



Cultural Diversity and Sensitivity Training



Why Diversity Matters

Diversity: The quality of being made of many different elements, forms, kinds, or individuals.

Diversity goes beyond race and gender—it encompasses age, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, socio-economic background, and more.

Why does it matter?

- **Innovation and Creativity:** Diverse teams bring a variety of perspectives and experiences, which fosters innovation and creativity.
- **Better Decision-Making:** Different viewpoints lead to more thorough decision-making processes and reduce the risk of groupthink.
- **Marketplace Advantage:** Reflecting the diversity of our customer base improves our ability to understand and meet their needs effectively.
- **Employee Engagement:** Employees feel valued when their backgrounds and identities are respected, leading to higher morale and productivity.



Understanding Sensitivity

Sensitivity in the workplace means being aware of and being empathetically responsive to the feelings and experiences of others.

Tools for sensitivity:

- **Active Listening:** Paying attention to verbal and nonverbal cues to understand how others are feeling. Paying full attention and showing understanding to others' perspectives.
- **Respectful Communication:** Using language and behavior that demonstrates consideration for others' perspectives. Being mindful of language and tone.
- **Empathy:** Putting yourself in someone else's shoes to understand their emotions and reactions.
- **Cultural Competence:** Understanding and respecting cultural differences.
- **Conflict Resolution:** Handling disagreements constructively and empathetically.



Creating an Inclusive Environment

Training and Education: Diversity and sensitivity training raises awareness and educates employees about different cultures, backgrounds, and identities.

Leadership Commitment: Support from leadership is crucial in setting the tone and expectations for diversity and sensitivity in the workplace.

Policies and Practices: Implementing inclusive policies such as flexible work arrangements, accessible facilities, and zero-tolerance policies for discrimination.

Celebrating Differences: Recognizing cultural holidays, hosting events that highlight different traditions, and encouraging open discussions about diversity.



Challenges and Solutions

Overcoming Bias: Recognizing both conscious and unconscious biases, and taking steps to mitigate their impact through awareness, education, and actions promoting mutual respect.

Handling Conflict: Developing conflict resolution strategies that emphasize mutual respect and understanding.

Feedback Mechanisms: Establishing channels for employees to provide feedback on diversity and sensitivity issues, anonymously if needed.

Continuous Improvement: Regularly reviewing policies and practices to ensure they are inclusive and responsive to the evolving needs of our diverse workforce.



Knowledge is Key

Cultural knowledge and proficiency are crucial in fostering a feeling of belonging in the workplace and strengthening interactions among employees, customers, partners, and others.

The key to effective cross-cultural communication is knowledge and awareness. It is essential to understand the potential problems of cross-cultural communication and make a conscious effort to overcome these problems. It is important to assume that one's efforts will not always be successful and adjust behavior appropriately.

For example, one should always assume that there is a significant possibility that cultural differences are causing communication problems, and be willing to be patient and forgiving, rather than hostile and aggressive, if problems develop. The response should be slow and careful in cross-cultural exchanges, not jumping to the conclusion that you know what is being thought and spoke.



How do you interpret this hand gesture?

What is the meaning behind its use?



Meaning of Gesture?

Well, it
depends...

In the United States and many English-speaking countries, the hand gesture usually means “OK,” or “everything is going well and according to plan.”

In Japan, the gesture can be used to symbolize money. Other countries such as Brazil, France, and Germany may view the hand gesture as an insult and find it offensive.

Why does
it matter?

This is an example of how cultural differences can lead to misunderstandings that have the potential to affect your daily interactions with people from culturally different backgrounds.



