

INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY

INTERLOCALITY

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Welcome to the Intercultural Sensitivity course!

IA Interlocality AR



This course was developed in the framework of the Erasmus+ project INTERLOCALITY co-funded by the EU, with the aim of increasing local employability among international higher education degree students. This course is co-funded by the European Union, it reflects the views only of the author, and the European commission cannot be held responsible for any use which may be made of the information contained therein.

Lack of local employment of international higher education degree students and graduates is a growing problem in many countries in the world. This problem touches many different stakeholders in local employment. **This course has three main target groups: local small- and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs); higher education institutions (HEIs) and third-sector organisations.** By third-sector organisations we mean government and non-government organisations, associations, labour market organisations and any other organisations besides HEIs that support the employment of international talents in the host country.

The Intercultural Sensitivity course is **a transformative journey towards enhancing intercultural competence.** In an increasingly interconnected world, understanding and appreciating cultural differences is crucial for effective communication and collaboration. This course will equip you with the knowledge and skills to navigate diverse cultural contexts with sensitivity and confidence - in short: The ability to **recognise, understand and adapt to cultural differences** in a respectful manner.

This course will take you on a journey of self-reflection, knowledge acquisition, and skills development. You will explore the **foundations of intercultural sensitivity**, learn about **cultural dimensions**, and examine your own **cultural assumptions and biases**. Through engaging exercises and discussions, you will gain insights into the impact of culture on communication styles, values, and behaviours. You will learn effective strategies for **bridging cultural gaps, resolving conflicts, and fostering inclusive environments**.

By completing this course, you will become a more **culturally competent individual, ready to thrive in diverse environments and feel secure in leading multicultural teams**. You will gain a competitive edge in today's globalised world and contribute to building inclusive and harmonious societies.

Join us on this transformative journey towards intercultural sensitivity. Embrace the diversity that surrounds us, and let's build a future of understanding, harmony, and connection. Be open and curious!

This course consists of three levels: Beginner, Developing and Skilled. Each level takes approximately 4 hours to complete, including text, videos and learning activities. At the end of each level, check your knowledge and self-reflection.

Before starting the course, go to the initial quiz to know which level you should start with!



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We have used OpenAI's ChatGPT 3.5 in editing our texts and ensuring a coherent use of language in the course, which has been created by a wide range of project members.



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[CONTINUE TO THE INITIAL QUIZ](#)

Initial Quiz



The Initial quiz of the Intercultural Sensitivity course includes 10 multiple-choice questions with the aim to suggest the appropriate level for you to start with: Beginner, Developing or Skilled. This makes the course flexible and centred on your needs and prior knowledge and competences.

Please note that the quiz results are preliminary recommendations based only on your score. Therefore, **you should also review the content of each level (presented after the quiz) to choose the most suitable level for you!**

Go ahead and start the quiz!

Question

01/10

Which of the following answers best defines intercultural sensitivity?

- A person's ability to speak multiple languages fluently
- A person's willingness to try different foods from different cultures
- A person's awareness and understanding of cultural differences
- A person's ability to adapt to different climates and environments

Question

02/10

Why is intercultural sensitivity important in today's globalised world?

- It allows us to create homogeneous societies.
- It promotes understanding and cooperation among diverse groups .
- It encourages assimilation of cultures into a dominant one.
- It limits opportunities for cross-cultural collaborations.

Question

03/10

What is the primary characteristic of critical incidents in a professional or educational context?

- They are minor issues that do not have a significant impact.
- They are unexpected events or situations that require immediate attention and reflection.
- They are everyday routine occurrences.
- They are planned and scheduled activities.

Question

04/10

Which of the following stages of intercultural development is characterised by recognising cultural biases and challenging assumptions?

- Denial
- Minimisation
- Acceptance
- Adaptation

Question

05/10

Which of the following is NOT one of the key principles of the IDC model by Bennett?

- The importance of individual agency
- The role of environmental determinism
- The dynamic and interactive nature of development
- The constructive nature of development

Question

06/10

Which of the following is an essential aspect of intercultural development?

- Avoiding interactions with people from different cultures
- Promoting cultural assimilation as the ultimate goal
- Valuing diversity and cultivating curiosity about other cultures
- Maintaining a fixed mindset and a homogeneous worldview

Question

07/10

What is the primary focus of intercultural development?

- Learning multiple languages
- Acquiring knowledge about different cultures
- Developing cultural self-awareness and empathy
- Adapting to new cultural environments

Question

08/10

Do you actively promote inclusivity and equal opportunities for individuals from different cultural backgrounds in your surroundings, personal or professional

Yes

No

Question

09/10

Are you aware of your own cultural biases and actively work to challenge them?

Yes

No

Question

10/10

Do you actively seek out and value diversity in your personal and professional relationships?

Yes

No

Instructions

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Depending on your score, you can choose which level to start with. **Please note that these are preliminary recommendations based only on your score, and you should therefore also review the content of each level below. You are of course free to choose any level!**

- **Between 0% and 40%: Beginner**
- **Between 40% and 80%: Developing**
- **Between 80% and 100%: Skilled**

If you get exactly 40% or 80%, please choose between them. You are always free to choose the level you want to start with, according to your personal experiences and knowledge of the course topic. But, if you take them all you might also learn more.

The **Beginner** level explores a general understanding of the main concept of Intercultural Sensitivity, gives some insights into empathy, cultural sensitivity, and political correctness at work and practical do's and don'ts for intercultural interaction.

The **Developing** level continues to work with some relevant soft skills and attitudes. Special focus is on your interaction with others, your colleagues, your team etc.

The **Skilled** level focuses on providing participants with the skills, knowledge and attitudes to successfully cooperate with others inclusively. The skilled level aims to provide participants with a comprehensive understanding of cultural complexity, communication, negotiation, worldview, and interpretation of communication.

If you would like to start with the Beginner level, please click on the Introduction button below.

If you would like to start with the Developing or Skilled level, please find them in the buttons below.

Developing level

GO

Skilled level

GO

INTRODUCTION

Introduction

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Welcome to the **BEGINNER** level of the Intercultural Sensitivity course!

In this level, we will have a look into a **general understanding** of the concept of Intercultural Sensitivity and **its development**.

This level will be a start to empower you to develop intercultural sensitivity - the **ability to recognise, understand and adapt to cultural differences in a respectful manner**. You will explore the foundations of intercultural sensitivity and its development, get insights into intercultural communication and interaction. All these elements are relevant in contact with international students and graduates – either when integrating them into your company, being a colleague or professional guidance person.

At the end of this level, you will be able to:

- Identify basic elements important to members of a culture concerning history, values, politics, communication, beliefs and/or practices and be able to recognise your own cultural rules and/or biases.
- Identify elements of cultural differences in verbal and non-verbal communication and be able to explain that misunderstandings can occur based on those differences.
- Describe your personal interest in learning more about other cultures and be able to describe components of cultural perspectives that influence the experience of others.

Throughout the lessons and the activities of the level, we encourage **active participation and critical thinking** by providing you with practical exercises, self-reflections, videos and readings. The level is meant to be flexible to accommodate your needs and resource limitations (e.g. time). You can complete lessons and activities as you wish, take a break, and continue anytime you want.

The duration is about 4 hours.

This level consists of the following themes:

- Definition of Intercultural Sensitivity
- Development Model of Intercultural Sensitivity
- Intercultural Communication and Culture Map
- Effective Intercultural Communication
- Intercultural Sensitivity in a Workplace

Let's embark on this exciting learning journey together!

CONTINUE

Definition

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What is Intercultural Sensitivity?

Read the definition of Intercultural Sensitivity below by clicking on the bottom right of the card to flip it. Then reflect: according to your experience, how and why Intercultural Sensitivity could be relevant in a working environment?

What is
Intercultural Sensitivity?

Intercultural sensitivity is the affective aspect of intercultural communication.

It is a critical component of effective intercultural communication and includes such elements as open-mindedness, empathy, and suspending judgment.

It is also supported by intercultural

Our definition of Intercultural Sensitivity (ICS) is based on works by Chen and Starosta (1996) and Elisabeth Plum (2009).

Relevance

Intercultural sensitivity in a workplace is crucial for respectful and successful cooperation. This includes organisational and interpersonal recognition and appreciation of cultural diversity.

The benefits:

- A safe work environment
- Minimises bias
- Job satisfaction
- Innovation and creativity



CONTINUE

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

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The American sociologist **Milton Bennett** originally developed the **Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity** in 1986. It has been updated multiple times since and is one of the influential models in the fields of intercultural communication, engagement, and equity. It describes the developmental stages along which people can progress toward a **deeper understanding and appreciation of cross-cultural differences**. ([Bennett, 2017](#)).

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity describes **six developmental stages of intercultural sensitivity and communication**, beginning with denial (the perception that one's cultural perspective is the only real, accurate, or valid interpretation of reality) and culminating with integration (the internalisation of multicultural awareness and the ability to interact productively across cultural differences). ([Bennett, 2017](#)).

Intercultural Sensitivity The Developmental Model of Milton Bennett

Denying the other	Defence against the other	Minimisation of the other	Acceptance of the other	Adaptation to the other	Integration of the other
<i>My culture is the only true one!</i>	<i>It's us against the others!</i>	<i>Actually there are hardly any differences!</i>	<i>My culture exists in a network of different cultures.</i>	<i>I understand other cultures.</i>	<i>I move effortlessly between cultures.</i>
At this stage people feel that their culture is the only correct one. Other cultures outside their own culture are ignored or perceived in a simplistic way.	This level is characterised by a very dualistic perspective: there is "us" on one side and "the others" on the other. People in this level feel that their culture is the best.	At this stage, people emphasize above all the similarities between two cultures. Although visible differences are registered, the focus is on the similarities. Their own form of communication is still the "right one".	At this stage, it is recognized that different cultures form a complex network in which one's own culture is also integrated. People accept other cultures and behaviors (not always without criticism).	At this stage, people realise that the world is not only made up of their own culture. Other cultures now also find their place in the world view. By adopting this perspective, successful intercultural communication is possible.	People at this level no longer have any difficulty in moving beyond cultural frames. A smooth transition between different world views is possible.
Ethnocentrism			Ethnorelativism		

Infographic based on "[Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity](#)" by Janine Söllinger-Weist, Elisa Schinke. English translation by Karen Oostenbrink (University of Freiburg), CC BY SA 4.0, free cultural work (creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/legalcode). This modification has changed the visual layout of the infographic.

Mind-Set within stages

Click on the bottom right of the cards to find out more about people's mind-sets within the stages ([Bennett, 2017](#)):

Denying

"New York is no different than Mumbai. Lots of people, lots of cars, lots of bad air."

Defence

"This is a sexist macho society and unbearable for normal people."

Minimisation

"All of us are born and all of us must die, so who cares...."

Acceptance

"I find it enriching to meet and talk to people from other cultures."

Adaptation

"To resolve a conflict with my foreign colleague, I need to understand his reasons."

Integration

"You can feel at home anywhere and just have to make an effort to find out how people treat each other and what cultural values are present."

CONTINUE

Intercultural Communication and Culture Map

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The first steps to working in an intercultural team or dealing with people with different cultural backgrounds is to understand that our own culture exists in a network of different cultures and to become a good intercultural communicator.

Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication revolves around the question, 'How do people with different cultural experiences understand each other?'

Today, we face this question a lot in our daily lives and our work lives. Many other questions come up: 'What kind of communication does a pluralistic society need?' and 'How does communication contribute to creating a climate of respect and diversity?'

