CULTURE, COMMUNICATION, AND CONFLICT:

Managing Divisiveness in the Workplace

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NCRC | THE ART OF INCLUSIVE COMMUNICATION

COMPANION LEARNING GUIDE

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CULTURE, COMMUNICATION, AND CONFLICT:

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BURST VIDEO:

Understanding Your Power and Utilizing Humble Inquiry as a Leader

Written by Dr. Toni Herndon and Lisa Maxwell

REFLECT: *What stood out for you in the video?*

JOURNAL: *Consider all the sources of social power that you have. How do you use your power to empower?*

DIALOGUE WITH A TRUSTED COLLEAGUE: *How do we tap into our referent power more successfully? What questions demonstrate an open attitude and curiosity?*

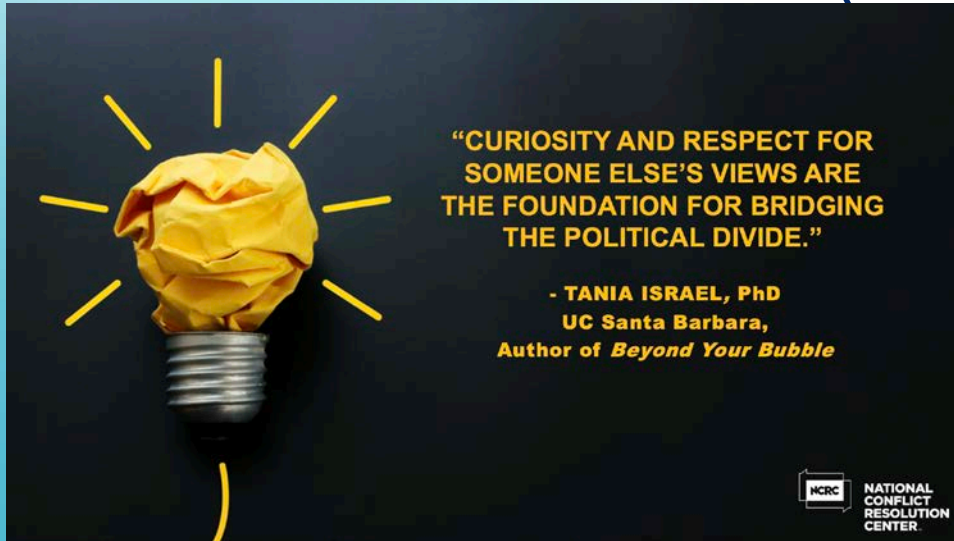# The ART of Inclusive Communication

We will do all we can to create a psychologically safe space for you so that you can comfortably share your experiences and perspective.

We also ask that you consider the work of Dr. Carol Dweck of Stanford University in taking the approach of a growth mindset as you participate in the sessions. While each of you is an expert, there is always more to learn!

There will be a series of four sessions:

1. **The ARTful Conversation**: You'll learn how to effectively handle challenging one-on-one conversations. This foundational course lays the groundwork for all subsequent sessions.

2. **The ART of Inclusive Communication**: You'll explore strategies and techniques to embrace and promote inclusivity.

3. **The Bystander Challenge**: You'll learn how to empower others at your workplace to become thoughtful upstanders as part of creating a sense of belonging in the workplace.

4. **The Exchange**: You'll learn a conflict resolution process that helps you lead a problem-solving conversation, focused on collaboration and future success.

"CURIOSITY AND RESPECT FOR SOMEONE ELSE'S VIEWS ARE THE FOUNDATION FOR BRIDGING THE POLITICAL DIVIDE."

- TANIA ISRAEL, PhD
UC Santa Barbara,
Author of *Beyond Your Bubble*

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Helping employees maintain curiosity about each other's perspectives is key to finding common ground. This humanizes their working relationship so that they can be considerate of one another as they work together.

