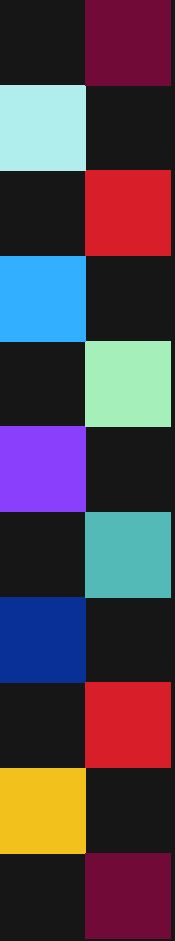


IBM In Conversation

Emb(race)





“In IBM, we have
made progress in our
commitment to equal
opportunity for all, but
the crisis the nation faces
in race relations today
demands that we make
good on that pledge to
the fullest extent with the
least delay.”

Thomas Watson Jr.

President, IBM

IBM management briefing, October 1968

Our legacy

Though Watson writes “this nation,” meaning the United States, his words ring true globally. This quote follows several developments at IBM; the hiring of our first Black salesman, Thomas Laster, in 1946 and the release of policy letter No. 4 in 1953. In that letter, Watson told his managers that it’s IBM’s policy to “hire people who have the personality, talent and background necessary to fill a given job, regardless of race, color or creed.” We can be proud of this legacy and still recognize that we have work to do. All of us need to work towards creating a more inclusive IBM. Every region has its own history, norms, and practices around race, ethnicity, nationality, caste, and more. By being open to listening and talking about these topics — no matter where we live and work — we take steps to deepen our understanding of one another, to foster inclusion and equal opportunity, and to make progress in creating a comfortable and welcoming work environment.

We can do difficult things

People are hesitant to discuss race for so many reasons. It can be awkward and uncomfortable. We may worry about saying the wrong thing and offending someone. Perhaps we think we won’t be listened to or others will tell us that our experiences don’t matter. We also may have been told it’s not polite, appropriate, or even acceptable, to talk about race. No one should feel that they have to participate in conversations about race in the workplace; these conversations are entirely voluntary. However, we do believe that positive, constructive conversations — if done with sensitivity and openness — can promote greater understanding, thereby enhancing our work environment.

This conversation guide was created to encourage people to really consider different perspectives and lived experiences, particularly with respect to race and ethnicity, through conversations among colleagues. We spend so much of our time at work and like all systems, the workplace can be a contributor to inequality. However, it can also be a place where we build greater mutual understanding and work towards minimizing inequality. We believe that having conversations at IBM can deepen understanding and help foster empathy, compassion, and action.

The structure of this guide

This guide is meant to support productive and meaningful conversations about race, racism, and related topics. We hope that the resources provided here, combined with IBMers' openness and genuine interest in contributing to an inclusive working environment, will further our progression towards a stronger, more welcoming IBM. We know that these conversations may not be easy. It's important to remember that we're all capable of tackling hard things successfully and that we do it every day.

Part 1: Before the Conversations

Part 1 includes the introduction and logistics. You'll find all you need to know regarding *how* to have the conversations.

Definition of key terms	6
Logistics: How to meet	8
How managers can help	12

Part 2: Having the Conversations

Part 2 is centered around the discussion prompts for four conversations on related topics: race, ethnicity, and identity; privilege; racism; antiracism. There's guiding material for the topics, as well as tips and suggestions.

Race, ethnicity, & identity	15
Privilege	18
Racism	21
Antiracism	24

Before the Conversations

Part 1

Ally

One who uses their power, resources, and opportunities to stand together with groups that don't have the same advantages, actively championing their interests and promoting equality and inclusion through action. An ally can be someone working to end biases based on race, gender, faith, sexual orientation, and other categories.

Antiracist

One who challenges racism through words and deeds, and supports efforts to promote racial equality. Being antiracist invites continual self-reflection and daily awareness.

