

Developing Multicultural Skills

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Multicultural skill competence involves finding the "common ground" between culturally different individuals or groups as the foundation of intrapersonal and interpersonal harmony. By defining culture broadly to include demographic, status and affiliation as well as ethnographic variables it becomes possible to re-frame relationships not normally thought of as cultural---such a conflict between a parent and child in the same family---into a relationship between two "cultures." The advantage of reframing relationships into cultural categories is that the two persons or groups might then disagree without either one being "wrong". The Interpersonal Cultural Grid provides a visual example of this process.

Figure 1. Between-persons cultural grid.

	"BEHAVIORS": WHAT was done?	
"EXPECTATIONS": WHY it was done?	Perceived Positive Action	Perceived Negative Action
Perceived Positive Intention	1	2
Perceived Negative Intention	3	4

Each quadrant explains parts of a relationship between two individuals or groups, recognizing that the salience of each quadrant may change over time and across situations and also recognizing that some part of the relationship will be in each of the four quadrants.

In the first quadrant the two have similar behaviors and also similar positive expectations. The relationship is congruent and harmonious and there is a positive expectation. Both persons are smiling (behavior) and both persons see one another as friends (positive expectation). While this quadrant is comfortable and free of conflict little learning is taking place and productivity is low.

In the second quadrant, the two have different behaviors but still share the same positive expectations. Both persons expect trust and friendliness; however each one is likely to interpret the other one's very different behavior incorrectly and possibly/probably hostile, when that behavior is interpreted out of context. For example, both persons have thought of one another as friends (positive expectation) but one is smiling and the other is shouting (different behavior). This quadrant is characteristic of "cross-cultural" relationships where each party is applying their own "self-reference criterion" to interpret the other's behavior and disregarding the other's different cultural context. The conditions of this second quadrant are very unstable and, unless the shared positive expectations are quickly found and made explicit, the salience is likely to change toward the third more hostile quadrant. Multicultural skill is the ability to find common ground of positive shared expectations such as trust, respect and fairness as that positive expectation is expressed through different behaviors as in quadrant two.

In the third quadrant the two persons show the same behaviors but at least one now has hidden their different or negative expectations. This quadrant has less to do with culture and is more of an "interpersonal" conflict. The similar behaviors give the "appearance" of harmony, congruence and agreement but the hidden negative expectations will ultimately destroy the relationship. Although both persons are in disagreement this will not be obvious so one of them may continue to expect friendship, trust and respect while the other is now actually distrustful and unfriendly. Both persons may be smiling and "glad-handing" but one of them is pretending out of necessity or because he/she is being forced to do so. When you hold a gun to the other person's head they will behave however you want. When the stronger person forces the weaker person to change their behavior in the second quadrant the weaker person may comply but at the expense of losing friendship, trust and respect. If the actual difference in their expectations is ignored or undiscovered, the conflict will ultimately move to the fourth quadrant.

The fourth quadrant is where two people have different and/or negative expectations and they stop pretending to be congruent. This quadrant is an example of "going to war" with one another. They may not want to find shared positive expectations any longer and simply want to hurt one another. The disagreement in behaviors and expectations is now apparent. It is very difficult to mediate conflict in this quadrant. Unfortunately conflict frequently is not discovered until it reaches this fourth quadrant. The culturally competent counselor can prevent war by early intervention when the conflict is in the second or third quadrant, allowing both persons to build on their shared common ground without forcing either one to lose integrity.

It is very difficult to retrieve conflict from the fourth quadrant because one or both parties have stopped trying to find shared positive expectations. Unfortunately, many conflicts between people and groups remain undiscovered until reaching the fourth quadrant. An appropriate prevention strategy would be to identify the conflict in behaviors early in the process when those differences in behaviors are in a context of shared positive expectations, allowing both parties to build on the common ground they share without forcing either party to lose integrity.

Therefore, two people may both share the positive expectation (intentions) of *trust* but one may be (action, behavior) *loud* and the other *quiet*; they may share *respect* but one may be *open* and the other *closed*; they may both believe in *fairness* but one may be *direct* and the other *indirect*; they may value *efficiency* but one may be *formal* and the other *informal*; they may seek *effectiveness* but one may be *close* and the other *distant*; or they may want *safety* but one may be *task-oriented* and the other *relationship-oriented*. Only when each behavior is assessed and understood in its *own* context does that behavior become meaningful. Only when positive shared expectations can be identified will two individuals or groups be able to find common ground without sacrificing cultural integrity.