In this lesson, we will try to find answers to these questions.

Listening: "Intercultural Communication"

Listen to the following University of Exeter '*Career Zone*'-podcast about Intercultural Communication.

GO



Effective intercultural communication

In our human coexistence, we also constantly have intercultural encounters. We usually act based on our individual patterns of behaviour and thinking, which we have learned and which run automatically. It is not possible to prepare for every single encounter, but it is advisable to remember the most important aspects of intercultural communication. The most important thing: Remaining authentic!

Reading:

Read the Do's & Don'ts for an effective intercultural communication from the "*Intercultural Toolkit*" from Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce .

GO



Reflection

In the daily interaction with your colleagues or students with a different cultural background,

- which Do's do you follow and which are happening automatically?
- which Don'ts do you normally try to avoid and which ones are difficult to prevent?

Culture Map

"*The Culture Map*" by Erin Meyer examines how people communicate, make decisions, lead, and manage time without looking at religion, the political system, or aspects of countries' worldviews. (Meyer, 2014)

It describes an extraordinary way in which communication in the world differs between different cultures and nationalities. With 8 scales for behaviour and communication, the differences are obvious at a glance with a left-right scale. (Meyer, 2014)

1. Communicating (direct or indirect)
 2. Evaluating (direct or indirect feedback)
 3. Persuading (principle or application-oriented)
 4. Leading (egalitarian or hierarchical)
 5. Deciding (consensual or top-down)
 6. Trusting (task- or relationship-based)
 7. Confrontation (direct or indirect)
 8. Scheduling (linear or flexible time)
-

Reading

Find out more about Erin Meyer and her work on "*The Culture Map*"

GO

Listening

Listen to the following podcast from Harvard Business Review about "*The Culture Map*"

GO



What's your own cultural profile?

Do the following test online to reflect on your cultural background and how this factor influences daily your cultural behaviour:

Exercise:

Complete this Harvard Business Review assessment to understand how well you understand cultural differences within the workplace. *What's Your Cultural Profile?* by Erin Meyer.

GO

CONTINUE

Case Studies

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What would you do?

Please read the following two case studies:

What happened and what would you do to resolve the situation? We give one of many possible explanations and solutions - for sure there are far more than the presented one!

The case studies are inspired by examples presented during intercultural training at FH Münster.

Case 1: "Nodding head and saying yes"

"NODDING HEAD AND SAYING YES" - THE SITUATION

A chemistry student from Asia has been offered a place for a three-month internship in a small company, where she is to carry out measurements of chemical samples on an instrument.

An older employee is her mentor, who is familiar with the apparatus and laboratory techniques. The employee explains the steps and operation to the student in detail. The student nods eagerly and often comments, "Yes, yes."

The staff member makes sure she understands everything and she nods again. He then leaves the office.

When he checks on her two hours later, she has not yet started work.

"NODDING HEAD AND SAYING YES" - AN EXAMPLE OF EXPLANATION AND SOLUTION

"NODDING HEAD AND SAYING YES" - THE SITUATION

"NODDING HEAD AND SAYING YES" - AN EXAMPLE OF EXPLANATION AND SOLUTION

The student did not understand much. Not wanting to be rude, she does not dare to say no.

Direct expression of opinion is alien to her and she is afraid of losing face. She doesn't want to disappoint the expectations and kindness of her mentor and waste his time.

The mentor takes his time again and once again explains each step slowly and asks her to repeat each of the steps to him in her own words - now the explanations have been delivered perfectly.

Case 2: Fasting in the workplace

"FASTING IN THE WORKPLACE" - THE SITUATION

"FASTING IN THE WORKPLACE" - AN EXAMPLE OF EXPLANATION AND SOLUTION

Mr. X is working as a sales manager in a medium-sized company. The working hours are from 8 a.m. until 5 p.m. Mr. X practised Ramadan without eating and drinking, which led to several challenges.

He abstained from lunch breaks and used to work during his usual break times. He asked his manager if he could finish earlier since he does not take his daily lunch break. This was refused as being unfair towards other employees and that breaks are important for recreation.

Another problem was business lunch where important matters would be discussed with important clients. The manager understood his situation and asked another employee to attend on his behalf.

Mr. X needed to interrupt his work to perform at least three of the five daily prayers, which took up to five minutes each. He was allowed to pray and was actually given a small room to perform his prayers. It was problematic while attending long meetings or presentations.

At sunset at that time, Mr. X would be finishing work and going home to eat his first meal of the day. This was challenging when being asked to stay late at work to launch a new product.

The manager was contacted by other employees complaining about the situation, who were convinced that it was not ok for the team to re-schedule working hours and to assign some of the tasks to others such as the business lunch.

"FASTING IN THE WORKPLACE" - THE SITUATION

"FASTING IN THE WORKPLACE" - AN EXAMPLE OF EXPLANATION AND SOLUTION

The Human Resources department is seeking the interest of the company as well as of the employees. They should explain to managers to put into consideration that diverse employees may have different cultural backgrounds which should be accepted in a more globalised world.

An effort is required from both parties. Employers and employees should understand that working with people coming from different cultural and religious backgrounds is something inevitable nowadays.

Same with team planning, it should be possible to make arrangements for work schedules and annual leaves for celebration without leading to serious conflicts. In this case, it could be a very practical approach such as designing a schedule for Ramadan beforehand, ensuring that all staff are aware of what fasting entails, avoid placing food and drink next to someone who is fasting, try and avoid 'working lunches', allow Muslims to take a 10 minutes break at sunset to break their fasting and pray, see the possibility of according work lunch breaks in return for an earlier finish or do not expect people to commit to evening functions.

For Muslim employees, it would be also important to plan for Ramadan in advance, i.e. informing their managers and colleagues about Ramadan and preparing a work plan.

Case studies are a good way to reflect on and gain new insights and perspectives.

To get the most out of it, we recommend the following procedure:

1

Start by describing the critical incident:

What happened, who was involved, when and where did it occur, what did you think, do and say?

2

Analyse why the incident happened:

What factors influenced it, what principles did you use or ignore, and what were the consequences?

3

Evaluate the critical incident:

How did it affect your work, what did you learn from it, what did you do well or poorly, and what were the opportunities or challenges?

4

Plan for action:

What will you do differently or similarly in the future, what changes will you

make, what strategies will you use, and what resources will you need?



[CONTINUE](#)

Cultural Intelligence in the Workplace

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In today's diverse workplace, people need the ability to handle cross-cultural encounters in the workplace. When working or interacting with people from other cultures, even from your own country, qualities such as being patient, adaptable and open to learning and listening must be met, as author **Andrew J. DuBrin** describes in his book "Human Relationships: Interpersonal Job-oriented Skills". These traits are part of cultural sensitivity, which is defined as "**the awareness and willingness to examine the reasons why people of another culture act the way they do**". Cultural sensitivity can be used to recognise certain nuances in habits that help build better relationships with people from other cultures. Empathy is also an important trait and skill that facilitates cultural sensitivity and political correctness, as it allows one to empathise with the other person's perspective. (DuBrin, 2014)

Cultural intelligence (CQ) is an advanced aspect of cultural sensitivity. According to DuBrin, it is understood as "*an outsider's ability to interpret someone's unfamiliar and ambiguous behaviour the same way that people from that culture would*". (DuBrin, 2014)

Dr. David Livermore, author of the book "The Cultural Intelligence Difference," described cultural intelligence as "*the capability to function effectively across a variety of cultural contexts, such as ethnic, generational, and organizational cultures*" (Livermore, 2011).

He highlighted four practical aspects of CQ (Livermore, 2011):

- **CQ Drive (motivation):** Personal interest and confidence in effectively functioning in culturally diverse settings.
- **CQ Knowledge (cognition):** Motivation to learn about other cultures and how cultures are similar and different. Understanding core cultural differences and their impact on oneself and others.

- **CQ Strategy (meta-cognition):** Culturally diverse experiences allow us to reflect on our own thought processes and judgments and those of others.
- **CQ Action (behaviour):** Capability to appropriately adapt your behaviour for different cultures. It requires having a broad and flexible repertoire of responses to suit diverse situations while remaining true to yourself. It is related to the process of turning your intentions and desires into actions to adequately interact with other cultures.

Please watch this 4-minute video with David Livermore to learn more about [Leading with Cultural Intelligence](#).

Turn subtitles on by clicking 'CC' at the bottom of the video player.

Reading:

To learn more, please read the following article from Penn State University about *Cultural Intelligence in the Workplace*. It provides information to understand cultural diversity in the workplace and apply strategies to facilitate intercultural relationships.

GO

CONTINUE

Practicing Empathy, Cultural Sensitivity, and Political Correctness

IA Interlocality AR

Introduction

Andrew J. DuBrin (2014) shared some strategies that help minimising cultural barriers and practice empathy, cultural sensitivity, and political correctness at work or any intercultural encounters.

Step 1

Interact with colleagues and people that are not close to you.



Interacting with new people from different cultures allows us to observe, understand, and learn from other cultures.

Step 2

Use straightforward language and speak slowly and clearly.



When working or being with people who are not totally fluent in your language, speak in an easy-to-understand manner. Avoid idioms and slang in your language.

Step 3

Correctly pronounce the names.



Communication is more fluid and personalised when you correctly pronounce the name of another person. After listening to the name for the first time, develop a strategy to help you pronounce it in the future (for example, phonetic spelling)

Step 4

Do not be diverted by style, accent, grammar, or personal appearance.



Although these superficial factors are all related to business success, they are hard to interpret when judging a person from another culture. Thus, it is better to judge people by the merits of their statements or behaviours.

Summary

Good luck on your way to more empathy, cultural sensitivity, and political correctness at work!



CHECK YOUR LEARNING

Check your learning

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This section is meant to help you recall and assess your learning in this level.

Quiz

Please tick the box or boxes you think are correct and then click on 'submit'. After that, please scroll down to the following question. **Please note that there may be multiple correct answers.**

Who created The Developmental Model of intercultural sensitivity?

Auguste Comte

Milton Bennett

Grace Hopper

Michel Foucault

SUBMIT

According to the Developmental Model for intercultural sensitivity, what are the three steps that are linked to ethnorelativism?

Acceptance

Empathy

Adaptation

Integration

SUBMIT

What is an important aspect of cultural sensitivity?

Cultural Intelligence

Cultural Initiative

Cultural Instinct

Cultural Behaviour

SUBMIT

Do you agree?: "We need to work on getting rid of our prejudices!"

YES: Prejudices are negative and hinder my open thinking.

NO: Prejudices belong to us - our task is to be aware of them and to constantly question them.

SUBMIT

CONTINUE TO CONCLUSION

Conclusion

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Congratulations! You have successfully completed this level.

As you may have realised: Intercultural learning is an ongoing and life-long process!

In the beginners level, we have introduced the concept of intercultural sensitivity (ICS). We have provided and explained the model by Milton Bennett: Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). The model describes common ways in which people experience, interpret, and interact across cultural differences.

Hence, we have tried to highlight that ICS development is rather linear and continuous. ICS develops over time. Quite often over a long period of time where the learning includes personal experiences and reflections. We have tried to give you some basic skills and knowledge (also theoretical) into the world of ICS.

We have also helped you see and recognize intercultural differences in your context. This is by looking into culture in relation to history and different forms of communication.

Did you reach the following learning objectives by now being able to:

Identify basic elements important to members of a culture in relation to history, values, politics, communication, beliefs and/or practices and be able to recognise own cultural rules and/or biases.