REFLECT

What ways do you maintain a curious stance with views that are different from your own? How do you encourage this in others?
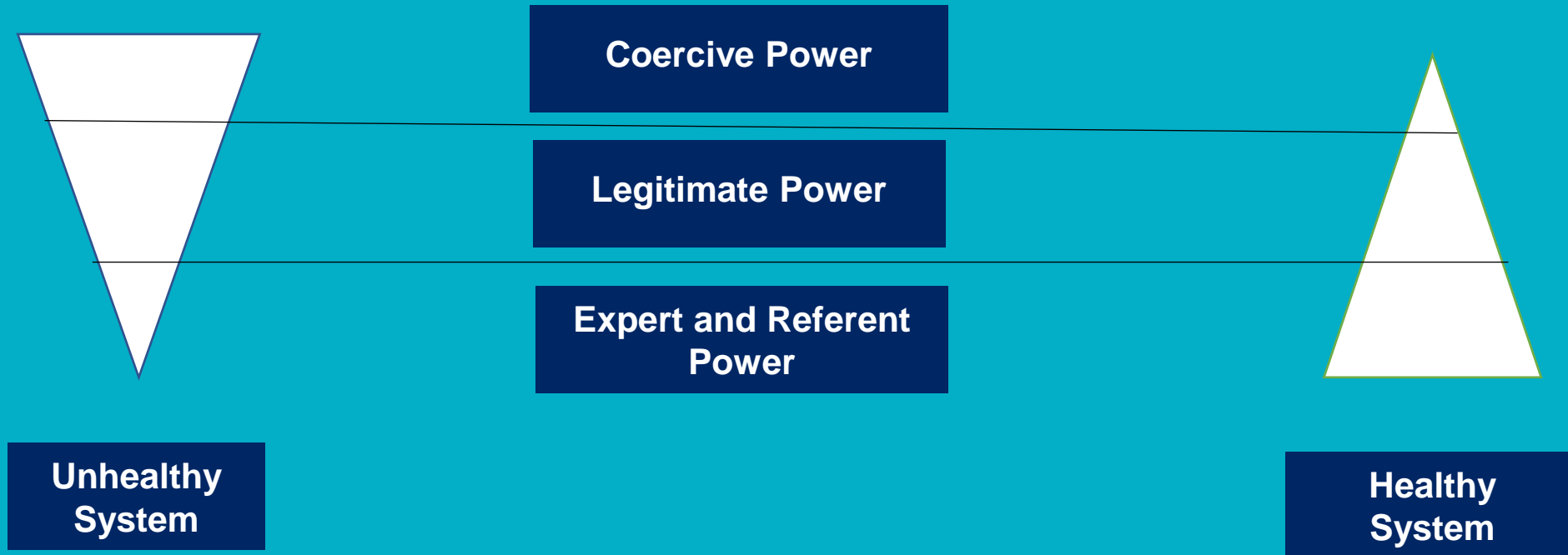
Learning Outcomes

The ART of Inclusive Communication introduces the essential element of culture and style into how we communicate. Not only will we look at a few ways our identities, including our political identities, impact communication, but we also will consider how to interact effectively with others who have different beliefs than us around controversial, divisive topics.

The ART skills are relevant in creating a human-centered approach to managing all conversations, but especially sensitive conversations around identity, culture, politics, and race.

The article *"The older model of leadership just doesn't cut it anymore"* *provides evidence that human-centered leadership is needed. Engaging and motivating employees becomes more important to business success. That includes making sure workers feel like they're being listened to, supported, and inspired to feel like "a psychological owner" in their work.* This article by NCRC President Steve Dinkin supports creating a trusting relationship with employees.

FURTHER LEARNING

Inclusive language is key to successful communication in a diverse work environment. To educate oneself further in this regard, the Inclusive Language Guide is especially helpful.

Power Dynamics in the Workplace

Coercive Power

Legitimate Power

Expert and Referent Power

Unhealthy System

Healthy System

In the burst video, we refer to a leader's sources of power. Learn more about the types of social power here.

