Cultural Competency 101

Working Across Cultural Differences

Eduardo González, Jr.
Diversity, Research Partnership, and Youth Development Specialist
Cornell University Cooperative Extension – NYC
eg36@cornell.edu
212-340-2950

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Any questions should be directed to Ryan Maher at rmm325@cornell.edu

Diversity and Inclusion are a part of Cornell University’s heritage. We are a recognized employer and educator valuing AA/EEO, Protected Veterans, and Individuals with Disabilities.
Workshop Goals

• Introduce key terms and definitions of cultural competency.
• Review the multiple dimension of diversity.
• Learn key steps for becoming more culturally competent.
• Cultivate curiosity about diversity.
Poll Question #1

Have you received any cultural competency training in the last 5 years? (Yes/No)
Poll Question #2

How often do you work with people who are different from you? (Daily; Once a Week; More than One a Week; Once a Month; Not Very Often)
What is diversity?
includes every aspect of a human being. It includes everything you know about a person by looking at them, such as their color, gender, height, and other physical characteristics, and it is also about things you can’t see such as their personalities, religion, dominant hand, values, sexual orientation, where they live, their goals, and so on.
Dimensions of Diversity

[Diagram showing various dimensions of diversity, including Cultural, Organizational, Secondary, and Primary categories with specific factors like Age, Gender, Religion, Education, etc.]

http://www.kornferryinstitute.com/institute-blog/2012-11-07/understanding-many-dimensions-diversity
What is Culture?
Culture...

A way of life of a given society, passed down from one generation to the next through learning and experiences.

-Concise Columbia Encyclopedia
The Iceberg Concept of Culture

Like an iceberg, nine-tenths of culture is below the surface.

Surface Culture
Most easily seen
Emotional level - low

Food, dress, music, visual arts, drama, crafts, dance, literature, langugae, celebrations, games

Shallow Culture
Unspoken Rules
Emotional level - high
courtesy, contextual conversational patterns, concept of time, personal space, rules of conduct, facial expressions, nonverbal communication, body language, touching, eye contact, patterns of handling emotions, notions of modesty, concept of beauty, courtship practices, relationships to animals, notions of leadership, tempo of work, concepts of food, ideals of child rearing, theory of disease, social interaction rate, nature of friendships, tone of voice, attitudes toward elders, concept of cleanliness, notions of adolescence, patterns of group decision-making, definition of insanity, preferences for competition or cooperation, tolerance of physical pain, concept of "self", concept of past and future, definition of obscenity, attitudes toward dependents, problem solving roles in relation to age, sex, class, occupation, kinship, and ...

Deep Culture
Unconscious Rules
Emotional level - intense
Fundamentals of Culture

- Culture is not good or bad. It just “is.”
- What may be considered “just the way it is” is often culturally influenced.
- Our view of the world is shaped by values, perceptions, assumptions and expectations.
- The more people know about their culture, and the more they know about other cultures, the better the communication will be.
- The way one does or sees things, when coupled with the way others do and see things, can lead to new improved ways of doing and seeing things.
- Being different is “OK” and differences can be recognized, acknowledged and cherished.

Adapted from *The Diversity Training Activity Book: 50 Activities for Promoting Communications and Understanding at Work* by Jonamay Lambert and Selma Myers, © 2009, AMACOM.
Cultural Competency
Cultural Competency

The ability to work effectively across cultures in a way that acknowledges and respects the culture of the person or organization being served.

**For Individuals:**
A set of consistent behaviors, attitudes, skills and knowledge that create respectful interactions with people different from ourselves.

**For Workplace:**
Recognizing the value of diversity and having policies and procedures in place which support a respectful organizational culture.

J. H. Hanley (1999) - Beyond the Tip of the Iceberg: Five Stages Toward Cultural Competence
Components of Cultural Competency

- Awareness of one’s own cultural worldviews
- Attitudes towards cultural differences
- Knowledge of different cultural practices and worldviews
- Cross-cultural skills

Result: Developing cultural competence results in an ability to understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures.

Attitudes Towards Diversity

A Continuum

- **Exclude**: people who are perceived as different are treated as outsiders with little value

- **Tolerate**: people who are different may be included, but not welcomed

- **Accept**: recognition that people who are different can contribute valuable knowledge, skills, and insight to the group

- **Embrace**: engage and celebrate diversity to achieve innovation and higher productivity

*Source: New Media Learning*
Barriers to Cultural Competency
Organizational Barriers to Cultural Competency

• **Plate is full** – *no time for building relationships across differences, there’s more important work.*

• **Diversity is a deficit** – “*We have a quality program and we don’t want to weaken it.*”

• **One size fits all programming** – “*color-blind*, “*gender-blind”, “*abilities-blind”, “*SES-blind*” approach to diversity

• **Lack of comfort with diversity** – *fear of being offensive, “political correctness”, embarrassment*

• **Quota anxiety** – “*How many of them do we need in our program?*”

Unconscious Bias

• Our natural people preferences
• Biologically we are hard-wired to prefer people who look like us, sound like us and share our interests.
• “Social categorization” is the process whereby we routinely and rapidly sort people into groups.
• This preference bypasses our normal, rational and logical thinking.
• We use these processes very effectively (we call it intuition) but the categories we use to sort people are not logical, modern or perhaps even legal.
• Simply put, our neurology takes us to the very brink of bias and poor decision making.
Perceptual Lens

Shaped throughout our lifetime by:

- **Cultural Learning** (norms, language, values, behaviors, practices)
- **Historic Group Learning & Cultural Narrative** (experiences, stories, history, thematic beliefs)
- **Individual Learning & Narrative** (individual experiences, trauma, & history)
- **Social & Institutional Learning** (patterns of historic behavior in relevant institutions)
So What?
Awareness & Skill: Who Am I

First step: Develop knowledge and awareness about your own cultural awareness & identity.

Questions to ask Yourself:

- What is my cultural background?
- What are some things that I value because my culture values those things? (think below the surface of the iceberg)
- How well do my beliefs and values fit in with my culture's values?
- Have clashes between my values and those promoted by my culture harmed me in any way?
- What things would I like to pass on to children from my culture?
Strategies to Develop your Awareness, Skills & Knowledge

Some general strategies to take with you to your workplace, home, relationships and community:

1. Value diversity
2. Engage in cultural self-assessments
3. Understand the dynamics of difference
4. Develop cultural knowledge
5. Adapt to culture, especially to its deep structural aspects
6. Establish cultural reciprocity and share your culture!
Now What?
1. Why is it important to enhance our cultural competencies and our outreach?

2. What can you do to promote your personal and professional skills in this area? What’s the benefit? What’s the cost of not doing so? To/for whom?

Questions, Reflections & Appreciations
Selected Resources


Hanley, J. (nd). *Five stages toward cultural competence: Beyond the tip of the iceberg.* Whole Communities.

Selected Resources


