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The Intersection of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and Social-Emotional Competencies

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As social beings, we rely on cooperation to survive and thrive, and therefore, it is incumbent upon us to understand how and why cooperative systems in societies, communities, and institutions succeed or fail (The Cooperative Human, 2018). As humans we have an innate longing for connection and community, which is foundational to the development of all societies and it is this connection and community that starts at an individual level and transfuses to a communal level. As social beings, we thrive in community, our stories and lived experiences are intricately linked. We share our thoughts, mindsets, and emotions through our interactions while in community. These shared encounters connect us and allows us to form community and experience psychological safety (Morgan, 2015; Muhl, 2018).

Our self-centered nature is a catalyst for our need for self-preservation. Furthermore, we also have an innate ability to manage our interactions by becoming intentionally conscious about our verbal and non-verbal communications. For example, depending on what one wants to say and the emotions one wants to project, it is possible to bridge the undeniable differences among ourselves with some intentional consciousness. Therefore, this goes to show that achieving cooperation is integral to the resolution of most global challenges we face at different levels in society; key among them is accepting diversity, ensuring equity, and promoting inclusion. It is this that grounds the importance of cultivating social-emotional competencies.

Social-emotional competencies are important in forging and maintaining healthy relationships as they point to one's capacity to interact with others, communicate effectively, manage emotions and behaviors in order to effectively solve problems. Social-emotional wellness encompasses an individual's capacity to Recognize, Understand, Manage, Express, and Reflect on their Thoughts, Interactions, Mindsets, and Emotions. The RUMERTIME Process® is a prevention/intervention strategy that promotes this strategy of social-emotional wellness. Using this strategy, one can successfully and effectively navigate daily activities and interactions whilst adapting to the demands of growth and development. Focusing on these five plots (RUMER), this section will outline how the RUMERTIME Process® which in part consist of these five skills (1) Self-Awareness, (2) Self-Management, (3) Relationship Management, (4) Social-Awareness, and (5) Responsible Decision-Making, should undergird the practice and implementation of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI).

Developing self-awareness

The first two plots in the RUMERTIME Process® promotes self-awareness skills. As one Recognizes and Understands their Thoughts, Interactions, Mindsets and Emotions their self-awareness skills are augmented. The first plot (Recognize) requires individuals to be able to identify or list and ask "what?" questions, about their Thoughts, Interactions, Mindsets and Emotions (TIME®). The second plot (Understand) requires individuals to dig deep into the "why, where, how, and when" of their Thoughts, Interactions, Mindsets and Emotions (TIME®).

Recognize(Self-Awareness Skills)

Recognize is aligned to self-awareness skills which at its most basic level embodies a person's ability to admit, acknowledge, identify and list one's Thoughts, Interactions, Mindsets and Emotions (TIME®). Furthermore, as a person moves toward social-emotional wellness, their ability to recognize requires that they honestly evaluate and assess their strengths, weaknesses, attitudes, and mindsets as well as the relationship between one's actions, feelings, and thoughts as it relates to the impact they have on others and oneself. Ensuring respect for diversity, enhancement of equity, and promotion of inclusion, Gurchiek (2017) asserts that difference is value-neutral, hence, how one reacts to differences is what matters. Cultural competence and responsiveness are critical to becoming socially-emotionally balanced if one is to effectively engage others across differences.

This is supported by Bailey (2014) who asserts that the reason most diversity and inclusion initiatives in institutions fail is because they do not address both diversity and inclusion at the individual level therefore creating a culture of exclusion where individuals feel psychologically unsafe. The result of this is that the initiatives become more compliance-based resulting in a situation where the majority feel guilty and differences are emphasized as opposed to being celebrated resulting in the rise of political correctness and resentment (Bailey, 2014). In the process of becoming self-aware we begin to recognize our unconscious and conscious biases that leads to discriminatory behaviors. In order to mitigate or minimize the potential for overt or covert discriminatory and exclusionary practices, it is critical for one to consciously and intentionally think about one's Thoughts, Interactions, Mindsets, and Emotions (TIME®). Engaging in the RUMERTIME Process® at any juncture in one's practice and implementation of DEI maximizes one's opportunities to consciously address discriminatory and exclusionary Thoughts, Interactions, Mindsets and Emotions (TIME®) resulting in intra- and interpersonal balance and conscious living. Therefore, since we innately drift to those we perceive as similar to us and exclude those who are different, building an inclusive culture requires building bridges which can only be achieved by recognizing our biases and blind spots and consciously fashion an environment where everyone feels physically, socially, emotionally, and psychologically safe enough to express themselves without being compelled to conform.