Identify elements of cultural differences in verbal and non-verbal communication and be able to explain that misunderstandings can occur based on those differences.

Describe your personal interest in learning more about other cultures and be able to describe components of cultural perspectives that influence the

experience of others.

Thank you for engaging with the Beginner level of the ICS course!

If you would like to continue to another level of the ICS course, please find them through the buttons below.

Developing level

If you would like to continue to the Developing level of this ICS course

GO

Skilled level

If you would like to continue to the Skilled level of this ICS course

GO

If you would like to try out a level of the **Employer-ability** or **Guidance and Counselling** courses, please go back to the main page and choose the course.

CONTINUE TO LIST OF SOURCES

Sources

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Here you can find the full references for all the sources we have mentioned in the BEGINNER level of the Intercultural sensitivity course.

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- Meyer, E. (2014): The Culture Map. Breaking Through the Invisible Boundaries of Global Business. Hachette Book Group US, Public Affairs, New York.
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If you would like to continue on your learning journey, please go to the Developing and Skilled levels of this Intercultural Sensitivity course!

CONTINUE TO THE DEVELOPING LEVEL

Introduction

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Welcome to the Developing level of the Intercultural sensitivity course!

In this level, we focus on the intercultural encounter, the interaction with others in a diverse workplace. The main topics in this level are awareness and openness and finally acceptance. The acceptance of cultural differences occurs when individuals acknowledge that diverse beliefs and values are a product of cultural influences, that various behavioral patterns exist among different cultures, and that other cultures possess valid and valuable perspectives deserving of respect. This acceptance phase may also be evident through an increased curiosity about or interest in other cultures, leading people to actively seek cross-cultural relationships and social interactions they might have previously avoided. These stages were also mentioned in the Beginner level which was more theoretical. For more on this topic see Beginner level ([Bennett, 2017](#)) and the IDR Institute ([IDRIInstitute, 2011](#)).

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity

For more on this topic visit Beginner level

GO

Additional reading

Intercultural Development Continuum, by IDI

GO

The Developing level includes exercises to strengthen the own openness which is seen as a key to becoming more aware and finally more accepting of cultural differences.

Throughout the lessons and the activities of the course, we encourage active participation and critical thinking by providing you with practical exercises, self-reflections, videos, and readings.

The course is meant to be flexible to accommodate your needs and resource limitations (e.g. time). You can skip lessons and/or activities and continue anytime you want.

The target group includes all stakeholders: small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), higher education institutions (HEIs), non-government organisations (NGOs), human resources (HR), mentors, counsellors, recruiters, and colleagues.

At the end of this level, you will be able to:

- Demonstrate a partial understanding of the complexity of elements important to a culture, and its members, concerning history, values, politics, communication, beliefs and/or practices and be able to question one's own cultural rules and/or biases.
- Distinguish elements of cultural differences in verbal and non-verbal communication and demonstrate a basic awareness of how to arrange a shared understanding based on those cultural differences.
- Begin to initiate and develop interactions with individuals from different cultures and demonstrate a partial ability to suspend judgment in these interactions and describe how one's worldview affects one's interpretation of situations.

Throughout the level and in the activities we encourage active participation and critical thinking by providing you with practical exercises, self-reflection, videos, and readings. The level is meant to be flexible to accommodate your needs and resource limitations (e.g. time). You can complete lessons and activities as you wish, take a break, and continue anytime you want.

The duration is about 4 hours.

This level consists of the following themes:

- Cross-Culture work in a Global Economy
- Conflicts in Diverse Environments
- The Circle of Trust
- Diversity and Inclusion
- Critical Incidents in Cross-Cultural Communication

Let's embark on this exciting learning journey together!

CONTINUE

Cross-Cultural work

IA Interlocality AR

Erin Meyer (Dr) is a professor at INSEAD, one of the leading international business schools. (If you took the Beginner level this is familiar to you.) Her work focuses on how the world's most successful managers navigate the complexities of cultural differences in a global environment. She helps companies develop organisational cultures that breed both flexibility and innovation and offers cutting-edge strategies to improve the effectiveness of projects that span the globe. Erin provides a field-tested model for decoding how cultural differences impact international business. She combines a smart analytical framework with practical, actionable advice for working in a global world. The model is explained in the podcast: Please, revisit the podcast and answer the questions below.

Practical exercise

Listen to this 17-minute podcast in Harvard Business Review with Dr Erin Meyer

GO

Once you have listened to the podcast, please reflect on what was most important among the said. Please also answer the short quiz below! Tick the box or boxes you think are correct and then click on 'submit'. After that, please scroll down to the following question.

Leaders need to de-code the cultures to

become better leaders

- become better negotiators
- become better motivators of co-workers
- become better at finding the right co-workers

SUBMIT

If we look more alike we are more likely to assume that we are more similar and can understand each other better

- True
- False

SUBMIT

If we look more alike but represent different cultures we can likely become frustrated and may feel that the other is incompetent.

- True
- False

SUBMIT

Superficial elements are becoming less important

- True
- False

SUBMIT

Erin Meyer says we need to show more humility, and curiosity and see things as a learning process.

- True
- False

SUBMIT

CONTINUE

Conflicts in Diverse Environments

IA Interlocality AR

At the very core of **conflict resolution**, effective communication and negotiation stand as top tools for achieving peaceful and constructive resolutions. The complex dance of dialogue and compromise plays a pivotal role in defusing tensions and finding common ground.

Communication acts as the bridge that connects opposing parties, allowing them to articulate their grievances, fears, and aspirations. It fosters empathy, as each side gains insight into the other's perspective. Moreover, open and honest communication can help identify the root causes of the conflict, leading to more targeted solutions.

Negotiation, on the other hand, is the art of finding mutually acceptable compromises. It involves the careful balance of assertiveness and cooperation, as conflicting interests are reconciled. Skilled negotiators work to create win-win outcomes, where both parties feel that their concerns have been addressed, reducing the likelihood of future disputes.

In the context of conflict resolution, these twin pillars—communication and negotiation—act as the scaffolding upon which sustainable peace and understanding can be built. Without them, conflicts may escalate and deepen. But with them, the path to resolution and reconciliation is illuminated, offering hope for a harmonious collaboration and future.

Diverse working environments refer to disagreements, tensions, and disputes that arise among individuals from different backgrounds, cultures, genders, ages, and other dimensions of diversity within a workplace. These conflicts can occur due to the various perspectives, communication styles, and values that diversity brings into the workplace. Here are some common sources of conflicts in diverse working environments (In Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce, [Intercultural Toolkit](#), 2017):

Cultural Differences —

Diverse working environments often consist of employees from various cultural backgrounds. Differences in communication norms, work ethics, and social customs can lead to misunderstandings and conflicts.

Communication Styles —

People from different cultures and linguistic backgrounds might have different ways of expressing themselves. Misinterpretations can occur, leading to conflicts based on what was intended versus what was understood.

Stereotyping and Bias —

Preconceived notions or biases about certain groups can lead to discriminatory behaviours and tensions among colleagues. Stereotyping can lead to a lack of trust and collaboration.

Power Dynamics —

Diverse workplaces might have individuals from different levels of authority or different social hierarchies. Power struggles can arise due to perceived differences in influence or decision-making authority.

Generational Differences —

A mix of generations in the workplace, such as Baby Boomers, Gen X, Millennials, Gen Z and Gen A can lead to differences in work styles, values, and expectations, resulting in conflicts

Work-Life Balance —

Different cultures and generations might have varying perspectives on work-life balance. Conflicts can arise when these differing expectations collide.

Perceptions of Fairness —

Conflicts can occur when employees perceive favouritism, unequal treatment, or bias in promotions, assignments, or recognition based on their diversity characteristics.

Religious and Ethical Differences —

Diverse workplaces might include individuals with different religious beliefs and ethical values. Conflicts can arise when these differences clash in terms of work practices, dress codes, or time-off requests.

Lack of Inclusivity —

If diversity is not genuinely embraced and inclusive policies are lacking, employees from underrepresented groups might feel marginalised, leading to conflicts and a negative work environment.

Microaggressions —

Subtle, unintentional behaviours or comments that belittle or offend individuals based on their diversity characteristics can accumulate over time and lead to conflicts.

Practical exercise

Please do the exercise in the Helsinki region Chamber of Commerce's (2017) Intercultural Toolkit about conflict in diverse environments. This is an individual exercise.

GO

CONTINUE

The Circle of Trust

IA Interlocality AR

Practical exercise

This activity will help you see the diversity in your group, team or workplace. You can do it individually or in your team. The activity will also help you understand unconscious bias. The exercise is based on an exercise with the same name curated by [Hyperisland \(2023\)](#).

What is Unconscious Bias?

Unconscious biases, also known as implicit biases, are the underlying attitudes and stereotypes that people unconsciously attribute to another person or group of people that affect how they understand and engage with a person or group.

What is Affinity Bias?

Affinity bias, also known as similarity bias, is the tendency people have to connect with others who share similar interests, experiences and backgrounds.

Step 1: Choose 5 "go-to" people

Choose 5 of your "go-to" people at work or in private life - think of them as your inner circle - the people you consider trustworthy and whose counsel or advice you seek in making decisions.

Step 2: Draw a table

Draw a table with 5 rows and 9 columns on a paper. See example under Step 4.

--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--	--

Step 5: Reflection

When having done the whole exercise reflect, or ask the participants to reflect, on your/their circle. No one has to share any details - the focus here is on what their results made them think about.

E.g. if you are male, are most of your trusted people male too? If you are female, are the majority of your trusted females? Are those you trust similar to you in age, race, or education level? Are the majority of your trusted people of the same nationality?

The results of the exercise can lead further into reflection or open discussion.

Examples of **reflection questions** are:

How diverse is your circle of trust?

How might you diversify your inner circle of confidants?

In regards to a business strategy, how might embracing diverse perspectives, have an impact on:

- Customer empathy?
- Worldview of markets?
- Potential customers?
- Opportunities?
- Possibilities?
- What else?

Our closest advisors and those we rely on most for sound insight are often an unconscious mirror of ourselves. For example: If religion is a value in life, we may tend to trust other people of the same religion because we feel we have a set of common 'underlying' values that mirror each other.

It can be the same for gender, age, etc. but if we move our circle of trust wider to include people that don't mirror ourselves the patterns might change to be more inclusive.

Step 6: Learn more

To explore more about Unconscious Bias here are a few resources:

Voluntary reading

Asana: 19 unconscious biases to overcome and help promote inclusivity

GO

Voluntary reading

Fellow: What is Perception Bias and How to Avoid It

GO

Take Harvard's Implicit Association Test below to figure out which of your individual perceptions are most likely to be governed by unconscious biases. Armed with that information, you can take proactive steps to address them on a personal basis.

Test

Harvard's Implicit Association Test

GO

CONTINUE

Diversity and Inclusion

IA Interlocality AR

A core learning in this level of the course is to become aware, open and accepting. Please read and reflect on the topics Diversity and Inclusion in the Harvard Business Review online report and article listed below. How do the readings make you more aware? Are you part of a culture of diversity?

Report

Creating a Culture of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion report 2021

GO

Article

Ely & Thomas (2020) Getting Serious About Diversity: Enough Already with the Business Case

GO

Reflection exercise

After you have read the report and the article, reflect on the following two aspects: A) One important thing per reading, describe it in short on a paper. B) One surprising thing per reading, describe it in short on a paper. Discuss with your peers if applicable.

