



Federation of International
Civil Servants' Associations

Ask the FICSA Expert

Identifying and Managing Microaggression in the Workplace

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What is Microaggression?

(The little things
that people say or
do!)

Originally coined by a Harvard Psychiatrist named Chester M. Pierce in 1970.

Was a term grounded mainly by racism in a form of insults and dismissals, which at that time geared towards Blacks from the White Americans.

Then the term extended to microaggressions against women and further to any verbal or nonverbal, intentional or unintentional hostile derogatory words to others.

What is Microaggression?

are short, everyday interactions that subtly convey negative slights and slurs to people.


most receivers of microaggressions are caught between feeling bad after confronting the aggressor and feeling regret and resentment for not doing anything at all.

some examples of microaggressions manifest in stereotyping someone or in supposed compliments and jokes that carry confusion and malice.



Question

Using the working definition: ***a statement, action, or incident regarded as an instance of indirect, subtle, or unintentional discrimination***, give one example of when you experienced microaggression in the workplace. What did you do or say? Did you think you were prepared to respond?



The three forms of microaggressions are as follows:

- **Microassaults.** This is old-fashioned discrimination such as name-calling and purposeful discriminatory actions. In this case, the remarks are often conscious and deliberate. Examples include racial slurs or displaying a swastika.
- **Microinsults.** These include subtle snubs that convey stereotyping, rudeness, and insensitivity to other people's identities and backgrounds. It is likely unknown to the microaggressor.
- **Microinvalidations.** This comes in a form of disconfirming messages. Examples include negating and dismissing someone's thoughts and feelings. For example, "I don't see color". The notion of colorblindness is a form of microinvalidation as it negates the experience and reality of people of color.

Effects of microaggression in the workplace

Contribute to a hostile and invalidating work climate

Devalue social group identities

Lower work productivity

Create physical health problems (i.e., depression, anxiety, and insomnia)

Mental health issues due to stress, low self-esteem, and emotional turmoil

4 and 5 could lead to more SHI claims and sick leaves, which impact the workload of affected teams

High employee turnover

How to prevent microaggressive behavior

Examine your beliefs, biases, prejudices,
and stereotypes

Acknowledge other people's feelings

Embrace empathy

Try not to get defensive if called out

"Do unto other what you want others do
unto you." The Golden Rule

Responding to microaggression as an employee

Pause and take a deep breath. Do not act with anger as it will not help the situation.

Decide when and if you want to respond. If it is coming from a colleague, perhaps you would want to address it.

Assume there is no malicious intent. Approach the situation with a positive attitude, and give the individual the benefit of the doubt.

Focus on the event and not the person. The goal is not to win a point or to make your colleague feel bad. It is about helping them understand how their comments or actions are hurtful.

Responding to microaggression as an employee (continued)

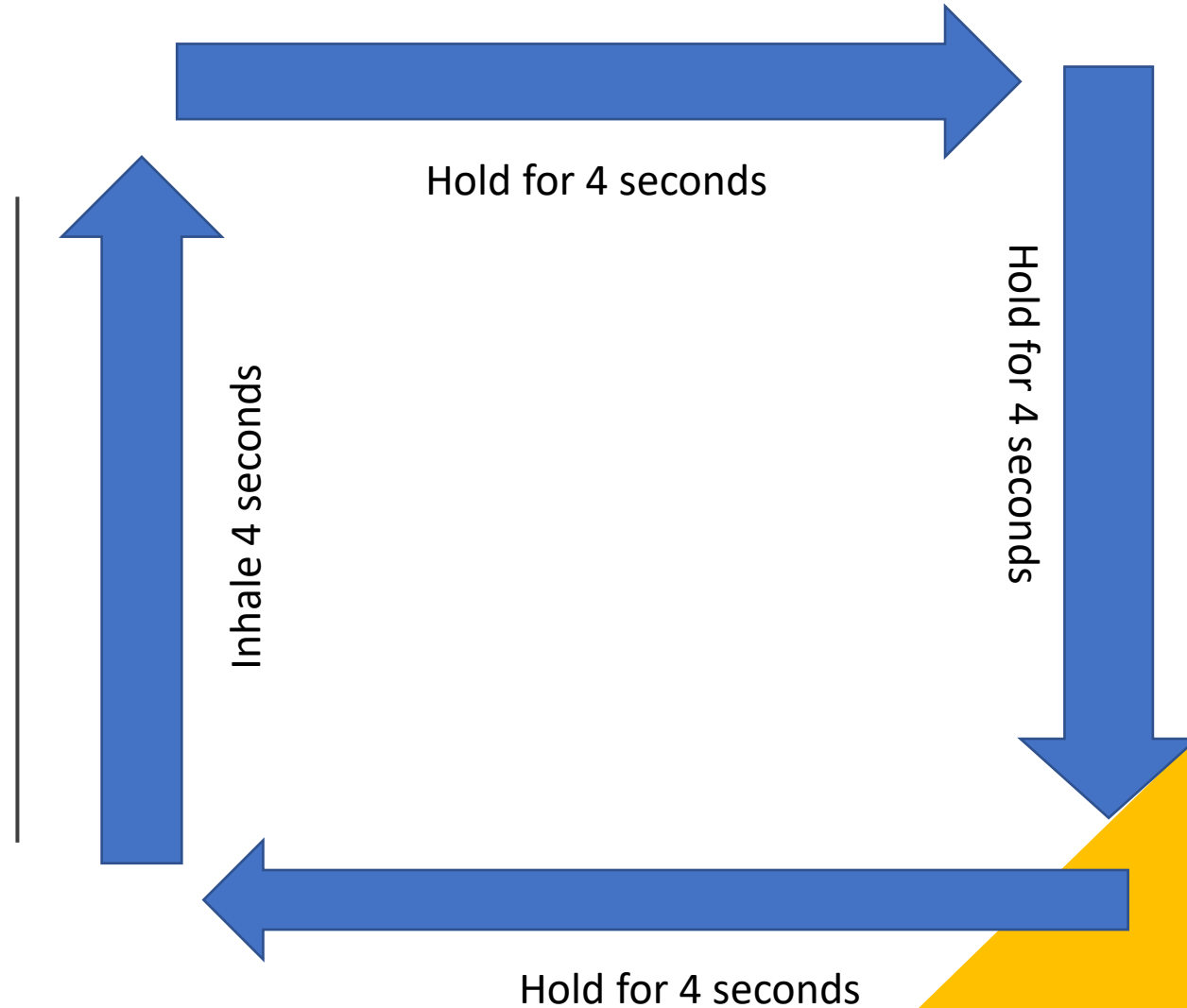
Discuss your feelings about the impact of the incident. Use emotional intelligence to help diffuse the situation. Try to understand the situation, and be empathetic.