Diversity

All the characteristics that make an individual or group different from one another. Obvious ones include race, sex, and ethnicity. Diversity, though, extends to religion, social standing, language, education, lifestyle, and other differences. It can also include values, ideas, and perspectives.

Ethnicity

Ethnicity refers to a social group, which can be based on religion, language, culture, tribal affiliation, or other shared background. Ethnicity is not the same as race.

Identity

The way we think about ourselves and make sense of who we are. Characteristics may include: nationality, ethnicity, sex, skin color, religion, job, education, political beliefs, age, and body type.

Inclusion

Giving every individual and group a voice and the ability to shape organizations and systems with the goal of everyone feeling accepted and valued.

Inclusion often refers to helping those who've suffered discrimination or are disadvantaged.

Privilege

Privilege in a social justice context refers to the advantages, opportunities, and benefits people experience because they possess characteristics that align with dominant groups/those who hold power. It can be invisible to those who have it.

Race

A category of people identified as distinct from other groups because of physical characteristics, such as skin color. Yet there's no scientific validity in distinguishing people by race; there's more genetic differences within groups than between them.

Racism

Racism is a belief that certain racial groups are superior to others, and therefore have the right to subjugate other races. It can be interpersonal. It can be institutional, affecting people across a nation, across generations. Individual attitudes reflecting racism can be unconscious.

How many people do I talk with and for how long? Should I assume the conversations are virtual?

Conversations are voluntary.

Recommended number of conversation participants: **2-10 IBMers.**

Length of each conversation: **45-60 minutes.**

Note: That's per conversation and we've provided guidance for four conversations.

Due to the nature of IBM's distributed teams, it's anticipated that conversations will happen virtually using WebEx. Once the conversation has started, consider locking the room to prevent participants from joining late ([instructions for WebEx](#)).

Who should lead?

Ideally, all participants should listen empathetically, reflect thoughtfully, and engage actively. One participant should serve as a facilitator. This participant guides the conversation and keeps track of time. Ideally, this participant isn't the most senior in terms of rank and position so that all participants feel comfortable expressing their thoughts. While the facilitator does not need to have formal experience, they should be open-minded, attentive, and willing to shape the conversation. Any IBMer with these qualities will likely be able to facilitate.

Does it matter if some participants are managers and/or leaders and some are not?

Power dynamics can affect how comfortable people feel about sharing their experiences or viewpoints. Because of this, we recommend that managers don't serve as the facilitator in groups that include their direct reports, unless this feels comfortable considering the people involved. Instead, we encourage managers and leaders

to have these conversations with their peers if at all possible. It should also be made clear that views and opinions shared in these conversations, unless they are in violation of IBM's Business Conduct Guidelines, will not impact performance evaluations nor advancement decisions.

How do we get a conversation started?

The facilitator can invite everyone to introduce themselves, their job role, and where they are located, if need be. State that this conversation is not meant to be shared beyond the group but understand that it is not a confidential conversation. Specifically request that participants don't record the conversation, and don't identify others if they talk about the conversation later. Spend about 2/3 of the time on the discussion questions and the remaining 1/3 on debriefing. Everyone should read the material provided to frame the conversation before the discussion. . Begin with the topic's first discussion question and then proceed, following the flow of the conversation. During the conversation, there may be periods of silence; this is OK, as participants may be thinking and processing.

How do we know if the conversation is going well?

- Participants learn something new. Maybe some shift their views or realize there were perspectives they were unaware of.
- Everyone shares their insights, observations, and questions and feels that their contributions are understood and valued.
- People might get uncomfortable, but they aren't defensive, and the focus is on sharing and learning. It's healthy and manageable. The group feels like a safe, open environment to talk about sensitive issues.

How do we end a conversation?

Each conversation has the same debrief questions and you'll want to leave time to answer them:

- Share one insight or realization triggered by the conversation with the group. Did anything surprise you?
- Note how you're feeling. Why do you think you're feeling that way?
- What is one thing you might try or do differently based on what you learned?

