STRATEGIES AND TOOLS AGAINST MICRO-AGGRESSION

GUIDE

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Inhalt

CHAPTER 1: WHAT IS MICRO-AGGRESSION?

1.1 OBJECTIVES OF THIS CHAPTER

Imagine walking down the street and getting punched in the face. Whether you did something previous to provoke that or not at all, that's obviously major aggressive behaviour right? This type of aggression is easy to recognize, and also easy to condemn. People around you will probably be shocked, get scared, or try to intervene. In any case, the person hitting you is definitely the aggressor, and you are the victim.

Now imagine walking down the street and as you walk by, people suddenly clasp their purse or check if their phone is still in their pocket. We probably wouldn't call that aggression as easily and quickly as the example before. People around you, and maybe even the people doing it themselves, probably won't even notice. Yet, just as the earlier example, this can also be classified as a type of aggressive behaviour, which we would call *micro-aggression*.

Still today, not many people know about micro-aggression, let alone recognize it in every situation. While at the same time it is present in everyone's everyday life, whether you have been a victim of micro-aggression, behaved in a micro-aggressive manner yourself, or both. The purpose of this chapter is to help you understand what micro-aggression is exactly, how to recognize it and explain why it is harmful.

1.2 WHAT IS MICRO AGGRESSION AND HOW TO RECOGNIZE IT

1.2.1 The Definition Of Micro-Aggression

Whereas punching someone in the face is an obvious example of aggression, some types of aggression such as micro-aggression are more subtle and therefore harder to recognize. Yet, the impact of micro-aggression is just as real and harmful. As the term describes, it's being aggressive, but in a subtle 'small' manner.

People in the field of researching micro-aggression tend to use slightly different definitions, however, all definitions at least contain the following aspects:

> I. *Every day, casual and/or subtle remarks, questions, actions or environmental factors*
> II. *that are painful because they have to do with a person's (voluntary or involuntary) membership of a group that's discriminated against or subject to stereotypes*
> III. *often -but not exclusively- without any harm intended*

The first aspect (I) considers what form micro-aggressions can have (what does it look like?). You will read more about this in paragraph 2.1

The second aspect (II) explains who can be affected by micro-aggressions. You will read more about this in paragraph 2.2

The third and last aspect (III) tells us more about the aggressors of micro-aggression. Who or what can be micro-aggressive and why?

1.2.2   Aspect I – Forms Of Micro-Aggression
'Every day, casual and/or subtle remarks, questions, actions or environmental factors'

Maybe the most important thing that sets micro-aggression apart from other types of aggression is that it's 'small', subtle, and even casual. It could be a minor change in you facial expression, an automatic act or a sentence that you didn't even think twice about saying, but do have a forceful attacking (aggressive) impact on the person on the other side.

Aggression in general can present itself in different forms. For example, you can be physically aggressive by punching someone, but you can also be verbally aggressive by threatening or name calling. The same goes for micro-aggression, as we can see in the definition. There are roughly three forms in which micro-aggression can present itself:

- Communicational (either verbal or non-verbal); meaning you say something verbally or communicate something in a non-verbal way (e.g. with facial expressions or hand movements)
- Behavioural; meaning you act in a certain way without necessarily wanting to communicate to other people
- Environmental; meaning someway the external environment or space is shaped or formed

To illustrate this, take a look at different examples for the different forms from our catalogue for each form of micro-aggression.

Stating that it is weird to see a male nurse at the hospital is a **communicational** form of micro-aggression because you communicate something to that person, with the underlying message that men are not or should not be able to be doing this kind of jobs. This is based on the underlying prejudice that gender roles are restrictive when it comes to your vocation. Another example of a communicational but more non-verbal micro-aggression is eye-rolling or generally not paying attention when female colleagues contribute something to a business meeting. The underlying prejudice being an assumption of incompetence based on gender.

Behavioural forms of micro-aggression differ from communicational because the micro aggressive person does not wish to communicate something to the other person, however, by behaving in a certain noticeable way, the person still does. For example, a store manager following around a person of color in a store might sends across the message that this person of color cannot be trusted,

based on an assumption of criminality. It may not have been the intention to let the person of color notice, but the behaviour itself is of course very noticeable and still sends a message across.

Lastly, an office building explicitly only accommodating for female and male toilets, is an example of **environmental** micro-aggression. It conveys the message that people who do not identify as either male of female either do not exist or are not important, based on the underlying prejudice that gender is limited to two options only. In the case of environmental micro-aggressions there is not one specific person in one specific moment the cause of the micro-aggression; rather, it happens on a more institutional level.

This brings us to the point that, apart from the different forms, micro-aggression also presents itself at different levels. The most obvious level is that an individual can be micro-aggressive towards another individual in one-on-one encounters. Communicational and behavioural micro-aggressions are mostly on this individual level.

But on another level, also institutions and society can be micro-aggressive. These are the environmental micro-aggressions. If we look at the example of the toilets in a building, there is no specific individual responsible for this situation.

Naturally, micro-aggression on an individual level requires a different response and solution as micro-aggression on a more institutional level.

1.2.3   Aspect II – Who Is Affected By Micro-Aggression?

'painful because they have to do with a person's (voluntary or involuntary) membership of a group that's discriminated against or subject to stereotypes'

Any group or individual can potentially be micro-aggressive or harmed by micro-aggression. Most people are probably both in different situations. What sets micro-aggression apart from a 'regular' insult, is that micro-aggression is always related to someone's membership of a certain group. Examples can be (but are not limited to):

- Gender
- Race
- Skin color
- Body image
- Language
- Religion or ideology
- Nationality
- Ethnic origin
- Physical or mental disability
- Age
- Sexual orientation

Each of these groups encounters their own kinds of micro-aggression, depending on the prejudices and biases that exist about these groups. In our catalogue we provide examples of different forms of micro-aggression for each of these groups. [1]

People always belong to different groups at the same time. For example, you can identify as a woman, have homosexuality as your sexual orientation and be a person of color. For each of these groups there are certain prejudices and biases that can lead to micro-aggression. This cross-over of different groups and identities is what we call internationality.

Although any group can potentially be harmed by micro-aggression, often the most painful and harmful ones are likely to occur between those who hold power and those who are most disempowered. For example in our western society, a man being micro-aggressive towards a woman about gender roles, or a white person being micro-aggressive towards a person of color about skin color or race.

1.2.4   Aspect III – Who Is Micro-Aggressive?

'often -but not exclusively- without any harm intended'

The last important aspect of micro-aggression is that it is a type of aggression that is not necessarily with the intention to harm. This makes micro-aggression difficult to grasp.

More straightforward physical aggression such as punching someone will always be with the intention to harm someone. However, for micro-aggression, this is not the case. To illustrate this, let's look at another example: women often get jokes that they belong in the kitchen and not at work.[2] This can be a casual 'joke' someone makes, with the purpose of it being humorous. Malicious people can still have the intention to harm the other person with this remark, but that isn't necessary in order for it to be micro-aggressive.

Micro-aggression can even be presented as a compliment, for example telling someone they speak the language so well for someone from a different ethnic background than the norm. While someone could've genuinely be positively surprised by this, the remark is again related to prejudices about a certain group, an ethnic minority in this case.

