**ABSTRACT**

Through the use of generational storytelling, our multi-layered exercise is designed to bridge gaps in the inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility conversations,. In doing so, students become aware of all that has been gained, and begin planning for the next phase of acceptance and inclusion. We begin by challenging the students on statements made about inclusion and equity from readings and textbooks. Stories are then shared from across generations to provide the IDEA definitions each different working generation has used. Finally, students are challenged to craft a path forward, to identify what steps are needed next.

KEY WORDS: GENERATIONAL DIFFERENCES, DEI, ACCESSIBILITY

**Storytelling: Generational Losses in Translation of IDEA Concepts and Terminologies**

**Introduction**.

In our experience, late undergraduate and accelerated MBA students cannot grasp why inclusivity, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA) is so difficult because they lack an awareness of the alternate perceptions of DEI across generations. Students, and other faculty, have suggested females and minorities entering the workforce should have fought harder, or stood up for change. In contrast, others offered that their personal experiences in the early years of gaining a seat at the table would be enough to discuss IDEA but it isn’t.

This face-to-face exercise was designed as a way to introduce students to fighting perceptions to produce industry’s incremental IDEA gains. Addressing and defining IDEA across the generations, and asking them to articulate its current state, builds respect for the earlier pioneers and produces a lively discussion where to head next. The goal is to spark awareness, and conversation. Storytelling highlights how the same terms, across generations, has had alternate meanings, providing space for IDEA to move forward. Students explore alternate definitions of the same words, and address the meanings over the years. By sharing the steps of where we have come from, and asking for their help to understand current and future state, students expressed an appreciation for past and were able to articulate a path-forward.

This exercise is designed for an upper-level organizational behavior or Management course, traditional late undergraduate or accelerated student. This exercise has not been used in a cross-cultural setting, but suspect it could be adapted and expanded.

**Theoretical Foundation/Teaching Implications**.

The concept of inclusivity, diversity, equity, and accessibility (IDEA) has evolved significantly over the generations, and the meanings of these terms have changed over time (Oswick & Noon, 2014). This can lead to misunderstandings and a "lost in translation" effect when different generations use these terms (Veli Korkmaz et al., 2022).

The so called "greatest generation," also known as the "golden generation," - those born between the late 1910s and the mid-1920s - may not be familiar with the concept of IDEA as it is understood today, as these terms were not widely used during their lifetime.

The "baby boomers," born between the mid-1940s and the mid-1960s, may have a different understanding of IDEA than younger generations (Smith & Turner, 2015). During this time, the civil rights movement and the women's liberation movement brought issues of discrimination and inequality to the forefront, and the concept of diversity began to gain traction. However, the term "inclusivity" was not widely used until the 1980s and 1990s, and the term "accessibility" became more commonly used in the 1990s (Weldon, 2006).

Generation X, born between the mid-1960s and the early 1980s, grew up during a time of significant social and cultural change. They may have a different understanding of IDEA than the baby boomers, as they came of age during a time when these concepts were more widely discussed and debated (Smith & Turner, 2015). For example, a study by Ely and Thomas (2001) found that Gen X respondents were more likely to endorse individualistic rather than collectivistic approaches to diversity and equality.

Generation Z, born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s, and millennials, born between the early 1980s and the mid-1990s, have grown up in a more diverse and inclusive society than previous generations (Smith & Turner, 2015). As a result, they may have a more nuanced and developed understanding of IDEA. Lopez and Rios (2020) found that Gen Z and millennial respondents were more likely to endorse inclusive and intersectional approaches to diversity and equality.

It is important to note that these generalizations about different generations are not necessarily applicable to all individuals within those age groups, as individuals may have different experiences and perspectives based on their personal backgrounds and circumstances.

Overall, it is important for different generations to be aware of the changing meanings of IDEA over time and to be open to learning from and understanding the perspectives of others. This is also critical in the pedagogical space. The understanding of these differences and evolution of the concepts, terminologies and taxonomies are important in management classrooms. It is also important for organizations and communities to create a common understanding and language around these concepts in order to facilitate effective communication and collaboration (Simmons & Yawson, 2022).

**Learning Objectives**.

* + Students build an appreciation for the IDEA experiences of their parents, grandparents, as it becomes the fabric of their future choices.
  + Students identify perceptual biases in their definitions of IDEA, as well as in others.
  + Students apply creative thinking to build a path forward
  + Teaching topics: Women in the workforce, perceptual bias, Inclusion, equity theory

**Exercise Overview**.

The exercise was developed for a 2.5-hour class, with a 15-minute break. It would be helpful if seating wasn’t fixed.

