

## Intersectional Lifelines Exercise

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EQUALITY - DIVERSITY - INCLUSION

## Dr Sandie Dunne: Intersectional Lifelines Exercise

### Introduction

Intersectionality refers to the social, economic and political ways in which identity-based systems of privilege and oppression connect, overlap and influence one another. This includes increasing mobilisation around forms of identity or *identities*.

Intersectionality is seen as a more meaningful description of the multiple impact of discrimination, where an individual's *identities* overlap with a number of 'minority' characteristics such as race, gender, ethnicity, sexuality, diverse-ability, class and age. Crenshaw (1989) coined the term to explain a feminist perspective to the view that women experience oppression in varying configurations and in varying degrees of intensity, accordingly cultural patterns of oppression are not only interrelated, but are bound together and influenced by the intersectional systems in society including race, gender, class, sexuality and diverse-ability. This gave rise to the importance of lived experience of structural inequality as an organising principle for change and transformation.

The purpose of this activity is to locate you as an individual in your own intersectional experience as part of a wider approach to working with lived experience. It also helps you to reflect on your positioning and the influences and patterns that have informed who you are now, for example gender may have played a role in your career history, 'coming out' may have been a significant and sometimes traumatic event, racism may have impacted on your success in work, class may have impacted your educational or life chances and so on.

This exercise should take about an hour.

**Individual activity** – Look at the Intersectional Lifelines questions below and using paper and pens 'draw' or map your lifelines. It may help to use different colours or symbols to track different aspects of your life e.g. education formal and informal, key relationship including family, health, work and career patterns, significant events births/deaths or significant or traumatic experiences. At the end of an hour you should have a visual lifeline, which graphically displays some of the key intersectional experiences, which have significantly impacted who you are now as a person and as a leader.

**In pairs** explore your lifelines (you choose how you want to share lived experience and what you wish to disclose from your experience).

**Group Activity** - explore key issues arising from the exploration of lived experience in this group and its systemic implications for your leadership.

## Intersectional Lifelines - based on lived experience

Looking back on your life overall and your experiences in the work place please consider the following in relation to your lived experience in the context of both family/care setting growing up and in your experiences of work and leadership:

**Power** – who were the powerful figures and how did they exercise power in relations to others?

**Authority** – who held authority and how was it exercised?

**Responsibility** – who held responsibility and how do you shoulder responsibility in your culture, family, friendship groups and at work?

**Relationships** – where were you placed in relation to others e.g. siblings, parents/carers, and colleagues?

**Values and norms** – what were the dominant cultural values and norms of your family and work settings?

**Role models** – who influenced your thinking?

**Life events** – what are the significant life events you experienced?

**Intersectional influences** –

- How did you experience your race and ethnic identity in relation to those around you?
- How did your gender influence you?
- What significance did religion, faith, spirituality, humanism and/or atheism have and how did that influence your beliefs and values?
- How did you experience disability – your own and others?
- What impact did class and social status have on you?
- How did you explore your developing sexuality ‘growing up’ and how did that impact your identity in terms of sexuality?
- How has your age, ages and stages of life impacted your leadership journey?

**Privilege** or lack of it, in any area may also emerge in the exercise and be an area for further exploration.

**Social movements** – what social movements were you aware of or involved in which informed your approach to being a leader, for example feminism, disability activism, anti-racism, communities of identity and LGBTQI pride, *This is not an exhaustive list please add your own!*

**Learning** – what was your experience of learning? What influences helped you to develop as a leader?

## CAUTION

What you choose to disclose to others as a result of this exercise is entirely up to you – you are not obliged to share personal or painful information but to explore what can be comfortably worked with to understand our differences and commonalities of lived experience in order to improve how we work together.

**Coaching/Leadership Question:**

***What has surfaced for you in doing this activity that will impact your leadership practice?***



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