Since the statement or act is related to the underlying prejudices about a group that is generally disempowered in this context, there is harm either way, whether intended or not. The situation reinforces underlying prejudices and suggests it is ok to keep those prejudices in place.

This aspect of micro-aggression probably makes all of us guilty of micro-aggression once in a while. That doesn't mean we are all terrible sexist, racist, you-name-it people. It does mean that there is room for improvement by creating awareness of this phenomenon and its effect on people.

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[1] Refer to catalogue
[2] Refer to catalogue

1.2.5   Harmful Impact Of Micro-Aggression

So far we have explained the general definition of micro-aggression and illustrated this with some examples. This showed that micro-aggression is something of everyday life and often very subtle with no harm intended. Considering this, is micro-aggression really that harmful? If the remarks or acts are subtle, and no harm is intended, why should it be such a big problem? Aren't we over reacting?

The problem with micro-aggressions is that they never stand alone. Micro-aggression is a constant, continuing and cumulative experience. This YouTube video[3] makes a striking comparison between micro-aggression and mosquito bites:

If one person gets one mosquito bite every year, no one would feel bad for the person. It's just part of life. However, if a certain group of people constantly get multiple mosquito bites every day of every year of their life that becomes a problem. It becomes a problem because it has such a big presence in your life that it can't be ignored. We would most definitely go look for solutions or ways to prevent this.

The same goes for micro-aggression. If a person gets a remark based on a prejudice about a group they belong to once a year, it's probably easy to ignore and will not have a big effect on your life. However, micro-aggression describes the situation in which a certain group of people constantly get the same kinds of remarks based on the same prejudices all the time. In this case, the cumulative effect of all those remarks, become a problem which we should try to prevent.

1.3   HATE SPEECH, MICRO-AGGRESSION AND POLITICAL CORRECTNESS

1.3.1   An Introduction on Hate Speech

As described before, micro-aggression can be a form of verbal discrimination (among other appearances. However, not all micro-aggression is verbal discrimination and likewise, not all verbal discrimination should be considered a micro-aggression. Hate speech is another example of verbal discrimination, previously defined in the Erasmus+-project Arguments Against Aggression[4] as:
''Hate speech is violence that is spread through language, word and images, both online and offline. Hate speech targets entire groups that are excluded with hatred in 'real-life' and on the internet. Hate speech insults, threatens and despises people because of their origin, faith, gender or sexual orientation. On social networks, hate speech creates a hostile climate that can also trigger acts of violence in real life.''

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[3] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hDd3bzA7450
[4] https://www.contra-aggression.eu

Then the project goes on to identify several criteria for Hate Speech. They state that identification of statements as being Hate Speech is difficult, because this type of language does not necessarily appear directly as hatred or emotions. Hate Speech can also be hidden in statements that at first glance seem normal or rational. The concept of Hate Speech encompasses a multiplicity of situations:

- Incitement of racial hatred or in other words, hatred directed against persons of groups of persons on the grounds of belonging to a race;
- Incitement to hatred on religious grounds, to which may be equated incitement to hatred based on a distinction between believers and non-believers;
- Incitement to other forms of hatred based on intolerance expressed by aggressive nationalism and ethnocentrism;
- Homophobic speech also falls into what can be considered a category of 'hate speech'.

1.3.2   Micro-Aggression And Human Rights

The trouble with human rights and hate speech is that often, conflicting human rights are at stake. For micro-aggression, it can be considered the same. Again and again we have to balance and weigh which conflicting human rights prevail in each specific case. For example, our right to freedom of speech can be in conflict with the right to freedom of religion or faith. Or a right to freedom of speech in conflict with the right to education. More fundamentally, there is a grey area between the right to freedom of speech and the prohibition of all forms of discrimination or abuse of freedom for spreading hate.

So for every case we have to decide which right prevails and is 'more important' in this specific case. Eventually in our society a judge decides. But what a judge decides is influenced by the public and political debate as they are an indicator for how the society handles micro-aggression and hate speech.

1.3.3   Online Versus 'In Real Live'

Hate Speech and micro-aggression online can by no means be seen detached from 'real' life. Because people experience a certain level of anonymity when being online, a kind of disinhibition effect can be observed on the Internet. Opinions or statements that in real life are often only openly represented by a small group, are published online with only a few clicks away and thus find a big stage on the Internet. Behind them are often extremist people who use the possibilities of the internet for their propaganda. The lack of a direct counterpart, the opportunity to remain anonymous and the knowledge that they are hardly ever held accountable all further contribute to this disinhibition.

CHAPTER 2: TAXONOMY OF MICRO-AGGRESSIONS

2.1   OBJECTIVES OF THIS CHAPTER

To inherit of the unconscious and unintentional biases (prejudices, stereotypes, and beliefs) from parents, grandparents or relatives are common in the society. They are sometimes minimized as simple cultural missteps or faux pas. You might know them better by colloquial definitions, "insensitive statement" or "dumb things people say." Usually they're aimed toward minority groups: "You don't sound black," or "You're Asian, so you must be good at math." The idea is that it's hard to face a steady stream of dismissive language, from people who don't realize they're doing harm but get defensive if they're called out.

A **micro-aggression** is a comment or action that negatively targets a marginalized person or group. A micro-aggression can be intentional or accidental. It is a form of discrimination.

Biases and prejudices might be expressed consciously, unconsciously or on the margins of consciousness. People who engage in micro-aggressions may mean no harm toward the person or group being targeted. They may not even realize that they are making a micro-aggressive comment or action. Regardless, micro-aggressions can be very hurtful to the people who experience them.

Conscious and deliberate bigots are those, who are aware of their racial, gender or other groups inferiority and who discriminate when there is opportunity. On the other hand, subtle and unintentional biases or forms of discrimination might be more harmful, because of its higher frequency.

Closely recognized are also **micro-inequities**: the patterns of being overlooked, under respected and devalued because of one´s race or gender. Usually it is about: subtle snubs, unnamed, and nebulous nature of aggressions, dismissive looks, gestures, or tones.

Scientists indicated significant associations between experiencing micro-aggressions, and higher levels of depression, anxiety, increased substance use, delinquency, posttraumatic stress disorder, impaired psychological well-being, decreased self-esteem and decreased academic success. In this chapter we will more fully describe several forms of micro-aggressive behaviours and mechanisms by which are they delivered.

2.2   FORMS AND TYPES OF MICRO-AGGRESSIONS

To avoid the micro-aggression, good intercultural communication is needed. It is important for people who are members of dominant cultural groups to not only understand what they are trying to communicate, but also the cultural context. If person is unable to minimize real intercultural conflict

by coming to terms with personal bias, and countering aggressive exchanges against individuals or marginalized groups, it results in the following types of micro-aggressions.

Micro-assaults – are conscious, deliberate and either subtle or explicit racial, gender or sexual-orientation biased attitudes, or behaviours that are communicated to marginalized groups through environmental cues, verbalizations, or behaviours. They attack the group identity of the person or harm the intended victim through name-calling, avoidant behaviour, or purposeful discriminatory actions. For example, if someone is telling a racist joke, then saying, "I was just joking." Micro-assaults are done in order to threat, intimidate or inflict the feel of unwanted.