Everyone who participated should be proud that they shared their thoughts and wrestled with these difficult topics. The participant acting as facilitator can also thank the group for their thoughtfulness. Everyone might also want to consider scheduling a follow-up session on an already discussed topic or another discussion about a different topic.

Race is a sensitive topic; what do we need to do and keep in mind to have a productive and worthwhile conversation?

- *Engage respectfully:* Don't interrupt. Make room for others to speak. Ask questions. Think about the words you're using. Be honest about when you don't understand something.
- *Engage constructively:* Keep an open mind. Assume positive intent. Listen closely to what people say and also observe how they say it (body language, etc.). Share if you're uncomfortable about something — and say why. If there's a disagreement, focus on the words said, rather than the individual who said them. Be courageous; this could mean sharing personal experiences and being vulnerable. For privacy and legal reasons, we ask that the names and identifying details of individuals, institutions, or companies be anonymized.

All participants should be aware: This is not the appropriate forum to share allegations of harassment or discrimination within the IBM workplace. IBM encourages the reporting of any such incidents to managers, [HR@IBM](#), and/or the [Concerns & Appeals channel](#). IBM does not tolerate harassment and discrimination and would take appropriate action to address it. For more information, review [Corporate Instruction HR 116](#).

What if a participant gets upset and/or struggles with emotions?

- The goal of these conversations is to deepen our understanding of one another and to promote inclusion. There won't always be agreement and it is possible that participants may experience strong feelings.
- If the conversation is becoming heated, take action. Be empathetic and say: "This subject can bring up strong emotions. We all have different experiences that can prompt all sorts of feelings, both positive and negative. Let's take a break and commit to coming back to this topic."
- Ask the participant to name the emotions they're feeling. Be curious and compassionate. If they're too upset to talk, or choose not to, that's OK. Encourage them to stay with the group and just listen if that would make them more comfortable.
- If there's anger, work to de-escalate the situation. Use a calm, even voice to ask, "I'd like to understand your point of view. Could you explain a bit more?" You might also want to share observations that are factual: "When you made that comment, I could see that our colleague was visibly upset and wanted to interrupt."
- If you feel the discussion has become inappropriate, disrespectful, and/or adversarial, remind everyone of the rules of engagement included in this section. Remind everyone about the importance of respect, openness, trust.

How managers can help

Managers play an important role in creating a culture where employees feel comfortable engaging in conversations about race and other differences at work. By helping team members who want to participate make time for these conversations, managers send a clear signal that understanding race and racism is important and necessary for building a stronger team. Managers are not obligated to facilitate conversations; they can participate and/or facilitate if they would like to. We recommend that managers don't serve as the facilitator in groups that include their direct reports, unless this feels appropriate considering the participants. According to Dr. Amy Edmondson, managers promote psychological safety in teams when people can, if they choose, share their identities and ideas and can admit to their errors and mistakes, which is essential for promoting racial inclusion.

As a manager, your response to your team members' conversations will also lay the groundwork for continued learning in the future. It is therefore important that you engage three zones of action: Head, Heart and Hands, according to Dr. Laura Morgan Roberts ([2020](#)).

Head



Acknowledge how race shapes people's lives and careers

Heart



Affirm people's experiences of racial injustice and reassure them that they won't be negatively impacted because of their participation in the conversations, and;

Hands



Act to promote racial inclusion by using your power constructively, both during and following conversations you participate in. For instance, you may need to follow up on questions or concerns that are raised regarding policies and IBM's point of view. You also may want to follow up with participants after the conversations, encouraging them to consult the [Emb\(race\) resources](#) and [Be Equal Allies Portal](#), and welcome one-on-one meetings with team members who want to share more about their experiences.

You aren't expected to be an expert or to have all of the answers; no one does. What matters most is that you are a role model for mindsets and behaviors that foster deeper learning among your team.

Having the Conversations

Part 2

Part 2 is comprised of four sections. Each section is organized the same way.

