

CULTURAL DIVERSITY TRAINING

MODULE 1- SECTION 2

Fundamentals of Intercultural Competency

BEFORE WE BEGIN

Now that you have a basic understanding of what culture is, we will be taking a deeper look at what it means to be interculturally competent. This section will highlight the importance of being interculturally competent when travelling and interacting with new cultures and communities.

In this section, we will be reviewing the ABC's of intercultural competency and identifying how we view, feel and act towards cultural difference.

This section will provide you with a better understanding of the ways in which you consciously or subconsciously think about other cultures and how you communicate.

You will then be introduced to the Somethings Up Cycle. Through this cycle you will learn how to develop self-awareness and adjust behavior in intercultural interactions for effective communication.

DEVELOPING INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCY

This section will move through the different ways in which we can develop intercultural competency.

We will review the importance of attitudes, beliefs and actions in becoming interculturally competent including how to address cultural communication conflicts through the Somethings Up! Cycle.

CULTURAL ATTITUDES

Intercultural Competency training aims to transform an individuals' attitudes, since attitudes guide individuals to behave in a particular way toward an object or a person (Pickens 2009).

Attitudes can be split in three components:

- cognition (thought or belief)
 - affect (feeling)
 - behavior (action)

Although people's feelings and beliefs may guide their actions, we can only infer their attitudes from their behavior because feelings and beliefs are internal to the person. It is important to understand the make-up of attitudes, as this training seeks to transform each component (cognition, affect and behavior) using the experiential and transformative learning approaches.

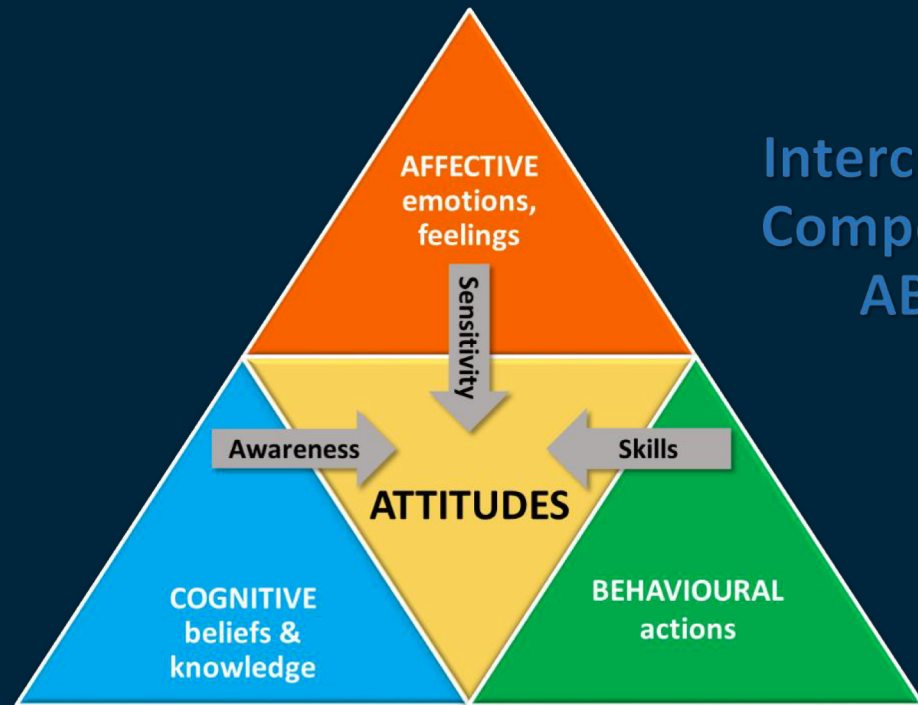
ABC'S OF CULTURE

Affective Dimension

This dimension speaks to feelings and emotions a person has about other cultures.

For instance, individuals may be disrespectful to members of a specific cultural group on account of their biases or assumptions and depending on the context.

This typically affects the members who have more easily identifiable cultural identities (such as an identifiable piece of clothing) - the identity of which has been connected to negative assumptions or stereotypes.