CONTINUE

Critical Incidents and Best practices



A critical incident is an event out of the range of normal experience – one which is sudden and unexpected. Often such events are sufficiently disturbing to overwhelm, or threaten to overwhelm, a person's coping capacity. Most people would be severely shaken by a critical incident but are likely to recover from its impact with appropriate support (Based on WHO's definition, in [Work Positive, n.d.](#)).

Critical incidents in the context of intercultural training refer to specific situations or events that highlight cultural differences, potential misunderstandings, or conflicts between individuals from different cultural backgrounds. These incidents are considered "critical" because they can have a significant impact on cross-cultural interactions and relationships. They often involve moments of cultural tension, miscommunication, or surprise, and they serve as valuable teaching and learning tools in intercultural training for several reasons:

Increased Awareness —

Critical incidents raise participants' awareness of the complexities and challenges of cross-cultural interactions. By analysing these incidents, individuals can better understand how cultural differences can affect communication, behaviour, and perceptions.

Engagement and Reflection —

Critical incidents encourage participants to reflect on their own cultural biases, assumptions, and behaviours. Through guided discussion and analysis, individuals can identify areas where their own cultural perspectives may have influenced their responses in a given situation.

Skill Development —

Intercultural training often focuses on developing intercultural competence, which includes skills such as empathy, active listening, and effective communication across cultures. Critical incidents provide practical scenarios for individuals to practice and refine these skills (IDRIInstitute, 2011).

Conflict Resolution —

Many critical incidents involve conflicts or misunderstandings stemming from cultural differences. Training participants can learn strategies for resolving such conflicts and improving cross-cultural communication, which is valuable in both personal and professional contexts.

Cultural Sensitivity —

Analysing critical incidents helps participants develop cultural sensitivity and respect for diverse perspectives. It emphasises the importance of recognising and valuing the cultural norms, values, and beliefs of others.

Real-World Application —

Critical incidents are rooted in real-life situations, making them relatable and applicable to participants' personal and professional experiences. This practicality enhances the effectiveness of intercultural training.

Customisation —

Intercultural trainers can tailor critical incidents to address specific cultural challenges or issues relevant to the participants' contexts, ensuring that the training is highly targeted and applicable.

Promoting Cultural Learning

Critical incidents encourage participants to engage with other cultures actively. They stimulate curiosity and a desire to learn more about other cultures, fostering a lifelong commitment to intercultural understanding.

In summary, critical incidents serve as essential tools in intercultural training by providing concrete examples of cultural clashes, misunderstandings, and challenges. They create opportunities for participants to develop intercultural competence, improve communication skills, and increase cultural sensitivity. By learning from these incidents, individuals are better prepared to navigate the complexities of our diverse world and engage in more effective and respectful cross-cultural interactions.

Practical exercise

Think about your own critical incident: some examples of awareness, openness and acceptance in intercultural encounters at work. This activity will help you reflect on critical incidents you have encountered in your work and private life.

Readings about Critical Incidents

University of Tartu MOOC Multilingual Education: Critical Incidents in Cross-cultural Communication

GO

Support material

Helsinki Region Chamber of Commerce Intercultural Toolkit (2017): Intercultural Matters at Work

GO

Good Examples and some Best Practices

These examples and practices highlight the varied ways diversity and intercultural communication can be effectively managed across different sectors. Each organisation may tailor its approach based on its specific

context, but the core principles of inclusivity, respect, and active engagement are universally applicable.

1. **Leadership Commitment:** Top management must visibly support and engage in diversity initiatives.
2. **Employee Resource Groups (ERGs):** These groups provide support, advocacy, and community engagement opportunities.
3. **Training and Education:** Regular training on cultural competency and anti-discrimination should be mandatory for all employees.
4. **Inclusive Policies and Practices:** From recruitment to promotion and beyond, policies should be explicitly designed to eliminate bias and promote equity.
5. **Monitoring and Evaluation:** Regularly measure the effectiveness of diversity initiatives to identify areas for improvement.

Effective diversity and intercultural communication practices are crucial for organisations to foster an inclusive and productive work environment. Here are some best practices and examples from different types of organisations:

1. Multinational Corporations

- **Google:** Known for its comprehensive diversity and inclusion strategy, Google invests in employee resource groups (ERGs) and diversity training programs. Their focus includes building products that reflect diverse perspectives and creating a workforce that mirrors their global user base.
- **Best Practice:** Implementing transparent hiring practices and promoting career development programs for underrepresented groups.

2. Non-Profit Organisations

- **Amnesty International:** This organisation promotes diversity through its global operations, emphasising human rights across different cultures and contexts.
- **Best Practice:** Ensuring that staff and volunteers are trained in cultural competence and sensitivity to work effectively across diverse communities.

3. Educational Institutions

- **Harvard University:** Has initiatives aimed at increasing faculty diversity and inclusive pedagogy. The university also runs workshops on intercultural communication to improve campus climate.
- **Best Practice:** Developing curricula that include a wide range of cultural perspectives and encouraging dialogue on intercultural issues among students and staff.
- **University of Helsinki:** The university actively works on inclusion and diversity by integrating international perspectives into its curriculum and research. They offer resources and support services specifically designed for international students and staff to aid their integration and success.
- **Best Practice:** Providing comprehensive support systems for international faculty and students, including language courses and cultural integration programs.

4. Healthcare Organisations

- **Kaiser Permanente:** Recognised for its leadership in employing a diverse workforce and providing culturally competent care. They offer training programs on cultural competency for their healthcare providers.
- **Best Practice:** Integrating culturally responsive care into their services and supporting diverse leadership within the organisation.

5. Tech Companies

- **Airbnb:** Promotes a culture of belonging both internally and in their global host and guest community. They emphasise anti-discrimination policies and diversity training.
- **Best Practice:** Building a platform that actively combats bias and fosters understanding among users from different cultures.
- **Supercell:** Known for globally popular games like "Clash of Clans," Supercell, based in Helsinki, values a diverse workforce to create games that resonate worldwide. They prioritise hiring from a global talent pool and support an inclusive work environment.
- **Best Practice:** Creating a company culture that not only hires internationally but also supports and celebrates cultural diversity on all levels.

6. Financial Institutions

- **Goldman Sachs:** Has initiatives aimed at increasing diversity within its workforce and leadership positions. They also focus on serving diverse communities and promoting financial literacy.

- **Best Practice:** Creating mentorship programs that help diverse employees navigate their careers in finance.

7. Public sector

- **City of Helsinki:** The municipal government has initiated several programs aimed at improving integration and fostering diversity. These include intercultural events and community outreach programs designed to engage immigrants and minority groups.
- **Best Practice:** Engaging community leaders in policy-making processes to ensure diverse voices are heard and represented.

CHECK YOUR LEARNING

Check your learning



The learning in this level was based on your self-assessment (activities) with the help of reflective practices which were a part of the activities such as reflection on a critical incident. Your learning was also supported by a quiz based on Erin Myers's podcast.

Here we have created a short quiz to help you recall and assess your learning in this level. Please tick the box or boxes you think are correct and then click on 'submit'. After that, please scroll down to the following question.

1. What role does communication play in conflict resolution according to the provided content?

- Communication acts as a barrier between conflicting parties, preventing them from understanding each other's perspectives.
- Communication serves as a bridge that connects opposing parties, allowing them to express their grievances and fostering empathy by providing insight into each other's perspectives.
- Communication is irrelevant in conflict resolution and doesn't contribute to finding solutions.



Communication only allows parties to articulate their grievances without contributing to understanding or solution finding.

SUBMIT

2. Which of the following is NOT listed as a common source of conflicts in diverse working environments based on the content?



Cultural Differences, arising from distinct communication norms and social customs.



Stereotyping and Bias, leading to discriminatory behaviours and a lack of trust.



Lack of Technology, hindering effective communication and collaboration among employees.



Generational Differences, stemming from variances in work styles and values among different age groups.

SUBMIT

3. According to the HBR article *Creating a Culture of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion: Real Progress Requires Sustained Commitment*, what challenges and considerations are highlighted concerning implementing and sustaining DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) initiatives in companies?

- DEI leaders always experience smooth and uninterrupted implementation of DEI strategies due to universal support and easy adaptation of practices in companies.
- Business pressures and existing policies, like hiring within tight deadlines, can lead managers to bypass some steps crucial for DEI, even with support for DEI initiatives in place.
- There are no real benefits to increasing DEI as it does not impact a company's financial performance or stakeholder relationships.
- DEI initiatives do not require ongoing effort and once implemented, do not need further monitoring or adaptation.

SUBMIT

4. According to the HBR article by Ely & Thomas, which of the following best represents the role of leaders in dismantling systems of discrimination and subordination within their organisations?

-
- Leaders should enforce strict rules and punishments for discriminatory behaviors and ensure the hiring of diverse candidates.

 - Leaders need to educate themselves about systems of privilege and oppression, investigate how such systems operate within their organisation, and use this personal learning to inspire collective learning and systemic change.

 - Leaders must prioritize the profitability and financial benefits of diversity over the cultural and systemic changes required to address discrimination.

 - Leaders should primarily focus on external public relations campaigns to showcase their organisation's commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion without deeply engaging in internal cultural shifts.

SUBMIT

5. According to the HBR article by Ely & Thomas, how should organisational norms and cultural differences be approached and utilised according to the examples and strategies discussed?

- Cultural differences should be ignored to treat everyone equally and ensure that there is no basis for discrimination or preferential treatment.

- Employees should be encouraged to suppress their cultural differences and conform to the prevailing organisational norms to maintain harmony and uniformity in the workplace.

- Cultural differences and diverse experiences of employees should be acknowledged, discussed, and leveraged as a resource for learning, generating new insights, and enhancing organisational work and culture.

- Cultural differences should be highlighted in organisational marketing materials without making any substantial changes in the internal organisational culture or practices.

SUBMIT

CONTINUE

Conclusion

IA Interlocality AR

Congratulations! You have successfully completed this level.

As you may have realised: Intercultural learning is an ongoing and life-long process!

In this level, we have been trying to be very hands-on by providing you with many reflective exercises. At the core we have had the intercultural encounter - the interaction with others in a diverse workplace or other context. In a way, we can say that we have been working mainly with the middle stage(s) of the Bennett model (DMIS/IDC) ([Bennett, 2017](#); [IDRIInstitute, 2011](#)), i.e. with awareness, openness as well as acceptance. It is essential to emphasise that, according to Bennett, acceptance does not necessitate a preference for, agreement with, or endorsement of the behaviours or values of other cultures. Instead, it signifies the recognition and acknowledgement that diverse cultural worldviews exist, that these worldviews influence human values, beliefs, and behaviours, and that one's own values, beliefs, and behaviours are to some extent culturally influenced and determined. This is the type of acceptance we hope has developed through the provided activities. Acceptance is crucial in the intercultural interaction with others.

Critical incidents were again used as a tool for becoming more aware of what is happening during an encounter. Writing your own critical incident connected the learning to your very own context and your own experiences. Trust and conflicts have been topics addressed in this level.

The Circle of Trust exercise was to help you see unconscious bias. Here you might have done the exercise individually, but we encourage you to do the exercise together with your team. You can do it whenever you have time!

We also included some recent readings from Harvard Business Review. This is to give you insight into research and examples from different organisations and companies.

At the end, we provided you with some good examples and best practices from some organisations.

Did you reach the following learning objectives by now being able to:

Demonstrate a partial understanding of the complexity of elements important to a culture, and its members, concerning history, values, politics, communication, beliefs and/or practices and be able to question own cultural rules and/or biases.

