



Cultural Competence



What is 'Cultural Competence'?

Cultural competence is how well an organisation and the individuals within it provide care to people with diverse values, beliefs and behaviours. This can involve designing services to meet social, cultural and language needs. It means valuing individuals, families, communities and protecting their dignity.

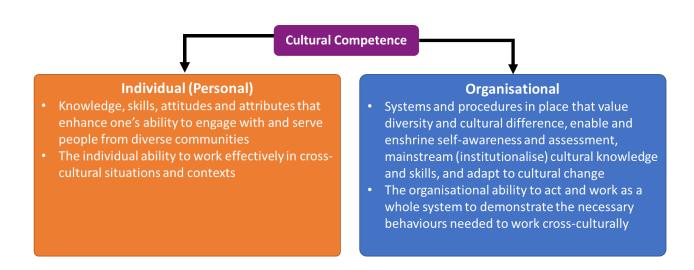
(Research in Practice for Adults, Dartington)

Cultural competence involves developing at individual and organisational levels an understanding that other people see the world differently; they have the right to see the world differently and they deserve your respect regardless of their world view. (Hackney Council)

Cultural Competence...is the capacity to provide effective services taking into account the cultural beliefs, behaviours and needs of people. It is therefore made up of cultural awareness, knowledge and sensitivity as well as the promotion of anti-oppressive and anti-discriminatory policies.

(Diverse Cymru)

What is important, therefore, is the approach to cultural competence and the context in which that approach lies. Fundamentally, by seeing it as part of equality, diversity, involvement and engagement and being conscious of bias, stereotypes and other discriminatory processes.





- At its core, it recognises and emphasises diversity
- It plays a part in addressing inequalities
- It enables organisations to meet legal requirements and deliver equal opportunities, e.g. the three 'general duties' of the Equality Act 2010
- It responds to and reflects demographic change
- It recognises that every person has a right to service and care that meet their needs
- In so doing, it improves both the quality of research and the outcomes of service and care by meeting the needs of all participants/service-users
- It identifies culture as a key factor in effective research and social care
- It can have a positive impact on making research and care cost effective
- In addition, it can decrease the likelihood of legal claims e.g. liability and malpractice
- It places a responsibility on everyone involved in research and service delivery morally, ethically, legally and with regard to good practice
- Cultural competence is directly and fundamentally intertwined with equality and diversity and good community engagement
- It incentivises and increases the involvement in research of people of diverse racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds
- It stimulates the desire and need to increase knowledge and awareness of people's differences and similarities
- It can change individuals and organisation

The term **Cultural Intelligence** is a more recent preferred terminology. Essentially, it works in the same way as our approach to Cultural Competence. Being Cultural Competent or Intelligent provides a level of insight into power relationships and dynamics that can be crucial in determining not just fairness, equity and inclusion but individual and organisational development



The **four key components** of Cultural Competence are:

Self-Awareness

The ability to be self-aware of one's own culture and of one's attitudes, biases and prejudices towards others

Cultural Knowledge

A constant process of bettering understanding of the world, of its communities and of people's views and practices

Cross-Cultural Skills

An ability to translate knowledge into practical everyday skills that exhibit and demonstrate an understanding of differing culture and human behaviour

Practice

The process whereby knowledge and skills are turned into patterns, systems and policies, particularly at an organisational level

You could also add 'cultural desire' here – between Self-Awareness and Cultural Knowledge. Defined as "the motivation...to develop cultural competence."

Cultural humility is an ongoing commitment to self-awareness and evaluation, a process of self-reflection looking at one's own "privileges, power, values and beliefs", and – in recognising the historical reality of cultural dominance – a recognition that one's own culture is not homogeneous or in any way 'superior' in a hierarchical sense.

Cultural sensitivity is also a term that can be used in connection with cultural competence. It relates to words such as acceptance and the notion of valuing and respecting the diversity of cultural practice across communities and across the world.



A key part of (developing cultural competence) is learning to be reflective about how our own culture influences our assumptions and the ways we work.

(Flying Start NHS)

Cultural competence begins with a desire not to allow biases to keep you from treating every individual with respect. (Hackney Council)



This therefore recognises that bias exists!

Unconscious bias

Unconscious bias happens when our brains make incredibly quick judgements and assessments of people, contexts and situations without realisation or conscious, deliberate thought...

Such bias is influenced by our background, cultural environment and personal experiences. We may not even be aware of these views and opinions, of how they affect us or of their full impact and implications...