Intercultural
Competency
ABCs

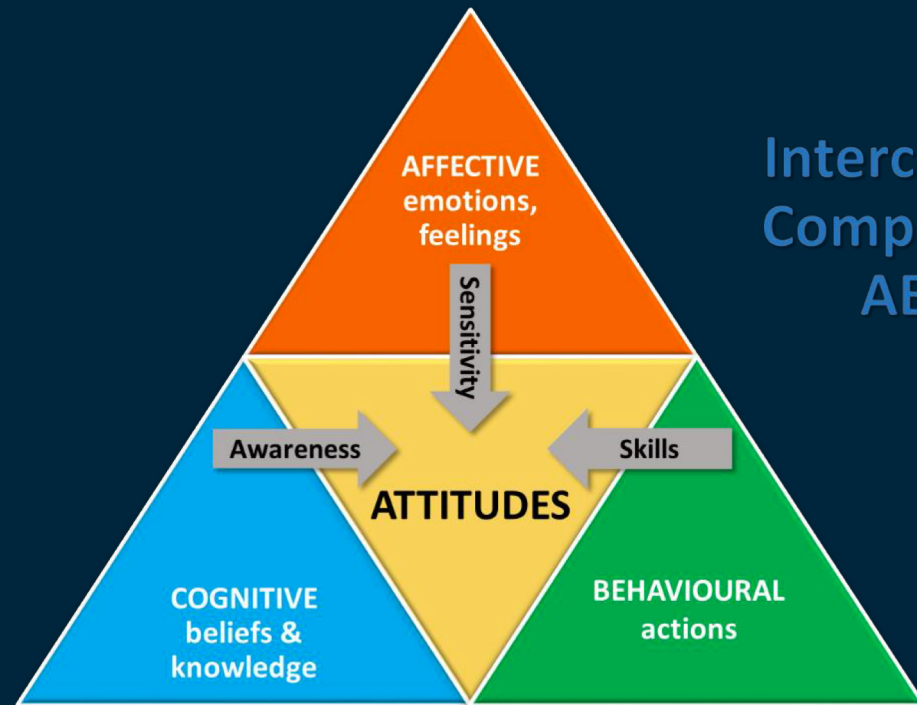
ABC'S OF CULTURE

Behavioral Dimension

This dimension incorporates one's past experience of culturally diverse situations as a basis to develop the skills necessary to act in a manner that is respectful toward cultural differences.

Intercultural Competency training aims to build one's skills to be more flexible and adaptive in intercultural relations. This includes behavior appropriate to one's own culture as well as alternative behavior that may be more appropriate when interacting with people from another culture.

The behavioral aspect involves skills such as intercultural communication and negotiation, complex thinking, relationship building, listening, information gathering, and problem solving (Martin and Nakayama 2004).



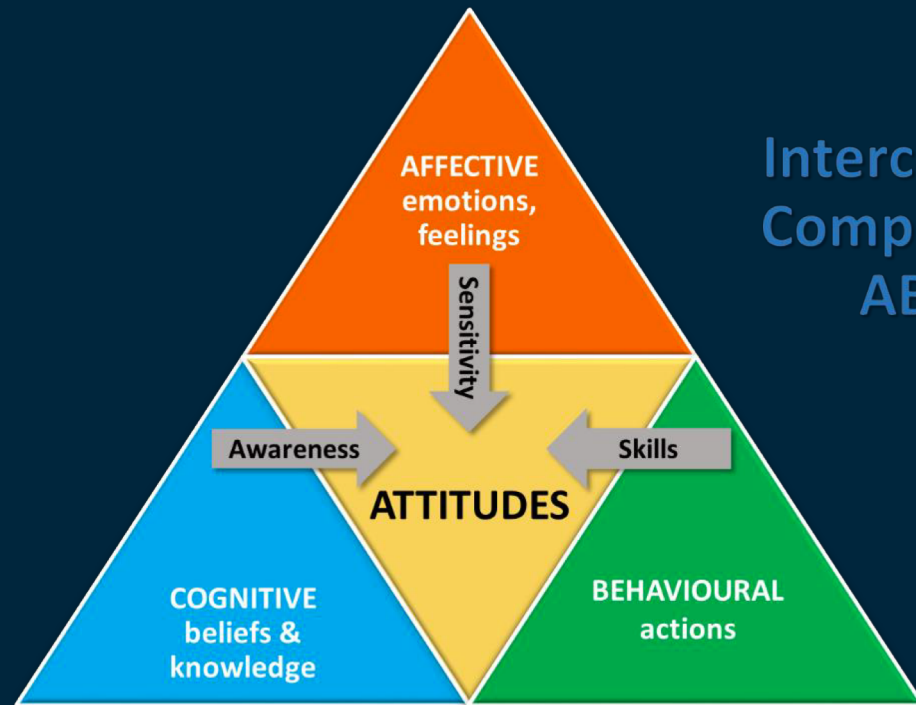
Intercultural
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ABCs

ABC'S OF CULTURE

Cognitive Dimension

This dimension involves knowledge, thoughts and beliefs about one's own and others' cultures, as well as the characteristics attributed to the members of a cultural group.