Distinguish elements of cultural differences in verbal and non-verbal communication and demonstrate a basic awareness of how to arrange a shared understanding based on those cultural differences.

Begin to initiate and develop interactions with individuals from different cultures and demonstrate a partial ability to suspend judgment in these interactions and describe how one's worldview affects one's interpretation of situations.

Thank you for engaging with the Developing level of the ICS course!

If you would like to continue to another level of the ICS course, please find them through the buttons below.

Beginner level

If you would like to continue to the Beginner level of this ICS course

GO

Skilled level

If you would like to continue to the Skilled level of this ICS course

GO

If you would like to try out a level of the **Employer-ability** or **Guidance and Counselling** courses, please go back to the instructions and choose the course.

[CONTINUE TO LIST OF SOURCES](#)

Sources



Here you can find the full references for the sources we have mentioned in the Developing level of the Intercultural Sensitivity course.

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<https://www.workpositive.ie/node/1905>



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If you would like to continue on your learning journey, please go to the Skilled level of this Intercultural sensitivity course!

CONTINUE TO THE SKILLED LEVEL

Introduction

IA Interlocality AR

Welcome to the SKILLED level of the Intercultural sensitivity course!

The skilled level focuses on providing you with the skills, knowledge and attitudes to successfully cooperate with others inclusively. The skilled level aims to provide you with a deeper understanding of how cultural complexity influences our own outlook on the world.

Furthermore, the skilled level helps you learn to respect another person's view, while maintaining your own limitations, by suspending their judgement.

At the end of this level, you will be able to:

- Show a deep understanding of the complexity of elements important to a culture, and its members, in relation to history, values, politics, communication, beliefs and/or practices and how these elements may influence each other; ability to address own cultural bias.
- Articulate a deep understanding of cultural similarities and differences in verbal and non-verbal communication and have the ability to negotiate a shared understanding based on those cultural similarities and differences.
- Start and develop communication with individuals from different cultures and demonstrate the ability to suspend judgment. Show the ability to interpret situations from other standpoints than your own.

Throughout the lessons and the activities of the level, we encourage active participation and critical thinking by providing you with practical exercises, self-reflections, videos, and readings. The level is flexible: you can complete lessons and activities as you wish, take a break, and continue anytime you want.

The duration is approximately 4 hours.

This level consists of the following themes:

- Racism and Exclusion
- Introduction of the Critical Reflection Tool with easy-to-follow Steps and recommendations
- Introduction and Explanation of the Concepts of Curiosity Ahead of Judgment and Cultural Relativism
- The Cultural Competence Self-Assessment Checklist

Let's embark on this exciting learning journey together!

CONTINUE

Racism and exclusion

IA Interlocality AR

Racism and exclusion

In the 1970s, a primary school teacher, Jane Elliott created an eye-opening exercise to show her students the harmful effects of racism and discrimination. The Blue Eyes-Brown Eyes exercise is now famous worldwide. In the video below, Jane Elliott is guiding her students through this exercise.

Please watch the [video](#) and reflect on the questions below.

1

How did watching this video make you feel?

2

What do the school children's experiences tell you about the way racism can impact people?

3

The children in the video only experience racism for a short while. If you compare their behaviour to those of minority group members in your society who experienced discrimination their entire lives, are there any parallels you can draw?

4

Think about your workplace or a workplace you know. Can you relate what you saw in the video to a workplace?

5

What can you do to ensure that everyone, regardless of their background, feels safe in your workplace?

CONTINUE

The cultural lens and critical reflection

IA Interlocality AR

Intercultural sensitivity is not about only learning facts about different cultures. It begins with reflecting on our own cultural identities because our background shapes how we see the world. By critically thinking about this, we can understand how culture influences our values, beliefs, and perspectives. (Laird, 2008)

Intercultural sensitivity can be defined as “an individual’s ability to develop emotion towards understanding and appreciating cultural differences that promote appropriate and effective behaviour in intercultural communication” (Chen & Starosta, 1997)

It is incredibly important to know how to interact effectively in diverse cultural situations. This is not just about learning about other cultures; it is about understanding ourselves. We need to realise that the way we see the world is influenced by where and how we were raised, and others might see things very differently.

To do this, we need to examine our own cultural identity and ask ourselves what our cultural lens is. Imagine that everyone in the world wears a unique pair of invisible glasses. These glasses are shaped by the cultures we live in, filtering how we see what is right or wrong, acceptable or unacceptable. Because of this, everyone has a unique way of looking at the world.

People from East Asian and American cultures often think about objects and events in different ways. In 1972, a researcher named

This study shows that people from different cultures can look at the same question and

Liang-Hwang Chiu did a study with Chinese and American children. He showed them groups of three objects (chicken, cow and grass) and asked them to pick which two objects go together.

picture but come up with different answers (Chiu, 1972). Click on the cards below to learn more about these cultural differences.

American culture

American children tended to pick the chicken and the cow and explained it by saying, "both are animals."

Chinese culture

Chinese children often chose the cow and the grass, and their reasoning was that "the cow eats the grass."

Challenging our cultural lens

People from different backgrounds often see and interpret the world around us in different ways. It's important to remember that each person's life experiences and cultural upbringing shape how they communicate and behave. The way we use gestures, facial expressions, and body language is deeply influenced by the cultural norms we learned while growing up.

Our cultural background also affects how we interpret and share information. It influences our sense of time, personal space, and comfort with physical touch. For example, your understanding of being late or on time might be different from other people's. Or what is seen as an "appropriate" greeting: a handshake or one, two, or even three kisses on the cheek? These cultural differences shape how we communicate. Understanding and appreciating diverse perspectives is important in intercultural interactions.

Thinking about our own cultural lens helps us see parts of ourselves we might not have noticed before. Communicating with others starts by understanding ourselves better. This means being aware of what influences us and how we form our views about the world. By becoming more self-aware, we make the invisible aspects of our cultural identity visible, so we can better appreciate and respect cultural differences and similarities.



By thinking about our own cultural lens, we start to question our assumptions and expectations about what is considered "normal," or "correct" behaviour.



By actively participating in diverse teams and being open to new experiences, we begin to reflect on the unspoken, unquestioned, and often unconscious rules that have shaped our thinking since childhood. This happens when others ask us why we do certain things the way we do.

This process of critical reflection helps us better understand how cultural influences shape our perspectives and behaviours (Surbone, 2004).

Practical exercise

Think about the different parts that make up who you are. Consider these factors:

- Gender

- Country of birth
- Current country of residence (if different)
- Hometown or region
- Religious beliefs
- Occupation
- Family status (e.g., parent of two children)
- Political affiliations
- Other characteristics (e.g., hobbies, education, socioeconomic status)

Reflect on Your Unique Culture Combination. It makes the unique individual that you are!

Think about how these factors shape your perspective and influence how you see the world. Ask yourself:

- How do these components of my identity affect my views and actions?
- Do they make me somehow biased in my worldview?

Reflecting on these questions can help you understand how your background influences your thoughts and behaviours.

There are four aspects to critical reflection, and they serve much like building blocks that help us gain a fuller understanding of intercultural interactions.

Choosing What to Reflect On

You begin by selecting a topic or event to reflect upon. It could be something that happened to you personally, a situation you observed, or an

1 of 4

intercultural experience you want to understand better.

Solo or Group Reflection

Next, you decide whether you'll reflect on your own or with others in a group. Both approaches have their merits, and you can choose what suits you best.

2 of 4

Following Reflection Steps

Critical reflection is a structured process. You work through a series of steps that guide you in exploring your thoughts and feelings about the chosen topic or event.

3 of 4

Applying Reflection Skills

4 of 4

Lastly, you employ various reflection skills and strategies to gain deeper insights. These skills help you analyse, question, and connect your experiences to broader intercultural concepts.

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Reflection steps

- Describe
- Interpret
- Verify
- Explain
- Reconstruct

Reflection skills and strategies

- Create a safe space
- Active listening
- Reflecting back and checking understanding
- Reserving judgement or evaluation of thoughts or others
- Putting yourself in others' shoes
- Being aware of power differences
- Practising humility

From [Intercultural Learning: Critical preparation for international student travel](#). (Jones et al., 2019)
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Critical Reflection: A Guide to Understanding Intercultural Interactions

Critical reflection helps us better understand intercultural interactions. Here are the four key aspects of this process:

1. Reflection on a Topic or Event

Start by choosing a subject or experience to reflect upon. This could be:

- A specific event that stands out in your memory.
- A situation that challenged your professional beliefs.
- An intercultural experience you want to understand better.

2. Reflecting with Others or Alone —

Reflection can be informal or formal:

- Informal Reflection: you can make it part of your daily routine, for example through conversations or keeping a journal.
- Formal Reflection: Engage in structured reflection with colleagues, instructors, or community members.

Both individual and group reflection have their benefits:

- Individual Reflection: Allows time, personal space, and privacy to gather your thoughts.
- Group Reflection: Provides insights from others who have had similar experiences, helping you uncover your own cultural assumptions.

3. Structured Reflection Process —

Critical reflection typically involves two main stages:

1. Uncovering Assumptions: Explore your deep assumptions by describing, interpreting, verifying, and explaining the topic or event.
2. Applying Insights: Put everything back together by realizing how the insights gained can impact your work.

This process can be summarized using the DIVER approach: Describe, Interpret, Verify, Explain, and Reconstruct (Brewer & Cunningham, 2010).

The DIVER Approach: Steps to Effective Reflection

1. Describe

- Take a close look at the situation and observe carefully.
- Provide a detailed account of the event that happened, or your feelings.
- Focus on what actually happened (reality) versus what you expected (theory).
- Be specific and objective, describing what you saw and heard without judgments.

2. Interpret

- Reflect on your description: what are your thoughts about the incident?
- Imagine how your description could be understood in other ways.
- Put yourself in others' shoes to see another perspective.
- Think about what your description says about your values and priorities.

3. Verify

- Recognize that cultures, including your own, always develop and change!
- Engage in collaborative learning practices to test your interpretations.
- Ask questions and seek input from various sources (e.g., host staff, students, local community).
- Ensure your understanding of other cultures is as nuanced and up-to-date as possible.

4. Explain

- Deepen your understanding by connecting your interpretation with your values.
- Pay attention to the words you use to explain your insights.
- Reflect on the assumptions in your original description and their influence on your understanding.
- Consider what your understanding shows about your perception of other cultural practices.

5. Reconstruct

- Put everything back together by considering how all these steps have shaped your understanding.
- Think about what these insights mean for your future professional practice.
- Consider changes you might make and how you will handle similar situations in the future.
- Apply what you've learned to make your interactions more successful and enter intercultural encounters with greater awareness and sensitivity.

4. Approaches and Strategies for Effective Reflection

To make the most of your reflection process, try these approaches and strategies:

- Active Listening and Checking Understanding: Move beyond quick assumptions by actively listening and verifying your understanding. This helps recognise different perspectives and gain deeper insights.
- Putting Yourself in Others' Shoes: Recognise multiple viewpoints by showing empathy. Looking at a situation from a different perspective will give you a better understanding of different opinions.

- Recognising Power Dynamics: Acknowledge power dynamics as crucial. Valuable insights often come from those with less power (an employee, a student etc.). If you have a position of more power, remember to show humility and respect towards those with less power.