Micro-insults – are characterized by interpersonal, or environmental communications that convey stereotypes, rudeness, and insensitivity and that demean a person´s racial, gender, or sexual orientation, heritage, or identity. Microinsults represent subtle snubs, frequently outside the conscious awareness of the perpetrator, but they convey an oftentimes hidden insulting message to the recipient marginalized groups.

Saying to a doctor from Middle Asia country: "Your people must be so proud of you" is an example of microinsult.

Micro-invalidations – communications or environmental cues that exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of certain group (people of colour, LGBTS, women). They may potentially represent the most damaging form of the three micro-aggressions, because they directly and insidiously deny the racial, cultural, gender or sexual-orientation reality of these groups.

For example, when white person would be telling the person of colour: "Racism does not exist in today´s society". This is the denial of the reality in which we are living.

The mechanism by which is micro-aggression delivered may go in several ways: interactional (**verbal, nonverbal**), **behavioural** or in **environmental** form.

Verbal and non-verbal micro-aggressions – purposeful and deliberate communications that are meant to cause long-term debilitating and depressing effects in the victim. Categories, in which verbal and non-verbal micro-aggressions are manifested, are: facial expressions; body language; avoidance; ignorance; distancing; pathologizing minority culture or appearance; assumptions about intelligence, competence, status; colour blindness; dangerousness; denial of racism; assumptions of abnormality (LGBT); gender roles prejudicing or stereotyping; sexual objectification; assumptions of criminal status; use of sexist language; behaviour as to second-class citizens; myth of meritocracy (achieving upward social status through one's own merits regardless of one's social position).

For example, verbal micro-aggression is saying: "You are so smart for a girl." On the other hand, non-verbal micro-aggression could be rolling eyes *only* when woman co-worker speaks during meeting.

Behavioural micro-aggressions – everyday, casual and/or subtle types of (non-communicational) action that are painful because they involves behaving in a way that is hurtful or discriminatory to a marginalized person or group.

For example, when a waiter or bartender ignores a person of colour and instead serves a white person - someone whose appearance matches their identity. Or excluding a co-worker with a disability from an after-work event due to the assumption that they aren't capable of participating. Or an empty seat on crowded train next to person of colour.

Environmental micro-aggressions refer to the demeaning and threatening social, educational, heritage, historical, political or economic cues that are communicated individual, institutionally or societally to marginalized groups (all deans are men and white - excluding women or people of colour from executive positions; or exclusion of Roma language literature in library, although literature in the language of other nationalities in the country is represented). Environmental exclusion is one time of micro-aggression. For example, if someone´s racial identity is minimized or made insignificant by excluding decorations, literature, or depictions of people that represent their racial group.

Usually, the perpetrators are making micro-aggressive remarks or behaviours when they feel some degree of anonymity and their action can be concealed. Also, when they feel safe such as in the presence of the people who share their beliefs and attitudes. People who hold notions of minority inferiority will usually display their biases when they lose control.

2.3   RECOGNIZING AND DECONSTRUCTING HIDDEN MICRO-AGGRESSIVE MESSAGES

The nature of the aggressive messages is invisible and every day. Micro-aggressions are continuing reality for people of colour, women, LGBT, or other marginalized groups. Most people can recognize, define and condemn explicit forms of bias and discrimination. However, the "invisible" manifestations of aggression are not under conscious control and awareness, so they occur spontaneously without checks in social, personal or work-related interactions. The micro-aggressions can occur in variety of relations: employer-employee, neighbours, co-workers, family members, teacher-student.

To recognize them, we need to understand how they manifest themselves and what is their impact. That is fundamental for intervention. The manifestation of micro-aggression is dynamic with very real personal consequences which can only be mitigated if they are recognised in their interactional or environmental form.

Recognition of the micro-aggression is possible in two situations: as an **observer** between two parties, or if you are involved in as a **recipient or perpetrator**.

If you recognize micro-aggressive behaviour as an **observer**, you may ask yourself: "Should I intervene? If I do, what is the appropriate way to do so? What are the consequences if I take action?"

For example, if you decide to intervene, when you see micro-aggression unfolding, you might consider stepping in with words: "What makes you say that? Or I don´t get the joke. Can you explain it to me? Or you can consider approaching the perpetrator later.

If you are **delivering micro-aggression**, or **you are a target**, it is important that you recognize it.

Deconstructing the meaning of micro-aggression is another challenging step. Only when person is aware of biases, she/he can act, to learn how to react and how to frame the communication so participants can feel empowered and not victimized. It is possible to sensitized yourself by practicing of empathetic listening (more in chapter 4) or by seeking to become more self-aware in the moment.

If you are approached by a person who is hurt or concerned about something you have said, it is important **not to react in defence**. It is difficult to accept criticism, even more when you are criticized about something you are unaware of. Probably it was not your intention to cause pain or offend someone.

So, try to **listen and be empathetic**. Avoid saying "I did not mean that" or "I was saying joke". Do not try to invalidate the feelings of another person. Regardless your intention, acknowledge verbally that you heard what other was saying in the way: "I have heard you and I can feel your pain and my future self will act more thoughtfully, because you have shared with me this." Apologize, but do not expect the forgiveness. If the relationship between you and hurt person allows, you can consider asking more questions, and untangle other verbal or nonverbal micro-aggression you are prone to do.

It is important also not to wallow in guilt, rather to start to **educate** yourself about unconscious biases from books, podcasts, movies or other channels. Ask yourself what kind of environment you grew up in and whether you have inherited any prejudices and biases against any group of people. It is important to be aware of them in order to be able to detect your tendency to make some hurtful comment. Self-monitoring, allowing the possibility that you have acted in bias are crucial to recognize such behaviour. Also, when you sensitise yourself, you can start to raise awareness about micro-aggressions within your working environment, or friends and family.

Chapter 3: Psychological Dilemmas And Dynamics Of Microaggressions

3.1 Psychological Dilemmas And Dynamics Of Micro-aggressions

3.1.1 Introduction

Nowadays, most people have either experienced or witnessed some kind of micro-aggressive behaviour, which made both them and the other people around them feel uncomfortable, awkward and, in many cases, unsure whether they should react or not. The psychological dilemmas the present for both recipients and perpetrators and the internal and interpersonal dynamics have been an understudied phenomenon.

People who have been victimised by micro-aggressive behaviour have felt even worse by other people's comments towards micro-aggression, like for example, 'Get over it' or 'I am sure she didn't mean it this way'. Such comments are in fact micro-aggressive, even aggressive, themselves. They show, for example, colour blindness, questioning of judgement, denial of disability or personal identity, which fall in the category of micro-aggression, thus creating a vicious circle and make victims of micro-aggression question themselves, their experiences and their emotions, as well as their beliefs, values and ideas, and lead to low self-esteem, self-confidence and self-value.

3.1.2 Psychological Factors Contributing in Micro-aggressions

Micro-aggressions are often rooted in implicit biases and stereotypes individuals hold about marginalized groups. Various psychological factors can shape these biases, including socialization, media portrayals, and personal experiences.

