

Commentary: Equity vs. Equality

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JOINT BASE SAN ANTONIO-LACKLAND, Texas – Though the terms of equity and equality are often thought of as the same, they are quite different. If “fairness” is the goal, through these two methods of equity and equality, we can achieve it. Equity, means everyone is provided with resources specific to their needs to be successful. Equality on the other hand, means everyone is treated the same exact way, regardless of a person’s needs or other individual differences. For example, in equity, the coach takes into consideration the specific needs of each player’s position on the team, and provides the shoes they need to be successful. Furthermore, in the concept of equality, a coach gives all the players the exact same shoes without consideration of the specific needs of their positions on the team.

“Equality is giving everyone the same pair of shoes. Equity is giving everyone a pair of shoes that fits.” – Author Unknown

Concept Definitions

- **Equity** recognizes, everyone does not begin in the same place within society. Rather, some individuals may face adverse conditions and circumstances in their lives that make it more challenging to achieve the same goals, with the same amount of effort. Equity advocates for those who may have been historically disadvantaged, making it difficult for them to be successful within society. Furthermore, what is “fair” as it relates to equity is not a question of what the

same is, but rather the point of where a person begins. In addition, equity takes into account numerous factors in determining what is fair.

- **Equality** is one of the central principles of democracy within the United States. Additionally, equality is based on the belief that all people should have the same opportunities to be successful and have a productive life. Equality is conceptually rooted in fairness. The idea of equality is key to the notion that everyone is able to contribute to society based on their efforts and contributions, instead of their status or position. Equality was predominantly important during the civil rights era when individuals did not have equal standing or treatment in society. It is important to note, there has been regular debate about whether equality is enough, and if equity is considered a more important principle to take in to consideration the concept of “fairness”.

Things to remember

1. Equity and equality are different concepts.
2. Equity means everyone is provided specific resources they need to be successful.
3. Equality means everyone is treated the same exact way, regardless of differences and specific needs.

Action Items

After reading this information, discuss with your colleagues, family members, and friends the similarities and differences of equality vs. equity, taking into consideration the below questions:

1. What are some real world examples (at home, in society, in your workplace, within AFIMSC, and in the Air Force) of equity and equality?
2. How are equity and equality related to fairness?
3. Are there other ways to achieve fairness besides equity and equality?
4. How can I use these concepts to create inclusive and equitable working environments within AFIMSC?