Diversity F's

An experiential exercise dealing with issues of observation / perception and cultural frames of reference

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Diversity F's

Summary:
"Things aren't always what they seem" is the message sent quickly in this visual exercise used to exemplify how we can easily get into a mindset and not see all sides of an issue. Discussions of peer pressure, the importance of learning from others, and posing contradictions are all lessons gained from this exercise.

Background:
"Seeing is believing" is a phrase that many people hold true to heart. However, what we see is often a result of what we choose to see and what we've been taught to see. Also, is what we are seeing our own perception or the perception of others? These issues may seem to complicate otherwise simple matters. However, one must not deny the reality of our natural tendencies to view things from our own frame of reference.

"Diversity F's" is a short exercise that allows participants to use a seemingly simple exercise to addresses a multitude of complex issues. Depending on whether or not it is being used as an icebreaker or as an impact exercise, facilitation questions and debriefing can focus on a variety of issues.

Procedure:
Distribute Diversity F's handouts to the participants, making sure that they do not read the statement before the facilitator instructs them. Once the handout has been distributed to the participants, allow them to read the statement once or twice. When everyone has finished, the facilitator asks them to look at the statement again and count the number of times the letter "F" appears. From this point on there should be no communication between participants. Once everyone is done counting, participants are grouped according to the number of F's they observed in the statement. Groupings will begin with those who counted 5 or fewer F's. The next group would be 6, then 7, 8, 9, and finally, 10 or more.

After the initial groupings, facilitators allow participants to talk to some one (often they talk to those in the group with them). After about 15 seconds, stop them and tell them they HAVE to speak to some one who is not in their group, i.e., did not count the same number as they did. After which participants are allowed to change groups if they choose to do so (some one who was in the "6" group can now change to the "9" group). Facilitators should look for feedback from the audience as to why there is such disparity among the responses. Finally, members from
the "9" group should spread out to the other groups and show them the 9 F's in the statement; at least this is what normally occurs.

**Processing/Debriefing:**

After everyone has been seated, allow them a couple of minutes to talk amongst themselves about the experience. Facilitators then begin a formal discussion addressing some of the following issues:

* What happened? Try to get some participants to talk about the experience. Did they count 9 F's right away? If not, why?
* Did anyone feel pressure from the other groups? Did they feel they miscounted or were they confident and comfortable with their group? Was there pressure from within the group or were members supportive and confident in one another?
* For those who counted less than 9 F's, why did this occur? Can you draw any real-life analogies to what happened (What groups/people do we often "miss" and why)?
* What do you think accounts for those who counted more than 9 F's? Again, can you draw any real-life analogies to this difference?
* Who did you talk to the first time you were allowed to talk to some one? Why? Who did you talk to the second time, and what was that conversation like?

Here is a brief summary of some important points to discuss:

* An analogy to draw to counting less than 9 F's would be that often we do not take the time to look closely enough at things and we end up missing out on important information. Once we have seen that information, just like when we saw all 9 F's, we cannot deny its existence. Analogies can be drawn to situations of oppression and discrimination and how we sometimes need the help of others to see these things.
* Discussion around the groups and how there may have been some pressure felt by members of groups with fewer members than others ("there is strength in numbers"). How we can become comfortable with the support of others, even though we may be wrong.
* The different way people interpreted the instructions and "counted" the F's in many different ways. Some counting them phonetically, some looking at "E" and counting two F's (one upside-down, one right-side up). Discussion about how everyone sees things differently, their own lens.
* Often when we check out new information, we do this with people who see things (the world) like we do. This only reconfirms what we saw and doesn't allow for new perspectives to help us see things differently.
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