Breakout Discussion

HUMBLE INQUIRY

"Humble inquiry is the fine art of drawing someone out, of asking questions to which you do not already know the answer, of building a relationship based on curiosity and interest in the other person."

- Edgar Schein

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BREAKOUT

➢ What stood out for you about a leader's sources of power?

➢ How does humble inquiry relate to being an inclusive leader of employees who have diverse perspectives on hot-topic issues?

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Humble Inquiry: Types of Questions

May I ask you for an example to help me understand?

Just for my understanding, could you tell me more about _____?

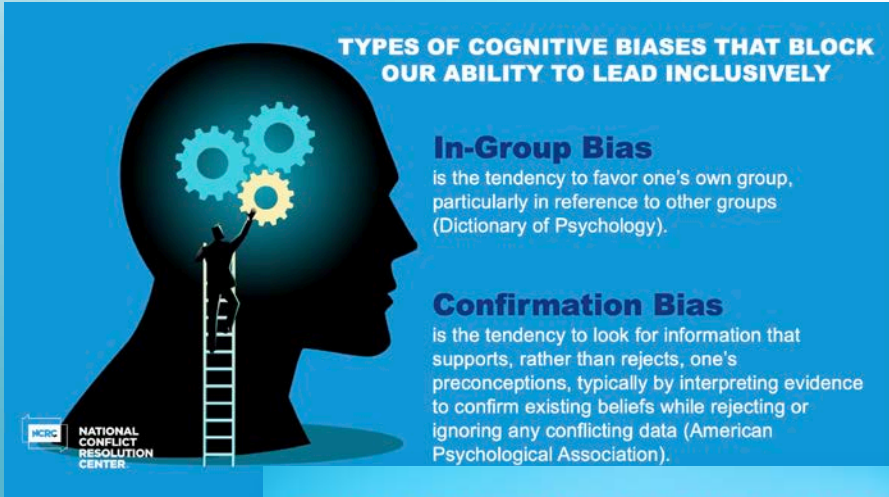Can you share with me any worries you may have about risks or concerns related to _____?

Could you please talk me through the pros and cons of your next steps?

FURTHER LEARNING
Highlights of Edgar Schein's Book on Humble Inquiry

It has been found that workplace leaders who demonstrate cultural humility are more inclusive leaders. Utilizing humble inquiry is one step to being an inclusive leader.

TYPES OF COGNITIVE BIASES THAT BLOCK OUR ABILITY TO LEAD INCLUSIVELY

In-Group Bias
is the tendency to favor one's own group, particularly in reference to other groups (Dictionary of Psychology).

Confirmation Bias
is the tendency to look for information that supports, rather than rejects, one's preconceptions, typically by interpreting evidence to confirm existing beliefs while rejecting or ignoring any conflicting data (American Psychological Association).

OVERCOMING THE IMPACT OF BIAS

What is the benefit of being aware of your biases as a workplace leader?

What can you do to overcome the impact of in-group bias and confirmation bias?

A workshop on inclusive communication would be incomplete without covering some aspect of bias in our presentation.

Considering confirmation bias will help us minimize preconceptions and assumptions in our work. In-group bias can prevent us from being truly inclusive with those whose cultural and political experiences are different from our own.

Confirmation bias forms and reconfirms stereotypes we have about people, while information that refutes our expectations is ignored. We tend to remember stereotype-consistent information and to forget stereotype-inconsistent information, which is one way stereotypes are maintained even in the face of disconfirming evidence.

FURTHER LEARNING

If you haven't taken Harvard's Implicit Association Test, you may want to do so.

Novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED Talk The Danger of a Single Story is a compelling example of the problems with confirmation bias.

Managing
Polarization Bias

"People often overestimate the level of disagreement between themselves and members of opposing political groups, the prevalence of extreme beliefs among those groups, and the extent to which those people view them negatively."