Understand(Self-Awareness Skills)

The Understand Plot (Plot #2) is also aligned with self-awareness skills and advances the gains made in the Recognize plot. As one identified, listed and acknowledged their Thoughts, Interactions, Mindsets, and Emotions (TIME®) that can contribute to one's biases, the next step involves pursuing an understanding of the underlying factors, the root level influences for the biases. This requires one to ask probing questions such as: what, where, how, why, and when. At this point, one acquires an understanding of the individual level factors that contribute to and enable the societal manifestations of discriminatory and exclusionary practices.

Moreover, understanding the root causes of our biases helps us to contextualize some of the origins for the lack of diversity, equity and inclusion in our work settings. Additionally, understanding the root causes provides us greater insight into ways we are the same, and different, our needs, experiences, and opportunities. So instead of shying away from this, one is encouraged to move toward a deeper level of awareness, even though it will be uncomfortable at times, however, it can result in a greater understanding of historically marginalized, invisible and voiceless groups. As you move toward self-awareness you will become more conscious of barriers experienced by marginalized groups as they access resources and opportunities, compared to the barriers experienced by those in privileged or advantaged groups (Saska, n.d.). Consequently, promoting the welfare of all persons requires one to not only come to terms with the history of marginalized groups, but to also understand that by improving life circumstances and being inclusive of such persons can address their individualistic and root level needs and therefore elevate them to an equitable playing field.

Developing Empathy

In the previous section, we recognized that as social and communal beings the ways in which we anticipate and match other's emotions influences how we develop a state of agreeableness with others, which can either promote or hinder human community and connection. The key to promoting a state of agreeableness is developing self-awareness skills. This entails recognizing our self-centered nature which manifests itself in varying degrees of intolerance for diversity. Part of developing self-awareness skills is the ability to recognize our innate capacity to perceive differences as threatening, as well as understanding why we have such perceptions (Larrier, 2016, Morgan, 2015).

However, as the world becomes more diverse due to the free movement of people across geographical borders, and the formation of a global village due to the rise and adoption of digital technologies, there is an urgent need to accept diversity, ensure equity, and promote inclusion.

This can be achieved by being intentionally conscious of how our Thoughts, Interactions, Mindsets, and Emotions (TIME®) overtly and covertly circumvent our capacity to forge and maintain healthy relationships with others who we perceive as being different from ourselves. This intentionality is foundational for social emotional education to occur and by extension social emotional wellness as an outgrowth. Therefore, this section will focus on the Manage and Express plots of the RUMERTIME Process®, which will move you closer to developing social emotional competence by detailing how you can promote conscious living and intra- and interpersonal balance through self and relationship management and as well as the development of social awareness skills.

Manage (Self & Relationship Management Skills)

Within the context of social emotional wellness, Manage is associated with the development of self-management and relationship management skills to address one's TIME. This is grounded in the understanding that thoughts are at the foundation of interactions and emotions, while dominant and recurring thoughts result in the formation of mindsets (Larrier, 2016). Finally, your thoughts inform the expression of your emotions, therefore, what you are thinking is linked to the emotion you are feeling. For instance, being from a majority group can reinforce the thinking that one is superior to others which influences how one behaves around others such as "talking over" the perceived 'inferior' persons. When this continues unchecked or unchallenged, it results in the 'inferior' person having no right to correct or question another's judgment, and when this happens, it results in feelings of anger and/or defensiveness on the part of the majority group person. In such a scenario, this hinders the formation of community and connection with people from other groups that one may perceive as 'inferior' in comparison.

However, from the acquired self-awareness of the Recognize and Understand plots, it is possible to call oneself out on unhealthy thinking patterns and inculcate some degree of open-mindedness by engaging oneself and others. That is, monitoring how one thinks about others and situations in relation to oneself, how one treats others and reacts to situations, how one's attitudes about themselves and others contribute to their approach to situations, and finally, how one feels about themselves and others in different situations. Self-management and relationship management skills encompasses using one's awareness of their TIME to consciously determine what to say or do to positively direct one's behavior. Collectively, the aim of both self- and relationship- management is to create and fortify bonds so that everyone feels heard, understood, and valued, which is central to the acceptance of diversity, ensuring equity, and promoting inclusion.