Practical Exercise

1

Part 1: Elements of Your Cultural Lens

Take 5 minutes to write short notes about your cultural lens. Consider:

- Traditions: Cultural practices during holidays, and celebrations.
- Norms: Expectations in behaviour, such as greetings (handshakes, kisses or hugs).
- Values: Core beliefs, like the importance of family or work ethic.
- Non-verbal Behavior: Gestures, facial expressions, body language.
- Beliefs: Religious or spiritual perspectives.
- 'Normalcy': What you consider typical or acceptable in different situations.
- Surprising Reactions: Aspects of your culture that others find unexpected or interesting.

2

Part 2: Reflection on Interpersonal and Intercultural Misunderstanding

Think about a professional experience involving someone representing a different culture. Use the DIVER approach to reflect and see if this approach helps you understand what you could have done differently to avoid misunderstanding.

Reflecting on your cultural lens and past experiences using the DIVER approach can enhance your understanding of how culture shapes perceptions and interactions. It also helps in developing strategies to figure out cultural differences effectively in professional settings.

CONTINUE

Intercultural practice

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Learning about our cultural lens and critical reflection are important in many professions. Another helpful strategy is to stay curious rather than jumping to conclusions. This means understanding that the "right" way of seeing and doing things may be different from one culture to another. It helps us be more open-minded and respectful in our interactions with people from different backgrounds.

"One should try to judge and interpret the behaviour of others in terms of their traditions and experience. This does not mean that one should not make judgements; it simply means that one should suspend judgment while engaged with aspects of that particular culture."

- Gothard et al., 2012

Cultural relativism means not judging people shaped by other cultures by our own standards of right or wrong, strange or normal. Instead, we try to understand their practices in their own cultural context. For instance, rather than thinking, "A full English breakfast is unappetising!" we should ask, "Why do some people eat a full English breakfast?" You might find out that it's high in protein and keeps you feeling full until lunchtime, unlike cereal or fruits.

Another helpful strategy for interacting with different cultures goes beyond cultural relativism. **Cultural pluralism** embraces the idea that different groups do not exist separately from each other; they also bring valuable qualities and strengths to the larger, global culture. It's about recognizing and appreciating the diversity each group contributes to (Inazu, 2016).

The idea of cultural pluralism isn't a new one; it has been around for a long time. An example from ancient history is the Persian Achaemenid Dynasty, led by Cyrus the Great (Crompton, 2008). He was successful in embracing, accepting and even adopting various cultural practices and traditions, showcasing the long-standing practice of coexisting and tolerating differences among different cultural groups (Kazemzadeh, 2018).

Case study

This case study can illustrate how to apply two different approaches in everyday practice.

Ms. A has recently joined the customer service department at a small tech company specialising in wireless headphones. The company operates Monday through Friday from 09:00 to 17:00. Ms. A has explained that, for religious reasons, she cannot work on Fridays.

- **Cultural Relativism Approach:** Instead of immediately judging Ms A's request based on company norms (working every weekday), you might seek to understand why Fridays are significant to her religious practice. By respecting her beliefs, you would accommodate Ms A's request by allowing her to not work on Fridays.
- **Cultural Pluralism Approach:** Embracing cultural pluralism involves recognising the value of diversity Ms. A brings to the team. Her religious practice can enrich the company culture by promoting inclusivity and understanding. Furthermore, this approach can be a win-win situation, helping the business as well. You could allow Ms A to take off Fridays but ask her to work on Saturdays instead. Embracing cultural diversity at the workplace can in fact improve customer relations and loyalty: you can offer customer service on a Saturday, when your competitors are normally closed.

Learning to withhold judgment, being comfortable with uncertainty, and recognising multiple valid perspectives are crucial when working with different cultures. Like Cyrus the Great did in his time, incorporating qualities from diverse groups into your own workplace culture can be beneficial.

Embracing diversity not only fosters inclusivity but also contributes to organisational success. According to a 2015 McKinsey report (Hunt et al., 2015), companies with diverse management teams—both in terms of ethnic

and racial backgrounds—were 35% more likely to achieve financial returns above industry averages. Similarly, companies with high gender diversity were 15% more likely to achieve these returns (Hunt et al., 2015).

Multiple studies consistently show the advantages of diversity across different contexts. For instance, diversity influences how teams make decisions. At Northwestern University in the USA, groups solving a "murder mystery" included members from different student organisations. These diverse groups were more likely to identify the suspect correctly, despite initially being less confident. Their openness to outsider perspectives proved helpful (Philips et al., 2004).

Research also links diversity to innovation. A study in Economic Geography found that culturally diverse leadership teams are more likely to develop new products. Data from the London Annual Business Survey, involving 7,615 firms, shows that companies with diverse leadership teams are significantly more innovative compared to homogenous teams. These findings highlight how diversity can enhance decision-making and foster innovation in organisations. (Díaz-García et al., 2013; Phillips et al., 2009).

However, achieving success with diverse teams requires effort. It's crucial to see each culture as dynamic and each interaction as an evolving partnership. We need to start with cultural humility, meaning trying to understand all aspects of a person, such as their race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socioeconomic background, education, and social needs. It's about being open to learning and connecting deeply while acknowledging power imbalances and approaching interactions with humility. To practice cultural humility, it's important to cultivate qualities like openness, self-awareness, setting aside ego, offering support, and engaging in self-reflection and critique. (Foronda, 2020)

When we meet or work with a diverse group of colleagues, it's perfectly normal to feel a bit uncomfortable. However, it's crucial to understand that these feelings are natural and part of the learning process when dealing with differences.

During any intercultural experience, it can be useful to think about the following four stages before passing judgment on a situation.

1

Recognising: Start by getting to know your own cultural identity. Be aware of any biases you might have.

2

Encountering: Dive into the experience by actively participating, observing, and learning in the situation. Be curious, try to understand why the

situation is how it is.

3

Adapting: Adjust your behaviour and responses as needed in different cultural settings. Be open to new ways of doing things.

4

Mastering: This doesn't mean you'll become an expert in intercultural skills. Instead, it's about gaining the confidence to deal with unfamiliar environments and handle any uncertainty that may come your way.

Remember, these stages are meant to help you reflect on your intentions and expectations during your experience. Adapting to new environments takes time, so approach every interaction as a chance to learn more about intercultural dynamics ([Jones et al., 2019](#)).



From [Intercultural Learning: Critical preparation for international student travel](#). (Jones et al., 2019). Creative Commons Attribution-ShareAlike 4.0 International License

Becoming effective in intercultural interactions is a process. It involves being aware of your attitudes, values, knowledge, and skills. The topics discussed provide a foundation and practical approaches for better interaction.

However, it's important to see this as just the beginning of your journey toward understanding different cultures, not the end. Learning about other cultures is a lifelong process. It requires a commitment to exploring complex ideas, being open to new perspectives and experiences, and regularly reflecting on your own cultural identity.

Practical exercise

Please identify solutions for the case studies below using the cultural pluralist approach. Turn the card to uncover one potential solution.

a) GreenSolutions, an SME focused on eco-friendly products, wanted to support employees' work-life balance, recognising that staff had varying cultural and family commitments.

Possible solution:

The company introduced flexible work arrangements that allowed employees to adjust their work hours to accommodate personal and cultural responsibilities. For instance, employees could choose between different start and end times or work remotely when needed. This approach enhanced employee well-being, reduced stress, and improved job satisfaction. Additionally, it attracted a more diverse talent pool as individuals with unique needs found

b) FamilyHealth Clinics, a network of small healthcare clinics, noticed their patient population becoming more diverse and wanted to create a healthcare workforce that could effectively serve this culturally diverse patient population.

Possible solution:

The clinics implemented inclusive hiring practices that prioritized recruiting healthcare professionals from various cultural backgrounds and language proficiencies. They also provided cultural sensitivity training to staff to ensure quality patient care. This approach improved patient satisfaction and health outcomes, as patients felt understood and valued, leading to positive word-of-mouth referrals and community trust.

c) TechTraining Hub, a small IT training centre located in Seville, hired 8 international students, none of which spoke Spanish fluently.

Possible solution:

Recognising the linguistic diversity of their employees, the training centre ensured all information/documents was accessible in both English and Spanish. Furthermore, staff were facilitated in organising language workshops, in which the international students taught the Spanish staff English and the Spanish staff taught Spanish to the international hires. This approach expanded the centre's customer base, since it opened up the training centre for non-Spanish

Practical exercise

Step 1. Choose three statements below and write down your initial reaction.

- It is appropriate for employees to wear religious or cultural clothing or symbols in public spaces.
- In the workplace, it is important to embrace and honour diverse cultural traditions, accommodating celebrations such as Lunar New Year, Hanukkah, or Ramadan.
- Companies must use strategies, policies, or practices to actively stimulate diversity within their organisation.
- To create an inclusive workplace, all employees must receive diversity and inclusion training.
- It's important for everyone to be mindful of their words to avoid micro-aggressions. Micro-aggressions are comments, either verbal or nonverbal, that can hurt individuals from marginalised or non-mainstream communities. Being accountable helps prevent misunderstandings like "That's not what I meant."
- If my country or organisation adjusts its identity to be more inclusive, that's acceptable.

Step 2. In your professional or personal network, seek out individuals with different opinions and approach their viewpoints with curiosity rather than judgment.

Step 3. Write a paragraph where you carefully explain someone else's different opinion. Afterwards, check with them if you've described their opinion accurately, including any details you might have missed.

Step 4. Finally, write another paragraph to share if your opinion has changed and how.

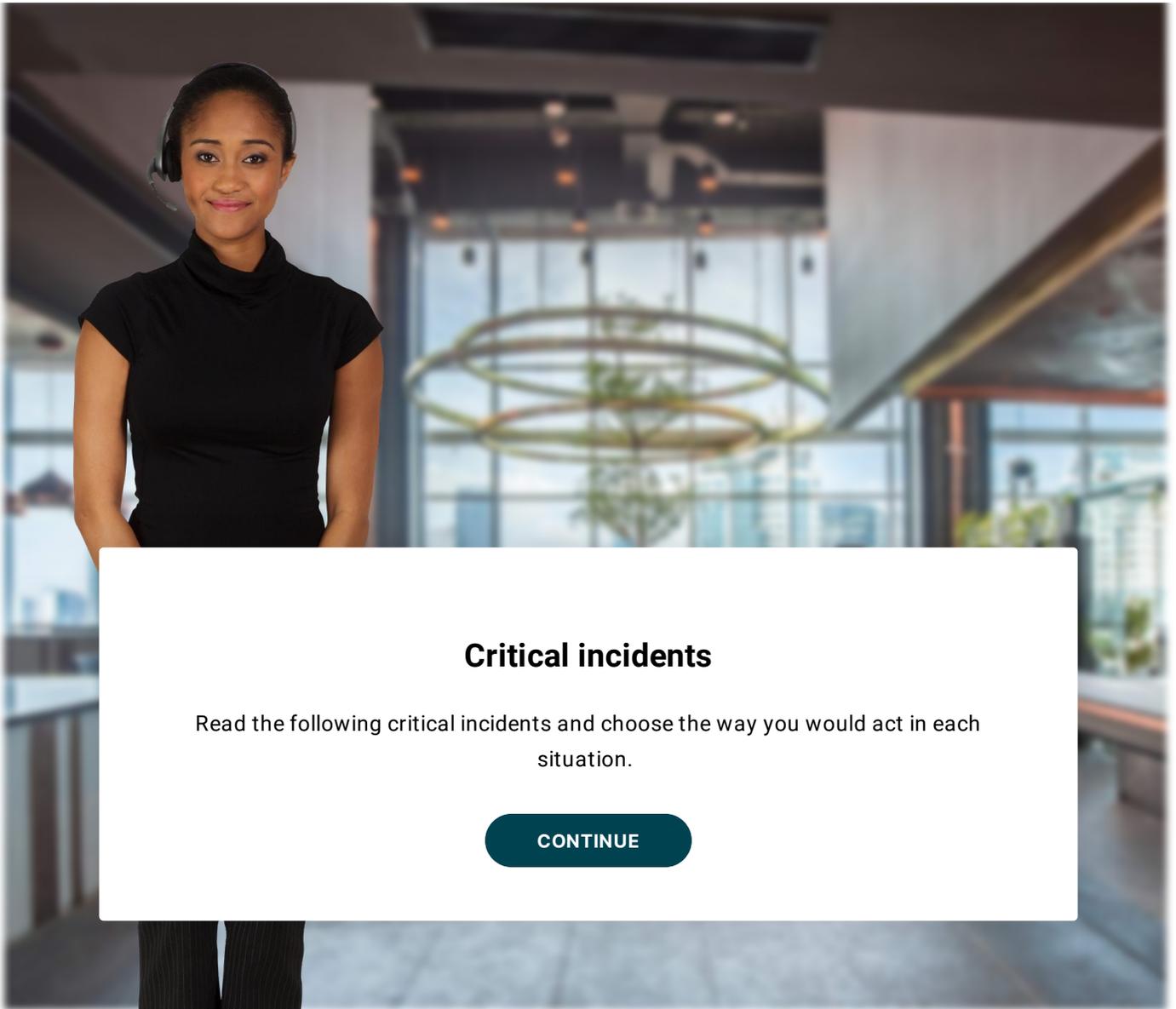
CHECK YOUR LEARNING

Check your learning

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Let's check your learning - Critical incidents

Read the following critical incidents and choose the way you would act in each situation.