The tendency to categorize and stereotype individuals based on their group membership is a natural cognitive process that helps us navigate the world. However, it can also lead to biases and prejudices. For example, an individual might assume that a person of a certain race is less intelligent or less competent based on stereotypes they have internalized. Stereotyping involves seeing someone primarily as a member of a group as opposed to an individual and assuming that the person shares all social, cultural, and behavioural traits with others in that group. Stereotype threat occurs across racial identity, gender, sexuality, age, disability, and even ethnicity and religion.

Another psychological factor that can contribute to micro-aggressions is the "ingroup bias," which refers to the tendency to favour and feel more positively toward members of one's group. This bias can lead individuals to make negative assumptions about individuals from different groups and to mistreat them.

Socialization also plays a role in the development of micro-aggressions. People are often socialized into certain attitudes and beliefs about marginalized groups through their families, peers, and broader cultural messages. For example, someone who grows up in a family that makes derogatory

comments about immigrants may be more likely to engage in micro-aggressive behaviours toward people from immigrant backgrounds.

Finally, personal experiences can shape an individual's attitudes and behaviours toward marginalized groups. Negative experiences with individuals from certain groups can lead to biases and prejudices, even if these experiences do not represent the group.

Overall, the psychological factors that contribute to micro-aggressions are complex and multifaceted. Understanding these factors can help individuals and organizations take steps to reduce micro-aggressive behaviour and create more inclusive environments.

3.1.3   Psychological Dilemmas of Micro-Aggressions

According to Sue et al. (2007), there are some psychological dilemmas regarding micro-aggressions. Firstly, the clash of racial realities which implies that the racial realities of people differ. Black Americans, for example, perceive racism as a continuing reality, while White Americans minimize its impact.

In addition, when marginalized groups attempt to discuss the harmful impacts of micro-aggressions, they often encounter the psychological dilemma of perception of minimal harm from micro-aggressions, because micro-aggression incidents may appear innocent.

Another major psychological dilemma is regarding the invisibility of unintentional biases. Individuals may have unconscious and biased attitudes and beliefs directed at specific groups which are expressed in unintentionally biased behaviour. As a result, it is difficult to make the perpetrators recognize that their actions may have been influenced by prejudice and unconscious attitudes and beliefs.

Finally, there is the catch-22 of responding to micro-aggressions dilemma. A micro-aggression incident can raise many questions for the recipient. Micro-aggressions result in attributional ambiguity, which drains psychological energy in trying to identify the truth (the incident was intentional or not? it actually occurred?), protect oneself and decide how to respond. This takes away the attention from the surrounding environment, and can harm victims' productivity, their abilities to solve problems, and their ability to learn.

When "double messages" are sent, attribution ambiguity causes significant energy depletion for marginalized populations. It can occur when the sender's actions affect only people from marginalized groups but can be considered rational and unbiased from their perspective.

Additionally, the recipient may experience complex effects if they decide to respond to potential micro-aggression. Generally, people do nothing in response to micro-aggressions because of the following reasons:

1. Attributional ambiguity — inability to determine whether a micro-aggression has occurred.

2. Response indecision — not knowing the best way or how to respond.

3. Time-limited responding — the incident is over before a response can be made.

4. Denying experiential reality — engaging in self-deception by believing it did not happen: Self-deception may occur due to an interdependent or close relationship with the offender or from a fear of acknowledging what the micro-aggression may say about them.

5. Impotency of actions — "It won' t do any good, anyway.": An assumption that one's actions will have a minimal positive impact on the situation. There may be a feeling of powerlessness, helplessness, and hopelessness.

6. Fearing the consequences — interpersonal power differentials determine degree of threat: The individual evaluates the benefits of action versus the threats (negative personal effects). Marginalized groups are more likely to fear the consequences of reacting to micro-aggressions.

Considering the above points, marginalized individuals are justified in refusing to respond to micro-aggressions. However, this decision may result harm, including loss of integrity, self-esteem, and anger. In addition, taking action may also carry risks that lead directly into the catch-22. Stereotypes may be triggered when confronting the perpetrator, such as describing African Americans, for example, as angry, oversensitive, and paranoid. That means that as long as micro-aggressions remain invisible to the aggressor, marginalized individuals are at risk whether they take action or not!

3.2   MODELS OF STRESS AND MICRO-AGGRESSIVE STRESSORS

3.2.1   The Life-Change Model of Stress

Any life change, even positive changes, can have a detrimental impact on health. The life-change model assumes that all changes in a person's life – large or small, desirable or undesirable – can act as stressors, and that the accumulation of several small changes can be as powerful as one major change. Stressful life events do play some part in producing physical and psychological illness for many people.

Personal characteristics can also modify the impact of the life changes on our health. Many people have illnesses that do not seem to be preceded by identifiable stressors, and others undergo stress but do not seem to get sick. Thus, micro-aggression is likely to act either as a stressor that can be recognised and addressed, or as a silent stressor, with major health effects nevertheless.

3.2.2   The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, suggest that stress is a dynamic transaction between a person and their environment that is judged to be personally significant and to exceed coping ability (Folkman, 2020).

Cognitive appraisal and coping are the two main features of the theory. Primary Appraisal is answering the questions 'What does this mean to me personally? What will be the impact of this on my well-being?', and can be influenced by people's values, goals, and beliefs. There are three types of primary appraisals: irrelevant (doesn't have impact), benign-positive (positively impacts), and stressful. Stress appraisals can signify harm or loss (already suffered some damage), threat (harm is anticipated) and challenge (possibility of gain or mastery) (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p.32-33, Lazarus & Folkman, 1987).

The secondary appraisal is activated if the person perceives the situation as stressful and answers, ' Do I have the capacity to deal with this?' (Biggs, Brough, & Drummond, 2017).

Coping happens when an event is deemed stressful (primary appraisal) and needs to be managed or resolved (secondary appraisal). The two types of coping strategies are problem-focused and emotion-focused. A problem-focused strategy aims to control or resolve the problem, whereas an emotion-focused strategy seeks to regulate emotions coming from a stressful situation. Problem-focused strategies include gathering information and developing an action plan. Emotion-focused strategies include avoidance and minimization. Several factors, like circumstances and personal characteristics, determine a person's strategy choice (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 150-151).

The outcome of coping efforts, accompanied by new information from the environment, results in cognitive reappraisal. It's the process of reappraising the situation to determine whether coping efforts have been effective or if the situation has changed from stressful to irrelevant or benign-positive.

3.2.3   Biological, Psychological and Social Stressors

Micro-aggression can be found in every aspect of everyday life, and is usually hidden in 'simple' words or phrases that can in fact be really stressful and difficult to handle. Some examples of micro-aggressive stressors are the following:

- **'So, you have never drunk alcohol in your life? Like, never?'** (biological and social stress, especially if the person decides to try alcohol to fit in a social group)

- **'When you say you are a vegetarian/ vegan, you mean that you do not even eat eggs/ cheese? How can you live without them?'** (in general, assuming that a person who doesn't drink or eat something specific is automatically problematic is an example of severe micro-aggression and can act like a biological, psychological and social stressor)

- (To a female of a Persian origin) '**So, I assume that your favourite Disney princess is Jasmin?'** or **'Come on, do some belly-dancing for me'** (biological and psychological stress)

- (To a person from Africa) **'Do you have cars in your country or do you ride horses/ camels?'** (social stress)

- **Automatically assuming that a person born in Africa or Asia and living in Europe is a refugee** (psychological and social stress)

- **Security guards at the airport being suspicious towards a bearded person of Arabic origin, asking too many questions, assuming they are a terrorist** (biological and psychological stress)

As mentioned above, constant exposure to such micro-aggressive comments can result in a host of mental health concerns including things like increased anxiety and symptoms of depression.

