



Social Identity Mapping

Overview

In the past, leaders worked in organizations in which most people shared a common culture and set of values. Today, leaders must bring together groups of people with very different histories, perspectives, values, and cultures. Leaders today need an awareness of social identity, their own and that of others.

Social identity uses parts of a person's identity to categorize them into groups. All of us are members of multiple groups. Many of us compare the groups we belong to with other groups, typically thinking more highly of our own.

Your social identity is a combination of three broad components: given, chosen, and core. Your given identity consists of the conditions that are outside of your control such as birthplace, gender, certain family roles or physical characteristics. Your chosen identity includes the characteristics that you choose such as occupation, hobbies and political affiliation. Your core identity is made up of the attributes that make you unique as an individual such as behaviors, values, skills, and items from your given and chosen category.

When to Use

The social identity mapping activity can be used to deepen your understanding of your own social identity. It is often used as a group activity to engage in deeper dialogue about who the group members are and move beyond typical introductions and ice-breakers.

When to Use

1. Create an example of a social identity map to share with the group.
2. In the outer ring, write words that describe your given identity: attributes that you had no choice about such as your nationality, age, gender, physical characteristics, certain family roles, possibly religion. Examples include female, only child, forty-eight, tall, blind, African American, cancer patient, widow.
3. In the next ring, list aspects of your chosen identity. Consider including your occupation, hobbies, political affiliation, where you live, certain family roles, possibly religion. Examples are cyclist, mother, engineer, expatriate, college graduate, wife, leader, New Yorker, Buddhist.
4. In the center, write your core attributes—traits, behaviors, beliefs, values, characteristics, and skills that you think make you unique as an individual. Select things that are enduring and key to who you are. For example, you may see yourself as funny, artistic, kind, conservative, creative, impatient, musical, family focused, assertive.
5. After you complete your map:

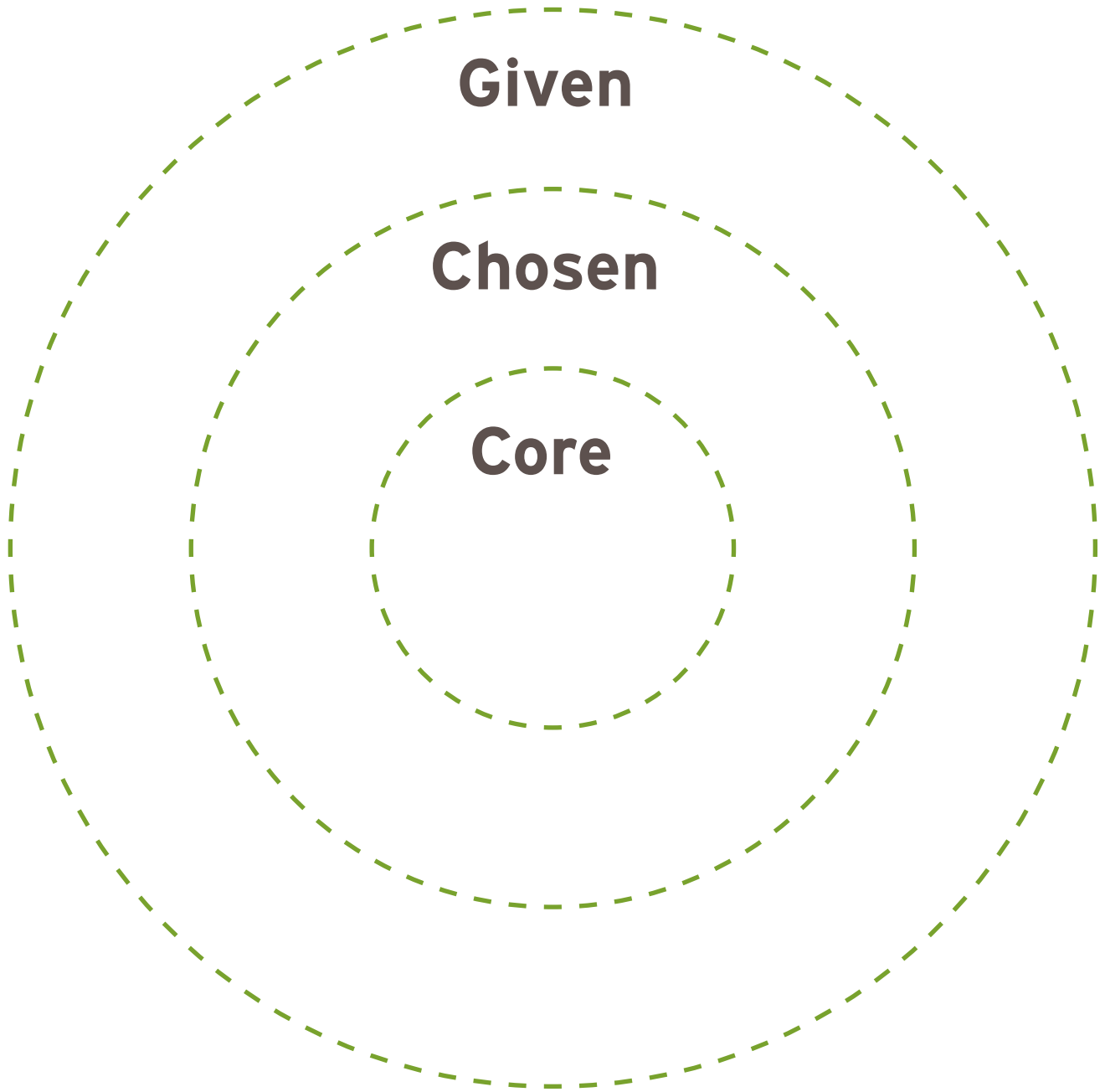
Underline the items that are important to you. These are likely to be the terms you would use to describe yourself.

- + Put a plus sign beside the items that you believe contribute to your ability to lead effectively.
- Put a minus sign beside the items that you believe detract from your ability to lead effectively.
- ? Put a question mark beside the items that may vary in how they affect your leadership ability, depending on context.

Options

- In small groups, have each person share their identity map. Ask the table groups to discuss similarities and differences between their social identities. Provide a minimum of 10 minutes for this discussion.
- Ask each small group to make a social identity map with the other people on their team. Identify what the group members have in common and what is unique to the individuals.

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Application to Your Community Coalition

1. When you are building a relationship, what do you want to know about the other person? What do you notice first? Are you attracted to certain characteristics in others?

2. What assumptions do you make about other people based on their social identity?

3. If someone else were mapping your identity, what do you think they would notice first? What would be most relevant to them? Why?

4. What assumptions do you think other people make about you based on your social identity?

5. If you were to see the identity maps of other people in your community coalition, how much do you think you would have in common with them?

6. What are the areas that would probably be different?

7. How does what I learn relate to how I work across boundaries?
