**Tool 5.3. - Levels of Listening\***

Inclusive leaders not only have a strong self-awareness and capacity for self-reflection and empathy for oneself, but they listen with genuine interest and value the contributions of others.

There are many levels of listening. This exercise is meant to increase leaders’ and employees’ awareness of how well and how deeply they listen to each other.

1. Divide your participants into teams of three people. Each member in the team selects a role: speaker, listener, and observer. Throughout the exercise, each person plays only this role. Each participant receives written instructions that the other members don’t see.

8 minutes (4 parts x 2 minutes)

*Guidelines for speakers:*

Task 1: Tell a short story about your professional work (2 minutes).

Task 2: Tell a story about a trip that you’ve made (2 minutes).

Task 3: Tell a story about a situation at work that provoked strong emotions in you (2 minutes).

Task 4: Together with the listener, discuss ideas to do something good for the other team members; see if you can actually do something good during this time. (2 minutes).

*Guidelines for listeners*:

Task 1: Try to remember a similar situation as fast as possible and share your experience with the speaker.

Task 2: Try to capture key information in the speaker’s story.

Task 3: Try to show the speaker that you are listening to him or her. Don’t say anything.

Task 4: Together with the speakers, discuss ideas to do something good for the other team members; see if you can actually do something good during this time. (3 minutes).

*Guidelines for observers*:

During each of the tasks, observe and write down how the speakers and listeners behave, paying particular attention to body language, eye contact, the manner of speaker (including the words selected, intonation, voice volume, and what the speaker focuses on), as well as emotions. What differences can you spot during each of these tasks?

1. Reflection: After the fourth task, have each team (i.e., speaker, listener, observer) discuss the following questions:
* What did you find out about each other?
* Did you notice how the listener was listening in various ways in each of the conversations? If so, how? How did the speaker react, and how did this affect the conversation?
* What feelings did the various conversations provoke in you?
1. Analysis and Generalization: Sum up the experience by introducing Otto Scharmer’s theory of the four levels of listening. You can show participants a video featuring Otto Scharmer: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eLfXpRkVZaI>

In the video, Scharmer contends that lack of listening and connecting is the main source of failure among leaders and professionals in the workplace today.

Scharmer’s four levels of listening:

* *Downloading* – “I know that already”; re-confirming what I already know. Downloading is listening from the assumption that you already know what is being said, and therefore only listening to confirm habitual judgments. You act from patterns you already know. (I-in-me).
* *Factual listening* – picking up new information. This is when you pay attention to what is new and different from what you already know. (I-in-it)
* *Empathic listening* – Seeing something through another person’s eyes and forgetting your own agenda. This type of listening is when the focus is on the speaker, not the listener. The listener tries to experience what it is like to be in the speaker’s shoes. (I-in-you).
* *Generative listening* – This deeper level of listening is when things slow down and inner wisdom is accessed through the conversation. In group dynamics, this is referred to as “synergy,” when there is a unity and flow in the conversation between the speaker and listener, and something new, unique and good is created. (I-in the here and now).
1. Practical Application/Reflection:
* To what extent (or at what level) do you typically listen to people at work?
* What affects our capacity to listen deeply?
* How can we strengthen our communication with others? What strategies can we use to listen better?

\*Adapted from the “Inclusive Leadership Manual for Trainers”. The manual was originally prepared by the School for Leaders Foundation, along with valuable contributions from the project partners, in particular from Irene Rojnik and Angelica Paci from alp activating leadership potential in Austria and from Michael Kraack, Heike Kraack-Tichy and Anna Sharapova from the EU-Fundraising Association e. V. in Germany. The manual can be downloaded and used free of charge by any company to improve their resilience under the terms of the Erasmus+ Programme. <https://inclusiveleadership.eu/inclusive-leadership-manual-for-trainers/> The manual is subject to the license: **Creative Commons Attribution NoDerivatives Version 4.0** (CC-BY-ND, https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nd/4.0/legalcode). Reproduction is authorized provided that the source is acknowledged.