CULTURE

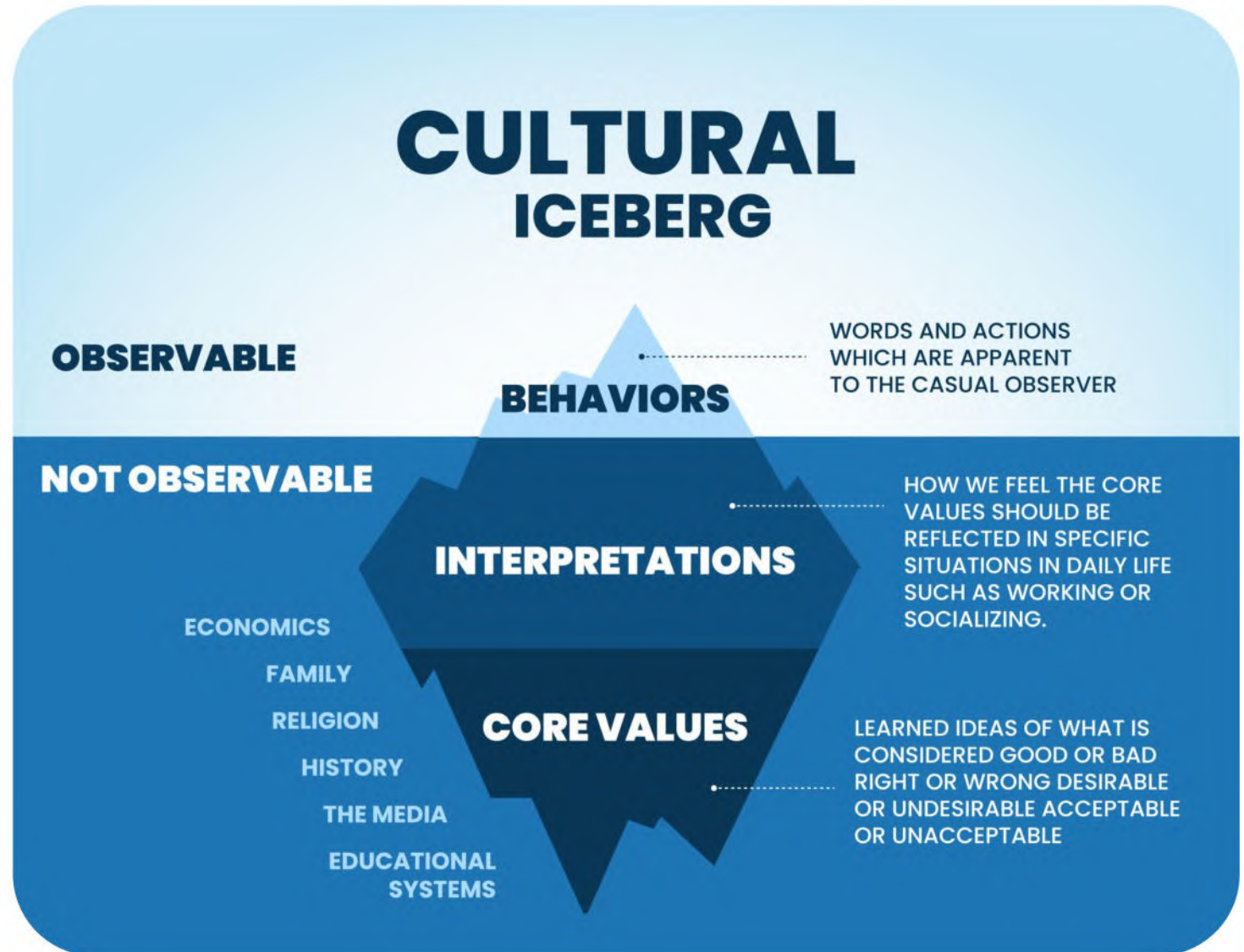
What is culture?

Culture has been defined in many ways. Some of the most common definitions include the following:

- Culture is the shared set of assumptions, values, and beliefs of a group of people by which they organize their common life.
- Culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group from another.
- Culture is the sum of attitudes, customs, and beliefs that distinguishes one group of people from another. Culture is transmitted through language, material objects, ritual, institutions, and art, from one generation to the next.

Cultural Iceberg

- The concept of the cultural iceberg was coined in 1976 by Edward T. Hall, who suggested that culture is analogous to an iceberg in that only about 10% of the iceberg is visible at any given time and that a large part of it is hidden beneath the surface. Culture has components that are external facing or above the surface and visible, and most of the culture, about 90%, is hidden below the surface.
- Take time to consider the values and beliefs that lie beneath your own waterline.
- Please keep in mind that the cultural iceberg, like any analogy, is limited. Culture is much more dynamic and complex. However, the analogy illustrates an important point: People behave the way they do for a reason. Whatever you may think of that reason, you can go beyond simply reacting to that behavior and figure out how to work with it. Knowing where people's behavior is coming from doesn't mean that you must like or accept it, but it should mean that you're no longer surprised by it-and that is a considerable step toward successful interaction.



Cultures Within a Society



Large societies often have subcultures, or groups of people with distinct sets of behavior and beliefs that differentiate them from a larger culture of which they are a part. The subculture may be distinctive because of the age of its members, or by their race, ethnicity, class, or gender. The qualities that determine a subculture as distinct may be aesthetic, religious, occupational, political, sexual, or a combination of these factors.

