

# UNCOVERING INCLUSION INHIBITORS

## Common Inclusion Inhibitors<sup>1</sup>

Inclusion inhibitors may be occurring around us regularly, but we often don't notice them. Here are some common inclusion inhibitors people experience:

1. Being interrupted or spoken over more often than others
2. Having their judgment questioned in their area of expertise
3. Being ignored until proving their worth
4. Not being given credit for their ideas or contributions
5. Being asked to perform stereotypical tasks based on gender, ethnicity, religion, etc. (*men: fix something mechanical, lift something heavy; women: take notes, order lunch, make coffee; religion: put up Christmas tree, organize a holiday party*)
6. Being overlooked for a promotion or stretch assignment
7. Being questioned on their emotional state
8. Being dismissed because they are viewed as "too new" or "too inexperienced"
9. Having surprise expressed at their language skills or abilities
10. Hearing or overhearing insults about the culture of people like them
11. Being expected to speak on behalf of all people of their group
12. Having comments made about their appearance
13. Having assumptions made about them based on their appearance
14. Being confused with someone else of the same race or ethnicity
15. Having someone mispronounce their name because it is complex or shorten their name with a nickname

## Tips for Responding to Inclusion Inhibitors

What can you do or say to be an ally? Here are some tips and examples for being an ally and responding if you hear or see any of these inclusion inhibitors occur:

### 1. Being interrupted or spoken over more often than others

You want to pause the conversation and give the floor back to the person who was just interrupted to finish what they were saying.

- "I am sorry YY (person interrupting), I don't believe XX (person being interrupted) was quite done with their thought. XX, would you mind sharing again what you were saying?"
- "I don't mean to be rude (to person interrupting), but I didn't catch everything that (person being interrupted) was saying. Before we move on, can I ask you (person who was interrupted) to finish what you were saying? It sounded important."

### 2. Having their judgment questioned in their area of expertise

You want to make it clear you find a lot of value in what the person has said, and that you believe based on their experience that there is a lot of merit to it. Another option is to share previous experiences you have had with the person with everyone in the room that lead you not to question their credibility on the topic.

- "XX (the person whose judgment is being questioned), I value your expertise on this topic. Would you mind repeating what you said and providing a bit more context?"
- "I know XX has faced a similar situation, and I believe they would have the most relevant point of view to share."
- "XX (the person whose judgment is being questioned), it sounds like your experience may be different than YY (who is questioning the credibility). I know you have a great deal of experience on this topic. Could you share more about your experience?"

<sup>1</sup> Integrating Women Leaders Foundation 2022 State of Allyship-in-Action Benchmark Study

### 3. Being ignored until proving their worth

As an ally, you want to invite the person being ignored into the conversation and listen with intention to what they have to say to validate it. You may also want to add in statements about their experience, if known, to lend credibility to them. Watch out: You may need the individual's permission ahead of time that they are ok with you pulling them into the conversation.

- *"I believe XX (person being ignored) might have some ideas on this."*
- *"XX (person being ignored), is there something else you might want to add to this conversation? I think you have some good experience here."*
- *"XX (person being ignored), as a new entrant to this team, do you have an outside in perspective you might want to share?"*

### 4. Not being given credit for their ideas or contributions

As an ally, the idea is to recognize the person who originated that idea or topic, and give the floor back to them to lead that discussion and get credit for their contribution.

- *"YY (person who is repeating what the person already said and somehow gets credit for a great idea), I like where you are going with this. I believe you are building on what XX (person who said the idea first) just said. I would be interested in how XX might build the idea out a bit more before we all jump in. XX, would you repeat what you had said and provide us with any other context to begin that discussion?"*
- *"XX, I think we are all interested in what you said earlier. Before we all jump in to build upon it, could you repeat what you said?"*
- *"I really like your idea of (topic). Sounds like we all agree it is a good idea. XX, can you please elaborate on what you were thinking?"*

### 5. Being asked to perform stereotypical tasks based on gender, ethnicity, religion, etc.

(men: fix something mechanical, lift something heavy; women: take notes, order lunch, make coffee; religion: put up Christmas tree, organize a holiday party)

Essentially, you want to create an "out" for the person, not to have to decline the request, but to spread the work out among all team members equally.

- *"It might be better if we all go round robin on taking notes on this. Who wants to be the first to volunteer?"*
- *"I think XX (person being asked) did this last time. Perhaps we should take volunteers for this next one?"*
- *"I am (or YY is) closer to the (door, client, kitchen, etc.). I am happy to take care of that."*
- *"This sounds like a big ask. We may want to take volunteers."*

### 6. Being overlooked for a promotion or stretch assignment

As an ally, you are looking for opportunities to throw a person who is qualified into the mix for a promotion, job, assignment, project, etc., instead of "the usual suspects." Watch out: Make sure you have confirmed in advance that the individual would like the additional responsibility you are proposing for them.