Race, ethnicity, & identity	15
<i>Understand we have very different experiences of race</i>	
Privilege	18
<i>Gain insight into your own privilege and make inequality more visible</i>	
Racism	21
<i>Gain perspective on what racism is and what it feels like</i>	
Antiracism	24
<i>Surface ideas to fight racism and foster inclusion</i>	

Before the conversation



This includes text to help you get oriented, explanations of important concepts, reflection opportunities, and some advice.

The conversation



Each conversation has several discussion prompts, as well as ideas to keep in mind. It's OK if groups don't get to all of the discussion questions. You may find that one question specifically generates a rich discussion.

Debrief and take action



Leave a few minutes for debriefing using the questions provided; these questions are the same for each conversation. There are suggestions for things you can try that are tied to the various topics. These actions can help us build understanding of race, fight racism, and build a more inclusive IBM. After each conversation, there's a link to a short survey where you can share your thoughts and insights.

A conversation about race, ethnicity & identity

Understand that we have very different experiences of race.

How do you think about you?

The way we think about ourselves and make sense of who we are – that's identity. Our identities are multifaceted and evolving. They affect how we think, act, and interact with others in all parts of our lives. When you describe yourself, race or ethnicity may be something you mention immediately or not. There are all sorts of reasons for this and it's tied to your background, your education, your family, the environments you've lived in, and so much more. When someone's racial or ethnic identity doesn't overlap with the dominant group, this can have profound effects on their life.

Reflect

If someone asked you to describe the impact of race where you live, what would you say?

Discussion questions

How do you feel about having this conversation?

When was the first time you were aware of your race and/or ethnicity? What about the races and/or ethnicities of others?

How does your race and/or ethnicity affect your daily life?

How have you seen race and/or ethnicity affect our interactions at work?

Keep in mind

Some people may have previously considered their racial or ethnic identity because of their life experiences. For others, this may be new. It can depend on where participants are from. Your assumptions and understanding of race and ethnicity may be challenged as you listen to your colleagues' varied experiences.

Debrief

Participants don't have to share if they don't want to.

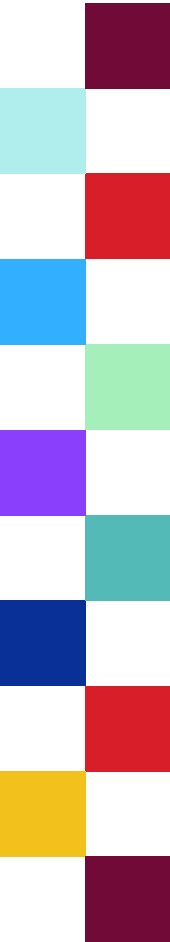
- Share one insight or realization triggered by the conversation with the group. Did anything surprise you?
- Note how you're feeling. Why do you think you're feeling that way?
- What is one thing you might try or do differently based on what you learned?

Take action

Share	Share lessons learned from this conversation with a colleague.
Attend	Attend and participate in an event, either at work or elsewhere that's focused on exploring race or ethnicity.
Diversify	Diversify what you read, watch, and follow on social media. This could mean reading a novel featuring characters of different races or ethnicities, following different influencers, and more.

Please take a moment to fill out this short survey to share how you experienced this conversation and what insights it generated for you.

[Go to survey](#)



A conversation about privilege

Gain insight into your own privilege and make inequality more visible.

People differ in terms of access to power, resources, and opportunities.

When we talk about privilege, we're acknowledging that systems and practices can intentionally or unintentionally give some people more power, resources, and opportunities than others. Privilege can be tied to demographic groups and personal characteristics. For example, belonging to a certain race, gender, sexual orientation, religion, or higher socioeconomic class may give you an advantage over those who don't belong, depending on how society is structured. Having two parents who both went to college and being a native speaker of the dominant language can also give you an advantage. Privilege can be invisible to those who have it.

Becoming more aware of your privilege can help you develop empathy and compassion for others. Using your privilege to intentionally support others is allyship.

