



# Social Equity and Intercultural Communication in the Workplace

## Assignment Goal

1. Practice composing and designing various workplace correspondence genres such as emails, letters, and memos
2. Consciously and critically consider ways that individuals from diverse cultural backgrounds/identity statuses and who have differing expectations for and styles of communication can come into conflict in workplace settings
3. Explore strategies and best practices for addressing and resolving workplace conflicts and difficult situation

## Assignment Overview

This assignment will consist of two parts, each part with two deliverables. You will submit all four deliverables as a portfolio at the end of the unit.

### *Part 1 - Responding to Intercultural Conflict in the Workplace*

You will select one of the cases (found at the end of this assignment sheet) of intercultural conflict and miscommunication in the workplace, and you will address the various concerns of the case from a variety of perspectives.

#### **Deliverable 1 – Employee Complaint Email (150-200 words)**

You will compose an email from the perspective of either the employee who is suffering from headaches in case 1 or Milena Mrozinski in case 2. Your email should include the following:

- Attention to professional email standards and expectations, including an appropriate subject line, greeting, and signature
- A clear and accurate description of your concerns with the situation in the office
- Empathetic acknowledgement of the complexity of the situation
- Sensitivity to the cultural identities and concerns of all parties

#### **Deliverable 2 – Supervisor/HR Representative Memo (300-400 words)**

You will compose a memo from the role of the supervisor in case 1 or the HR representative in case 2. Your memo should include the following:

- Professional memo formatting including header
- Discussion of how the situation is being handled, including steps that will be taken to prevent similar events from occurring in the future

- Clear, concise language
- Easily scannable design that facilitates readers' ability to easily identify key information

## *Part 2 - Composing Cases and Resource Lists*

For part 2 you will invent a case of workplace conflict and/or discrimination (implicit or explicit) based on one or more of SCAAR+ categories (sex, class, age, ability, race). Additionally, you will gather a series of resources that lend insight into your case that might be distributed by the company in response to the issue presented.

### **Deliverable 3 – Case Narrative (500-600 words)**

In your narrative you invent a scenario in which one or more individuals' experience discrimination or conflict due to some aspect of their identity. In good cases there are no obvious or easy solutions to the concerns raised, and the individuals/characters involved should have real and logical (if misguided) motivations for acting in the ways they do. In describing your case, you should discuss answer some of these questions:

- What occurred?
- What cultural factors (company or societally) allowed this to occur?
- Who is involved in the event/scenario?
- What are their respective roles in the company?
- What power/privilege(s) do they have/experience?
- How might this incident influence performance?
- What are the values/assumptions/motivations of those involved?
- What blind spots might those involved have regarding how others might experience the scenario/event?

### **Deliverable 4 – Annotated Bibliography**

You will perform research and collect 15+ sources that address the various concerns and issues that arise in your case narrative. You will collate these resources into a single, visually appealing document that the company in your case might distribute to their employees. Please include the following:

- A brief contextualizing summary of the topic and issues explored in the list
- 15 publically available resources such as infographics, articles, reports, interviews, news stories, apps, etc. that address some aspect of the case topic/problem
- Correctly formatted APA/MLA citations
- Brief annotations and explanations that summarize, evaluate, and discuss how each resource addresses the case

## Case 1 - “Smelly ethnic foods”

Jaewon Park has recently started working at a tech startup for his first job out of college. After working at the company for a couple of months, Jae sees that a note has been left on the microwave of the communal break room (see image below) that reads:

“Please **DO NOT** bring smelly ethnic foods to work for lunch! When you heat it up in the microwave it makes the office smell **AWFUL**, and it gives everyone who works next to the break room a headache! You know who you are. (especially you Mr. Kimchi-for-lunch-every-day) For the sake of your officemates, **PLEASE** stop!”

Jae feels that the note is directed to him because he always brings kimchi as a side dish for his lunch. He feels offended and singled out, but because he is so new to the company, and because the company prides itself on being relaxed and relatively informal, he decides not to say or do anything about it. Two days later, he goes to the same kitchen and finds some hand-written responses to the note. One of them (on the left of the image) reads, “**RACIST!**” in all caps, while another (on the bottom of the image) reads, “No! You stop, Mr. Taco Bell-for-lunch-everyday!” Another commenter has sarcastically written (on the right of the image), “Please do not use Comic Sans. It gives everyone using the microwave a headache!”

For several days everyone in Jae’s division seems to be talking about the note, and he has several co-workers ask him what he thinks about it. Every time they do, he feels singled out again, and wishes it would all just go away.



## Case 2 - A well-meaning miscommunication

Linda Kramer is a mid-level manager at a technology company, and is having difficulty with an employee in her organization, Milena Mrozinski. Milena has been with the company for two years and has a generally strong performance, but recently, she has been markedly quiet in the weekly team meetings and rarely participates in her unit's discussions. Linda has noticed Milena's lack of participation and repeatedly calls on her in meetings, and in trying to understand the problem asks "Do you understand me?"

Midway through a big project, the company's annual performance reviews were released. Linda met with each of her employees to discuss their reviews, and in meeting with Milena, Linda informed her that she had received a lower than average review. She encouraged Milena to put more effort into her work so they could get a strong response from the client. After the meeting, Milena began call in sick more frequently and failed to submit a number of reports for the weekly meeting. Linda, noticing Milena's ever-decreasing involvement and communication, decided to visit Milena at her home, where Linda received no response even though it was clear Milena was at home.

Since Milena started with the company, she has felt that her coworkers make fun of her and single her out because of her struggles with English, and so she has started contributing less in public settings. In doing so, Milena has proceeded to feel further demoralized because of Linda Kramer's comments during the meetings, and it all came to a head following the annual review. Milena knew Linda was trying to help, but because Linda assumed that Milena was doing poorly due to lack of effort, Milena has felt depressed and completely unmotivated. To make matters worse, Milena knows that one of her colleagues has missed several meetings due to his being hungover, but Linda has never visited him at home or reduced his performance reviews.

After talking with some friends who work for another company who have experienced similar issues, Milena concludes that Linda has biases against international employees, especially those who are non-native English speakers, and decides to write an email to the HR representative to seek redress.