

Cultural Awareness

CULTURE DEFINED

Culture is a way of life developed and communicated by a group of people, consciously or unconsciously, to next generations. It consists of ideas, habits, values, belief systems, food, dress, musical taste, traditions and customs, language, protocols of interacting, and general styles of behaving. Ethnicity is a component of culture and is defined as belonging to a group with unique language, ancestral, religious, and physical characteristics.

Most individuals belong to several identity groups. Identity group membership may be based on common biological characteristics (such as, race, age, and gender), common or equivalent histories or similar worldviews (such as, education, lifestyle, occupation, social class, and religion). While most cultural and identity groups to which an individual belongs have some impact on the person, the importance of each identity factor on an individual's self perception varies among individuals.

CULTURE TYPES

- PATTERNS OF CROSS-CULTURAL DIFFERENCES -

Communication Styles

Attitudes Toward Conflict

Approaches to Completing Tasks

Decision-Making Styles

Attitudes Toward Disclosure

Approaches to Knowing Things

Approaches to Family Structure

Adapted From: Brooks, Nelson. "Parameters of Culture", Foreign Language News Exchange, Connecticut State Department of Education, 1973.

DEEP CULTURE ELEMENTS

- ATTITUDES, FEELINGS, AND VALUES RELATED TO A GROUP OF PEOPLE -

CEREMONY: What a person is to say and do on particular occasions.

COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE: Attitudes toward dating, marriage, and raising a family.

AESTHETICS: Enjoyment related to literature, music, dance, art, architecture.

ETHICS: How a person learns and practices honesty, fair play, principles, morals, etc.

FAMILY TIES: Feelings toward family members, classmates, roommates, and others.

HEALTH AND MEDICINE: Reaction to sickness, death, soundness of mind and body, and medicine.

FOLK MYTHS: Attitudes toward heroes, traditional stories, legendary characters, superstitions, etc.

GESTURES AND KINETICS: Nonverbal communication or reinforced speech such as use of the eyes, hands, body.

PRESENCE: Personal behavior such as laughter, smiling, voice quality, gait, poise, etc.

GROOMING: Appearance such as hair style, cosmetics, dress, etc.

OWNERSHIP: Attitudes toward property, individual rights, loyalties, beliefs, etc.

PRECEDENCE: Accepted manners toward older persons, peers, and younger persons.

REWARDS AND PRIVILEGES: Attitudes toward motivation, merit, achievement, service, social position, etc.

RIGHTS AND DUTIES: Attitudes toward personal obligations, voting, taxes, military service, legal rights, personal demands, etc.

RELIGION: Attitudes toward Divine Beings and the supernatural, and how these attitudes affect a person's thoughts and actions.

SEX ROLES: How a person views, understands, and relates to members of the opposite sex and what deviations are allowed and expected.

SPACE AND PROXEMICS: Attitudes toward self and land, the accepted distances between individuals within a culture.

SUBSISTENCE: Attitudes about providing for oneself, the young, the old and who protects whom.

TABOOS: Attitudes and beliefs about doing things against culturally accepted patterns.

CONCEPT OF TIME: Attitudes toward being early, on time or late.

VALUES: Attitudes toward freedom, education, cleanliness, cruelty, etc.

Adapted From: Brooks, Nelson, "Parameters of Culture", Foreign Language News Exchange, Connecticut State Department of Education, 1973.

CULTURAL AWARENESS CHECKLIST

When I belong to the dominant culture:

1. I am aware that I am part of a dominant culture and know how its dynamics work.
2. I listen when people of other cultures tell me how my culture affects them.
3. I have a philosophy of fairness and I let others in my culture know my philosophy.
4. I am aware that outsiders to my culture recognize my cultural peculiarities better than I do and I listen when others tell me about the effects of things I do or say.
5. When answerable to someone of a different culture, I avoid the tendency to “go over his or her head” to a person of my own culture.
6. I am willing to learn the “unwritten rules” of a different culture so I can work effectively with members of that culture.
7. I help prepare individuals of different cultures to interact in my culture without negating their own culture.
8. I recognize that when under pressure, I may revert to narrower beliefs to make myself and my culture right and those of other cultures wrong.
9. I respect differences in others.
10. I apologize when I have done something inappropriate that offends someone of a different culture.