It may occur when people favour others who look like them, speak like them, and/or share values or experiences.

(Equality Challenge Unit and ACAS)

It is important to note:

- That unconscious bias is revealed by our 'gut reaction' to things, the first thing that comes to mind
- That you may not even be aware of the meaning of these immediate thoughts, assumptions and conclusions
- That they may not always be seen as 'negative'
- That they can differ from our conscious thoughts and values
- That we all have them!
- That they are useful to know if we are to challenge and act against them

Unconscious bias can be complex!

For a start, there are lots of different types. These include:

Affinity Bias

Preferring those that are 'like ourselves'

Authority Bias

Preferring those with 'status', believing those with authority

Confirmation Bias

Looking for information that we already believe

Conformity Bias

Behaving like those in a group, irrespective of personal beliefs

Hierarchy Bias

Believing that responsibility has been passed on or upwards

Implicit Association

Associating skills/behaviours with a particular group

Internalised Bias

Believing attributes and stereotypes about ourselves

The 'Halo' and 'Horns' Effect

Consistent similar judgments on people

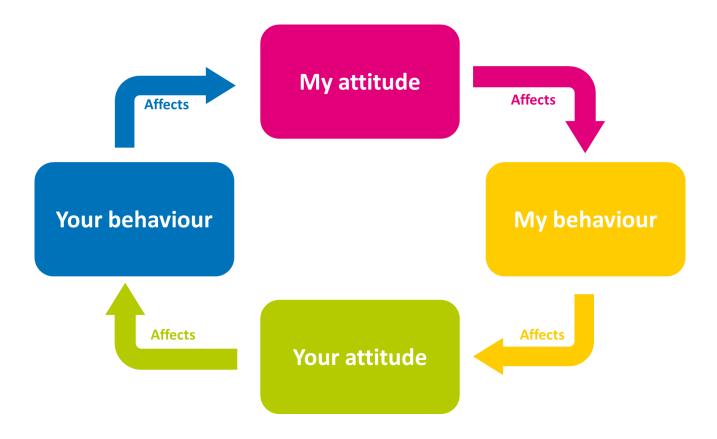
The Rule of Optimism

Seeking and preferring 'positive' interpretations

The Rule of Pessimism

Only seeing 'negative' interpretations

Betari's Box is quite useful in helping us to understand that our own attitudes and behaviours have an impact on those of people around us...and vice versa



Also note the **Implicit Association Test** which measures automatic, instinctive word and image associations and therefore 'implicit attitudes'

Stereotypes & Generalisations

Stereotype 'An overly simplistic, standardised and universal image of a person or a group of people'	Generalisation 'A broad statement, description or portrayal of a group that may or may not apply to its individual members'
Essentially limiting	More flexible
More unconscious and reactive	More conscious and analytical
Infers divisions between people	Notes similarities amongst people
Can be judgmental rather than descriptive	Descriptive rather than judgmental
Resistant to change	Can change as a result of new information
Can be hurtful	Can be helpful
An end point	A starting point

Here is an example of the difference between 'Stereotype' and 'Generalisation'.

Stereotype

Rosa is a Romany Gypsy. She must live in a caravan, have a large family and she does all the housework.

Generalisation

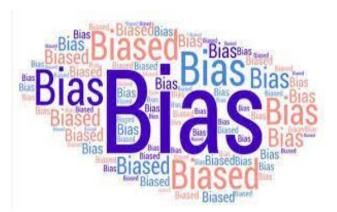
Rosa is a Romany Gypsy. Most Gypsies will live in caravans with their family around them. It is likely that Romany women are responsible for the housework

There's a condition that relates to this called **Stereotype Threat Condition**. Effectively...When someone is aware of a stereotype that relates to their identity, their anxiety about possible judgement can rise to a level that then affects how they behave...sometimes in ways that actually reinforce the stereotype.

Generalisations are more respectful. Though mindful of generalisations, treat individuals as individuals, with their own unique combination of inherent factors, traits, values, community belongings and experiences.

Implications of Unconscious Bias

- We stereotype rather than generalise
- We build everything around first impressions
- We unconsciously believe what some people say as opposed to others
- We recruit and/or select, and prefer the company of, people who are more 'like ourselves'
- We doubt people without just cause or evidence
- We make judgements without evidence
- We give more opportunities to some over others
- We focus more on communities that reflect our own identities and/or with which we are more familiar





And what do we do about it?