Subculture: A group within a society that has its own shared set of customs, attitudes, and values, often accompanied by jargon or slang. A subculture can be organized around a common activity, occupation, age, status, ethnic background, race, religion, or any other unifying social condition, but the term is often used to describe deviant groups, such as thieves and drug users.

More simply, subcultures are groups of individuals who, through a variety of methods (conspicuous clothing and ostentatious behavior), present themselves in opposition to the mainstream trends of the mainstream culture that they are a part of. It may also be difficult to identify subcultures because their style (particularly clothing and music) may often be adopted by mass culture for commercial purposes, as businesses will often seek to capitalize on the subversive allure of the subculture in search of cool, which remains valuable in selling any product. This process of cultural appropriation may often result in the death or evolution of the subculture, as its members adopt new styles which are alien to the mainstream.

Ethnic Group: An ethnic group or ethnicity is a population of humans whose members identify with each other, usually on the basis of a presumed common genealogy or ancestry. Recognition by others as a separate ethnic group, and a specific name for the group, also contribute to defining it. Ethnic groups are also usually united by certain common cultural, behavioral, linguistic and ritualistic or religious traits. In this sense, an ethnic group is also a cultural community



Cultural Diversity

Diversity: The quality of being made of many different elements, forms, kinds, or individuals.

Cultural diversity: The variety of human societies or cultures in a specific region, or in the world as a whole. The term is also sometimes used to refer to multiculturalism within an organization.

There are many separate societies around the globe that differ markedly from each other.

As well as the more obvious cultural differences that exist between peoples, such as language, dress, and traditions, there are also significant variations in the way societies organize themselves, in their shared conception of morality, and in the different ways they interact with their environment.

It can be argued that cultural diversity may be vital for the long-term survival of humanity; and that the conservation of cultures may be as important to humankind as the conservation of species and ecosystems is to life in general.



Cultural Pluralism

Cultural pluralism exists when all groups within a smaller society maintain their cultural identities. In a pluralist culture, unique groups not only coexist side by side, but also consider qualities of other groups as traits worth having in the dominant culture.

For example, a community center in the United States may offer classes in Indian yoga, Chinese calligraphy, and Latin salsa dancing. That city may also house one or more synagogues, mosques, and/or Buddhist temples, as well as several churches of various Christian denominations.

The existence of such institutions and practices is possible if the cultural communities responsible for them are protected by law and accepted by the larger society in a pluralist culture. Cultural pluralism is a necessary consequence of a flourishing and peaceful democratic society, because of its tolerance and respect for cultural and ethnic diversity.

Cultural Change

Cultures, by predisposition, both embrace and resist change, depending on culture traits. For example, men and women have complementary roles in many cultures. One gender might desire changes that affect the other. There are both dynamic influences that encourage acceptance of new things, and conservative forces that resist change.

Three kinds of influence cause both change and resistance to it:

1. Forces at work within a society
2. Contact between societies
3. Changes in the natural environment

Cultural change can come about due to environment, to inventions, and to contact with other cultures.



Cultural Competence

Cultural competence is defined as a set of behaviors, attitudes, and policies that come together to enable systems, agencies, or professionals to work effectively in cross-cultural situations.

Culturally effective systems integrate and transform knowledge about individuals and groups of people into specific standards, policies, practices, and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings to increase the quality of services; thereby producing better outcomes.

Quite simply, culturally effective services are respectful of and responsive to the beliefs and practices, and cultural and linguistic needs of diverse populations.



Cultural Competence

Cultural competence is a developmental process that evolves over an extended period. Both individuals and organizations are at various levels of awareness, knowledge, and skills along a cultural competence continuum.

There are five essential elements that contribute to a system's ability to become more culturally competent. The system should:

1. Value diversity
2. Have the capacity for cultural self-assessment
3. Be conscious of the "dynamics" inherent when cultures interact
4. Institutionalize cultural knowledge
5. Develop adaptations to service delivery reflecting an understanding of diversity between and within cultures

Further, these five elements must be reflected in attitudes, structures, policies, and services manifested in every level of the service delivery system.



The Dimensions of Culture

Culture is a complex concept, with numerous dimensions and facets. The focus of this training will be on several of the most important cultural dimensions.

The Building Blocks of Culture

- The most significant ways in which cultures differ are in how they view and react to the cultural dimensions.
- Not everything people do can be explained through cultural dimensions, but because they are so fundamental, they are often the source of or ultimate reason behind a wide range of human thought and behavior.
- Cultural dimensions offer a structure for thinking about and analyzing culture that can explain why people who are from a different country think and behave the way they do, and why you think and behave the way you do.
- Think about how your place in the dimensions might be different from those with whom you interact.



