

Rupture and Repair

Bias Alerts

1. Someone gets marked too low because of the group(s) they belong to.
2. People get angry because someone “doesn’t know their place.”
(Often because that person belongs to a lower-status group or groups but also has real authority at work.)
3. “Unusual” people get left out, forgotten about, or otherwise marginalized.
4. People feel compelled to notice – and then talk about – difference.
5. People get nervous when an “outsider” is in their space.

Discussions

Discussion 1

Go through each question, one at a time.

1. When you were growing up, what was your “normal” for critical feedback?
Were you allowed to give critical feedback, or only receive it?
2. Were you raised to lean into conflict? Or avoid it?
3. How do you think this affects your work relationships today?

Notes

Discussion 2

Go through each question, one at a time.

1. Have you seen someone do a good job recognizing that there was a rupture and working on getting it repaired?
2. Have you wished that someone would recognize and fix a rupture? What actually happened?
3. What are you afraid might happen if you talk about a rupture with the person who created it?

Notes

Discussion 3

Read the real-world scenarios, and then discuss them using the questions as a starting point. It's ok to just do Scenario A.

- A. Ming is an (untenured) assistant professor. She's the only Asian woman in her department. Everyone else is white, and there's only one other female professor. At a faculty meeting, she disagrees with her colleagues about the next year's curriculum and suggests some alternatives. After, her chair pulls her aside and reprimands her for her "unseemly and unprofessional outburst."
1. How do you think Ming feels about her department in terms of being respected and being included?
 2. Who could Ming tell? What if they don't believe her?
 3. Who would be a good person to make the chair aware of his rupture? What could this person do to protect Ming from backlash or retaliation?
 4. What might a defensive response from the chair sound like? What about if you know that his wife is Vietnamese – he met her while conducting research in her home village there.
 5. What would real and meaningful repair look like?

Notes

A. Juanita is Black, and grew up in the Dominican Republic. She's professional-track faculty at a campus center and comes to give a talk at her university's Language Science Center. The faculty member who introduces Juanita uses the word "exotic," because it is the center's first time hosting a speaker from her subfield. After her talk, a professor opens by saying, "Well, that was surprisingly articulate. I'm impressed." Other faculty members grill her, speaking forcefully and loudly, and some critique her for being insufficiently quantitative (her subfield is qualitative).

1. How do you think Juanita feels about being called "exotic" and "articulate"?
2. How about being loudly grilled, or criticized for the norms of her subfield?
3. There are at least three faculty members who have created ruptures. Who might be aware of these ruptures? And who should make the faculty members aware of the ruptures? What are the potential complications?
4. What would real and meaningful repair look like?
5. What could the Language Science Center do to prevent similar ruptures from happening at future talks?

Notes

Discussion 4

A. Research suggests there are six standard components of apologies and that two are absolutely necessary for an apology to be effective and let people move forward. Which two do you think it is? Why?

1. Expression of regret
2. Explanation of what went wrong
3. Acknowledgement of responsibility
4. Declaration of repentance
5. Offer of repair
6. Request for forgiveness

B. What's wrong with the apology "I'm sorry if your feelings were hurt"?

Notes

Discussion 5

1. What can you do to prepare yourself that you might make mistakes as you work to interrupt bias in your workplace? How can you set yourself up with a growth mindset?
2. How can you signal to people that you are open to hearing about mistakes you made, about ruptures you created?
3. What can your department or center or institute do to make these discussions feel both safe and possible?
4. What obstacles are you likely to face because people didn't attend these workshops or don't see this work as important?

Notes

Potential Next Steps

1. Learn how other people were socialized to deal with conflict

Reach out to a colleague* to set up a 30-minute talk. When you meet up, use these discussion prompts to learn more about each other.

1. When you were growing up, what was your “normal” for critical feedback? Were you allowed to give critical feedback, or only receive it?
2. Were you raised to lean into conflict? Or avoid it?
3. How do you think that affects your work relationships today?
4. What’s your preferred way for people to let you know you’ve made a mistake?

*Are you faculty? Then this is a gentle reminder that colleagues include both graduate students you supervise and staff.

2. Create new protocols and norms for your department/center/institute

Set up a meeting or series of meetings to decide how you can set up new group norms for rupture and repair. You will probably want to consider:

1. Who should be involved in these meetings to make sure they’re effective
2. Who should be responsible for bringing awareness of an institutional or interpersonal rupture
3. How to take power dynamics and potential risk into account
4. How people can signal that they are open to critical feedback and hearing they’ve made a mistake
5. How to recognize and deal with backlash and retaliation
6. How to make sure apologies contain the necessary parts and are effective
7. How to determine who is responsible for a repair
8. How to make sure repairs are actually effective.

To make sure decisions don’t get lost, how can you create a resource with the results of the meetings so people can refer to it when they need it?