The Interpersonal Cultural Grid demonstrates how culturally different people may share the positive expectation for trust, fairness, efficiency, effectiveness and safety even though their behaviors are quite different. To identify the expectations of culturally different clients the

culturally competent counselor needs access to the hidden messages a client is thinking but not saying. One training design to identify the "hidden messages" in culture-centered counseling is The Triad Training Model (Pedersen, 2000b). When two people communicate there are three conversations going on at the same time: (1) the verbal exchange, (2) the counselor's internal dialogue and (3) the client's internal dialogue. The more cultural differences between the counselor and client the less likely that a counselor will accurately comprehend the client's internal dialogue. We can, however, expect part of the client's internal dialogue to be negative and part to be positive. A culturally competent counselor will be able to "hear" the positive and negative messages that a culturally-different client is thinking but not saying.

The Triad Training Model matches a counselor from one culture with a three-person coached team from the same contrasting culture. The team includes a coached client, coached "pro-counselor" (like an angel) and coached "anti-counselor" (like a devil) to articulate the positive and negative messages the client may be thinking but not saying during the interview. The counselor hears immediate and continuous feedback from the pro-counselor and anti-counselor and can judge their accuracy by observing the client's reaction during the interview. These brief 5-8 minute role played interviews with debriefing feedback are designed to help counselor trainees (1) perceive the problem from the client's viewpoint, (2) recognize resistance in specific rather than vague general terms, (3) reduce counselor defensiveness and (4) learn recovery skills for getting out of trouble.

Resource teams can be recruited from target culture populations and brought into the classroom to help counselors imagine more accurately what clients from those cultures are thinking but not saying in a counseling interview. Multicultural skill builds on multicultural awareness and knowledge toward taking right actions at the right time in the right way and it provides the final test of a culturally competent counselor. Multicultural skills are difficult to evaluate because the same suggested action may not be credible to all persons in the other culture. Skill requires framing the solution in the client's cultural language and context. Skill requires testing stereotypes against the real and present situation and then modifying the stereotype accordingly. Skill requires culturally appropriate evaluation of the context so that resulting change will be constructive with positive consequences.

There are many reasons for conflict across cultures. Different needs and wants, different beliefs, competing goals, different loyalties, values, ideologies, and geopolitical factors provide opportunities for conflict. Limited resources and wealth, the availability of technological solutions, disparities in power across social groups and classes all provide reasons for disagreement.

Seven guidelines for mediators of intercultural disputes:

1. Anticipate different expectations.
2. Do not assume that what you say is being understood.
3. Listen carefully.

4. Seek ways of getting both parties to validate the concerns of the other.
5. Be patient, be humble, and be willing to learn.
6. Apply win-win negotiating principles to the negotiation rather than traditional adversarial bargaining techniques.
7. Dare to do things differently.

These recommendations parallel ten guidelines, which suggests that the negotiator study the opponent's culture and history, try to establish a warm personal relationship, refrain from assuming that others understand what you mean, be alert to indirect communication, be sensitive to face/status issues, adapt your strategy to your opponent's cultural needs, be appropriately flexible and patient, and recognize that outward appearances are important.

Fictions

One fiction is that conflicts are merely communication problems and if effective communication can be facilitated, then the conflict will be solved. In fact, the cultural context mediates all communications between groups and must be attended to in all conflict management.

A second fiction is that there is a middle ground which both parties must reach through compromise to get some of what they want. In fact, the conflict may not fit a win-lose model and compromising may be less effective than reframing the conflict so that both parties gain without losing integrity.

A third fiction is that the optimal way to address conflict is to get both of the parties in the same room and facilitate an open, forthright discussion of the issues. In fact, direct contact in many cultural contexts may be destructive, especially in contexts where conflicts are managed indirectly.

A fourth fiction is that parties in conflict should emphasize their individual interests over collective values of family, community, or society. In fact, the collective interests may be more important than individual interests in some cultures.

A fifth fiction is that any third-party mediator must be a neutral person with no connections to any of the conflicting parties. In fact, neutrality may be impossible or even undesirable when it requires going outside the group to find a third party.

A sixth fiction is that good procedures for conflict resolution should be standardized according to fair, reasonable, and rational formats and policies. In fact, the expectation of fairness, reasonableness, and rationality may be expressed quite differently by each culture.