3.3   EFFECTS OF MICRO-AGGRESSIVE STRESS

3.3.1   Micro-Aggressive Harm

In the long term, micro-aggression can make victims grow an aggressive behaviour themselves, as a defence mechanism and a means to respond to stress.

In many cases, when micro-aggression is related to a person's body image, that person is likely to make drastic changes in order to fit in existing stereotypes and follow the fashion trends, from making a hair bun in order not to look too 'Afro-style' to following exhaustive diets, suffering from eating disorders, or even going through plastic surgery.

3.3.2   Physical Health Effects of Micro-Aggressive Stress

Being victimised by micro-aggressive behaviour is likely to contribute to poor health among minorities and people of colour and can lead even to heart disease and type-2 diabetes. Also, they can cause digestive issues which can lead to reflux disease or other conditions.

In cases when micro-aggression is constantly repeated, the victims may experience headaches, high blood pressure, and difficulties with sleep.

3.3.3   Psychological Health Effects of Micro-Aggressive Stress

Micro-aggressions exclude, negate, or nullify the psychological thoughts, feelings, or experiential reality of a person or group. They can make victims feel like they are being mistreated or excluded.

The psychological dilemmas which create, can lead to increased levels of racial anger, mistrust, and loss of self-esteem. Racism and discrimination result increased rates of depression, prolonged stress, trauma, and anxiety.

Over time micro-aggressions create inner conflict and chronic stress. Those who experience micro-aggression might feel tension which leads to physical tightness, and anxiousness. They can often deal with confusion, anger, anxiety, helplessness, hopelessness, frustration, paranoia and fear which lead to negative coping mechanisms, such as denial, substance abuse and withdrawal. In conclusion, being a victim (or a witness) of micro-aggressive behaviour can lead to trauma, anxiety and depression symptoms, as well as social phobias and anti-social behaviour.

3.3.4   Cognitive Effects of Micro-Aggressive Stress

Chronic exposure to micro-aggressions can lead to chronic stress, which has been linked to cognitive decline and an increased risk of dementia. This is because prolonged exposure to stress hormones can damage brain cells and disrupt the connections between them.

Moreover, the cognitive effects of micro-aggressive stressors are compounded by the fact that they often occur in contexts of structural inequality, such as racism, sexism, or homophobia. This means that individuals who are already marginalized and facing systemic barriers may be further disadvantaged by the cognitive effects of micro-aggressive stressors.

3.4   Micro-Aggressive Perpetrators

3.4.1   Micro-Aggressive Statements

Some population groups are more likely to be victimised, such as women, people of colour and migrants they are ubiquitous across daily work and life, while there are many stereotypes related to gender or race, for example, which act as perpetrators of micro-aggression.

Here are a few seemingly innocuous statements that in the context of racist assumptions and stereotypes can be quite damaging:

- "When I see you, I don't see colour." (signalling that the person doesn't acknowledge your Blackness or won't hold it against you)
- "You are so articulate." (signalling that Black people are not usually capable of competent intellectual conversation)
- "I see your hair is big today! Are you planning to wear it like that to the client meeting?" (signalling that natural Black hairstyles are not professional)

- "Everyone can succeed in society if they work hard enough." (signalling that disparate outcomes for Black people result from laziness)
- "We are all one race: the human race." (signalling that your experience as a Black person is no different from the experience of people of other races)

3.4.2   How to React

There are two factors to consider when and how to respond to micro-aggressions: your goal, and your role. The goal refers to the kind of resolution that the individual is seeking. Some of the goals could be to interrupt the situation, to educate, or release of anger or frustration.

The role is defined as the relationship between the target, the aggressor, and bystanders. For instance, employees may feel more threatened if they confront their boss than a co-worker (Byrd, 2018).

According to Byrd (2018), there are several strategies to respond:

1. **Appeal to values:** "I've always thought of you as an open-minded person who wouldn't say things like that". Trying to appeal to the aggressor's values, such as fairness and egalitarianism, can feel counterintuitive since he's acting in the opposite way. However, letting the aggressor know about this discrepancy makes them feel guilty and makes them want to change their behaviour.

2. **Express your feelings:** This strategy can cause value–behaviour discrepancy, especially if the aggressor and target know each other and the remark is meant as a joke. Also, this approach encourages perspective-taking and empathy, which reduce stereotyping and denial of discrimination.

3. **Get the aggressor to explain:** "What did you mean by that?". By asking for further information, one can highlight logical inconsistencies in the aggressor's statements, as well as uncover unconscious bias.

4. **Empathize with the underlying feeling**: "I know it's hard to find a job after college, but affirmative action isn't the problem". Using empathy can help the aggressor see the target's values as similar to their own. It can also reduce feelings of threat, which can reduce bias in intergroup interactions and make aggressors more willing to admit their guilt.

5. **Give information:** Providing information that contradicts the aggressor or provides a different perspective.

6. **Use humour:** Reduces defensiveness.

7. **Involve others:** If no one reacts to prejudiced comments, a community norm is set. Confrontation sets the opposite norm.

8. **Non-verbal response:** The confronter can still make an impact with a look or sigh.

In general, determine how much of an investment you want to make in addressing the micro-aggression. Express yourself in a way that acknowledges your concern about the issue. Allow yourself to feel what you feel. Any emotion is legitimate and should factor into your decision about whether, how, and when to respond. If you choose to confront a micro-aggression, be prepared to disarm the person who committed it. Explain that the conversation might get uncomfortable for them but that what they just said or did was uncomfortable for you. Invite them to sit alongside you in the awkwardness of their words or deeds while you get to the root of their behaviour together.

Chapter 4: Micro-Aggression And Socially Multicultural Aware Society

4.1   Objectives Of This Chapter

Talking about micro-aggression actually means talking not only about its occurrence, but above all about its complexity. As an expression, we understand it, how we name it, how we deal with it in our everyday life. Above all, how and if at all we recognize it in the pores and segments of the diversity of our life situations.

In this chapter, we will focus on these aspects and deepen them in the light of new awareness. Both on a personal and socially collective level.

The term is well known in certain circles but largely unknown to most people. To really understand micro-aggression in its wide spectrum it is necessary to point out:

First, people sometimes think that this is political correctness run amok and therefore it is impossible to speak any challenging issue. The key idea could appear here is to taking "micro" part of "micro-aggressions" to heart, arguing that they are not a big deal compared to the more serious racism or other "-isms" that we recognize the problem.