The Dimensions of Culture



Individualist Cultures:

- Focus on oneself and one's individual identity.
- Value is put on being self-sufficient.
- Independence is greatly stressed and valued.
- In general, people tend to distance themselves psychologically and emotionally from each other.
- One may choose to join groups, but group membership is not essential to one's identity or success.
- Example: The United States has an individualist culture.

Collectivist Cultures:

- Sense of self comes from one's membership and role in a group, such as one's family or work team.
- Belief that the survival and success of the group ensures the well-being of the individual, so that by considering the needs and feelings of others, one protects oneself.
- Harmony and the interdependence of group members are stressed and valued.
- Group members are relatively close psychologically and emotionally, but distant toward non-group members.
- Examples: China and India are both collectivist societies.

The Dimensions of Culture



Low Power Distance Cultures:

- More interaction exists between the boss and his/her employees.
- The boss is more democratic, and freely delegates responsibility.
- It's okay to disagree with or question the boss.
- The boss sees themselves as one of the group.
- One may choose to join groups, but group membership is not essential to one's identity or success.
- Examples: Australia and the U.S. are low power distance cultures.

High Power Distance Cultures:

- A greater distance exists between the boss and subordinates.
- Power is centralized and generally is not shared.
- The boss does not delegate responsibility or reward initiative.
- The worker does not disagree with or question the boss.
- The boss sees themselves as on one level, workers on another.
- Examples: Russia and China are high power distance cultures.

The Dimensions of Culture



High Comfort With Uncertainty:

- Fewer laws exist and less emphasis is placed on conformity.
- It's okay to break certain laws or rules for practical reasons.
- It's okay to bypass the chain of command if necessary.
- Conflict can't always be avoided.
- Taking risks is acceptable.
- Examples: The United Kingdom and Ireland have a high level of comfort with uncertainty.

Low Comfort With Uncertainty:

- More laws exist and greater emphasis is on obeying laws and conforming.
- It's never good to break laws or bypass the chain of command, whatever the reason.
- Conflict must be avoided; risks are not attractive.
- Interactions are more formal.
- Different is dangerous.
- Examples: Russia and Germany have a low level of comfort with uncertainty.

The Dimensions of Culture



Internal Locus of Control:

- Control over outside events is largely internal, within the individual.
- Emphasize the strength of will and determination; circumstances do not have to be accepted as they are.
- There are no limits on what one can do or become, as long as they set their minds to it and make the necessary effort.
- Life is in large part what one makes of it.
- Example: Cultures in North America have an internal locus of control.

External Locus of Control:

- Control is considered external to the individual.
- Many aspects of life are predetermined and cannot be controlled.
- There are limits beyond which we cannot go and certain givens that cannot be changed and must be accepted.
- Life happens TO you.
- Examples: Cultures in the Middle East and South America have an external locus of control.

The Dimensions of Culture



Monochronic Time:

- Time is a fixed resource, and a limited amount of it is available.
- The needs of people are adjusted to suit the demands of time-schedules, deadlines, etc.
- People do one thing at a time and finish it before starting something else, regardless of circumstances.
- Examples: The United Kingdom and Germany have a monochronic conception of time.

Polychronic Time:

- Time is the servant and tool of people.
- Time is adjusted to suit the needs of people.
- More time is always available, and one is never too busy.
- It's not necessary to finish one thing before starting another.
- Examples: India and Greece have a polychronic conception of time.

Coping with Differences

Assumptions

- What assumptions might you have about the personality and behavior of people from other cultures?
- What assumptions might you have about people from your own culture?
- How might these assumptions affect the way you interact with others?





Cultural Issues in Communication

Communication is more than just writing and editing; it also involves information gathering and teamwork. In the 21st century this means communicating cross-culturally.

There are three main components to any communication:

1. Subject matter
2. Medium of delivery
3. Cultural considerations

Of the three, the third is often overlooked.

Few people seem to feel the need to truly face the underlying issues that cloud even the simplest of delicate, and frequently confusing, cross-cultural interactions.



Cultural Barriers to Effective Communication

Effective communication with people of different cultures is especially challenging. Cultures provide people with ways of thinking, ways of seeing, hearing, and interpreting the world. Thus, the same words can mean different things to people from different cultures, even when they speak in the "same" language. When the languages are different, and translation must be used to communicate, the potential for misunderstandings increases.