Reflect

Consider privilege in your life. What opportunities, advantages, resources, etc. have made your life run more smoothly?

Discussion questions

How do you feel about having this conversation?

Are there certain aspects of your privilege that you only became aware of at specific times of your life? Why do you think that is?

Describe an experience when you clearly realized that your privilege gave you advantages not shared by others. Consider also when you realized that certain disadvantages were not shared by others.

How does your race affect the privilege you experience?

Keep in mind

Talking about privilege is difficult for many of us. We may feel that acknowledging privilege ignores the hardships we have experienced in life. We may feel that it hides the hard work we've put in to creating a better life for ourselves and our families. Try focusing on the positive instead: How can your privilege allow you to make a meaningful difference in other people's lives at work and in your community?

Debrief

Participants don't have to share if they don't want to.

- Share one insight or realization triggered by the conversation with the group. Did anything surprise you?
- Note how you're feeling. Why do you think you're feeling that way?
- What is one thing you might try or do differently based on what you learned?

Take action

Speak up	Observe how others are treated compared to you. Speak up when you notice unfair treatment or bias. Your voice may help discourage the behavior and it lets the targeted person know that people care.
Develop	Develop further awareness of your own privilege through self-reflection.
Use	Use your position and power to help others with less. This could be making introductions, helping someone less experienced navigate a tricky situation, and making sure to give credit when it is appropriate. There are many ways to support and advocate for others.

Please take a moment to fill out this short survey to share how you experienced this conversation and what insights it generated for you.

[Go to survey](#)



A conversation about racism

Gain perspective on what racism is and what it feels like.

We've all said things that have had unintended consequences or have been perceived in ways very different than we intended.

Perhaps it was a comment that you thought was innocent, or even something that you didn't think much about at all. However, when that comment touches on racial stereotypes (and of course, other types of discrimination), it can be exceptionally harmful to the recipient. This is because you're likely not the only offender, but one of many. The term microaggressions refers to "small" acts of any kind, sometimes intentional and sometimes unintentional, that contribute to discrimination and/or convey bias. While the term microaggression is used often, it minimizes the harm that targeted groups can experience each and every day. These slights can add up to a challenging, unwelcoming, and racist environment.

Racism is not just about interpersonal interactions. Systems can foster racism and protect the advantages of a dominant group. We see evidence of systemic racism when looking at levels of family wealth, employment, and education by racial groups.

Reflect

What is your personal experience of racism? Depending on who you are, it could be very direct, or it could be less direct.

Discussion questions

How do you feel about having this conversation?

Share a direct experience of racism or when you witnessed an act of racism. How did you feel? How did you respond and why?

Can you think of a time when you heard someone else make a racist comment? Did you choose to respond in the moment? Why or why not?

Keep in mind

If you're a member of the majority racial group where you live, you may have very little direct experience with racism. It is important to not dismiss the experience of others, who may encounter discrimination and bias every day. If you experience or witness racism at IBM, speak up. [I Matter@IBM](#) has helpful resources. **Get your manager involved as soon as possible.** If you do not feel comfortable discussing your experience with your manager, you still have options. Communications channels include: [HR@IBM](#), [Concerns and Appeals](#) (Open Door and Confidentially Speaking) and [Talk It Over@IBM](#).

Debrief

Participants don't have to share if they don't want to.

- Share one insight or realization triggered by the conversation with the group. Did anything surprise you?
- Note how you're feeling. Why do you think you're feeling that way?
- What is one thing you might try or do differently based on what you learned?

Take action

Hear

Hear our Black colleagues' experiences around race ([Emb\(race\) our voices](#)).

Learn

Learn about the history of racism where you live and work.

Empathize

Did you make a mistake or say something insensitive? Show empathy to the person you hurt and apologize. Be curious and courageous about learning what went wrong.

Please take a moment to fill out this short survey to share how you experienced this conversation and what insights it generated for you.

[Go to survey](#)

A conversation about antiracism

Surface ideas to fight racism and foster inclusion.

