

Session Proposal for OBTC 2017 at Providence College June 14th – 17th, 2017

1) Title, Abstract & Keywords

In your abstract, please include a brief session description (not to exceed 100 words), and three to four keywords. If your proposal is accepted, this description will be printed in the conference program.

“I’m Exhausted! Racial Microaggressions and the Burden of ‘Articulateness’”

Given the unconscious nature of many racial micro-aggressions, conversations about them easily devolve into cycles of accusation and recrimination. To foster better understanding of microaggressions, this interactive exercise emphasizes listening, hearing and empathizing. By stressing and analyzing different segments of a frequently used sentence, individuals and groups consider both sides of oral messaging – the intent of the sender as well as the interpretation of the receiver. Both unintended and intended consequences are analyzed, opening up deeper discussions about the origins of our reactions to other people and their remarks.

Key words: communications, microaggressions, unintended bias

2) Teaching Implications:

What is the contribution of your session to management pedagogy/andragogy? Specifically, please include your learning objectives, and describe what management and/or teaching topics are relevant to your session, and why. Also, include theoretical, disciplinary, or theoretical foundations that will help reviewers understand how your ideas fit within the broader field of management.

Summary of Contribution

This exercise provides a very practical, low-overhead, discussion-oriented approach to examining the issues associated with racial microaggressions within a classroom setting. Rather than relying on theory, definitions or accounts of events and incidents students may not consider their own, this simple exercise invites students to generate their own observations within a safe environment. Many dimensions and approaches may be brought to bear on issues around diversity and inclusion, and the times we live in make all of these very important. This exercise focuses on the components and dynamics of communication itself, and fits a broad range of courses in the management area at both the undergraduate and graduate levels.

Learning Objectives:

1. Compare and contrast personal racial reality with that of others.

2. Identify ways people and institutions can expose unintended bias.
3. Examine the minimum harm assumptions frequently associated with racial microaggressions.
4. Consider responses to racial microaggressions that present less of a “catch 22” for the parties involved.

Background

Pierce, Carew, Pierce-Gonzales and Willis (1978) first coined the word “micro-aggressions” to describe “subtle, stunning, often automatic, and non-verbal exchanges which are ‘put downs’ and send denigrating messages to people”. Racial micro-aggressions specifically target people of color with subtle insults or patterns of overlooking, under-respecting, and devaluing, that may be consciously or unconsciously delivered (Sue et al., 2007). Such interactions are so pervasive and automatic in daily conversations and interactions that they are often dismissed and glossed over as being innocent and innocuous. However, they are detrimental to their subjects because they impair performance in a multitude of settings “by sapping psychic and spiritual recipient energy reserves and by creating inequities” (Sue et al., 2007: 273).

Micro-aggressions have been divided into three basic categories: micro-assault, micro-insult and micro-invalidation. Racial micro-assaults are explicit derogations characterized by verbal or nonverbal attacks meant to hurt the intended victims through name-calling, avoidant behavior or purposeful discriminatory actions. Racial micro-insults involve communications that convey rudeness and insensitivity and demean a person’s racial heritage or identity. Racial micro-invalidations, on the other hand, include communications that exclude, negate or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential realities of a person of color (Sue et al., 2007: 274). While micro-assaults and micro-insults are typically not a routine element of friendly cross-ethnic conversations, even individuals with good intentions can incorporate racial micro-invalidations into everyday interchanges.

Given what might be the unconscious nature of racial micro-invalidations, conversations about the same can devolve into an exchange of accusations and recriminations. In an effort to enhance mutual understanding of what might be happening, this interactive exercise is designed to allow participants to better hear and subsequently reflect upon the subtle dual-aspects of communication that occur when people of different ethnicities are engaged in conversation. After working through this analysis, participants may be better able to consider both

sides of oral messaging – the intent of the sender as well as the receipt and interpretation by the receiver – as the unconscious is made more apparent.

Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2013). Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership. John Wiley & Sons.

Cornelissen, J. P., Durand, R., Fiss, P.C., Lammers, J. C., & Vaara, E. (2015). Putting communication front and center in institutional theory and analysis. *Academy of Management Review*, 40(1): 10-27.

McGirt, E. (2016). Fortune Race Ahead, Culture and Diversity in Corporate America, December 20, 2016.

Smooth, J. (2015). TEDx. Obtained 01/10/2017 from

Sue, D.W., Capodilupo, C.M., Torino, G.C., Bucceri, J.M., Holder, A.M.B., Nadal, K.L., & Esquilin, M. (2007). Racial microaggressions in everyday life: Implications for clinical practice. *American Psychologist*, 62(4): 271-286.

3) Session Description and Plan:

What will you actually do in this session? If appropriate, please include a timeline estimating the activities will you facilitate: how long will they take, and how will participants be involved? Please remember that reviewers will be evaluating how well the time request matches the activities you'd like to do, and the extent you can reasonably accomplish the session's goals. Reviewers will also be looking for how you are engaging the participants in the session.

For demonstration purposes, this exercise can be made to fit a 30 minute presentation slot. However, for effective use in class, we typically require 35-45 minutes. If a 60 minute time slot is granted, a more complete experience and richer discussion of how this exercise plays out in class will be possible.

Pre-Exercise Setup

Materials needed:

- 6-7 8 x 11" sheets of paper

- Set of 5 x 7" index cards
- Prepared poster paper and markers for debrief notation
- Powerpoint summary of instructions (ancillary item)

The instructor/facilitator should assure that participants have had a chance to review some model of the communication from the literature, whether a credible on-line source, published book or article, or relevant material from a course text. Students will be examining in considerable detail their processes of encoding and decoding messages during communication.

