

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

Communicating and establishing relationships with people from different cultures can lead to *a host of benefits*, including *healthier communities*; increased international, national, and local *commerce*; *reduced conflict*; and *personal growth* through *increased tolerance*. Through open and honest intercultural communication people can work together to achieve goals that *benefit* everyone, regardless of group or cultural orientation. Effective communication can ultimately lower or remove the walls and barriers of misunderstanding that separate human beings from one another.

Our ability to interact with persons from different cultures both within and outside our borders has *immense* economic benefits. Intercultural communication is *inevitable*, we will never be able to avoid it entirely. We can, however, through cooperative intercultural communication, reduce and manage it. Often conflict *stems from* our inability to see another person's point of view, especially if that person is from a different culture.

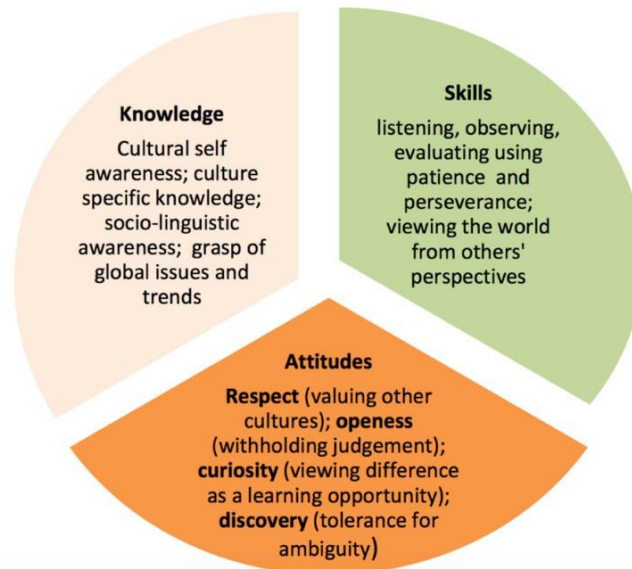
We develop *blatant*, and often incorrect, *generalizations* about people from other cultures that lead us to *mistrust* them. Mistrust leads to *defensive behavior*, which *fosters conflict*. However, by thinking and acting cooperatively, and by communicating *assertively* (not aggressively) and *responsively*, we can learn to effectively manage and reduce intercultural conflict.

While culture is seen as “the sum of a way of life, including expected behaviour, beliefs, values, language and living practices shared by members of a society and consists of both explicit and implicit rules through which experience is interpreted” (Hofstede), intercultural competence can be defined as:

- Set of *cognitive, affective, and behavioral* skills and characteristics that support effective and appropriate interaction in a variety of cultural contexts (Benett, 2008);
- Ability to communicate effectively and appropriately in intercultural situations based on one's intercultural knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Deardorff);
- Ability to develop targeted knowledge, skills and attitudes that lead to visible behaviour and communication that are both effective and appropriate in intercultural interactions (Hofstede).

Constituent elements of intercultural competence are knowledge, skills, and attitudes.

Constituent elements of intercultural competence
(Adapted from Deardorff, 2006)



Knowledge

- Cultural *self-awareness*: *articulating* how one's own culture has *shaped* one's identity and world view;
- Culture specific knowledge: analysing and explaining basic information about other cultures (history, values, politics, economics, communication styles, values, beliefs and practices);
- *Sociolinguistic awareness*: acquiring basic local language skills, articulating differences in *verbal/ non-verbal communication* and *adjusting* one's speech to *accommodate* nationals from other cultures;
- *Grasp of* global issues and trends: explaining the meaning and *implications* of globalization and relating local issues to global forces.

Skills

- Listening, observing, evaluating: using patience and *perseverance* to identify and minimize *ethnocentrism*, seek out *cultural clues* and meaning;
- Analysing, interpreting and relating: seeking out *linkages*, *causality* and relationships using comparative techniques of analysis;

- *Critical thinking*: viewing and interpreting the world from other cultures' point of view and identifying one's own.

Attitudes

- **Respect**: seeking out other *cultures' attributes*; value *cultural diversity*; thinking comparatively and *without prejudice* about cultural differences;
- **Openness**: *suspending criticism* of other cultures; *investing in* collecting 'evidence' of cultural difference; being *disposed to* be proven wrong;
- **Curiosity**: seeking out intercultural interactions, viewing difference as a *learning opportunity*, being aware of one's own *ignorance*;
- **Discovery**: *tolerating ambiguity* and viewing it as a positive experience; *willingness to move beyond one's comfort zone*.

The above knowledge, skills and attitudes lead to *internal outcomes* which refer to an individual who learns to be *flexible, adaptable, empathetic* and *adopts an ethno-relative perspective*. These qualities are reflected in *external outcomes* which refer to the observable behaviour and communication styles of the individual. They are the *visible evidence* that the individual is, or is learning to be, *interculturally competent*.

Sources:

What is intercultural competence ? Sabine McKinnon, Global Perspectives Project, GCU LEAD
https://www.gcu.ac.uk/media/gcalwebv2/theuniversity/centresprojects/globalperspectives/Definition_of_Intercultural_competence.pdf

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