

Inclusive Communication Interview_Part I.mp4

Lisa: [00:00:11] Welcome Lila, I'm really happy to have you here today at Karlshochschule International University. We are going to have a conversation about inclusive communication in teams. So, Lila would you like to present yourself first?

Lila: [00:00:25] Sure. My name is Lila Sax Dos Santos Gomez, a very long name, and I'm from the United States originally. I've lived for 25 years in Germany. I originally studied anthropology with a focus on Brazil. I studied in Heidelberg, in Brazil and in the UK. My degree is in what is called International Studies of Childhood and Youth. Which is basically the anthropology of education, so how do people in different cultures see childhood and youth, what are the educational practices that they have. After that I spent a lot of time working in different areas. I worked in different municipalities. I also worked in the NGO sector and in 2019 I then founded my own company, Yarrow Global Consulting. We focus on supporting especially what we call public policy or practical, participative public policy. So how can we support municipalities, private institutions and also the general public in creating more inclusive public policy including also education systems.

Lisa: [00:01:45] That sounds very interesting. Now today, as we want to talk about teamwork, my first question would be to understand a bit more which are the most common barriers within teams.

Lila: [00:01:59] Well, I think the most important thing, first of all is, that even though we look at barriers within teams, different studies have shown that more diverse teams are actually much more innovative, they're much more sustainable, they are able to approach the complex challenges that we have in today's society in a much different way because they bring together different perspectives.

Even though sometimes we focus on one of the difficulties that we have, in fact, we have to be looking at how to create inclusive frameworks for intercultural teams or diverse teams because our society is becoming more and more diverse. I think that we need to really focus on what are the advantages of it.

But of course, it's difficult, you have many different barriers in diverse teams, you have language barriers, you have cultural barriers. There are different studies that show that people have different concepts, for example of time, of how to organize time, different concepts of efficiency, different concepts, of communication not only language communication but also bodily communication and one of the concepts that I'd like to use the most is the idea of linear and circular time.

So, this is a way that we can look at different barriers within teams and this is just one aspect of it that I think a lot of people can really relate to.

For example, I married to a Brazilian and we also work together in different projects, and he has a very circular concept of time. So, this means that time for him is not something that can be divided into nice little blocks and then when we finish with one block we start with the next. But basically, you work on something until it's finished, and this could take an hour, this might take two hours. But this really supports, for example, friendships or sort of collegial communication and cooperation within teams.

When he moved to Germany it was very difficult for him because in Germany there's a very strong linear concept of time which means basically: if we plan to do something for 60 minutes, after 60 minutes no matter where we are on the project, we stop and we start with the next concept. This can be understood by people as being more efficient. For people who have a circular concept of time this might be seen as being rude, because they are like: okay we're just building on our relationships and so why are we stopping the conversation now?

And so, I think that if we talk about barriers you really have to think about what are the people's concepts of time, what are the concepts of communication, formal informal communication and also body language that people use (...).

Lisa: [00:04:47] But do you think that there are specific barriers that we need to address in teams of students? Because this course is for students from universities.

Lila: [00:05:00] Well, I think that students will be bringing different sorts of questions. One is about where they come from? What are the skills that they bring with them? Are these skills, for example, recognized in formal education systems, or are they bringing informal skills with them? Also, if you're working more with a more diverse body of students then you'll be dealing with different concepts of gender, you'll be dealing with different ideas and concepts of what education services need to offer. You'll probably have students that will be coming from different age spectrums, people might be bringing professional education with them or non-professional education. And so, I think that on the one hand you'll need to be looking at how students (...) can deal with different forms of diversity and use that type of diversity to be able to enhance their educational experience.

Lila: [00:05:59] But what can the students themselves do to create a more inclusive communication when they work in teams?

Lisa: [00:06:07] Well, I think if you look, we had talked previously about mitigating barriers or mitigating bias. And I think that the main way, and this counts for students, but for anybody who's dealing with different biases, is basically... we have these three steps that you look at when you're talking about mitigating biases:

One of them is to recognize your own biases. So, what are the types of stereotypes that I might bring myself into any lived experience that I have? And that has to do with socialization that I've had, the way that I was raised, perhaps the culture that I was raised in, or experiences that I have had that I draw on when I deal with other people. So how can I be more sort of recognized and become more aware of my own biases and what I am bringing into an experience with another person.

And then the second step is to create empathy or to try and sort of have a shift of perception. (...) We take a lot of things for granted, somebody might act in a certain way that we think is for example rude or doesn't fit to the situation. But put yourself into the other person's perspective and think (...) why might they be acting that way and why you know what reasons could be (...) for people to act in certain ways. To have that change of perspective.

But then also creating safe spaces in which people can either talk to other or talk about own experiences.

I think those are the three steps that students can really use in order to mitigate biases.

Lisa: What does safe space mean?

Lila: Well, a safe space is a pretty large term (...). You have different concepts of safe spaces. The concept that is mostly used is where I have access to physical space. This could be an online space or an offline space in which I can interact with people. Who may have experienced same things that I have, this might have been for example racism or discrimination because of disabilities, physical or mental disabilities.

Lisa: Thank you for the explanation. I would like to come back to the setting of a team. In a team usually there are different roles or at least you distribute different roles. The role of a leader and the role of the other members. Is it important to have different roles in an inclusive team? And which different responsibilities would each of these members have?

Lila: [00:08:49] (...) I think roles are something that you can distribute actively or consciously. I think, the main thing is to really reflect on the roles that may have consciously or mostly unconsciously be distributed.

So, somebody might have a role of a leader... [you should reflect], is that person really fitting to that role? Is this the role that they want to have? Is it the role that they're comfortable with? Has this role changed over the period of a project? (...) Quite often when we work in teams and especially if we're working on teams in a certain project, people will come into a certain role consciously or unconsciously and then sort of be stuck with that role for the rest of the project. That might not help the person, but it also might not help the project. So, I think it's really important to have, sort of every once in a while, - maybe once a month or once every six weeks - to go on a meta level (...) a reflective level and to look at the project and not only look at the operational part of it, but to really take the time.

To look and be like, everybody is really comfortable in the roles that they're in? Is this still working for the project? (...) Are we stagnating at some point? (...)

People tend to take very little time when they start a project. (...) For example, you're doing a group project together, you're writing an essay together or you're creating a presentation together. Quite often we tend to (...) start doing it and people tend to take very little time to think about like sort of a strategic approach to any sort of project.

Maybe there's somebody who we think as (to be a) critical thinker. You can even print out a card on a piece of paper, you can have different colored cards, and you say to this person, for example, for the course of the project, you're going to be the critical thinker. You're going to raise your blue card every time (...) questioning what we're doing. So, you can have something like a critical thinker, you can have a timekeeper, you could have the clown, humor, somebody who's responsible for making sure that everybody's still having fun or not taking themselves too seriously.

And then you can have the leader (...) and a really important role is somebody who is responsible for protocoling things. And if you (...) actively think about those roles before you start a project, then that can help you in the course of the project also to think about, okay, what roles are missing? What roles might we need? And you can have that for the course of a project.