- Dawn Chow and Jeffrey Lees

BREAKOUT

➤ What have you seen in the workplace regarding polarization bias?

➤ What can a workplace leader do to lessen polarization bias? BRAINSTORM!

The impact of bias in the workplace is much greater than our personal preferences. The article "*As Politics Heat Up, so Do Hiring Bias Worries*" examines the issues with selecting a candidate based upon their political affiliation.
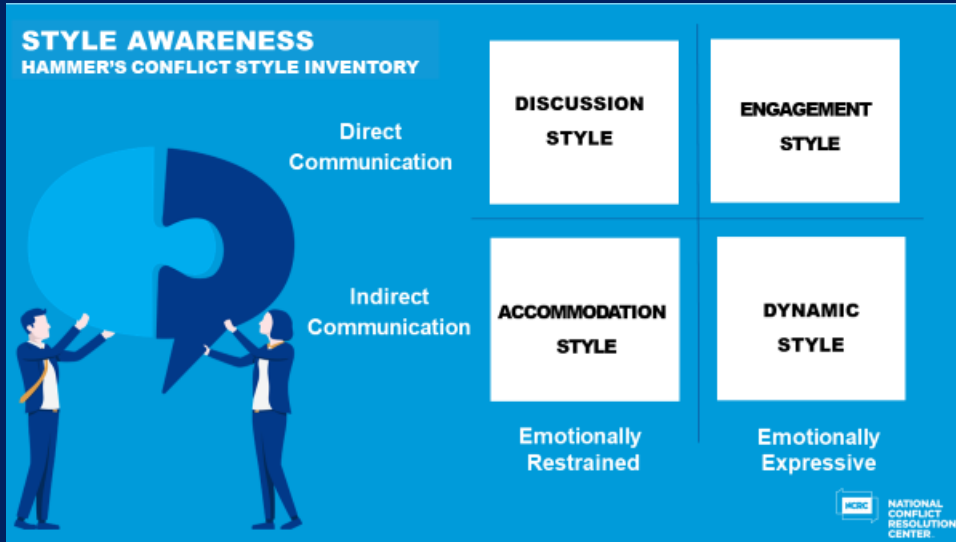
It is important to note that one of the greatest issues around bias that workplace leaders face is the bias between employees who have different political beliefs. In the article, the authors point out that people often overestimate 1) the level of disagreement between themselves and members of opposing political groups, 2) the prevalence of extreme beliefs among those groups, and 3) the extent to which those people view them negatively, which the authors call "**false polarization bias**." This can lead to unhealthy work environments. Workplace leaders have a clear responsibility to create an environment in which this is less likely to occur.

Raising Awareness: Communication Styles

STYLE AWARENESS
HAMMER'S CONFLICT STYLE INVENTORY

Direct Communication

| DISCUSSION STYLE | ENGAGEMENT STYLE |

Indirect Communication

| ACCOMMODATION STYLE | DYNAMIC STYLE |

Emotionally Restrained | Emotionally Expressive

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BREAKOUT

- What are the strengths of your style?
- How do we show respect to all styles on an ongoing basis?
- How would someone's style impact if or how they discuss hot topics?

