

us vs. them

the tendency of individuals to view the world in terms of an ingroup (“us”) and an outgroup (“them”)



Looking around organizations today and leaving out the contentious topics of politics, race or gender, there are a myriad of largely unchallenged “Us Vs. Them” attitudes. There’s “Management vs The Rest”; “Employees Vs. Contractors”; lately and worryingly “Old Timers vs. any kind of New-Comers”.

WHY DOES IT MATTER?

So why shouldn't we have any “versus”? Because the positioning crushes empathy and goodwill and therefore honesty, so no Psychological Safety is being created and **in the absence of Psychological Safety, no company can expect productive, innovative results.**

What Is “Us Against Them” Mentality? We tend to naturally group people into categories. When you do this, it helps your brain process where and how you fit into varying social situations.

Ways we group people include:

Race

Religion

Location

Social Class

The ways we use “us against them”. Any time you feel threatened by something, you want to feel superior, stronger, and better than what you are up against. You want to feel better about yourself. *Categorizing people isn't necessarily a bad thing until you use these categories to exclude people – even without meaning to.* You place yourself in one group and your perceived “enemy” in an alternate group. Then you tell yourself that the group you're in is better and the “other” group is the one causing problems.

Downfalls of us against them. The “us against them” mentality is dangerous. You subconsciously use this thought pattern to help yourself feel more at ease. But it often causes you to make decisions based on subconscious discrimination instead of leaving room for understanding and growth. Once you subconsciously figure out who is in “your” group, you tend to be more forgiving of those people.

How to Overcome “Us Against Them”

Look for similarities. When you meet someone that you may tend to categorize as being different than you, identify ways that you're the same. This helps you build connections by establishing warmth and empathy.

Get in tune with yourself. As you work to reset how you view yourself and others, it is important to focus on your values. Biases can be built into how we approach social situations, but you can overcome them. How can you act on your desire to be caring, kind, and supportive of those around you?

Be intentional. It takes conscious effort to overcome the “us against them” mentality. If there is someone in your life who falls into a category of people who tend to be discriminated against, be sure to include them. Empower your friends, family, and coworkers and show them that you reject excluding people based on categories.