For instance, an individual may believe that typical members of a group are hostile and/or unintelligent; or an individual may think that members of a certain group violate the freedom of expression (Areni & Kim 1993).



Intercultural
Competency
ABCs

INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS

Intercultural competency training aims to increase self-awareness or an 'intercultural awareness', which refers to a person's ability to understand similarities and differences between one's own and others' cultures.

First, individuals examine their own cultural worldviews, values, and biases which may act as a motivator for self-reflection.

Second, individuals become aware that they are operating in an intercultural context; that is, they learn to see others as *cultural beings* with different practices and worldviews.

Third, individuals are provided with generic knowledge of cultural issues that can be applied in intercultural contexts (e.g., communication styles, effects of immigration and resettlement).

SOMETHINGS UP! CYCLE

The following Something's Up! Cycle is an exceptional tool to use when developing self-awareness and changing behavior in intercultural interactions.

This tool can be applied as a means to personally reflect on situations, as well as a means to discuss a Something's Up! moment with others. By working through Something's Up! moments in a manner that promotes self-reflection, you can increase your intercultural competency, enhance intercultural communication.



SOMETHINGS UP! CYCLE

Stage 1: This first stage of the cycle is about noticing differences and usually occurs when a person's behavior does not meet with our own expectations.

It is also about accurately describing the facts of the situation. Indeed, we need to name the action that has made someone uncomfortable to distinguish the action from the person that did it.

In this way, the negative emotion is attached to the action and not the person. Notice that we have emotions because of the actions of another person, and it is not only about "facts" but mostly about the interpretation of the situation.

Signs that 'something is up' include: feeling threatened, overwhelmed, disapproving, or exhilarated; feeling the need to hang onto something familiar; withdrawing without explanation; different understandings of an agreement; thinking everything is fine when another team member is distressed, upset or frustrated; feeling confused.

At this stage of the cycle, we need to ask such questions as: What happened? How did I feel? How did (might) each of the people involved feel?



SOMETHINGS UP! CYCLE

Stage 2: Judging something as right or wrong or good or bad is a normal, often automatic, response to many situations. In many ways, this reaction is a natural display of cultural values.

When we take the time to reflect on a situation—in other words, when we identify a judgment—we can gain valuable insights into what is happening and increase our cultural self-awareness.



SOMETHINGS UP! CYCLE

Stage 3: At this stage, we attempt to make sense of a situation by observing general patterns of behavior and expression and then using these observations to figure out (or anticipate) a misunderstanding.

This 'Making Sense' stage of the Something's Up! Cycle has two steps: (1) trying to understand what the misunderstanding was specifically about, as related to our understanding of "normal behaviours" in the workplace; and, (2) how were our expectations of the people involved similar and/or different?

In trying to understand what our 'normal' might be, we can employ some of the cultural orientations and workplace values discussed in this training. At this first step of the making sense stage, the questions to ask are: What is this situation/misunderstanding about? What did each person expect, or what is each individual's perception of "normal" workplace behaviours/interactions?

In order to begin to move on, we want to seek commonality between persons involved and acknowledge the value in different perspectives. Questions for this second step in the making sense stage are: How are their/our expectations similar or different?



SOMETHINGS UP! CYCLE

Stage 4: Informed action implies that different perspectives have been considered and the best response possible has emerged. At this stage, the questions to be asked are: What can be done to move forward? What are the short-term actions? What are the long-term considerations?

Also, consider that every time we try something new, we also move out of our comfort zone because we do not feel in control anymore and have few clues to predict the consequences of our actions. This can result in other Something's Up moments, which will be faced going again through this cycle.



TAKE HOME

Developing intercultural competency is an ongoing, lifelong process of personal growth that entails a growing awareness of one's own and other cultures.

It involves increasing one's sensitivity about differences in values, beliefs and behaviors, and developing skills to determine the most appropriate practices and behavior to communicate and work effectively and respectfully across cultures.

Visiting and immersing yourself into a new country is a key part in learning and engaging with different cultures and a critical way to develop intercultural communication skills.