Second, people may argue that even if the micro-aggression causes harm, it is everyone's right under the free speech to say it anyway. They imagine that people fighting for social justice are literally telling people that they can't say certain things, which they consider an assault on free speech.

Third, some people argue seeing micro-aggressions everywhere and feeling that words can do violence actually feeds "victim culture" and makes people more fragile (e.g. helicopter parents who don't think their children can handle disappointment. So these young people see any ideas contrary to their own beliefs as a form of violence that needs to be limited or avoided).

Fourth, others would argue that there is little scientific evidence to prove micro-aggressions exist. They would see this lack of evidence as reason to give less importance to the concept. If we can't measure it, it can't form the basis for policy.

Contrary to this skepticism, there is empirical evidence that experiencing micro-aggressions takes a toll on people's emotional well-being and physical health.

4.2   Strength Through Diversity

We do find the current social climate in which it is hard to talk about sensitive issues problematic. We do want to contribute to find a way to create a culture where people can openly discuss sensitive topics. However, we also agree that the subtle ways that verbal and non-verbal acts serve to exclude people have real and serious consequences.

Inclusion happens when people feel valued, respected and the part of a group. When people feel excluded, the opposite is true. One of the most critical aspects of inclusion is that it must happen actively. When we just passively think of ourselves as good people but don't do anything to actively include others, that creates **passive exclusion**. There are specific inclusive behaviours that everyone can learn and practice that work to create a more inclusive environment and culture.

The term itself, could be also understand, instead to include, exclude people, making their concerns feel small and unimportant, when what we want is the exact opposite of that. By communicating that the whole issue is "micro" it might let's to know that this is not something very important. So, when we are talking about the "micro-aggression" we actually address and mean **subtle acts of exclusion.**

They are subtle: there is a wide range of act that can insult, exclude, and harm. Many of them are obvious, but many are in fact quite subtle, hard to identify, and challenging to speak about.

They are acts: They are things that people say and do and we can talk about why those particular things might have been a problem. We can get better not doing those things.

They serve to exclude: subtle acts create exclusion rather than inclusion. This is a problem on an individual level, as well for the larger culture where the repetition of these subtle acts reinforces and maintains systems of power, inequality, bias and what is considered normal**.**

4.3 CULTURAL AND SOCIAL LITERACY

Language matters and can have profound effects on individuals' sense of belonging, self-efficacy, and identity. We can ourselves use language that may slight or invalidate someone else, even with only the best of intentions. We all make mistakes and may lack awareness of the way our words may affect those around us. We also all have unconscious biases that influence how we interact with one another. One of the ways that these biases can manifest is in our language, through the use of *micro-aggressions*. No doubt, all situations involving language and bias are complex, but a thoughtful exploration of micro-aggressions is currently warranted, because micro-aggressive language may be a key variables that is influencing the experiences, persistence, and even personal success.

Language is actually a coded pattern of communication and as such a part of culture as well as society itself. By changing the coding in the language, i.e. by changing the social reality, the pattern of mutual communication also changes. In this sense, it is necessary to stress the increasing importance of awareness or social literacy.

When studying Society and Culture we need to be familiar with the language.

Therefore Social and Cultural Literacy refers to **the idea that people should possess a body of knowledge, understanding and skills that allows them to share, communicate effectively, and**

respect themselves and others. *S*ociety and Culture is designed to facilitate the development of our social and cultural literacy. Achieving social and cultural literacy is a developmental process that requires synthesising personal experience and public knowledge at the *micro*, *meso* and *macro* levels of society.
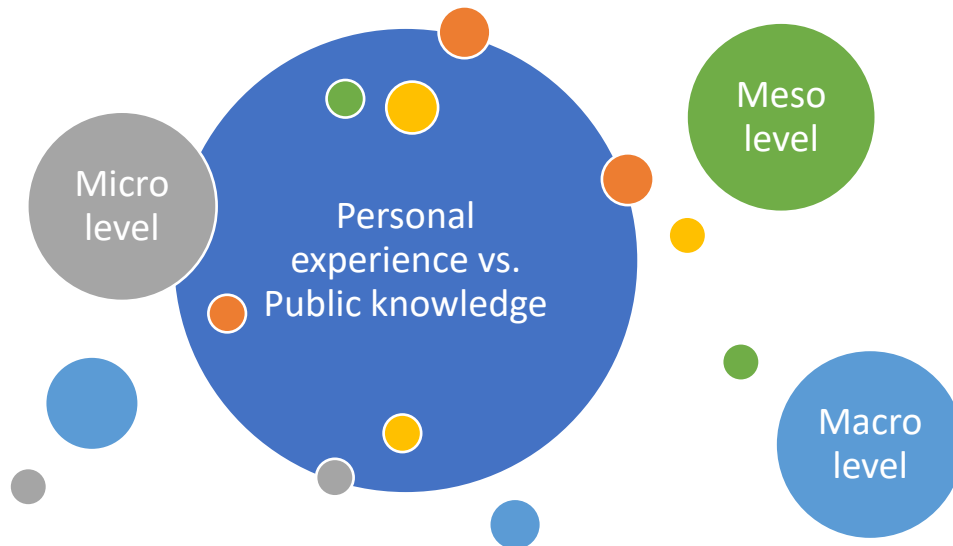
A socially and culturally literate person demonstrates the **following characteristics**:

- Has a sense of personal, social and cultural identity and understands that culture underpins one's behaviour, beliefs and values.
- Is interested in, observes and also questions about the micro, meso and macro level of society.
- Empathises with and appreciate the diverse beliefs and values of different societies and cultures.
- Researches effectively and ethically, showing critical discernment toward information and the media.
- Communicates effectively with individuals and groups, and works cooperatively in cross-cultural settings.
- Applies skills to achieve social inclusion and is aware of the issues of discrimination and prejudice.
- Avoids making judgements of another culture's practices using the values of his or her own culture.
- Has a sense of social responsibility and displays active citizenship by engaging critically with social issues, and takes considered action for the welfare, dignity, social justice and human rights of others at the local, national, and global level.

As a key component to building deep understanding around "micro-aggression" as subtle acts of exclusion, we name the framework, or taxonomy, for identifying what was implicitly communicating.

The **framework** provides us with a language for describing why a particular communication is a problem. You said one thing. But what you were implicitly communicating to another person was something quite different. Many messages (verbal, non-verbal, etc.) can be communicating multiple types of exclusion at the same time. The following list accounts for the wide range across many different dimensions of diversity (gender, sexuality, race, ethnicity, disability, and religion).

A framework of types of such messages

- You are invisible.
- You (or people like you) are inadequate.
- You are not an individual.
- You don't belong.
- You are not normal.
- You are a curiosity (strangeness).
- You are a threat.
- You are a burden.

As mentioned, the "insult" often happens when people are trying to be good people. They slip out when have good intentions, trying to:

- compliment: "You are so professional."
- be curious: "where are you *really* from?"
- show comfort: "You are from India? I love Ravi Shankar."
- be funny: "Can we get el mucho disconto?"

One of the reasons it's so easy to slip out when people have good or benign intentions is that we all have unconscious (or implicit) biases. There are associations, assumptions, and expectations that we hold about certain groups of people without even necessarily being aware of it.