*30-37 minutes:* The exercise begins with students participating in a World Café setting. 4 different sentences are culled from the readings, some meant to be inflammatory – others designed to draw out experiences (see list below). Students are randomly assigned to a table, and given 6-7 minutes to discuss the question. One student is asked to be the “recorder,” for their discussion. At the end of time, students are randomly assigned to a second, then third, then fourth table until they have discussed all of the question. For each time slot, a record is made of the discussion – which is then summarized in a debrief by the full class.

*World Café Questions: These statements are meant to entice discussion. Students are asked to provide examples of these situation, or to argue their points. Versions of these statements may be used*

* Women are more transformational than men and tend to engage in more contingent reward behaviors than men (Schedlitzki & Edwards, 2014)
* When men are outspoken, they are seen as visionary or passionate (Amanatullah & Tinsley, 2013)
* Outspoken women are too assertive and unlikeable (Amanatullah & Tinsley, 2013),
* Leaders should be dominant, confident, aggressive, rational, in other words, they should possess male traits (Schedlitzki & Edwards, 2014)
* Female leaders are more hostile than male managers (Heilman, Block, & Martell, 1995), they can be bitter and deceitful (Deal & Stevenson, 1998).
* Skin color, gender, religion or identity should not be measured or counted in business settings
* A seat at the table means ….

*25-30 minutes:* Storytelling - During this time, we ask students for help, explaining struggles with aligning my definition of DEI with what we read, what we hear.

We begin with the terms DEI, and how different phases of the 20th century defined them; e.g., 60- 70’s: diversity was wrought through legal action. 80’s – 90’s, diversity was not enough and equity took shape. We were in the building, but now needed a seat at the table, or equity. Equity meant just that and nothing else. As we move through each phase, stories are shared – from our history\* and from relatives of our students.

Finally, we reach current industry definitions and the conflict of reconciling inclusivity and with equity is brought to the table. This tends to bring a lively discussion of how the perception is different – that a seat at the table is no longer enough. Sometimes, students will accuse older generations of selling out with equity – and we discuss whether they could be an inclusive space without it.

*15 minutes:* a short lecture highlighting salary, career opportunities, serves to bring awareness to current state of industry, particularly for women, and ALANA drawing on current data from across respected business sources including: <https://www.diversityinc.com/top-50-list/2022/>; <https://fortune.com/2022/05/23/female-ceos-fortune-500-2022-women-record-high-karen-lynch-sarah-nash/>; <https://www.businessinsider.com/personal-finance/gender-pay-gap>; <https://fortune.com/2022/08/22/women-are-increasingly-being-hired-for-cfo-roles-this-year-says-an-executive-search-firm-president/>

*20-30 minutes:* In small groups, students are asked to address these DEI issues and debrief.

* Group 1: Inclusion as a new employee -what does it mean?
  + Students lean on authenticity here. They want to be seen, and see inclusion as very different from 20th century inclusion. We discuss if this is a better pathway.
* Group 2: What does 21st-century inclusivity bring to the corporate table?
  + Here students usually discuss creativity, openness – fewer politics. Perceptual biases should be explored here.
* Group 3: What is the next phase of DEI in the workplace? What needs redefinition?
  + Here students might bring the past into the present by addressing diversity laws, revisiting equality. They might also want to touch on the next phase of inclusion- if everyone is their authentic self, what does this do equity theory, to work assignments, etc. How will they reimagine work?
* Group 3: Should diversity laws still be in place?
  + Depending on the part of the country in which you reside, this discussion could go either way. In the NE area, this is typically “yes.” The impact of these laws, and of those which have been overturned lately should help in exploring biases here.
* Group 4: Will DEI still be an issue when the Baby Boomers retire?
  + Again, pulling out perceptual biases are an important element here.

\*Even if individuals came through an academic path instead of industry, there are stories to tell.

**Session Description.**

This has been built for a 45-minute session, and excludes the opening World Café discussion assuming that most MOBTS participants have read IDEA literature previously. We plan to focus on storytelling and future forward. Participants will be asked to share their stories.

* 5 minutes: explanation of classroom setting and the impetus for the exercise.
* 15 minutes: *Storytelling* – audience will be provided generational definitions (handout) of DEI, and asked to tell their stories through a pair/share.
* 7 minutes: Open discussion of *inclusion* and its many definitions, opportunities, concerns throughout the industry environment.
* 10 minutes: Audience will then break into groups to address and debrief questions.
* Remaining: Q&A

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