Since societal development starts at the individual level and then permeates to the communal level, the capacity to ensure and promote community and connection should also be understood on the same plane. Therefore, by managing one's TIME, one acquires self-discipline, self-motivation, and impulse control; whilst advancing goal setting and stress management as related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). From the example outlined earlier, self-awareness contributes to recognizing and understanding that they are in a privileged position. Under the Manage plot, such an individual can effectively manage their TIME to ensure they do not approach situations from a position of privilege. In this way, such an individual will be successful in forging and maintaining healthy relationships with others, communicating effectively, and managing their emotions and behaviors to solve problems related to the acceptance and promotion of DEI. Therefore, in addition to the determination of the underlying factors that cause biases that ingrain systemic, institutional, and structural oppression and racism as noted by Saska (n.d.), it is possible to challenge these factors through one's effective management of their TIME.

Express (Social-Awareness Skills)

Arguably, the Manage plot is heavily focused on self-management but prepares and primes the user for a smooth transition into the relationship management and social awareness plot. The Express plot uses a highlighter approach as it shows an alignment with an essential and common building block, empathy, without which relationship management and social awareness are nearly impossible to achieve. Social awareness is described as being other-focused which includes a state of mindfulness for other people's perspectives, culture, concerns, needs, and feelings during an interaction. As such, it involves the demonstration of empathy, compassion, care, and acceptance towards both individual and societal problems in tangible ways.

Therefore, as was with the relationship between the Recognize and Understand plots, Express is related to Manage in a similar fashion. What is that similarity? As people effectively Manage their TIME they become better equipped to Express their TIME (Larrier, 2017). What is more, through the development of social awareness, one acquires the competence to evaluate their TIME from another person's perspective which engenders empathy, and empathy is foundational to the implementation and practice of DEI.

Specifically, this plot invites one to consciously and critically evaluate their thoughts, interactions, mindsets and emotions. As such, they can embody the assertion by Gurchiek (2017) that differences are value-neutral. As people move along the continuum of self-management to social awareness, their focus and engagement evolves which helps to ensure a sense of value neutrality and community building. When this is considered within the context of DEI, it is possible to avoid the pitfall outlined by Bailey (2014) that diversity and inclusion initiatives fail because they do not address the individual-level variables to create an enabling culture. Consequently, by embedding DEI at the individual level, one is empowered to say and project the Thoughts, Interactions, Mindsets and Emotions(TIME®) that bridge the undeniable differences which promote connection and community.

Social emotional wellness is in part a journey that begins with self-awareness. Continuing on this journey, individuals need to dig deeper into their TIME® to ensure and promote DEI at the communal level. This is attained as you pursue self-management and relationship management skills through the effective and efficient managing and expressing of one's TIME®. Therefore, one becomes empowered to promote DEI by not only being aware of their own biases but also becoming disruptors to the status quo. The key antecedents of community and connection for present-day diverse families, communities, societies and institutions are grounded in the application of social emotional wellness to DEI practices.

Reflectiveness in DEI

From the previous two sections, we have outlined why and how social-emotional competence is central to the creation and maintenance of healthy relationships in diverse settings but mainly in work spaces and places. Social-emotional competence reflects one's capacity to interact, communicate, and manage emotions and behaviors to solve problems effectively. We have demonstrated how the RUMERTIME Process®, relates to social emotional wellness. Inherently, the RUMERTIME Process® promotes cultural competence and responsiveness which in turn cultivates one's ability to effectively engage with others across conspicuous differences in Thoughts, Interactions, Mindsets, and Emotions (TIME®). Starting from the Recognize and Understand plots, we learned that one's ability to be self-aware is fundamental to intra and interpersonal relationships and one's social emotional wellness. As one navigates through the five-step social-emotional problem-solving process, the ability to effectively manage self and relationships becomes central to the formation of community and connection. As one moves through this problem-solving process of rumerizing one's TIME®, it is important to pay attention to another key component of social emotional wellness and that is social awareness. As discussed in the previous section, social awareness is expressed when you are being "other-focused." It is empathy in action which is an outgrowth of all the prior plots and another building block in the formation and maintenance of healthy relationships (Morgan, 2015; GC SCORED, 2021). Notably, one's ability to live consciously and self-aware influences to some degree one's ability to be other-focused and socially aware. The RUMERTIME Process® serves as a way to enable one to consciously think about their TIME® (self-awareness) and how they covertly or overtly influence and inform their interactions (social awareness), in this case, the acceptance and promotion of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI).

