

A DEVELOPMENTAL MODEL OF INTERCULTURAL SENSITIVITY

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I. DENIAL OF DIFFERENCE

The inability to construe cultural difference. Indicated by benign stereotyping (well meant but ignorant or naïve observations) and superficial statements of tolerance. May sometimes be accompanied by attribution of deficiency in intelligence or personality to culturally deviant behavior. Tendency to dehumanize outsiders.

- **Denial/Isolation:** Isolation in homogeneous groups fails to generate either the opportunity or motivation to construct relevant categories for noticing and interpreting cultural differences.
- **Denial/Separation:** Intentional separation from cultural difference protects worldview from change by creating the conditions of isolation. Some awareness of cultural difference may yield undifferentiated broad categories, such as “foreigner” or “Asian” or “Black.”

Cognitive Structure:

- No categories (“what difference?”) or only broad categories for different cultures.

Affective Quality:

- Benign on the surface (“live and let live”), but potentially genocidal when pressed into cross-cultural contact.

Behavioral Emphasis:

- Aggressive ignorance (“I don’t need to know”), stress on the familiar.

Exercise Of Power:

- Possibility of exploitation.

Implications for Organizations:

- Organizations may be insular and basically clueless about cultural issues
- They may be susceptible to being blindsided by political action around race and gender and to being criticized for “disrespect”
- In general, there may be no systematic recruitment of a diverse workforce, thus losing cultural diversity as a resource, both domestically and internationally

At this stage, learners say :

- “Live and let live, that’s what I say.”
- “All big cities are the same – lots of building, too many cars, McDonalds.”
- “What I really need to know about is art and music.”
- “As long as we all speak the same language, there’s no problem.”
- “The main concerns I have involve knowing how to get around and ordering in restaurants.”
- “With my experience, I can be successful in any culture without any special effort.”
- “I never experience culture shock.”
- All I need to know about is politics and history---I can figure out the rest of it as I go along.”

II. Defense Against Difference

Recognition of cultural difference coupled with negative evaluation of most variations from native culture—the greater the difference, the more negative the evaluation. Characterized by dualistic us/them thinking and frequently accompanied by overt negative stereotyping. Evolutionary view of cultural development with native culture at the acme. A tendency towards social/cultural proselytizing of “underdeveloped” cultures.

- **Defense/Denigration:** Cognitive categories for construing cultural difference are isolated by evaluating them negatively, thus protecting world views from change. (“I know Americans have a different culture, but everything about it proves what barbarians they are.”)
 - **Defense/Superiority:** Existing cultural world view is protected by exaggerating its positive aspects compared to all other cultures. Any neutral or positive statement about another culture may be interpreted as an attack.
 - **Defense/Reversal:** Tendency to see another culture as superior while maligning one’s own. Dualistic thinking is identical; only the poles are reversed.
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Cognitive Structure:

- Better elaborated categories for cultural difference, but original world view is protected by poor integration of the new categories (hardening of the categories).

Affective Quality:

- State of siege; defense of privilege and defense of identity.

Behavioral Emphasis:

- Same-culture segregation; “backlash” actions; possible support for supremacist and hate groups.

Exercise of Power:

- Exclusionary denial of equal opportunity.

Implications for Organizations

- Attitudes of superiority may lead to overconfidence or arrogance
- Cultural difference is seen as an obstacle to be avoided if possible, so diversity recruitment efforts are half-hearted and often unsuccessful
- Combativeness may damage valuable international partnerships

At this stage, learners say:

- “I wish these people would just talk the way we do.”
- “Even though I’m speaking their language, they’re still rude to me.”
- “When you go to other cultures, it makes you realize how much better the U.S. is.”
- “These people don’t value life the way we do.”
- “Boy, could we teach these people a lot of stuff.”
- “What a sexist society!”
- “These people are so urbane and sophisticated, not like the superficial people back home.”
- “I am embarrassed by my compatriots, so I spend all my time with the host country nationals.”
- “I wish I could give up my own cultural background and really be one of these people.”

III. Minimization of Difference

Recognition and acceptance of superficial cultural differences such as eating customs, etc., while holding that all human beings are essentially the same. Emphasis on the similarity of people and commonality of basic values. Tendency to define the basis of commonality in ethnocentric terms (i.e. since everyone is essentially like us, "just be yourself").

- **Minimization / Physical Universalism:** Emphasis on commonality of human beings in terms of physiological similarity. (e.g., "After all, we're all human!").
 - **Minimization / Transcendent Universalism:** Emphasis on commonality of human beings as subordinate to a particular supernatural being, religion, or social philosophy. (e.g., "We are all children of God, whether we know it or not.")
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Cognitive Structure:

- World views protected by attempting to subsume difference into familiar superordinate categories ("deep down we're all the same").

Affective Quality:

- Insistently nice.

Behavioral Emphasis:

- Active support for universal religious, moral, or political principles.

Exercise of Power:

- Acceptance of institutionalized privilege.

Implications for Organizations

- Organizations may overestimate their sensitivity to diversity issues and inadequate "tolerance" or "colorblind" policies may lead to poor retention of diversity *even when recruitment is successful*
- Extreme emphasis on *existing* organizational culture often creates strong pressure for cultural conformity, with resulting loss of diversity as a resource

At this stage learners say:

- "The key to getting along in any culture is to just be yourself – authentic and honest!"
- "Customs differ, of course, but when you really get to know them they're pretty much like us."
- "I have this intuitive sense of other people, no matter what their culture."
- "Technology is bringing cultural uniformity to the developed world."
- "While the context may be different, the basic need to communicate remains the same around the world."
- "No matter what their culture, people are pretty much motivated by the same things."
- "If people are really honest, they'll recognize that some values are universal."
- "It's a small world, after all!"

