



BACKPACK

CULTURAL DIVERSITY TRAINING

MODULE 1-SECTION 3

Fundamentals of
Intercultural Competency

BEFORE WE BEGIN

This section focuses on the 6 Cultural Orientation Continua. These 6 cultural orientations will provide a better understanding of the motivations and values that influence behaviour.

You will be reviewing the 6 Cultural Orientation Continua with 2 contrasting descriptions for each. In this section, we will be practicing self reflection so that you may accurately identify where you sit on the spectrum for each continuum.

At the end of this section as a personal exercise we encourage you to think about 3 concrete changes you can make in regard to your relations with others.



CULTURAL ORIENTATIONS

Cultural orientations provide clues to better understand the motivations and values that influence behavior. As we discussed earlier, our behavior is consciously or subconsciously informed by our previous experiences, such as learning the norms and rules of the culture in which we are living.

By learning about cultural orientations, we deepen our awareness about the ways cultural experiences may influence an individual's behavior.



CULTURAL ATTITUDES

The following Six Cultural Orientations are continua between couples of terms that identify two contrasting descriptions (i.e., direct –indirect).

1. Individualism – Collectivism
2. Direct – Indirect
3. Formal – Informal
4. Straight – Questionable
5. Bigger – Smaller
6. Low – High

However, in our daily lives, we do not encounter people who are completely embedded in one or the other. Instead, people move along the continuum, and may simply gravitate toward one of the two ends.

CULTURAL ORIENTATIONS

Indeed, individuals will not always behave in a certain way nor will all members of one cultural group. People can contextually adjust their orientations according to where they are, the people around them, what they want to achieve, and so on. Being aware of cultural orientations and commonalities is useful as a cautious starting point, but applying generalizations to different cultural groups can lead to stereotyping.

ORIENTATION 1

Individualism

You are likely to be self-sufficient and solve problems on your own. Your focus is on individual preferences, success, rights and pleasures.

Collectivism

You identify with your group(s) and consider the goals and the needs of the group before your individual needs. You are more likely to depend on others when accomplishing a task because team work and group recognition is more important.

ORIENTATION 2

Direct

You prefer direct messages, you “say what you mean and mean what you say.” Others do not need to read between the lines as your requests are direct (you prefer to over-communicate and clarify). Silence and pauses could be misunderstood as signs of agreement or a lack of interest.

You challenge ideas and are open to being challenged because you do not consider confrontation as a personal insult.

You believe the responsibility for clear and effective communication lies with the speaker.

Indirect

You prefer less direct messages. Your requests are more hints and suggestions instead of direct requests. Communication is less explicit; most of the message is in the physical context or internalized in the person. Silence and longer pauses are needed. You avoid confrontation to maintain harmony. Disagreement is subtler. Others need to read between the lines: “yes” may mean “maybe” or even “no.” You believe the responsibility for clear and effective communication lies with the listener.

ORIENTATION 3

Formal

You see the workplace as a formal professional space and prefer to develop professional relationships. You draw boundaries and avoid expressing emotions during workplace disagreements. You put the emphasis on the work that needs to be done, and tasks to be completed. Your priority is to 'get down to business'.

Informal

You are relationship focused. Boundaries between personal and professional spheres are negotiated and, thus, you develop more informal, personal relationships in the workplace. You may express emotions in the workplace because colleagues are seen as friends and an informal communication style is preferred.

ORIENTATION 4

Straight

You see time as a limited commodity. You work with deadlines and schedules and may be too busy to engage in new activities if not scheduled.

Questionable

For you, time is flexible in order to meet people's needs. Therefore, deadlines and schedules are flexible. You will often make time to engage in new activities regardless of other workplace commitments and/or the risk of being late for a meeting.

ORIENTATION 5

Bigger

Personal space is like an invisible circle or bubble around the body. You tend to have a clear perception of “your” space and feel uncomfortable when somebody is standing too close to you. You avoid touching people and do not like to be touched.

Smaller

You get close to the people with whom you are communicating. You sometimes use touch, and enjoy expressing friendship, trust, and closeness with hugs and kisses.

ORIENTATION 6

Low

You allow employees, regardless of their title, to participate in the decision-making process. You emphasize equality and try to minimize the distance between yourself and your workers. You create an egalitarian work environment and expect others to openly disagree with the boss, critique your work and contribute to your ideas. You expect informal communication (e.g., no use of titles). You believe everyone should take initiative in their job.

High

You prefer an authoritarian style. You think managers do not gain power easily; therefore, they have the right to make decisions and give instructions to subordinates. You use titles and formal language when communicating. You do not expect subordinates to take much initiative; instead, everyone is expected to follow instructions and only do what they are told to do. You may see disagreement as a challenge to your authority. Subordinates are not typically welcome to criticize their managers, raise questions that could embarrass the managers, or to correct them if they make a mistake. Higher power distance oriented individuals place importance on saving face and are extremely careful to save face for others.

COMMITMENT TO CHANGE

Think about 3 concrete changes you can make with regard to your relations with others before you leave Canada.

Try to think of concrete changes so you are able to self-assess whether you have achieved your goals. Examples: I will not react emotionally to others' actions or I will apply the somethings up cycle when a communication conflict arises.