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NCRC developed this exercise based on research by Dr. Mitchell Hammer to help leaders explore differences in communication styles. Understanding your default style and being able to identify the style of others can help to create a collaborative and inclusive environment. Being responsive to the style and needs of others is an important component of managing sensitive conversations.
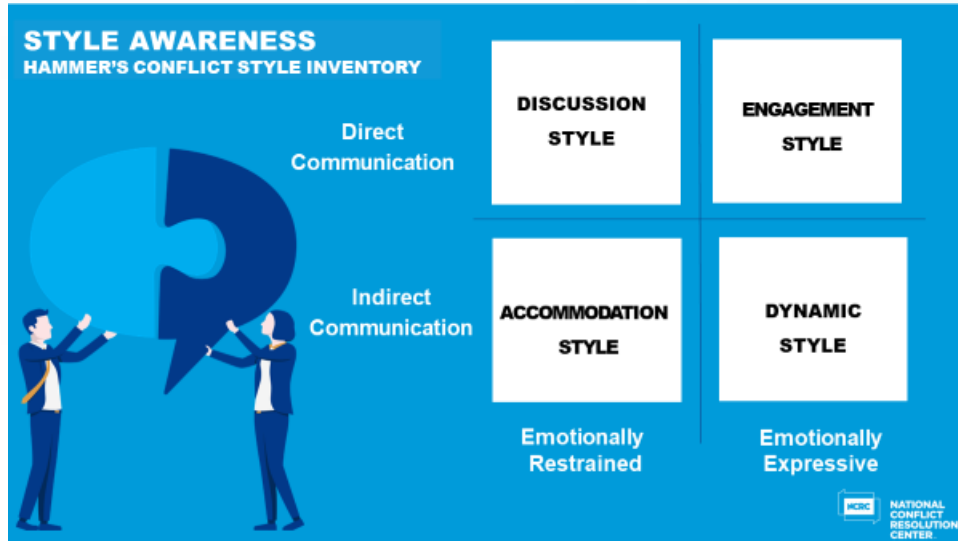
Each style has its strengths; no one style is better than the others. As humans, we are adaptive and can sometimes fluctuate between styles based on power dynamics or situations; however, we all have a default style we feel most comfortable using. Recognize that power dynamics in the workplace may play a role in whether someone expresses their style fully. Inclusive work environments honor authentic expression of individuals.

Raising Awareness: Communication Styles

STYLE AWARENESS
HAMMER'S CONFLICT STYLE INVENTORY

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DISCUSSION STYLE

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ACCOMMODATION STYLE

DYNAMIC STYLE

Emotionally Restrained

Emotionally Expressive

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Discussion-style communicators tend to be verbally direct and emotionally restrained. They are clear and concise with their words and can set aside their emotions in the interest of problem-solving.

Strengths: Direct, clear, good at problem-solving and remaining objective

Needs from others: Directness, logic, calmness, transparency

Engagement-style communicators tend to be direct with their words and emotionally expressive. They value timely verbal and nonverbal expression and appreciate when others actively listen and validate their emotions.

Strengths: Vulnerability, transparency, compassion, openness

Needs from others: Emotional vulnerability, clear communication, openness, validation

Raising Awareness: Communication Styles

STYLE AWARENESS
HAMMER'S CONFLICT STYLE INVENTORY

Direct Communication

DISCUSSION STYLE	ENGAGEMENT STYLE
ACCOMMODATION STYLE	DYNAMIC STYLE

Indirect Communication

Emotionally Restrained — Emotionally Expressive

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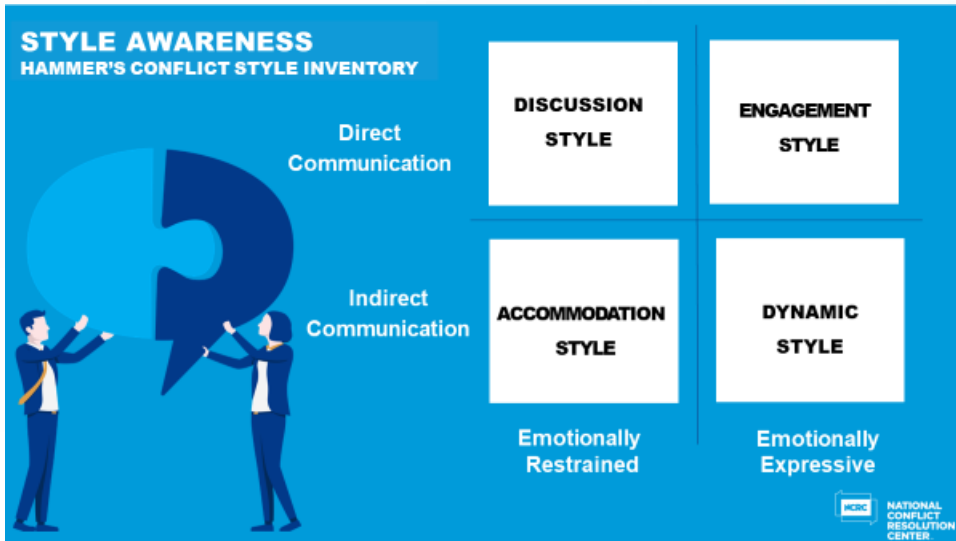
REFLECT