1. **"Cognitive Constraints"** are the frames of reference or world views that provide a backdrop that all new information is compared to or inserted into.
2. **"Behavior Constraints"** Each culture has its own rules about proper behavior which affect verbal and nonverbal communication. Whether one looks the other person in the eye-or not; whether one says what one means overtly or talks around the issue; how close the people stand to each other when they are talking--all of these and many more are rules of politeness which differ from culture to culture.
3. **"Emotional Constraints"** Different cultures regulate the display of emotion differently. Some cultures get very emotional when they are debating an issue. They yell, they cry, they exhibit their anger, fear, frustration, and other feelings openly. Other cultures try to keep their emotions hidden, exhibiting or sharing only the "rational" or factual aspects of the situation.

All these differences tend to lead to communication problems. If the people involved are not aware of the potential for such problems, they are even more likely to fall victim to them, although it takes more than awareness to overcome these problems and communicate effectively across cultures.

In the Mind of the Beholder

One way to understand why making cultural distinctions is useful in figuring out "what something means" in another culture is to acknowledge that what we call "reality" may have more than one meaning or interpretation, often vastly different. Most human beings tend to believe that what they see is "real," and assume anyone observing or experiencing the same situation would "naturally" describe, react to, or characterize the event in the same way they do.

We all believe that we observe reality, things as they are, but what actually happens is that the mind interprets what the eyes see and gives it meaning. It is only at this point, when meaning is assigned, that we can truly say we have seen something. In other words, what we see is as much in the mind as it is in reality.

If you consider that the mind of a person from one culture is going to be different in many ways from the mind of a person from another culture, then you have the explanation for that most fundamental of all cross-cultural problems: the fact that two people look upon the same reality, the same example of behavior, and see two entirely different things.

Any behavior observed across the cultural divide, therefore, must be interpreted in two ways:

1. The meaning intended by the person who DOES the action
2. The meaning perceived by the person who OBSERVES the action.

Only when these two meanings are the same do we have successful communication, successful in the sense that the meaning that was intended by the doer is the one that was understood by the observer.



Mastering Communication

Think about your own culture as you take a moment to read and answer these questions:

- How is disagreement expressed?
- How is bad news or a negative concern communicated?
- How important does saving face seem to be?
- Are people generally direct or indirect in their conversation?

Your answers to these questions are likely to be different from the way a person from another culture answers them. Even slight differences in communication styles can create massive misunderstandings. By the time you realize that you have not communicated what you intended, it might already be too late.





Mastering Communication

Cross-Cultural Communication

- Communication, the sending and receiving of messages, is an integral part of culture. Because culture is such an important ingredient in all behavior, and so much of behavior is spent in one type of communication or another, it is hard to tell the difference between the two. In any event, whether or not they are one **in** the same, culture and communication certainly go hand in hand.
- In the cross-cultural context, communication, like everything else, is more complicated. It's almost impossible to send a message that does not have at least some cultural content, whether it's in the words themselves, in the way they are said, or in the nonverbal signals that accompany them. And even if it were possible to send a message without any cultural content, it's not possible to receive one without passing it through the filter of one's own cultural conditioning. All of this means people from cultures different from your own may not interpret everything you say the way you **intended**. And vice versa.



Mastering Communication

Verbal Communication

Communication falls into two classic categories: verbal and nonverbal. The verbal category is split further into direct and indirect forms of communication. We will first discuss the differences between direct and indirect communication.

- Indirect:
 - Rely less on words to convey the literal meaning of the spoken word and more on nonverbal communication.
 - Imply/suggest what they mean
 - Understatement is valued; you need to read between the lines
 - The truth, if it may possibly hurt, should be tempered.
- Direct:
 - Rely more on words, and on those words being interpreted literally.
 - Getting or giving information is the goal of most communication exchanges.
 - People say what they mean and mean what they say; you don't need to read between the lines;
 - It's important to tell it like it is; honesty is the best policy.
 - The truth is more important than sparing someone's feelings.

Mastering Communication

Examples of Communication Differences Across Cultures

1. Understatement. (Example: "I have one small suggestion.")
 - Meaning in a Direct Culture: Understatements are often taken literally; in this case, the listener would assume the speaker doesn't feel strongly about this matter.
 - Meaning in an Indirect Culture: This is the way to express considerable interest in/concern about the matter.
2. Saying "yes".
 - Meaning in a Direct Culture: Agreement, approval, acceptance, understanding.
 - Meaning in an Indirect Culture: Mere acknowledgement that the person heard you; being polite and respectful.
3. Saying nothing in response to a proposal or suggestion.
 - Meaning in a Direct Culture: The person does not object, disagree with, or have a problem with the proposal/suggestion. A direct communicator assumes the speaker will say something if he or she has a problem with or does not agree with or like the proposal; hence, silence means approval.
 - Meaning in an Indirect Culture: The person does not approve or does not think it is **their** place to comment and would rather say nothing than criticize (especially if the proposal is made in a group setting). An indirect communicator assumes silence means the speaker has some objection to the proposal and will pursue the matter with that person in the appropriate setting.