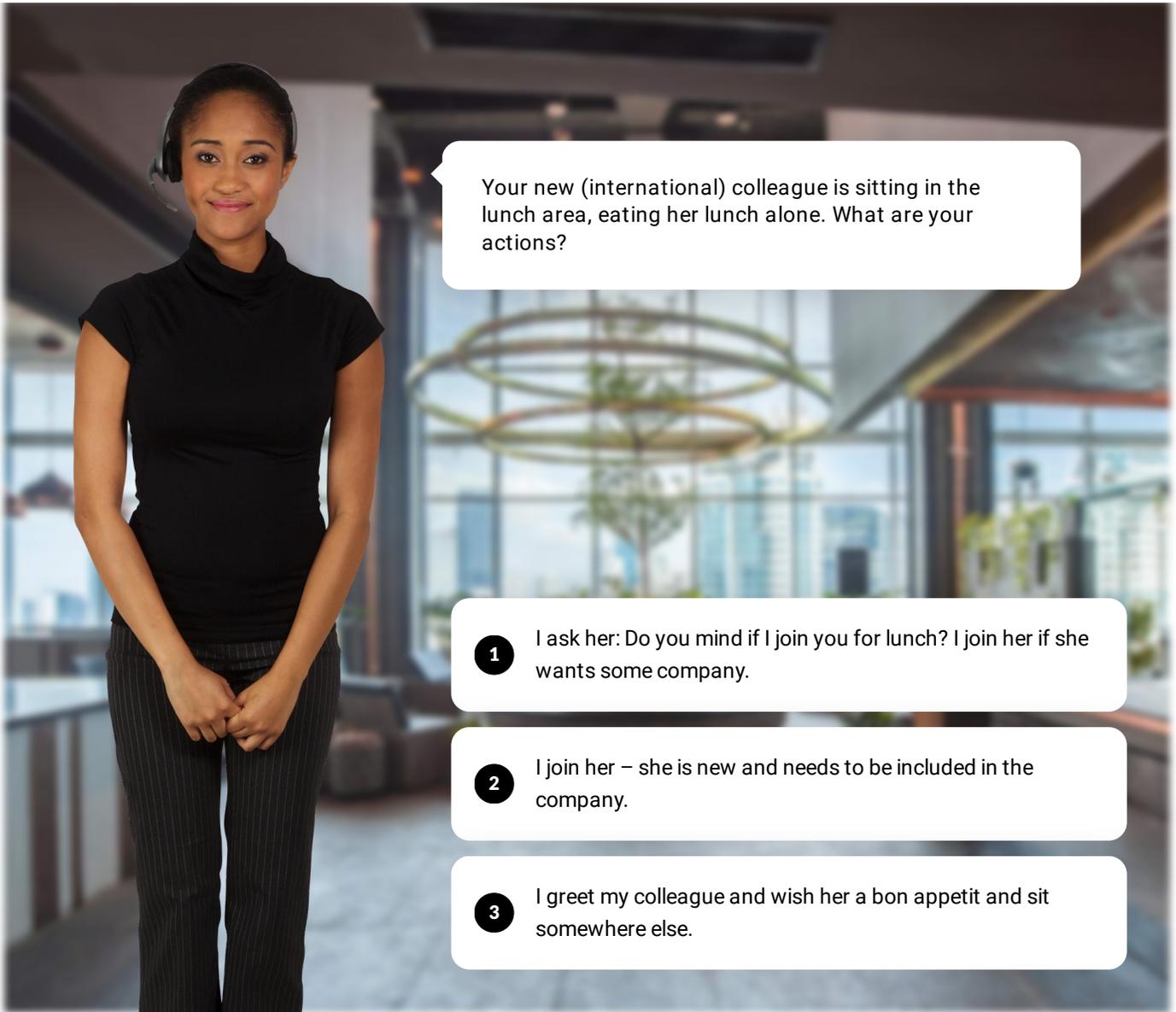
Critical incidents

Read the following critical incidents and choose the way you would act in each situation.

CONTINUE

Scene 1 Slide 1

Continue → Next Slide



Your new (international) colleague is sitting in the lunch area, eating her lunch alone. What are your actions?

1 I ask her: Do you mind if I join you for lunch? I join her if she wants some company.

2 I join her – she is new and needs to be included in the company.

3 I greet my colleague and wish her a bon appetit and sit somewhere else.

Scene 1 Slide 2

0 → Next Slide

1 → Next Slide

2 → Next Slide



Your colleagues are planning a pub crawl for the entire team. It sounds like fun, but you realise that some of your international colleagues do not drink alcohol. What are your actions?

1 Cancel the pub crawl. Your company must encourage only social activities including every colleague.

2 Adjust the concept slightly. It can include going to a pub or two, but you can emphasise that the goal is not drinking, but hanging out together.

Scene 1 Slide 3

0 → Next Slide

1 → Next Slide



You and your colleagues are chatting in the lunch area in your native language, but your newly arrived international colleague's skills are not so good yet. Your actions:

1 You call out to him in English to join you and involve your colleague in the chat by switching to English.

2 You tell your team members to switch to English to include your new colleague.

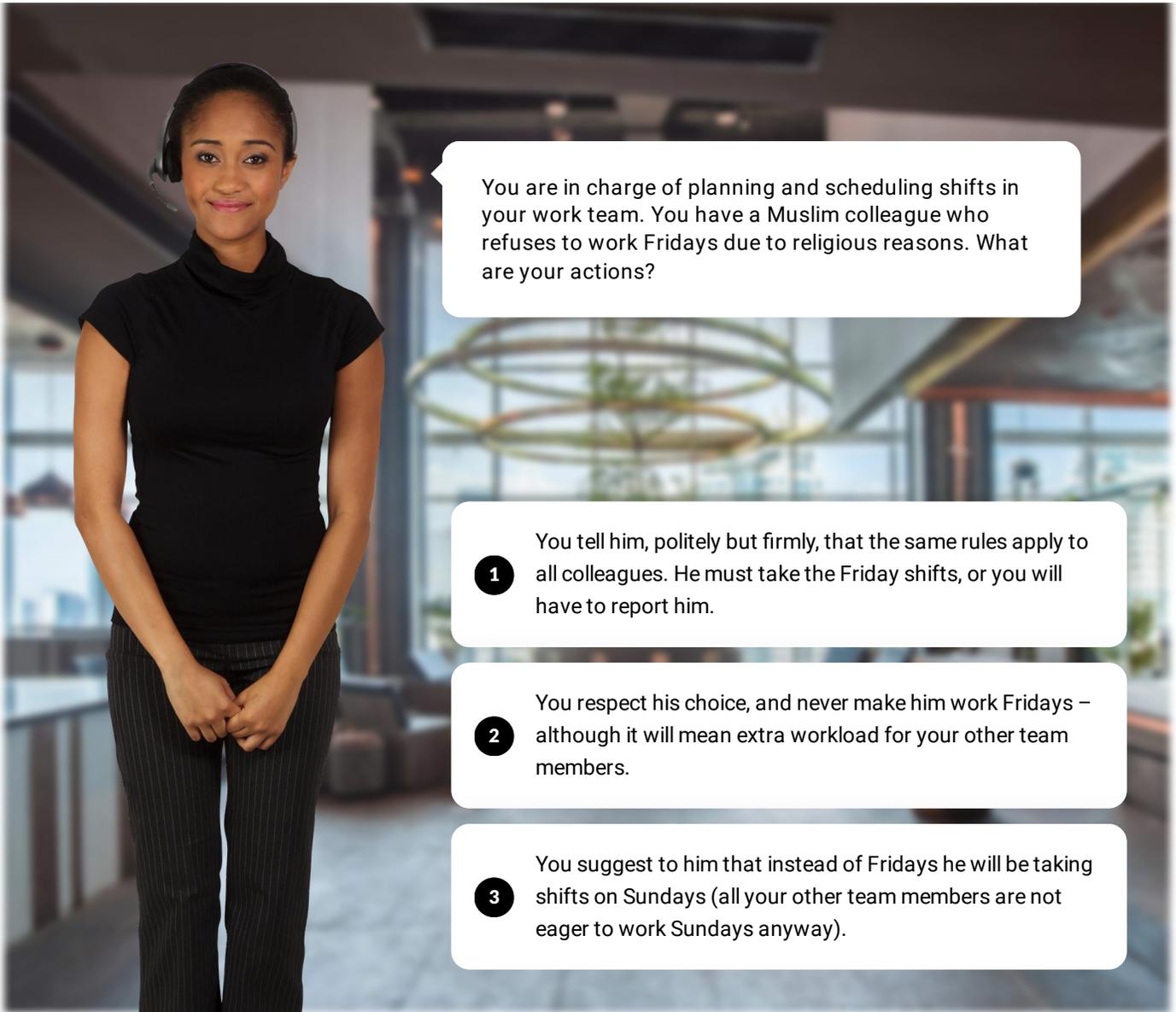
3 You continue chatting with your colleagues in your native language, as this is how your international colleague adjusts fastest to the local culture.

Scene 1 Slide 4

0 → Next Slide

1 → Next Slide

2 → Next Slide



You are in charge of planning and scheduling shifts in your work team. You have a Muslim colleague who refuses to work Fridays due to religious reasons. What are your actions?

1

You tell him, politely but firmly, that the same rules apply to all colleagues. He must take the Friday shifts, or you will have to report him.

2

You respect his choice, and never make him work Fridays – although it will mean extra workload for your other team members.