How would knowledge of these styles affect how you demonstrate that you are listening to employees?

Accommodation-style communicators tend to be indirect and emotionally restrained, which makes them the peacekeepers in relationships. During conflict, they may opt to just let the issue go, but when they choose to bring up something, they have put much thought into it.

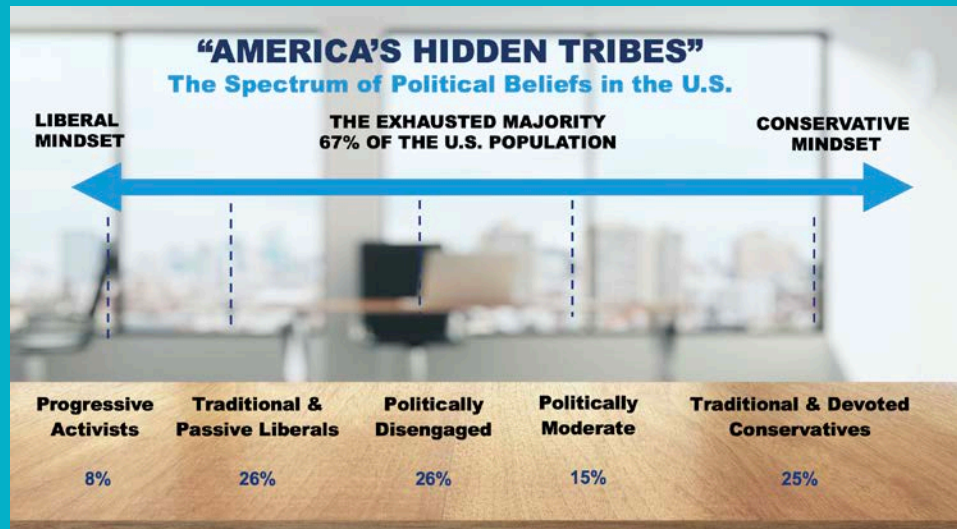**Strengths:** Fair, observant, collaborative, unproblematic

Needs from others: Time, boundaries, acknowledgment

Dynamic-style communicators tend to show their emotions but are verbally indirect. During conflict resolution, they feel deeply and intuit the emotions of all involved. They need time to process their emotions before putting them into words.

Strengths: Intuitive, allows space for all to process, thinks before they speak, observant of others' emotional well-being

Needs from others: Space, time, patience, understanding, compassion

"AMERICA'S HIDDEN TRIBES"
The Spectrum of Political Beliefs in the U.S.

LIBERAL MINDSET — THE EXHAUSTED MAJORITY 67% OF THE U.S. POPULATION — CONSERVATIVE MINDSET

Progressive Activists	Traditional & Passive Liberals	Politically Disengaged	Politically Moderate	Traditional & Devoted Conservatives
8%	26%	26%	15%	25%

BREAKOUT

➤ Discuss reactions to "America's Hidden Tribes" and how you believe this impacts the workplace.

➤ As a leader, how do you respectfully talk to employees, especially with those on each wing of the continuum?

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It can be useful to acknowledge that employees can fall anywhere on the spectrum of political beliefs. Although this is also true for workplace leaders, the ability to remain neutral while in the workplace is expected and shows good leadership qualities.