Adapted From: Brooks, Nelson, “Parameters of Culture”. Foreign Language News Exchange, Connecticut State Department of Education, 1973.

Values-Based Disputes

Conflicts over values, or disputes involving strong beliefs as a significant factor, are very difficult to resolve and are often found in interpersonal conflicts, such as separation and divorce.

Definition of Values and Values-based Disputes

“Freely chosen internal standards or beliefs that people use to judge whether issues, behaviors, or events are good/bad, right/wrong, moral/immoral, fair/unfair, just/unjust. . . The development of values is the result of a complex socialization process in which parents, siblings, peers, education, religion, work, associations, and ethnic and national affiliation all play a part . . . “

“These basic values rarely change dramatically during the life of an individual or group, and if so, they usually shift only after an extended period of time, in-depth introspection, a significant life-changing critical incident or event, or dramatic pressure from external sources. The relatively permanent and stable nature of values means that disputes involving clashes of strong belief systems may require months or years to reconcile, if they are resolved at all.”

~ Christopher W. Moore, author, “The Mediation Process”

Values at Work in Our Lives

Generally, individuals have three levels of values:

1. Self-definition. Also known as “moral values,” these are the deepest and most basic form of individual or group beliefs, defining how a person believes they really are or how they present their core selves to others.
Examples: gender, honesty, truthfulness, candor, fairness, equality, openness, love, safety.
2. Terminal. Strong beliefs that guide the behavior of an individual or group in most areas of their lives.
Examples: lifestyle, class, sexuality, nature, political beliefs, ethnicity, nationality, religion.
3. Operational. Standards and norms that guide day-to-day activities and interactions of individuals or groups; often used to judge attitudes and behaviors of others.
Examples: expectations of manners, cleanliness, acceptable taste in music/noise levels, expectations of timeliness, definitions of offensive language, beliefs about debt, beliefs about responsibility, definition of and expectations around promises, quality of life preferences, aesthetics.

Why Values-based Disputes Are Difficult to Resolve

Often these value conflicts challenge the identity of individuals or groups, challenge the predictability of how the world should be ordered, and trigger significant fears concerning change. Because of the deep-rooted nature of these conflicts, parties are often unable to acknowledge the importance or validity of values held by others. These types of conflicts are not as amenable to trading to satisfy interests. Compromise is seen as invalidating one's identity or the loss of self or group image, the sacrifice of enduring and unchangeable principles, and a loss of self-respect, a way of life, or worldview.

How to Recognize Values-based Disputes

If parties do not directly state the value in conflict, a mediator can identify four behavioral indicators that often point to a values-based dispute:

1. Significant presence and use of values-laden language. Presence or use of words expressing values or judgments and strong feeling words.
Examples: unfair, unjust, unreasonable, bad, outraged, frustrated, incredulous, hurt.
2. Predictions of dire consequences. Potential or feared outcomes if a particular strategy or solution is pursued
Examples: "I'll be homeless" "The kids will never see me if I agree to this."
3. Quotation of venerable sources. Appeals to documents or people whom the speaker claims to be trustworthy, credible, and unquestionable. Used to try to convince others of the "truth" of a position.
Examples: religious books, The Constitution, statutes, quotes from famous people, attributing belief to decision maker, "Judge is going to say..."
4. Characterization of other involved individuals or parties. Judgments about the views, values, or capabilities of another person or group.
Examples: "Women are crazy" "Men are stubborn" "She's out of touch with reality." "He's a totally irresponsible parent."

General Approaches for Responding to Value Differences

- Address or resolve peripheral conflict elements or issues: avoid talking about identity or values; avoid framing issues or problems in terms of identity or value differences.
- Change the relationship of the parties, not their values: change behaviors, attitudes toward each other, structure of how parties interact, but not values.
- Increase understanding and tolerance for diverse values:
 - encourage education about values, but stress no expectation for change
 - create understanding of and empathy toward another's values, but do not push for agreement
 - clarify values and agree to disagree
 - create spheres of interest where each party's values will lead