

Where Your Name Comes From

The simplest tool for cultural difference you'll ever lead! It's almost too simple to be its own tool, but it works. The exercise: do a go-around where each person shares their full name and where it comes from.

Procedure

In a group from many countries and with wide cultural difference this inevitably opens up a whole field of difference. It's an easy, low-risk tool. Yet it can be powerful. For a group of 10 to 15, it can be facilitated to take an hour, as people give full context to where their names come from, how people pick/give/get names, what the "hidden" meaning is of the name.

For a group with lots of diversity, it's a great way to break the ice, notice the diversity in the room, and allow people to slowly realize the importance of cultural difference in how people operate. When leading this tool, set the tone by either a) modeling a full disclosure of your name and its meaning (taking 5-10 minutes to tell its story is a good way to model that it's not to be just a light tool); or b) using following questions to elicit more from the person ("So you were given your name by aunt. Is that typical where you come from?" or "Does your name have meaning in your culture?")

(In groups with less cultural diversity the sharing will tend to be less deep; this is especially good for groups from many different countries.)

Written by Daniel Hunter