Mastering Communication

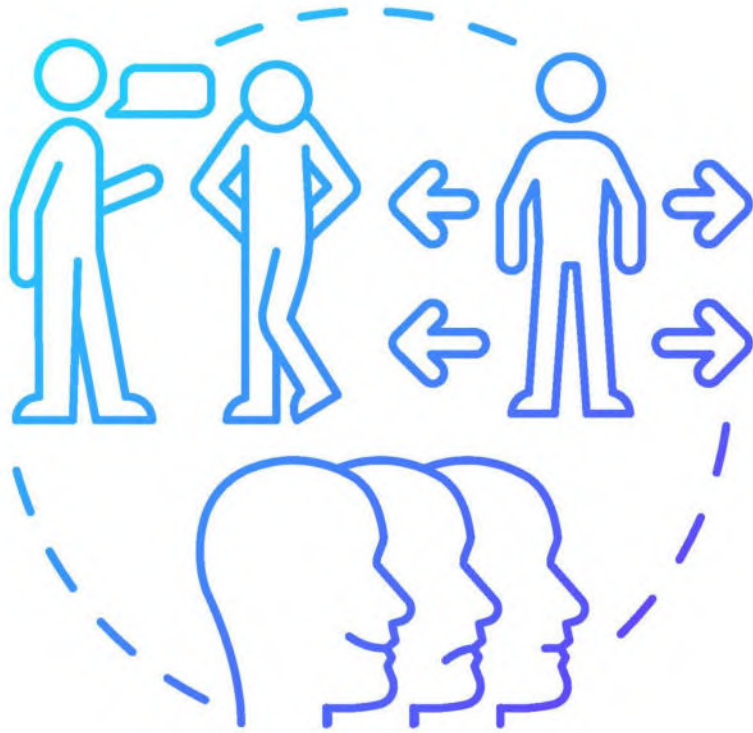
Examples of Communication Differences Across Cultures (continued)

4. Informing a superior about something that is going on.
 - Meaning in a Direct Culture: Asking for some kind of intervention or help. Direct communicators may interpret this as a request for a solution or some kind of assistance and offer help where none is needed or wanted by the speaker.
 - Meaning in an Indirect Culture: Being respectful to a superior by keeping them informed of routine goings-on. Indirect communicators might interpret such a conversation as a routine update, a common courtesy to the bosses who like to know everything that's going on-and fail to offer help that was, in fact, being requested by the speaker. .

5. Qualified answers. (Examples: "Probably," "I think so," "I'm almost sure," "There's a good possibility")
 - Meaning in a Direct Culture: Suggesting the likelihood that the thing will happen. Direct communicators interpret these literally as affirmations, when often they are, in fact, polite ways of saying the opposite of what the words mean.
 - Meaning in an Indirect Culture: The person is not in agreement with or positive about the matter and doesn't want to say so. Indirect communicators hearing these words would take them as polite "No's" when, in fact, they may be meant literally, as near affirmations.