IV. ACCEPTANCE OF DIFFERENCE

Recognition and appreciation of cultural differences in behavior and values. Acceptance of cultural difference as viable alternative solutions to the organization of human existence. Cultural relativity. The beginning of ability to interpret phenomena within context. Categories of difference are consciously elaborated.

- **Acceptance / Behavioral Relativism** : All behavior exists in cultural context. Ability to analyze Complex interaction in culture-contrast terms.
- **Acceptance / Value Relativism**: Beliefs, values, and other general patterns of assigning “goodness” and “badness” to ways of being in the world all exist in cultural context.

Cognitive Structure:

- ♦ Differentiation and elaboration of cultural categories; development of a metalevel view of cultural difference, including one’s own culture.

Affective Quality:

- ♦ Curiosity

Behavioral Emphasis:

- ♦ Acquisition of knowledge about cultures, including one’s own.

Exercise of Power:

- ♦ Tends to be avoided through inaction (liberal paralysis)

Implications for Organizations

- Recognition of the value of diversity leads to active efforts to recruit and retain a diverse workforce
- There is a tendency to “talk the talk” without “walking the walk”
- Marketing and training efforts may acknowledge the local cultural context, but appropriate action may be unclear
- Managers are encouraged to recognize cultural difference, but they are not trained in intercultural skills

At this stage, learners say:

- “The more difference the better—more difference equals more creative ideas!”
- “You certainly wouldn’t want to have all the same kind of people around—the ideas get stale, and besides, it’s boring.”
- “I always try to study about a new culture before I go there.”
- “The more cultures you know about, the better comparisons you can make.”
- Sometimes it’s confusing, knowing that values are different in various cultures and wanting to be respectful, but still wanting to maintain my own core values.”
- “When studying abroad, every student needs to be aware of relevant cultural differences.”
- “I know my homestay family and I have had very different life experiences, but we’re learning to work together.”
- “Where can I learn more about Mexican culture to be effective in my communication?”

V. ADAPTATION TO DIFFERENCE

The development of communication skills that enable intercultural communication. Effective use of empathy, or frame of reference shifting, to understand and be understood across cultural boundaries.

- **Adaptation / Empathy:** Ability to consciously shift perspective into alternative cultural world view elements and act in culturally appropriate ways in those areas.
 - **Adaptation / Pluralism:** Internalization of more than one complete worldview. Behavior shifts completely into different frames without much conscious effort.
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Cognitive Structure:

- Knowledge and behavior are linked by conscious intention; category boundaries become more flexible and permeable.

Affective Quality:

- Competence

Behavioral Emphasis:

- Intentional perspective-taking, empathy

Exercise of Power:

- Ability to recognize and respond to power in cultural context; some ability to exercise power appropriately in alternative contexts

Implications for Organizations

- Executives, administrators and managers define their roles as demanding intercultural competence, and they encourage educational training in those skills
- A strong climate of respect for diversity leads to high retention of diversity in the workforce
- Both domestic and international cultural differences are routinely used as a resource in multicultural teams

At this stage, learners say:

- ♦ "To solve this dispute, I'm going to have to change my approach."
- ♦ "I know they're really trying hard to adapt to my style, so it's fair that I try to meet them halfway."
- ♦ "I greet people from my culture and people from the host culture somewhat differently to account for cultural differences in the way respect is communicated."
- ♦ "I can maintain my values and also behave in culturally appropriate ways."
- ♦ "In a study abroad program, every student should be able to adapt to at least some cultural differences."
- ♦ "To solve this dispute, I need to change my behavior to account for the difference in status between me and my counterpart from the other culture."
- ♦ "I'm beginning to feel like a member of this culture."
- ♦ "The more I understand this culture, the better I get at the language."

VI. INTEGRATION OF DIFFERENCE

The internalization of bicultural or multicultural frames of reference. Maintaining a definition of identity that is "marginal" to any particular culture. Seeing one's self as "in process."

- **Integration / Contextual Evaluation:** Ability to use multiple cultural frames of reference in evaluation phenomena. Similar to "contextual relativism" in Perry's terms.
- **Integration / Constructive Marginality:** Acceptance of any identity that is not primarily based in any one culture. Ability to facilitate constructive contact between cultures—for one's self and for others. Participation to some extent in a "marginal reference group," where other marginals rather than cultural compatriots are perceived as similar.

Cognitive Structure:

- ♦ World view categories are seen as "constructs" maintained by self-reflexive consciousness (cultures and individuals are making themselves up")

Affective Quality:

- ♦ Confusion, authenticity

Behavioral Emphasis:

- ♦ Formation and maintenance of constructed affiliation groups; cultural meditation

Exercise of Power :

- ♦ Culturally appropriate, but tending toward consensual

Implications for Organizations

- Organizations characterized by this kind of intercultural sensitivity are truly multicultural or transcultural
- Every policy, issue, and action is examined in its cultural context and assessed for its strengths and limits
- There is little emphasis on the ethnic or national identity of the organization, although its cultural roots and influences are recognized

At this stage, learners say:

- ♦ "Everywhere is home, if you know enough about how things work there."
- ♦ "I feel most comfortable when I'm bridging differences between the cultures I know."
- ♦ "Whatever the situation, I can usually look at it from a variety of cultural points of view."
- ♦ "In an intercultural world, everyone needs to have a trans-cultural mindset."
- ♦ "I truly enjoy participating fully in both of my cultures."
- ♦ "My decision-making skills are enhanced by having multiple frames of reference."

Derived from: Bennett, Milton J. "Towards a Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity" in R. Michael Paige, ed. *Education for the Intercultural Experience*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1993. Also refer to Bennett, Janet M. "Cultural Marginality: Identity Issues in Intercultural Training," in R. Michael Paige, ed. *Education for the Intercultural Experience*.