4.4   STRENGTHENING ETHICAL COMMUNICATION

4.4.1   What is Ethical Communication?

Ethical communication is a type of communication that is predicated upon certain (work related/personal) values, such as being truthful, concise, and responsible with one's words and the resulting actions. As a set of principles, ethical communication understands that one's thoughts must be conveyed and expressed effectively and concisely, and that the resulting actions or consequences will [potentially] be based solely on how the message was communicated. Thus, ethical communication defines a framework or set of acceptable communication principles that align with an societal, or institution (organization) overarching code of conduct or code of ethics for certain professions.

Ethical communication dictates that speakers utilize the language that listeners understand and takes into account the level of fluency as well as the language spoken by listeners so that recipients of the communication (whether be spoken or written) are able to fully understand what is being communicated. The art of communication allows people to express themselves in order to develop relationships. Therefore, the Principles of Ethical Communication are:

- Be truthful and honest!
- Active listening!
- Speak non-judgmentally!
- Strive to understand!
- Avoid a negative tone!
- Do not interrupt others!
- Respect privacy and confidentiality!
- Consider the receiver's preferred communication channel!

4.4.2   Taking Active Part In Communication

Listen for understanding

Once the problematic behaviour is addressed it is time to listen. The natural human reaction to being confronted will be some form of defensiveness. Some people will be downright angry, others profusely apologetic, and others will just dismiss the person and her unwanted criticism. If your ego is involved in the exchange, it is far more One need to be prepared not to take whatever comes next personally likely to escalate into a shallow verbal altercation. The person you approached will likely fall into their limbic brain and not think rationally for a short time. If you are initiator, just listen. Stay calm and try to remain as objective as possible. Being called out will likely trigger an emotional defensive response. So, this is the time to lean into the various mechanisms that people use to remain calm:

- Take a deep breath.
- Count to ten.
- Find an appropriate opening to ask for a minute and take a short walk (to distress).

Spend your mental energy listening and trying to understand the speaker's perspective instead of trying to formulate a response or a defense. If your brain has dropped into fight or flight mode, you won't be able to access your rational mind and you will likely make the situation worse if you speak up to soon. If you chose to "collect yourself), make sure you do it with grace. Avoid storming out, leaving without words, or saying anything passive aggressive. It is suggested that an affirming statement proceeding a departure is useful. Something like: "I hear what you are saying and I would like to take a moment to process it," or "Thank you to bringing this to my attention. Can I go to reflect on this and come back to you?" If you say so, make sure to really come back to it.

Remember, if someone has called your behaviour and identify something you have said as micro-aggression, they to mustered courage to name it. And they or someone else has likely been adversely affected what was said. It is OK to be nervous about speaking up when you witness the micro-aggressive act.

Alliance – From Observer to Ally

When confronting the initiator, do so with grace. Let them know what they said or did and why you perceived it as problematic. The listen and wait for a response. If they are not showing signs of upset, feel free to proceed with helping them see the perspective of the subject. If they are showing signs of a distress, offer to speak with then in a later time in a more relaxed setting, after they have had some time to process the data you presented (valid for example, if you observed an impropriate behaviour with you coworker).

Naming a micro-aggression tends to make people feel judged. And when they feel so, they are less willing, and likely less able, to learn and receive new information. The information may be incredible useful and likely to increase **their emotional intelligence** and **cultural fluency**. If people feel judged, they will experience you as someone who thinks they are superior to them in some way. You immediately position yourself as an enemy. Allow the person to share their perspective, their confusion, or perhaps their hurt and embarrassment. Whatever they throw out next, be willing to listen with an empathetic ear. What they say may feel like an attack, but understand that what you said may feel that way to them as well. Breath through it and try to be there with them, fully present, always communicating that you are on their side and wanting to help not blame.

Think before you speak

If what you intend to say is about or to a marginalized person, it is worth asking yourself a few quick questions in advance. Think about the taxonomy and whether you may be walking into one of those inadvertent exclusions:

- Is what I am about to say/ask based on stereotypes or assumption about a marginalized group?
- Is what I am about to say/ask unnecessarily intrusive?
- Am I overstepping?
- Is what I am about to say based in kindness and generosity or opposite?
- Do I have the authority/right to tell/ask this person to comply with my request?
- Is this a good use of my authority privilege?
- Would I say the same thing to a person of a different gender/color/race/age?
- Is this going to make the person feel inadequate or as if they don't belong?
- Does this question that normalcy or make them feel like a threat or a curiosity?
- Will this make someone feel invisible as if they are not an individual?

The best way for each of us to learn to do better is to have greater insight into the effect our behaviours have on the people around us. How can we improve if no one is brave enough to let us know that we have areas for improvement.

Interpersonal Action

What to do when the act of micro-aggression happens? Speaking up in a way that holds people accountable with productive, open, and civil conversation. We can call it **accountability system**.

Guidelines for speaking up as the subject or observer

The subject and the observer are grouped together because they are both in the position of speaking up and giving feedback to the initiator. The most critical guideline is *pausing the action*. Most micro-aggressions (subtle act of exclusion) continue to occur because subject and observers get stuck trying to figure out what to say, and by the time they have some ideas, the moment has passed and they just let it go. Or people spend some time trying to access whether they have the emotional energy for turning a casual conversation into a very different kind of conversation and again by the time they decide the moment has passed. These are both reasonable deliberations that people have. First, is hard to know what to say. Second, when speaking up, the initiator often reacts negatively. They often feel embarrassed or defensive. And subject or observer are hesitant to give feedback, anticipating that negative reaction. No matter what you decide as an individual, a facilitator, or an organization, make it something that people will be able to say right in the moment, before they realize what they even want to say about it.

Assume good intent!

We live in the culture that is largely "call out" rather than "call in". People point out things that others do and say while also implying that the offender is essentially a sexist/homophobe/racist, or at the least, uncaring and potentially ignorant. Some have called this a "toxic call-out culture" in which people almost compete to demonstrate to others how woke they are. We all have unconscious bias of some sort. That does not make bad people, it makes us human. That's important for people to remember as they call out biases in other people. Calling someone out as a bad person is unproductive for pointing out a specific action that person took, helping them understand why it was a problem, and really improving that person's future behaviour. As such, we prefer to think of speaking up in terms of "calling people in" to a conversation. Speaking up will go most productively if people assume good intent in others.

Have Patience but Expect Progress!

Because conversations can be sensitive and emotional you also must be in tune with your own readiness for the conversation. You may find that you are not in an emotional state that allows discussion. It is extremely common, especially as you have these conversations perhaps for the first time. If that is the case, don't be afraid to ask for the time you need. You might want to say: "Hold up. I know didn't mean it like this, but what you just said really upset me. I need a little time to get to a place where I can discuss it with you. Can we meet for tea tomorrow?" This allows the person who speaks up to be able to have patience with that initiator, which is important for productive conversations. Patience, however, only lasts so long. When we give that initiator the gift of feedback, we expect progress in return. We expect that they will follow their own guidelines and we expect that they will make an effort to improve their behaviour.

Guidelines for Responding as the Initiator

Here are guidelines for the person who says or does the micro-aggressive act of exclusion:

Acknowledge the Feedback with gratitude!