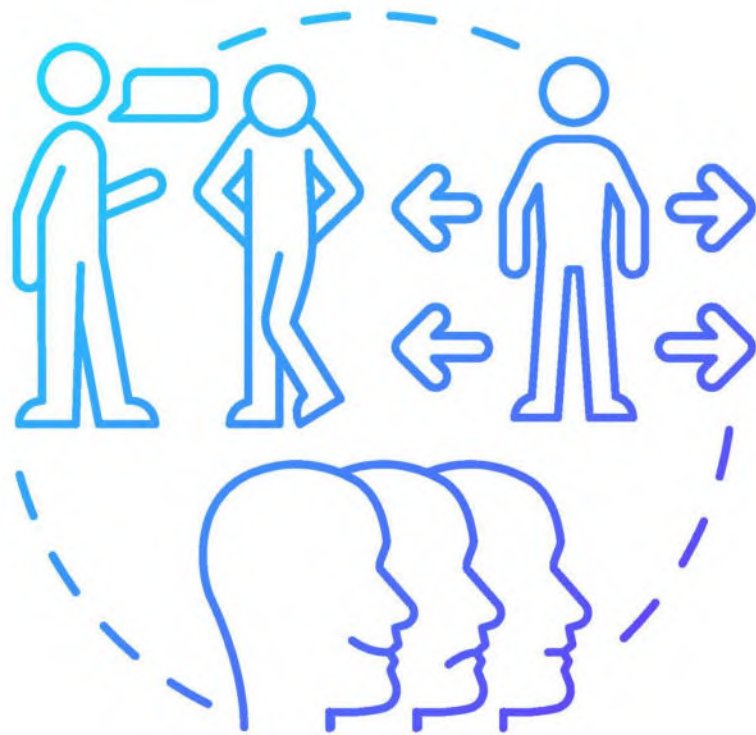
Mastering Communication



NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Nonverbal Communication

- Nonverbal communication encompasses a diverse range of signals that go beyond spoken language, such as gestures, facial expressions, body language, and vocal nuances like tone and rhythm. These cues carry subtle meanings critical to effective communication.
- Some things to think about:
 - If you were in a country where people stand closer to each other than they do in your country, what impression might you give them?
 - What impression might you have of people in those same situations?
 - If you were in a country where people stand further apart than they do in your country, what impression might you give them?
 - What impression might you have of people in those same situations?
 - Non-verbal communication can be broken down into the following elements: Silence, turn-taking, eye contact, space and touching, and gestures.

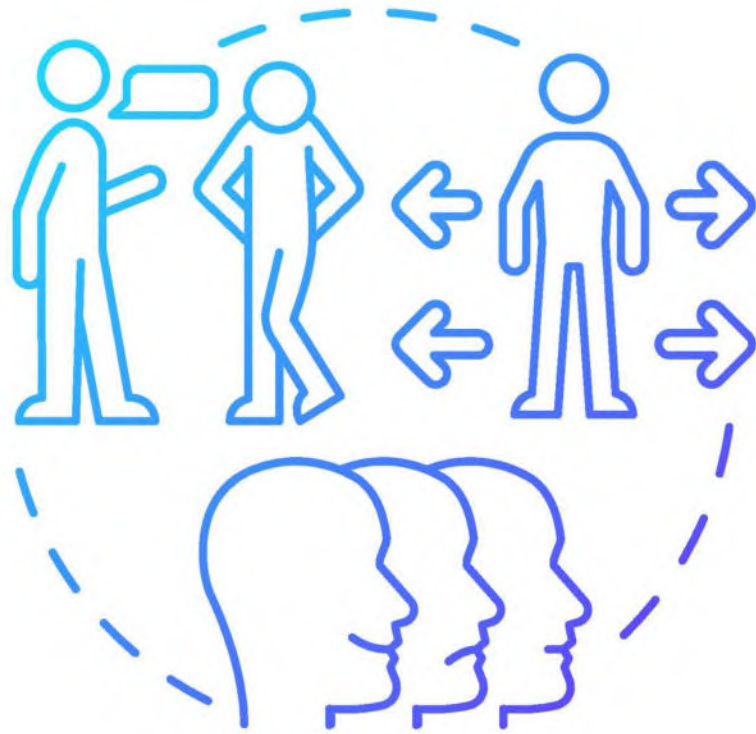


NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Mastering Communication

Nonverbal Communication (continued)

- Silence
 - Silence is the sign of a good listener; or is it? In many Western cultures, especially in Central and Southern Europe, it is expected that you will actively show you are listening by commenting- "I see", "that's interesting", "really" etc. You may also interrupt people. In these cultures, silence may suggest a lack of interest, boredom, or ignorance. It may make the speaker uncomfortable. In other cultures, being silent while others speak is a sign of respect, a sign that you are paying attention and considering the speaker's words carefully.
- Turn-taking
 - Related to silence is turn-taking. How do you know when it is your turn to speak? Do you wait to be invited? Do you wait until the other person has finished? Or do you just interrupt when you see an opportunity to do so? If so, exactly how do you interrupt? Having different turn-taking behavior from other people can cause problems and frustration.
- Eye Contact
 - Eye contact is another crucial aspect of communication, and one that can lead to cross-cultural misunderstanding, as different cultures attach different values to prolonged eye contact.
 - In many Western cultures, maintaining eye contact shows trust, confidence, and interest. Avoiding eye contact suggests that the person may not be trustworthy or is hiding something. In Asian cultures it is quite the reverse. Avoiding eye contact is a sign of respect, and maintaining eye contact may be seen as challenging and disrespectful. What passes as eye contact in one country becomes staring for another country.