Actively listen.

Document the incident(s). If this behavior becomes a pattern, you may have to take formal action. HR, Ethics, SA, and Ombuds may request specifics (date, time) of each incident.

If you choose not to address the interaction directly, you should process your experience with an ally, who will help validate your experience. Or do something creative to express your feelings about the experience (i.e., write your feelings in a journal).

EXERCISE:
Box
Breathing





Calling in & Calling out





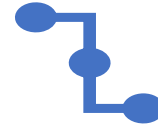
Calling in



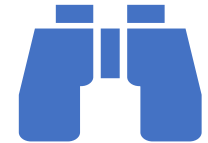
When we focus on reflection, not reaction



When we are seeking to understand or learn more



When there is an opportunity to explore deeper and to find a mutual sense of understanding across difference



When we want to help imagine different perspectives, possibilities, or outcomes and encourage paradigm shift

Calling in Examples

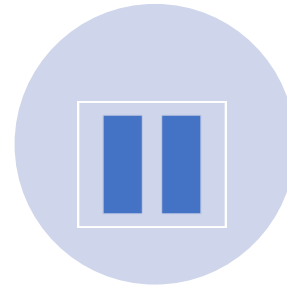
- "I'm curious. What was your intention when you said that?"
- "How might the impact of your words or actions differ from your intent?"
- "How might someone else see this differently? Is it possible that someone else might misinterpret your words/actions?"
- "Why do you think that is the case? Why do you believe that to be true?"
- "What is making you the most fearful, nervous, uncomfortable, or worried?"



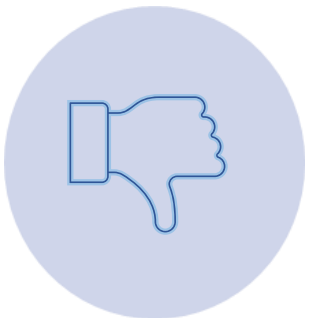
Calling Out



When we need to let someone know that their words or actions are unacceptable and will not be tolerated.



When we need to interrupt and hit the pause to prevent further harm.



When Previous attempts of calling in have failed.



Will likely feel hard and uncomfortable, but necessary.

Calling out Examples

- “That’s not our culture here. Those aren’t our values.”
- “I don’t find that funny. Tell me why that’s funny to you.”
- “It sounded like you said _____. Is that what you really meant?”
- “I need you to know how your comment just landed on me.” “It sounds like you’re making some assumptions that we need to unpack a bit.”

When you are called in or called out



Pause - take a breath. Ground yourself to receive what they have to say.



Listen - with the intent of learning and seeing things from their point of view.



Acknowledge - take responsibility for the impact of your words or actions.



Reflect - process your thoughts and emotions.



Repair the harm done.



Don't beat yourself up or go on a shame spiral.

What about if you were a witness to a microaggression?

01

Intervene if safe to do so.
Examples of what can be said:
“That’s inappropriate,” “That’s
homophobic,” “That’s
disrespectful,” “That’s racist,”
“That’s not okay,” “That’s
harassment,” etc.

02

Ask the person who
experienced the
microaggression if they are
fine and if they need help.

03

Document. Write down what
you witnessed by describing
the situation, people involved,
what was said by whom, date,
and time, etc. Email your
contemporaneous notes to the
person who experienced the
microaggression.

Coping with microaggressions



The End

Thank you!!