3

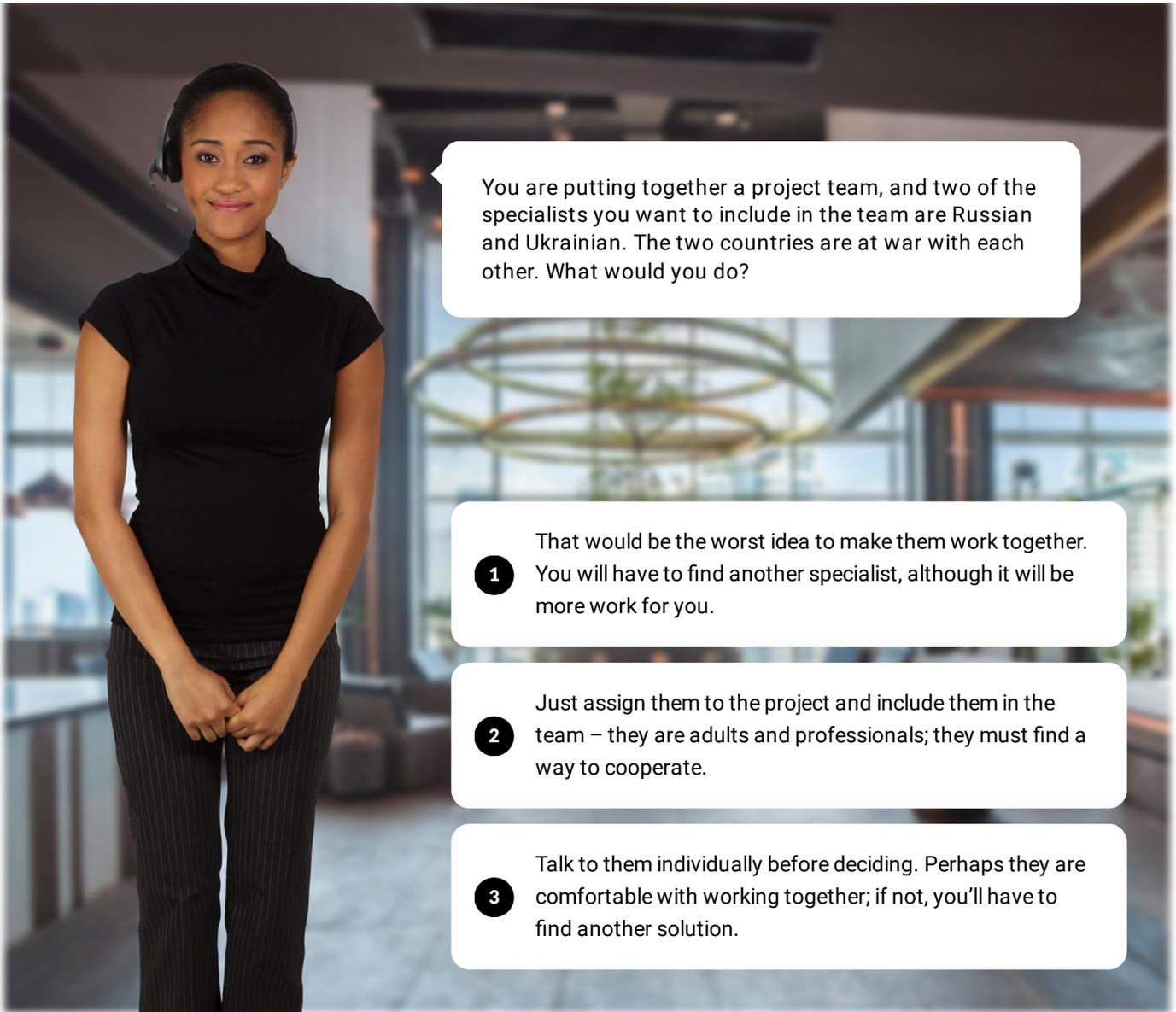
You suggest to him that instead of Fridays he will be taking shifts on Sundays (all your other team members are not eager to work Sundays anyway).

Scene 1 Slide 5

0 → Next Slide

1 → Next Slide

2 → Next Slide



You are putting together a project team, and two of the specialists you want to include in the team are Russian and Ukrainian. The two countries are at war with each other. What would you do?

1 That would be the worst idea to make them work together. You will have to find another specialist, although it will be more work for you.

2 Just assign them to the project and include them in the team – they are adults and professionals; they must find a way to cooperate.

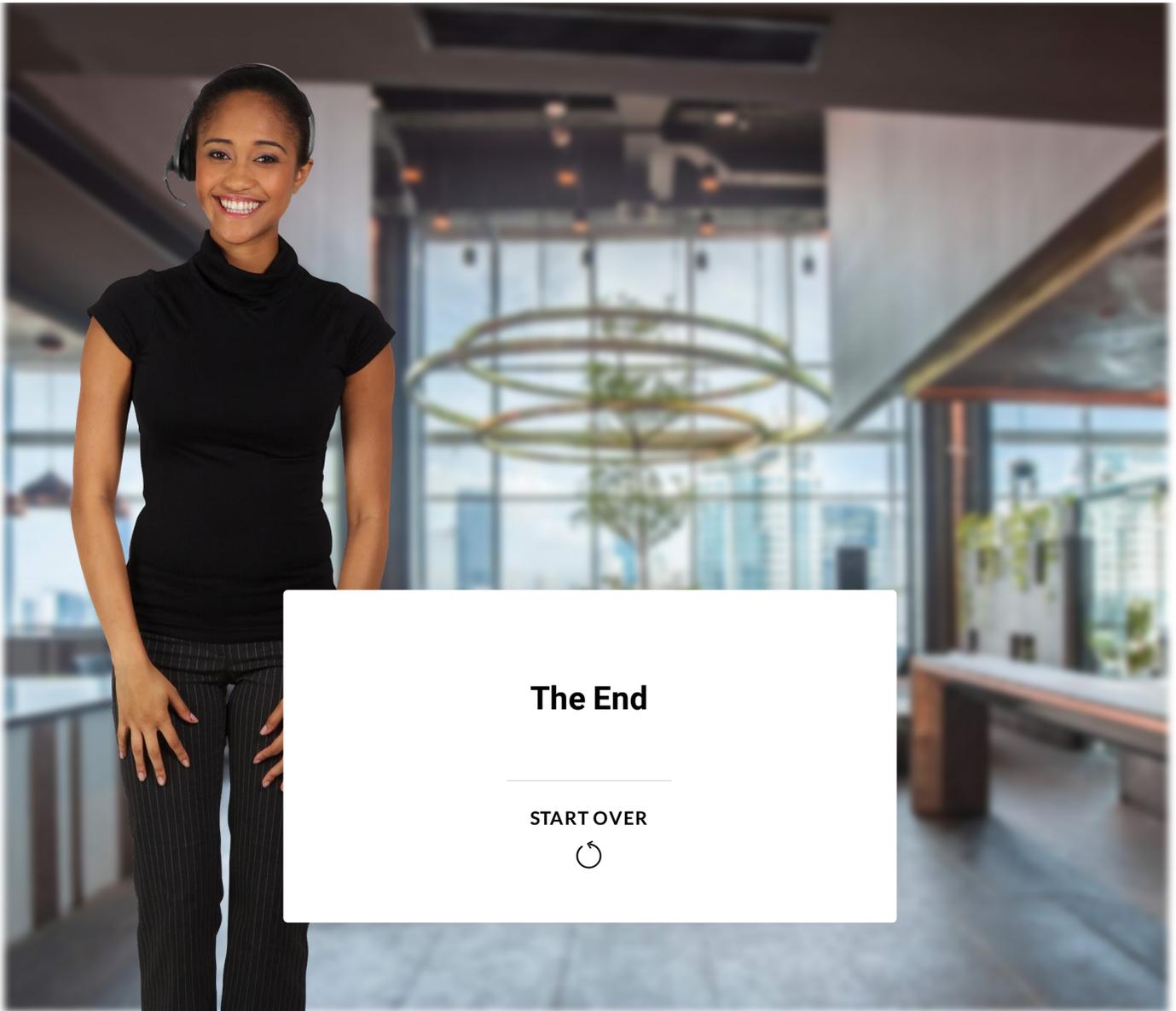
3 Talk to them individually before deciding. Perhaps they are comfortable with working together; if not, you'll have to find another solution.

Scene 1 Slide 6

0 → Next Slide

1 → Next Slide

2 → Next Slide



Scene 1 Slide 7

Continue → End of Scenario

Self-assessment

Complete the self-assessment at the bottom of this page in a downloadable document. It is adapted from the Greater Vancouver Island Multicultural Society (CVIMS) [Cultural Competence Self-Assessment Checklist](#), originally funded by the Government of Canada and the Province of British Columbia and validated in 2022.

This self-assessment tool was crafted to explore individual cultural competence. Its purpose is to help you reflect on your self-awareness in your interactions with others. Also, it can help you enhance your effectiveness in both professional and personal diverse environments. The term 'culture' encompasses not only race, ethnicity, and ancestry but also shared beliefs and common experiences.

After each section, total the number of checks in that column. Multiply the number of times you checked "Never" by

1. "Sometimes/Occasionally"
2. "Fairly Often/Pretty Well"
3. "Always/Very Well"

The higher your total score, the more culturally competent you are becoming.



This assessment is merely a tool, not a test, since cultural competence is an ongoing process that unfolds along a continuum over a lifetime. The rating scale is provided to help you pinpoint areas of strength and areas requiring further development to progress toward your goal of cultural competence.



Self Assessment Cultural Competence.pdf

314.7 KB



CONTINUE TO CONCLUSION

Conclusion

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Congratulations! You have successfully completed this level.

Understanding racism and inclusion is about thinking about our own experiences and how they connect to bigger ideas. Learning about different cultures isn't just memorising facts; it's exploring our own cultural identity.

Thinking critically in cross-cultural situations can reduce stereotypes or biases. Developing cultural sensitivity means doing things step by step: deciding what to focus on, thinking alone or with others, using the DIVER steps (Describe, Interpret, Verify, Explain, Reconstruct), and trying different ways of thinking. DIVER helps break down situations, understand them, check what you think, connect new ideas with what you already know and put it all together for what comes next.

Being curious instead of judging is important in how we interact with people from different cultural backgrounds. Cultural relativism helps us see why others may do things differently. We try to put judgment aside for a while when we're dealing with different perspectives and explanations.

Understanding different cultures is a journey that takes time. Start by knowing your own cultural point of view, think about any biases you might have, try new things, and adjust to new situations. "Mastery" doesn't mean being perfect but feeling more confident in new situations.

To be really good at understanding different cultures, think about your own ideas, beliefs, and skills. The things we talked about here and the exercises you completed are important for becoming better at intercultural communication. But it's just the start. Stay curious and keep listening to different points of view to keep learning about yourself and different cultures!

Did you reach these following learning objectives by now being you able to:

Demonstrate a deep understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of a culture, concerning history, values, politics, communication, beliefs and/or practices and how these elements may influence each other; be capable of addressing your own cultural bias.

Show a deep understanding of cultural similarities and differences in verbal and non-verbal communication and demonstrate the ability to negotiate a shared understanding based on those cultural similarities and differences.

Initiate and develop interactions with individuals from different cultures and demonstrate the ability to suspend judgment, and show the ability to interpret situations from a worldview other than your own.

Thank you for engaging with the Skilled level of the ICS course!

If you would like to continue to another level of the ICS course, please find them through the buttons below.

Beginner level

If you would like to continue to the Beginner level of this ICS course

GO

Developing level

If you would like to continue to the Developing level of this ICS course

GO

If you would like to try out a level of the **Employer-ability** or **Guidance and Counselling** courses, please go back to the main page and choose the course.

CONTINUE TO LIST OF SOURCES

Sources

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Here you can find the full references for all the sources we have mentioned in the Skilled level of the Intercultural sensitivity course.

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