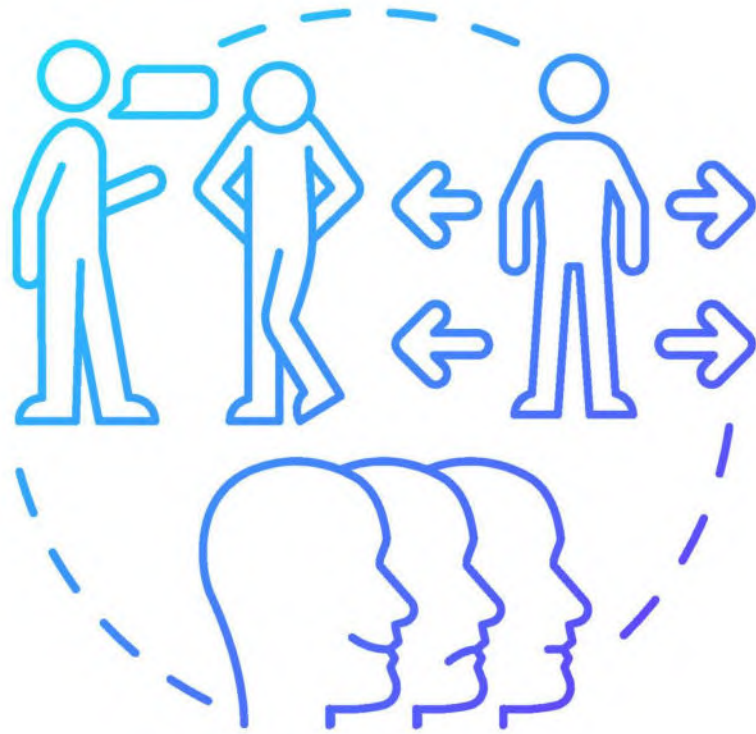


NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Mastering Communication

Nonverbal Communication (continued)

- Space and Touching
 - All cultures maintain a “comfortable” distance between people. In some cultures this distance may be very close, almost touching. In others, it is much more distant. In some cultures, such as Spain and parts of Latin America, your colleagues will often touch your arm or shoulder when making a point; it is not a sign of intimacy, only of communication. For example, a collectivist culture may interpret the preferred space of an individualist culture as cold and unfriendly.
- Gestures
 - What one person means by a gesture may not be what a person from another culture understands by that gesture. It is important to learn the different meanings of gestures in order to correctly interpret what people are “saying” to you. If you have ongoing communication with someone who is from a different country than you, it is a good idea to ask him or her what certain gestures mean in their country.



NONVERBAL COMMUNICATION

Mastering Communication

Nonverbal Communication (continued)

Tactics for Effective Nonverbal Communication

1. Be aware of rules for attentiveness during conversation. Example: The constant maintenance of eye contact while listening during a conversation often violates a conversational rule in some cultures.
2. Be aware of different rules for taking turns during conversation. Example: In some cultures, people frequently perceive “breaking in” to reinforce or disagree with another's point to be perfectly permissible, even desirable.
3. Cultures may use different standards for loudness, speed of delivery, silence, attentiveness and time to respond to another's point. Example: Many societies place high value on contemplation and tend to feel little responsibility to make immediate responses during conversation.

Mastering Communication

Communication Techniques

- Know your audience and match your message to the audience.
- Respect your audience and suspend judgments.
- Know exactly what you want to achieve.
- Think and organize before you proceed.
- Think about your audience's point of view.
- Be mindful of what your facial expressions, sounds, and posture are conveying nonverbally.
- Listen carefully to all responses.
- Be willing to share what you know and hear what you don't know.
- Stay focused on what you want to achieve and don't get distracted.
- Find a way to get your audience to explain what they think you said. Discuss differences until you hear a satisfactory version of the message you wanted to convey.



Summary

Embracing diversity and promoting sensitivity isn't just a moral imperative—it's also a strategic advantage that benefits our organization in numerous ways. By fostering an inclusive environment where every individual feels respected and valued, we not only enhance employee satisfaction and productivity but also strengthen our ability to innovate and thrive in an increasingly diverse world.

Culture is a generalization about groups of people's behaviors, and consequently, cross-cultural training is a generalized solution. Remember; when we deal with generalizations, there are always exceptions. The same way you may not represent your culture 100% of the time, people from different cultures may not represent theirs fully.

The secret of cross-cultural success is AWARENESS. If you are aware of how culture influences thought and behavior, how people from other cultures may see you, and how your cultural background may influence how you see them, then the rest is easy.