Consequently, it is in this state of balance that one can consciously evaluate their TIME® to promote intra- and inter- personal balance and conscious living. As such, it can be posited that social awareness is the application of self-awareness to promote the creation and maintenance of healthy relationships. However, it is important to highlight that social emotional wellness is a journey and not a destination which supports the cyclical nature of the RUMERTIME Process® whilst also grounding the importance of the final step in the process, Reflect, which will be the focus of this section.

Reflect(Responsible Decision-Making Skills)

Defined as the ability to quietly and calmly look back and think, make known to self, and also consider choices, reflecting is associated with responsible decision making. Hence it can be posited that while the other plots created the body of social emotional wellness, reflecting brings life to that body.

The Reflect plot ties everything together as it continually motivates and prompts one to consciously evaluate how one's TIME influences self and others. The Reflect plot, the epicenter of all the prior plots, is where growth, development and social emotional wellness becomes a thoroughly conscious endeavor.

This is especially so since responsible decision-making embodies the skill of making conscious constructive choices on one's interactions across diverse settings, through the cultivation of effective Mindsets, Activities, Relationships, Knowledge, Emotions, Resources, Skills/Strategies (MARKERSTM) (GC SCORED, 2021). Therefore, it is plausible that by promoting responsible decision-making skills, individuals inter and intrapersonal skills can positively impact personal growth and development as well as help to create a psychologically safe working environment for the historically marginalized, invisible and voiceless workers. Similar to the prior plots, Reflect follows much the same pathway in how we stay conscious and solve problems in DEI practices, paradigms and policies.

While self-awareness, self-management, relationship management and social awareness skills can be seen to easily fit into the intra and interpersonal categories of the social emotional wellness matrix, responsible decision-making acts as the packaging or even the bow that gives an additional layer of meaning (or purpose) to the first four SECs (GCSCORED, 2021).

The Reflect plot is an iterative plot more so than the other four plots, in that making choices is part and parcel of every thought that you consciously choose to feed or not. You make choices in the type of interactions you decide to engage in; you make a choice regarding whether the mindset you decide to adopt in terms of who you are becoming; you choose how you respond to the emotions which are messengers or indicators. So, throughout this entire five step process, you are engaging in decision-making. Depending on where you are in these five steps your decisions or choices could be considered responsible or not responsible. As you reflect on the helpful or harmful manifestations of each of the five plots, you can become effective and efficient in making responsible decisions (GCSCORED, 2017).

In order to become an effective DEI practitioner and/or policy maker, you must commit to being reflective. From a DEI perspective, being reflective aims to help the DEI practitioner and policy-maker to systematically and consciously identify the opportunities and barriers of the daily decisions that are thrust upon them and those decisions that are inherently a part of living consciously and intentionally as they practice and implement DEI in their diverse work spaces and places. (The Cooperative Human, 2018). In this way, reflectiveness promotes effectiveness in the work spaces and social places. Therefore, as you reflect on your Thoughts, Interactions, Mindsets, and Emotions (TIME®), in relation to DEI practice and policy, it is possible to identify which element of your TIME® was helpful and which was harmful to your growth and development at the individual level as well as the communal level.

Conclusion

We are innately self-centered beings, which engenders the need for self-preservation. However, given this seemingly disadvantaged starting point, we as rational, connected and community minded beings have an intrinsic ability to consciously manage our interactions so as to produce work spaces and environments that accept diversity, ensure equity and promote inclusion. Even though we may have the best intentions to accept diversity, ensure equity and promote inclusion in our daily interactions, without a reflective mindset or attitude we may consciously and unconsciously project some discriminatory and exclusionary practices, biases and prejudices. However, by being reflective in these interactions and situations, it is possible to identify our prejudicial TIMES and by extension promote social emotional wellness. Hence, reflecting ties together all the other plots whilst promoting cyclical learning through iterative development whereby every interaction serves as an opportunity to not only learn, but also apply lessons from previous interactions. By promoting continuous learning, this creates a foundation for the development of social emotional, and cultural competence, and by extension, promotes and ensures DEI both from a personal stance, as well as a communal stance as manifested in society and institutions.

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