- Firstly, be aware that we all have it!
- Examine, understand and 'rationalise' your own bias, including the possibility that your own bias may impact on your own self-image and self-esteem
- Pre-empt where it can affect decisions and other important standpoints
- Challenge your bias. Put yourself in positions where it impacts. Make use of positive action to reduce 'internalised bias'
- Take your time and think things through. Be self-critical
- Justify your decisions/positions, using evidence rather than instinct
- Take practical steps, particularly in involving others e.g. diversity on panels/groups
- See the importance in images that 'question' bias and de-bunk myths
- Always focus on positive behaviour rather than negative stereotypes

If you don't **challenge** or **mitigate** your own 'unconscious bias' and see no reason to do the same with regard to stereotypes – relying on them rather than on generalisation – this cannot fail to have an impact, not just on your own cultural competence, but also your ability to be effective in engaging with community members in research and healthcare.

In saying this...

Remember that a generalisation is a starting point – not an end point. Only by engaging thoroughly and openly with an individual will you be able to determine whether or not the generalisation applies to them.

Understanding our own self-awareness is a crucial first step on the road to cultural competence.

Recognising that such an awareness relates to the way we see others is as important. But what we need to do is challenge, rationalise, modify and change.

If we don't, we will continue to see the world as limiting and static. As a succession of stereotypes.

Mindfulness: Training in, or using the experience of, mindfulness is also important here. Mindfulness is not just a technique or device to be used in relation to one's mental health. It can also act as a useful mechanism to 'interrupt' automatic thought, to see things 'in the moment' in an objective way, to enable one to distinguish approaches that are more useful from those that are 'instinctive'.



You need to be aware of the following as necessary background:

- Equality and Diversity principles and the legal framework
- Discrimination what it is and how it works
- Racial stereotypes and racism
- Engagement principles and issues in relation to ethnic minority communities
- The difference between 'hard to reach' and 'easy to ignore'
- Unconscious bias
- That culture is not homogeneous or static

What is 'culture'?

"Culture is the sum total of a way of living, which includes values, beliefs, standards, language, thinking patterns, behaviours and communication styles. Seen as a set of guidelines, culture is passed on to the next generation to provide cohesion and continuity in society. Hence, culture is a social construct that is constantly changing and difficult to measure."

(Hackney Council)

"Culture can be defined as the values, norms and traditions that affect how individuals of a particular group perceive, think, interact, behave, and make judgments about the world."

(Steven P Chamberlain)

"Culture is dynamic...there are cultural differences within and between groups...recognising this is key in developing cultural competence."

(Flying Start NHS)

The key concepts of culture

- Culture both unites and divides. It unites through shared norms, traditions and behaviour passed on through the generations. It divides as humans divide themselves into communities and sub-communities.
- Culture shapes and influences (rather than dictates) how people understand and see the world and their place in it. It is, though, a key influencer.
- Culture involves the use of symbols (including language, customs, behaviour, dress etc).
- As people, we are involved in multiple cultures, the mixture of which is perhaps the key aspect to our individual identity.
- There are some aspects of culture that are more 'permanent' and resistant to change, though this may depend on the nature of the community and the individuals therein.
- There are other aspects that are more amenable and susceptible to development as humans adapt their view of the world around them.
- Culture is never static. It is always dynamic. Ever changing.

Key words: Symbolic, Dynamic, Values, Beliefs, Norms, Traditions, Behaviours, Language, Communication Patterns, Dress, Ethnicity, Religion, Protected Characteristics, Social, Multiple, Generational, Organisational, Professional...and more!

We need to identify and then understand specific 'knowledge areas'. Things you may want to consider include (but not limited to):



Developing cultural knowledge is not a process of learning lists of 'facts' about 'other' cultures. It is about learning to understand and work with service users from a range of diverse cultural and social backgrounds.

(Flying Start NHS)

Knowledge about broad and common areas of cultural identity and behaviour constitute a starting point in the move towards cultural competence. They should be used as a precursor, to offer 'ways in' to discussions about cultural factors, to enable the process of establishing a rapport to begin. To help to gain trust. To open communication paths and enable more specific elements of individual experience to be voiced and understood.

There are two important additional factors that need to be considered when looking at cultural knowledge and practising cultural competence. These are **Intersectionality** and **Demographic Change.**

Intersectionality

'Intersectionality' is a term coined by Kimberlé Krenshaw, an American civil rights advocate and a leading scholar of critical race theory. She is a professor at the University of California, Los Angeles and the Columbia Law School.