1. The instructor/facilitator should prepare six sheets of paper with the following information:
 - Sheet 1 is a summary sheet that should read "Hello, my name is".
 - Sheet 2 is a summary sheet that should read "You are so articulate".
 - Sheet 3 should read "you".
 - Sheet 4 should read "are".
 - Sheet 5 should read "so".
 - Sheet 6 should read "articulate".
2. While it is not necessary for effective instruction, the instructor/facilitator may also want to prepare a Powerpoint slide that has the full sentence spelled out with animation that first displays the full sentence and then allows each word of the sentence to enlarge and shrink as the word is emphasized in turn.

NOTE for alternate formulation: Depending upon the ethnic mix of the audience, if there is a sizable percentage of Asian or Hispanic Americans in the audience, instructors/facilitators may want to have six substitute sheets including a summary sheet that reads "you speak English so well". In this case, Sheet 3 would read "you", Sheet 4, "speak", Sheet 5, "English", Sheet 6 "so", and Sheet 7 "well".

3. The instructor/facilitator should prepare pads of poster paper with markers and three debrief columns entitled: word examined; assessment similarities; assessment differences. Depending upon the estimated size of the audience, 8-10 sets of poster pads and markers should be scattered around the room.

Facilitating the Exercise (15-20 minutes demo, 10-15 minute discussion)

1. Depending upon the formulation used, the instructor/facilitator should ask five or six participants to volunteer to assist with the exercise. Each participant should be given a sheet and asked to face away from the audience until directed to do so.
2. The instructor/facilitator should distribute index cards to all non-volunteer participants. The audience should be told they will be exposed to a summary statement, which they will read silently. They will then be asked to re-read the statement aloud, emphasizing the word that is presented to them by turn. After each reading, they will be given time to list the word emphasized as well as their interpretation as to the meaning implied by the sentence with the emphasized word. Then, the class will move to reading aloud the sentence with the next word emphasized.

NOTE: To demonstrate, the instructor should display the summary sheet that reads "Hello, my name is" and ask participants to read it aloud. After the first reading, the instructor/facilitator can point to the word "hello" and ask that participants emphasize "hello" when they re-read the statement aloud. Then, the instructor/facilitator can point to the word "my" and ask that participants emphasize that word in contrast to the rest of the sentence as they again read it aloud. The instructor/facilitator may want to continue with the entire sentence, emphasizing each sequential word or may ask if the instructions are clear and the group is ready to proceed.

3. When the instructor/facilitator is ready to begin, the volunteer who has the summary sheet should be asked to turn around, face the audience and continue facing the audience. The audience should be asked to read the summary statement silently.
4. The instructor/facilitator should then ask the second volunteer to turn around and face the audience. The audience should be asked to read the sentence aloud, referencing the summary sentence but emphasizing the word displayed by the second volunteer. The instructor/facilitator should invite participants to make a notation on their index card as to the word displayed and their interpretive assessment of the meaning of the sentence, considering the emphasized word. After a minute of notation, the second volunteer should be asked to turn their back to the audience and the third volunteer asked to face the audience. Again, the sentence should be repeated with the new word emphasized and a notation made about the word and interpretive assessment of its meaning in the summary sentence before that volunteer is asked to place

their back to the audience and the next volunteer is invited to face the audience.

5. This process should be repeated until each of the words has been presented with differing emphases and audience notations have been made about the meanings associated with each emphasis assessment.
6. Pair/Square
 - a. For the “pair” component of this exercise, participants should be asked to find a partner for a 7-8-minute conversation about their assessments. Each participant in the dyad should be given 3-minutes to share their individual emphasis word assessments and to note similarities and differences on a provided poster paper with markers. The dyad should put no identifying information on the poster paper except for noting the words they assessed and similarities/differences in their individual meaning assessments of the meaning of the sentence with the particular word emphasized.
 - b. For the “square” component of this exercise, dyads should be asked to take their poster paper with them and find another dyad. What is now a quartet should be asked to take 10-12 minutes to compare their dyad assessments to one another and anonymously compile a third sheet, summarizing the two sets of word emphases and similarities and differences in their final meaning assessments.
 - c. The final anonymous “square” assessments should be posted around the room.
 - d. Participants should be asked to conduct a 5-minute “gallery walk”, visiting all of the quartet posters to note similarities and differences with their own individual assessments prior to participating in the collective large group debrief.
- 4) Application to Conference theme:
How does your session fit with the overall OBTC theme of *Navigating the Changing Currents*?

The theme, “Navigating the Changing Currents”, brings to mind how our world continues to face rapid change. Some this effect is due to shifting demographics and globalization and the rest is due to the tremendous shockwaves sent through

all corners of the international community as a result of the 2016 US presidential election, Brexit and the dislocation of Syrians and other international migrants. In order to prepare our students for the increasing daily communication challenges associated with the growing relevance of diversity, inclusion and cultural competence, we offer this exercise as an opportunity to help make our OB and management classrooms places where students can become more intentionally insightful regarding the histories, perspectives, and issues in play when they encounter others who are different from themselves.

5) Unique Contribution to OBTC:

Have you presented the work in this proposal before? If so, how will it be different? Is this proposal under current review somewhere else? If so, please explain. How will your proposal be different for the OBTC conference?

This exercise was presented in a doctoral/masters class in a session discussing university-related educational leadership and diversity issues. We intend to use the peer comments we receive at the OBTC conference to further develop the exercise for submission to MTR.