The question becomes how to help employees navigate conversations for those who wish to take part in them in a way that respects the needs of both the speaker and the listener. Other employees who are impacted have workplace needs that should be respected as well. Here is an example in a family situation, utilizing NCRC's Tip #7. Johnny C. Taylor, CEO of SHRM (Society of Human Resource Management), shared in "We Are More Than Our Differences" that "we don't have the right to be agreed with, but we do have the right to be heard respectfully." **How do leaders create safety for all employees?**

FURTHER LEARNING

Learn more about "Hidden Tribes: A Study of America's Polarized Landscape" here.

Please note that we use the word "tribe" here based on the researchers' framing of the different group associations.

Tips for Interacting
with Employees Holding Strong Political Beliefs

APPLYING THE ART SKILLS
WHEN AN EMPLOYEE SHARES POLARIZING VIEWS

A CTIVE AWARENESS
- Remain nonjudgmental
- Refrain from projecting your mindset onto the employee
- Manage your neutrality, and check your reaction

R ESPOND RESPECTFULLY
- Utilize questions to engage the employee
- Acknowledge emotions and experiences
- Connect what they are saying to their needs

T ROUBLESHOOT TOGETHER
- Help them gain better understanding of (not agreement with) others' perspectives
- Focus on the needs of all involved to work comfortably despite the different perspectives

REFLECT

Employees will demonstrate different mindsets on sometimes polarizing topics. Which of these mindsets would be the most challenging for you to support?

We have taken our ARTful Conversation acronym and principles and inserted tips for supporting employees with strong political beliefs. Helping the employee process the impact of their often-intense interactions with coworkers is important. Many employees, part of the "exhausted majority," share the feeling reflected by Lex Fridmen in this viral message he shared on Twitter.

Lex Fridman ✔
@lexfridman

I am not right wing or left wing. I am a human being who listens, empathizes, learns, and thinks.

People want to assign labels to each other so they can judge without trying to understanding a person.

Labels lessen our capacity for empathy and free thought.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER: If the answer to these questions is no, perhaps the employee may reconsider discussing the topic with their coworkers:

- Is the employee able to consider other points of view that may differ from their own on this topic?
- Does the employee think that someone may have something to teach them?
- Can the employee find common ground with those who differ from them on the topic?

Tips for Interacting
with Employees Holding Polarizing Views

APPLYING THE ART SKILLS
WHEN AN EMPLOYEE SHARES POLARIZING VIEWS

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- ► Remain nonjudgmental
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T ROUBLESHOOT TOGETHER
- ► Help them gain better understanding of (not agreement with) others' perspectives
- ► Focus on the needs of all involved to work comfortably despite the different perspectives

With **ACTIVE AWARENESS**, it is important for you, as a leader, to be aware of your own biases and reactions to the individual. Maintaining a stance of nonjudgment is important.

RESPOND RESPECTFULLY to the individual, asking thoughtful questions, using humble inquiry, and maintaining a curious stance. This is when you can acknowledge their emotions and experiences without agreeing with their conclusions. As much as possible, connect their comments to their needs (instead of reinforcing their stereotypes). This will allow you to maintain that neutral stance.

Lastly, with **TROUBLESHOOT TOGETHER,** helping the employee see that others have different perspectives is critical for moving forward. Then you can help them see the value of working with others, despite their different perspectives.

Conclusion

The ART of Inclusive Communication
- Humble Inquiry
- A Leader's Social Power
- In-Group Bias, Confirmation Bias, and Polarization Bias
- Conflict Styles
- "America's Hidden Tribes"

What is one takeaway for you from today's session?

WHAT'S NEXT
➢ Watch "Bridging: Towards a Society Built on Belonging"
➢ Next Week: The Bystander Challenge: Building Belonging

Thank you for your participation in the ART of Inclusive Communication. We look forward to seeing you in The Bystander Challenge: Building Belonging.

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