It is helpful to see someone giving you feedback as a wonderful chance to improve your behaviour around inclusion. The person spoke up, even though it was hard, in an effort for you both to make the world a better place. They provide an opportunity for us to grow. It's helpful to explicitly acknowledge the discussion with gratitude, so you might say something like: "Thank you so much for speaking up about this." You may be thinking that this will come across as fake, because deep down you are embarrassed or feel defensive. However, if you get in the mindset of gratitude and get in the practice of acknowledging even critical feedback like this, it can really start to feel natural and the appreciation can be genuine.

Replace Defensiveness with Curiosity and Empathy!

Mentioned above already, we approach such conversations as opportunities to learn rather than feeling the need to defend. So, if you find yourself getting feedback about something you did, you should not try to clarify your intent (which is assumed to be good). Instead, listen to what the other person is saying and think about the impact that it had on them. The initiator usually wants to explain their intent (to get to know the person, to be funny, to bond, etc.). At this specific moment when the action has been paused, we train people to think about **impact rather than intent**. Disagreements sometimes happen, but ideally we practice this reaction through trainings. To approach the conversations more productively it's helpful to replace defensiveness with more positive mental states. Going into the conversation with curiosity about other people's experiences and empathy for their perspective is incredibly helpful. So, put yourself in a listening and learning mindset. Your only goal to hear the other person. You can engage in simple behaviours to make the listening active and to help the other person feel heard. As for example:

- Ask follow up questions, trying to better understand.
- Paraphrase what the other person is saying.
- Look the other person in the eye and make sure your body language is open.
- Refrain from interrupting and make sure that you are not distracted by looking at your cell-phone or smart watch, or similar. If your laptop is open, close it.

Research shows that those little gestures can make people feel more valued in your interactions with them. Take some time and practice these skills during regular interactions with coworkers, family members, or friends. You will likely notice immediate results-that people feel great when you do it. Develop those habits with low stakes interactions and then you will be ready for the more challenging conversations.

4.4.3 Life Skills as Personal Strength

The processes described in this chapter require quite a bit of practice, getting to know and consolidating certain skills. In order to be able to encode and decode language through the described

processes, we use some useful modalities when working with people, which will equip you with new knowledge. The latter serve us especially when working with more demanding clients and Difficult conversations, where the field of micro-aggressions also belongs.

Knowledge, education and training in the field of emotional and social intelligence, as well as the skills derived from them, certainly serve as support. Below we list some of the most important ones.

Self-awareness

Definition of self-awareness involves being aware of different aspects of Self, like personality traits, feelings and behaviours. It is one of the first components of self-concept. The most commonly **positive personality traits** are being honest and taking responsibility for one's own actions and decisions. To get along with others adaptability and kindness are great traits, as well compassion, empathy, patience, loyalty, trustworthiness, optimistic, reliable, fair, discreet, respectful, if we mention just few of them. The fully functioning person is an individual who has "ideal emotional health." In general, such person will be open to experience, lives with the sense of meaning and purpose, and trust in self and others.

Her **self-concept** is constantly taking new information and experiences. Such individuals are in touch with their emotions and make a conscious effort to grow as a person. **Self-awareness** is an important component of **personal development,** which is without a doubt a life -long process.

Empathy

The ability to sense, understand and share the feelings of others is empathy. Researchers coupled the terminus with the ability to imagine what someone else might be feeling or thinking.

They also differentiate between:
- Affective empathy – sensations and feelings we get in response to others' emotions;
- Cognitive empathy – ability to identify and understand other people's emotions.

Empathy has deep roots in our brains and bodies and has been associated with two different pathways in the brain:
- one aspect of empathy can be traced to **mirror neurons** when we observe someone else perform an action in much the same way as we would perform that action by ourselves (so called mapping, mirroring);
- genetic basis to empathy – people can enhance or restrict their natural empathic abilities.

Resilience

All individuals who show a greater degree of personal resilience face with life changes more easily. Resilient people respond to those change with healthy and positive adjustment while remaining physically and mentally healthy. In doing so, they activate the ability to learn from these experiences, accept new information, adjust their thoughts and behaviours, and incorporate all of these new

lessons into later life. This is also confirmed by Darwin's idea of evolution that not the greatest and strongest survive, but those with the greatest ability to adapt.

Therefore we can say that resilience is the ability to adapt positively and restore personal balance during life's trials and various negative experiences. It activates us to equip ourselves with our own internal and / or external sources of power and to tackle problems in the right way by self-regulating, adapting, learning, changing and / or going beyond existing patterns.

Assertiveness

Assertiveness is the ability to stand up for yourself without violence, with the respectful attitude to differences of others and their freedom. It is the ability to stand up for yourself, to defend your opinion, to strive for something and to fight for your rights, without violence, with a respectful attitude to differences of opinion and freedom of expression. It is intended to protect yourself, your values, your personality and your dignity.

Assertiveness is a broader term for decisiveness and confidence of a person while at the same time it includes the qualities of compassion and openness to the needs, interests and limitations of others. She/he can compromise when a conflict arises and knows how to put him/her self in somebody else's shoes.

People that act assertive are aware of their virtues and flaws but accept themselves nonetheless. They try to go beyond their limits while at the same time they are kind and patient with themselves; they know their needs, interests, emotions, feelings, and limits and don't hide them from others. They are aware of their responsibility to others and that is why they treat them with respect; they understand their flaws and limits but don't surrender to manipulation and aggression.

Authenticity

The characterization of authenticity describes a person who acts by motives, desires, ideas, or believes that not only hers (as opposed to someone else's) and at the same time express who she really is. Being human is best achieved through being unique and distinctive, even when these collide with certain social norms.

Authenticity is more about presence, living in the moment with confidence, and staying true to oneself. An authentic person puts the people around them at ease and comforts them. There is no doubt and questioning the integrity of an authentic person. When we are looking to build relationships in life, we want to grow and learn from people of value. It means we identify and desire to find honest, trustworthy and kind people.

Some characteristics of authenticity:
- Be true to yourself
- Think inward, look outward
- The way you treat people (kindness and respect)

- Be a good listener
- Live in the moment
- Open-mindedness
- Fairness to opportunities and people.

Positivity and Optimism

An optimistic view of the world is the basis for satisfaction with your life. If I judge for myself that I have enough strength, resources and support in my current life situation, then I successfully use emotional energy to achieve goals and live in accordance with my values. Optimists have a characteristic pattern of thinking where they highlight what they have an impact on, focus on the here and now, and describe their future with positive expectations. **Learned optimism** is a concept that says we can change our attitude and behaviours by recognizing and challenging our negative self-talk, among other things. it's the opposite of **learned helplessness**: a phenomenon whereby individuals believe they are incapable of changing their circumstances after repeatedly experiencing a stressful event.

Critical Thinking

Critical thinking is the ability to think clearly and rationally, understanding the logical connection between ideas. Critical thinking has been the subject of much debate and thought since the time of early Greek philosophers such as Plato and Socrates and has continued to be a subject of discussion into the modern age, for example the ability to recognise fake news. Critical thinking might be described as the ability to engage in reflective and independent thinking.

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