

Principles of cultural competence include:

Define culture broadly.

Value clients' cultural beliefs.

Recognize complexity in language interpretation.

Facilitate learning between providers and communities.

Involve the community in defining and addressing service needs.

Collaborate with other agencies.

Professionalize staff hiring and training.

Institutionalize cultural competence.

What is Cultural Competence and How to Develop It?

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Develop cultural competency skills to enhance the ability to practice effective communication in intercultural situations.

This article will help better understand cultural competence and its components. Adopted cross-cultural attitude strategies will help to develop and enhance the ability to practice effective communication in intercultural situations.

Working and living in a global society requires the ability to create interactions and relationships with people who are different from oneself. It is critical to know how to assess our cultural competency

and evaluate our own cultural behaviors. Globalization and diversity lowered the barriers that once separated cultures both internationally and domestically (Garneau & Pepin, 2015). Cultural competency skills can help businesses run more productively, and efficiently. Practicing cultural competency skills can also elevate your customer service skills. Exceptional customer service gives you the ability to set your business apart from your competitors and keeps your customers returning to your business.

What is culture?

In 1951, Kluckhohn explained culture as sharing a pattern of thinking, feeling, reacting, and problem-solving. Culture is a dynamic relational process of shared meanings that originate in the interactions between individuals (Carpenter-Song, Schwallie, & Longhofer, 2007). In 2010, Gregory and colleagues emphasized that culture must be considered in historical, social, political, and economic contexts. Betancourt (2004) defined culture as a pattern of learned beliefs, values, and behavior that are shared within a group; it includes language, styles of communication, practices, customs, and views on roles and relationships. Edgar Schein (2010) described a culture as "shared beliefs, values, and assumptions of a group of people who learn from one another and teach to others that their behaviors, attitudes, and perspectives are the correct ways to think, act, and feel." Psychologists argue that unfamiliar culture negatively affects an individual's sensemaking mechanisms and determine their behavioral responses. As a result, individuals cannot accurately perceive, interpret, explain, and predict the behavior of people with different cultural background(s) (Muzychenko, 2008).

What is cultural intelligence?

Cultural intelligence is the ability to interpret the stranger's behavior the way the stranger's compatriots would (Muzychenko 2008). For example, if employees don't feel as if their manager understands or respects their culture, employees may find it hard to trust the leader or work as a team.

What is cultural competence?

Current research on cultural competence focuses on sensitivity to cross-cultural differences and the ability to adapt to other cultural environments (e.g., Hansen, Pepitone-Arreola-Rockwell, & Greene, 2000), or reflective awareness of cultural influences on one's thoughts and behaviours (Chao, Okazaki, & Hong, 2011).

Muzychenko (2008) defined cultural competence as the appropriateness and effectiveness of one's behavior in an alien cultural environment. Wilson, Ward, and Fischer (2013) defined cultural competence as "the acquisition and maintenance of culture-specific skills" for very practical reasons:

function effectively within a new cultural context.

interact effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds.

Williams (2001) defined cultural competence as "the ability of individuals and systems to work or respond effectively across cultures in a way that acknowledges and respects the culture of the person or organization being served" p.1.

Why do we need to develop cultural competence?

Developing cultural competence helps us understand, communicate with, and effectively interact with people across cultures. It gives us

the ability to compare different cultures with our own and better understand the differences. Unconsciously, we bring our own cultural frame of interpretation to any situation. This is not to say that culture alone determines how one interprets a situation. One's own unique history and personality also play an important role (Hofstede, 2002).

How do we develop an attitude and components of cultural competence?

Developing cross-cultural attitudes allows one to develop skills for better engaging with people from all kinds of cultures. Cross-cultural skills demonstrated through the ability to communicate with respect; recognize others' values, accept knowledge, skills, and talents; and tolerate, engage, and celebrate the success of others. Deardorff defined competence as "the ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes" (Deardorff, 2006, pp. 247-248). We adopted Deardorff (2006) cross-cultural attitude strategies that help you to develop and enhance one's ability to practice effective communication in intercultural situations:

Practice openness by demonstrating acceptance of difference.

Be flexible by demonstrating acceptance of ambiguity.

Demonstrate humility through suspension of judgment and the ability to learn.

Be sensitive to others by appreciating cultural differences.

Show a spirit of adventure by showing curiosity and seeing opportunities in different situations.

Use a sense of humour through the ability to laugh at ourselves.

Practice positive change or action by demonstrating a successful interaction with the identified culture.

Borchum (2002) described cultural competence as "a non-linear dynamic process that is never-ending and ever expending. It is built on increases in knowledge and skill development related to its attributes" p. 5. We synthesized and adopted Williams's (2001) and Martin and Vaughn's (2007) studies that can assist in better understanding of components of cultural competency. These attributes will guide you in developing cultural competence:

Self-knowledge and awareness about one's own culture.

Awareness of one's own cultural worldview.

Experience and knowledge of different cultural practices.

Attitude toward cultural differences.

In conclusion, our global society necessitates interactions and relationships with people who are different from oneself. By developing one's own cultural competence, productivity and efficiency may increase and in turn improve one's customer service skills. Customers who feel valued and understood will return for repeat business.

Resources

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