- *"I think XX is well qualified for this opportunity/assignment/etc., and I would like to see us consider them for the role."*
- *"How about we consider XX for this assignment/opportunity/etc., as they have the skills and experience necessary to get the job done."*

### 7. Being questioned on their emotional state

You may see or hear comments made to a person, such as "you look stressed today" or "you look upset" or "you seem very angry." These things tend to be said more frequently to women, but asking about someone's emotional state is not always welcome, particularly in group situations.

If you sense someone is uncomfortable at a question, or if it seems inappropriate or misplaced, you want to move on or take a break, so the individual does not have to respond in that moment. You want to create space for the individual to regroup themselves or distract the attention off the person by moving onto another topic. Essentially, you want to own feeling that way yourself if the issue is that many in the room are feeling that way, but this person was singled out.

- *"I think we have all been under a lot of stress lately. Why don't we take a break?" (if appropriate)*
- *"This topic has a lot of us feeling upset. Do you mind if I share why it bothers me?"*
- *"I think XX (person being asked) has a lot of passion on this topic. I am excited to hear what they have been thinking."*

### 8. Being dismissed because they are viewed as "too new" or "too inexperienced"

As an ally, you want to lend your own credibility on the topic to this new or young person by being clear you value their fresh perspective. Watch out: Make sure you clear with this person ahead of time that they are ok for you to call on them.

- *"XX (person being dismissed), I think you have some good ideas, and I would like to hear more."*
- *"I am excited XX (person being dismissed) is here to give us a fresh perspective."*
- *"Many of us have been on this problem for a while. I would appreciate learning from your perspective what you see."*

## 9. Having surprise expressed at their language skills or abilities

This type of inclusion inhibitor is typically said to someone who is young, foreign, and/or black/brown. As an ally, you want to convey that the assumption they would not be well spoken is misplaced and confirm their credibility as an individual.

- *"I'm not sure why you would be surprised. XX (person being questioned) has done great work for years on this." or "... has made a big impact through their work" or "...wrote their thesis on this topic" or "...has developed several strategies already on this topic"*

## 10. Hearing or overhearing insults about the culture of people like them

In these situations, you don't want to call out the person who made the comment/stereotype/insult as that could create shame or blame. You want to assume they were just ignorant to the impact of their statement. You do want to speak up and share that whatever was said may be based on a misleading or unkind stereotype of overgeneralization.

- *"I haven't found that to be true in my interactions. We should probably dig into this situation a bit more to understand what the contributing factors were, rather than assume it was because of (gender, race, culture)."*
- *"That seems like an oversimplification of the problem. Perhaps there is more we can learn about this situation before falling into a trap on a misleading stereotype."*
- *"That seems like a stereotype and isn't reflective of the facts as I understand them."*

## 11. Being expected to speak on behalf of all people of their group

As an ally, you want to shift the question away from the individual in the group and refocus the discussion onto facts and data that have been collected from representative groups.

- *"You raise an interesting question. Perhaps we should do some research to better understand how (women, native Americans, LGBTQ+ individuals) might respond/react/identify with that."*
- *"We should check the web to see if there is any insight on (the group)"*

## 12. Having comments made about their appearance

Comments like "You look beautiful today," may sound like a compliment, but in a work setting is usually inappropriate and can make someone feel uncomfortable. Another inappropriate example is, "When I spoke to you on the phone, I didn't think you would be so short."

When people make inappropriate or out of place statements like these, you want to raise awareness that the statements made you feel uncomfortable (you don't want to assume they made the person they were being made to feel uncomfortable). And, while you don't want to blame or shame the person who may have said them, you do want to call out that it does not seem appropriate.

- *"I am feeling uncomfortable. Am I missing context for that statement?"*

## 13. Having assumptions made about them based on their appearance

The assumption is made because the person saying something does not know the person they are making assumptions about. What you want to do is to honor, and reinforce honoring, the person based on who they are, not what they look like or what they are wearing, etc.

- *"Not sure why you would say that about XX. They have always been ..."* (some positive reinforcement of who they are).
- *"xx (person in question), I have always been impressed with your (some positive reinforcement of something they have accomplished, experienced, etc)"*

## 14. Being confused with someone else of the same race or ethnicity

As an ally, you want to clarify who this person is, and not leave it to them to have to awkwardly correct someone.

- *"This is XX (call this person by their right name). It sounds like you may have them confused with someone else."*

## 15. Having someone mispronounce their name because it is complex, or shorten their name with a nickname

Clarify how this individual would like to be addressed, without leaving it to them to correct someone.

- *"XX (person whose name has been misstated), I have always pronounced your name as XX. Is that the correct pronunciation?"*
- *"XX (person whose name has been misstated), do you prefer your full name XX, or do you go by a different nickname?"*
- *"XX (person whose name has been misstated) how do you prefer to be addressed?"*

# UNCOVERING INCLUSION INHIBITORS

## Your Assignment

Work with intention for the next week to listen for inclusion inhibitors in the workplace that may be excluding someone in the group, singling someone out, statements that may make you uncomfortable, and statements that may be based on stereotyping or unconscious bias.

Capture your observations and any actions taken throughout the week in the space below.

Day	What did you notice?	What did you do?	What, if anything, do you wish you had done differently?