session. For classes that meet twice a week for 75 to 90 minutes, we recommend doing Part 1 on the first day and Parts 2 and 3 on the second day. For classes that meet once a week for two and a half to three hours, we recommend doing all three parts of the workshop.

## CONCLUSION

We have successfully used this workshop in higher education (with undergraduate and graduate students), in industry (as part of team-building or as a kick-off to diversity and inclusion-related training), and as a professional development workshop for management educators. We label the workshop as "global" because unlike many diversity or inclusion-related exercises, we do not impose a U.S.-centric notion of diversity. Ubuntu Inclusion envisions the classroom as a collaborative learning community in which all experience learning together. Part 1 of CGIC enables learning community members to introduce themselves using their own histories and identity constructions. Part 2 of CGIC explores the basic human need for inclusion or social belonging (à la Maslow's hierarchy) and how students have (or have not) experienced it in college. They then extrapolated from the Ubuntu Inclusion model behaviors that they could enact at work to improve organizational learning, teamwork, decision-making, and innovation. In, Part 3 of CGIC participants reflected upon the workshop, what they learned about inclusion, and what aspects of the workshop made them feel most included. We ask the last question for two reasons: to reinforce generative classroom behavioral norms (should the need arise) and to do pedagogical "quality control."

Students experienced Ubuntu Inclusion during the workshop. "The initial workshop introduction, "Navigating Identities," created a connection and a community through open sharing of personal information with each other. This led to a sense of trust that continued throughout the workshop with genuine communication shared with one another." Students experienced connections with each other and a safe space for communication as a result of the authentic personal talk about themselves throughout the workshop. Students experienced "Fairness and trust" because they were listened to "honestly and openly by other classmates and the professor who showed care about who they were through feedback."

In an inclusive classroom, students and faculty co-create a community to learn the subject matter and develop skills including listening, checking assumptions, and appreciating how diversity of perspectives and experiences adds value to their own learning. Through inclusion, students built bridges to diverse communities, connecting with each other and displaying a willingness to collaborate for enhanced mutual learning.

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