"The interconnected nature of social categorizations such as race, class and gender as they apply to a given individual or group, regarded as creating overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage."

(Google Dictionary)

What we are looking at here are multiple and connected areas of discrimination and disadvantage, prompting further examination and consideration of just how these links impact on individuals and groups.

We need to consider identities and discriminatory practices as they relate to people. Amongst these will be the nine 'protected characteristics' identified by the Equality Act 2010.

How it works:

- 1. If each road is a different race, gender or ethnicity
- 2. If each car is a different tool of oppression
- **3.** Then the more cars that meet at an intersection, the bigger a crash of systems will be.



Demographic Change

- Knowing both figures and trends is vital if our understanding and application of cultural competence is to be truly effective
- Through globalisation and migration patterns it is arguably safe to say that the world is changing faster than at any time in recent history
- We can predict what may happen, though some areas of demographic change are harder to estimate e.g. asylum statistics and migration as a result of global conflict
- Change is happening as we speak!







We need to be ability to turn our increased self-awareness and the knowledge of culture and how it works into other tangible outcomes, including our ability to build relationships and to understand the world in which we live. We do this, firstly, by using a variety of 'cross-cultural skills'.

Cross-Cultural skills give us the ability to:

- Understand and contextualise equality and diversity principles
- Engage effectively, flexibly and differentially with people from diverse communities
- Know how to be 'inclusive' and understanding
- Build-up, retain and develop trust and confidence
- Have and show personal qualities such as interest, warmth, friendliness, respect and empathy
- Communicate productively information from and to different people
- Understand how intersectionality works and the sensitivities involved
- Openly and honestly self-reflect. Assess how you come across to others
- Be open about unconscious bias, stereotypes and generalisations
- Listen carefully and objectively
- Discuss openly racial/ethnic differences and relevant issues such as racism and ongoing myths
- Understand and appreciate people's different views on race and ethnicity
- Accept that some views and practices may be challenging for you personally
- Assess thoroughly the role of language in different cultures
- Understand and appreciate power balances between and within different communities
- Adapt to local circumstances
- Do what you say you are going to do, whilst managing expectations



The final part of the four-component cycle is putting things learned so far, our increased understanding, into practice. This works at both the individual and at an organizational level.

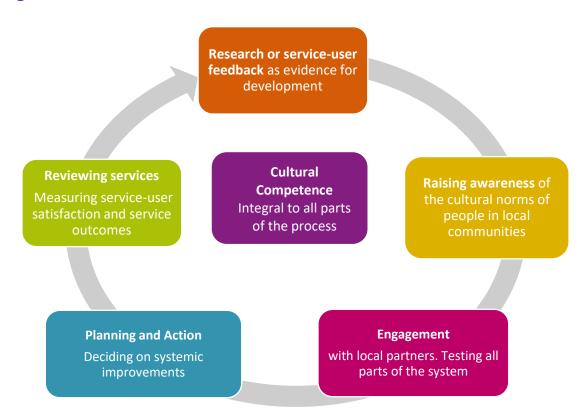
As an individual...

- Create your own 'cultural biography', detailing your own cultural beliefs and practices
- Be aware of your own biases, particularly aware of sensitive subjects and issues
- Research and expand your knowledge by collating background information of your own on different cultural traditions and communities
- Create your own knowledge checklists
- As an initial step, find out how to make initial contact and to greet someone
- Then familiarise yourself with issues such as 'eye contact' and 'body language'
- Treat every person as an individual, don't suppose that everyone in a community will be the same and behave in the same manner
- Remember that generalisations are useful, but they are only a starting point. Familiarise yourself with, but be wary of, stereotypes
- Attend cultural events in local communities
- Speak to, and learn from colleagues who have a track record of working in specific communities, sharing your own experiences with others too!
- Be familiar with terminology and any differences in usage in communities
- Update yourself on the latest demographic information
- Create some relevant Google Alerts e.g. Equality and Diversity or more specific such as Somali culture, Racism, non-binary gender etc
- Take advantage of training opportunities
- Recognise that what you are doing fully embodies the contents and principles of the Equality Act 2010
- Continually self-assess and evaluate
- Play an active part in an organisation's work in this area as a service-user, community member, employee, partnership worker etc

A 'culturally competent' organisation could have any of the following:

- Mission statement which incorporates the importance of cultural competence
- Regular leadership statements and commitments using different languages
- High-level taskforce or strategic committee for cultural competence, alongside regular leadership statements and commitments
- Cultural competence policy, practice and procedures, making cultural competence, equality, engagement and diversity a key part of organisational planning and service delivery
- Cultural competence assessment tools and impact assessment processes
- Specific budget, perhaps allowing for staff training
- Policies and practices relating to equality/equity, diversity and community engagement (EDI)
- Monitoring systems that include questions on languages used and spoken
- Impact assessment processes (EDI)
- Background information on all local communities, including key individuals
- Evaluation processes
- Communication strategy; use of interpreters & communication paths into diverse communities
- Interfaith/International Calendar, use to promote relevant cultural events
- Continual process of attending local community events, commemorations and festivals
- Understanding and practice of building trusted relationships
- Partnership working with all sectors (business, public, voluntary and community)
- Processes that focus on access and enabling local decision-making
- Service-user satisfaction and outcome surveys and other measures
- Customer complaint procedures
- Conflict resolution procedures and practices
- Up-to-date demographic data with an understanding of how to use it
- Staff training
- Recruitment and retention of a diverse workforce
- Attention to detail e.g. with pronunciation of names and appropriate use of pronouns

An organisational model...



What if I don't know?

The simple answer would be to just ask!

However...



- If you're thorough in your preparation, you may have most of the information you need
- Consult with colleagues who have prior knowledge and/or experience
- Group discussions involving colleagues and others are useful sources of knowledge and experience exchange
- When asking people in communities, think carefully beforehand about what exactly you're going to say. Remember the need to engage positively as well as effectively
- Personalise research as relevant for groups/communities
- The key word here is RESPECT
- It is likely that people will welcome the opportunity to answer questions. They are more likely to respect your openness and respond warmly
- And...don't be afraid! This is an opportunity, not a test!

A model for recognising and contextualising cultural differences:

- **E Everyone** has a culture
- Take time to collect relevant cultural information
- **H** Hold all judgments. Be careful about interpreting culturally different behaviour
- N Notice and negotiate differences in understanding
- I Involve cultural resources as appropriate
- **C Collaborate** to develop objectives and strategies

(Hackney Council; University of Hawai'i, Honolulu Community College)



Here are some tips that can help you to become more culturally competent.

Before Engagement

- Preparation is key! Prepare as thoroughly as you can beforehand, recognising the difference between stereotypes and generalisations and the importance of individuality.
- Be mindful of religious and cultural calendars before meeting. Day of the week and time of the day may also be important.
- You may find learning a few words in the individual's/community language (such as 'hello' and 'thank you') can help establishing a rapport. Use these words as potential opportunities.
- If using interpreters, make sure that you have allowed extra time for this during the session.
- Interpreters, as far as practically possible, should reflect community members with respect to age, gender (if applicable) and cultural background.





During Engagement

- It may be the case that people, particularly older people, will dress quite formally and smartly. This is likely to be because of the need for them to feel and be respected and should not be considered as reflective of their economic situation.
- People will vary in the nature of conversation, i.e. speed and volume of speech, willingness to interrupt etc. So, consider modifying your speech to 'complement' that of the person with whom you are in conversation and search for non-verbal clues as to the impact of your speaking style.
- Some people will be uncomfortable with eye contact for cultural and other reasons. Try sitting next to them instead of opposite when in conversation.
- Be careful about using 'gestures'. Some may have different interpretations.
- Follow the lead of the person with whom you are talking on physical distance between you and touching. Be prepared for the absence of handshaking.
- Ask open-ended questions and recognise that people sometimes find it easier to answer questions through story-telling.
- If meeting someone at their home, be guided as to whether the removal of shoes is necessary.
- Repeat and emphasise important information and always confirm that you are understood. Also, be prepared to give information in 'small chunks'.

After Engagement

- Look for ongoing experience and training opportunities that focus on more specific aspects of culture or indeed individual cultural traditions. These may include cultural competence and mental health; specific community and faith backgrounds; new communities; asylum seekers and recent refugees; cultural competence and medical treatment.
- Practice as often as you can. Like most things, the more you practice, the greater your confidence and proficiency.

Remember that...

- Cultural competence is fundamentally entwined with equality and diversity and effective community engagement.
- Working at being culturally competent will have important implications for your personal as well as your professional life.
- Cultural competence is ever evolving because the nature of culture itself is precisely that.
 It's always changing. The same can be said of human relationships and power dynamics.
 One can never be completely culturally competent. But one can always try!

GG

The beauty of the world lies in the diversity of its people

Walter Lippmann - American writer

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