Antiracism involves noticing and challenging racism.

Antiracism involves noticing and challenging racism. Dr. Ibram X. Kendi describes an antiracist as “one who is supporting an antiracist policy through their actions or expressing an antiracist idea” ([2020](#)). So what do those actions look like? The actions depend on you and the influence and power you have. Individual actions alone won’t end systemic racism, but they can make a positive difference in our workplace and in our communities. Individual actions alone won’t end systemic racism, but they can make a positive difference in our workplace and in our communities. Individual actions can lay the groundwork for encouraging systemic change through policies, and incentives that encourage and discourage certain behaviors.

Dr. Stephanie J. Creary has researched strategies that can be used to improve diversity and inclusion in organizations. A subset of actions is shared here. Everyone can:

- Speak up when they see discriminatory behavior
- Work on building connections with those of other races and ethnicities
- Support cultural change initiatives and forward-thinking policies about race and racism
- Support Diversity & Inclusion programs
- Learn more about our colleagues' experiences around race and ethnicity
- Be open to sharing more of their identity and to learning more about their colleagues' identities to increase mutual understanding and inclusion
- Adopt a growth mindset regarding learning about race and racism
- Consider how to bring more diverse perspectives into IBM
- Celebrate leaders who prioritize diversity and inclusion

Creary, S. J. (2019). Evidence-Based Tips, Strategies, and Takeaways. Retrieved October 27, 2020, from https://ade29a24-7213-4c63-b0f0-9833f198915a.filesusr.com/ugd/05ba63_ae7ec3021d834096b78235b7cfe380d8.pdf

Reflect

What kind of decisions do you make at work? What are ways you shape your team's culture? What are ways you could use your influence and power to create and support antiracist policies?

Discussion questions

How do you feel about having this conversation?

How can we encourage others to care about antiracism and act?

What do you think stops you or others from speaking up when they hear a comment that is biased or discriminatory?

What actions to combat racism do we think are important considering our organization?

Keep in mind

It can be easy to copy and paste a supportive message on social media or give a thumbs up on Slack, but so much more work is needed. You have the opportunity to use your talents in a way that can help and support others who need it.

Debrief

Participants don't have to share if they don't want to.

- Share one insight or realization triggered by the conversation with the group. Did anything surprise you?
- Note how you're feeling. Why do you think you're feeling that way?
- What is one thing you might try or do differently based on what you learned?

Take action

Reach out

Talk with your colleagues about your team's climate for inclusion. Do people feel like they belong?

Pay attention

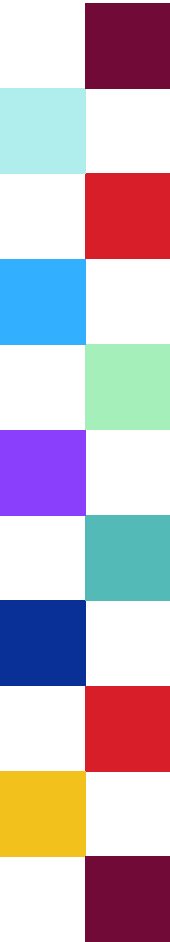
Notice and support inclusive behaviors.

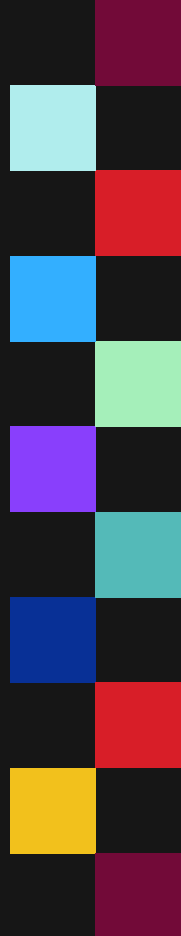
Join

Join local efforts to fight racism.

Please take a moment to fill out this short survey to share how you experienced this conversation and what insights it generated for you.

[Go to survey](#)





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