A Study on cross-cultural competency needed in cross-cultural employees

Savitha Lakshmanan
Bharathiar University
India

Abstract

Cross-cultural competence refers to the capability to communicate proficiently with people from various cultural communities. Even though the actual explanation may differ, the foundation of cross-cultural competence can be a mix of knowledge, understanding, skill, and attitude (Jane Suderman, Understanding Intercultural Communication). At the company level, cross-cultural competence refers to a set of values, concepts, behaviors, attitudes, and guidelines that make it possible for a workplace system to function effectively cross-culturally (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989). Cross-cultural competence can find its ideal building ground in shared respect, understanding, and inclusiveness. The principle of justice and fairness should be applied to everyone. There must also be a balance between diversity and unity. Five fingers are different but equal elements of a hand; yet one finger can’t lift a pebble (Hopi Indian Proverb). To understand cultural competence, it is important to grasp the full meaning of the word culture first. According to Chamberlain (2005), culture represents "the values, norms, and traditions that affect how individuals of a particular group perceive, think, interact, behave, and make judgments about their world" (p. 197). Taylor (1996) defined culture as, "an integrated pattern of human behaviour including thought, communication, ways of interacting, roles and relationships, and expected behaviours, beliefs, values, practices and customs." Nine-Curt (1984) qualified culture as, "The bearer of human wisdom that includes a wealth of human behaviours, beliefs, attitudes, values and experiences of immense worth. It also carries things that are offensive to a person's dignity and well being, and certainly to others whose cultural framework is different." While a few individuals seem to be born with cultural competence (reference needed), the rest of us have had to put considerable effort into developing it. In this paper we discuss about the factors that affect the cultural competence and the cognitive components needed to develop cultural competence.
Introduction

Cross-cultural competence refers to the capability to communicate proficiently with people from various cultural communities. Even though the actual explanation may differ, the foundation of cross-cultural competence can be a mix of knowledge, understanding, skill, and attitude (Jane Suderman, Understanding Intercultural Communication). At the company level, cross-cultural competence refers to a set of values, concepts, behaviors, attitudes, and guidelines that make it possible for a workplace system to function effectively cross-culturally (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989). Cross-cultural competence can find its ideal building ground in shared respect, understanding, and inclusiveness. The principle of justice and fairness should be applied to everyone. There must also be a balance between diversity and unity. Five fingers are different but equal elements of a hand; yet one finger can’t lift a pebble (Hopi Indian Proverb). To understand cultural competence, it is important to grasp the full meaning of the word culture first. According to Chamberlain (2005), culture represents "the values, norms, and traditions that affect how individuals of a particular group perceive, think, interact, behave, and make judgments about their world" (p. 197). Taylor (1996) defined culture as, "an integrated pattern of human behaviour including thought, communication, ways of interacting, roles and relationships, and expected behaviours, beliefs, values, practices and customs." Nine-Curt (1984) qualified culture as, "The bearer of human wisdom that includes a wealth of human behaviours, beliefs, attitudes, values and experiences of immense worth. It also carries things that are offensive to a person's dignity and well being, and certainly to others whose cultural framework is different." While a few individuals seem to be born with cultural competence (reference needed), the rest of us have had to put considerable effort into developing it. This means examining our biases and prejudices, developing cross-cultural skills, searching for role models, and spending as much time as possible with other people who share a passion for cultural competence.

Components used to develop cultural competence

For developing cultural competence, Diversity Training University International (DTUI) isolated four cognitive components: (a) Awareness, (b) Attitude, (c) Knowledge, and (d) Skills.

Awareness

Awareness is consciousness of one's personal reactions to people who are different. A police officer who recognizes that he profiles people who look like they are from Mexico as "illegal aliens" has cultural awareness of his reactions to this group of people.

Attitude

Paul Pedersen’s multicultural competence model emphasized three components: awareness, knowledge and skills. DTUI added the attitude component in order to emphasize the difference between training that increases awareness of cultural bias and beliefs in general and training that has participants carefully examine their own beliefs and values about cultural differences.
Knowledge

Social science research indicates that our values and beliefs about equality may be inconsistent with our behaviours, and we ironically may be unaware of it. Social psychologist Patricia Devine and her colleagues, for example, showed in their research that many people who score low on a prejudice test tend to do things in cross cultural encounters that exemplify prejudice (e.g., using out-dated labels such as "illegal aliens" or "colored"). This makes the Knowledge component an important part of cultural competence development.

Regardless of whether our attitude towards cultural differences matches our behaviors, we can all benefit by improving our cross-cultural effectiveness. One common goal of diversity professionals is to create inclusive systems that allow members to work at maximum productivity levels.

Skills

The Skills component focuses on practicing cultural competence to perfection. Communication is the fundamental tool by which people interact in organizations. This includes gestures and other non-verbal communication that tend to vary from culture to culture.

Notice that the set of four components of our cultural competence definition—awareness, attitude, knowledge, and skills—represents the key features of each of the popular definitions. The utility of the definition goes beyond the simple integration of previous definitions, however. It is the diagnostic and intervention development benefits that make the approach most appealing.

Factors to be considered to improve cultural competency:

Doing business with sensitivity to cultural differences may require employees training and education. Employees who interact with publics from a variety of cultures should be competent in their cultural awareness, along with their other business skills. Here are some key areas in which business people should be in touch for cultural competency:

**Development of culture:** How cultures develop and their impact on the workplace, including relationships with customers and other businesspeople.

**How cultures think and act differently:** If your employees come from a uniquely Anglo American background and experiences, they think and act differently from those outside their own culture. The same holds true, regardless of what culture your employees belong to.

**The cultural lens:** Americans tend to look at the world through their own lenses and, as a result, tend to believe that what others think and do differently from them is wrong. Everyone on staff needs to realize that differences are merely differences.

**The cross-cultural opportunity:** By becoming culturally competent, staff members can more effectively serve customers and boost sales and profits. By presenting facts and figures about the multicultural market potential in your area, you can get staff members to buy into your plan to expand into this market and contribute to the business's success.
The cross-cultural challenge: By developing an understanding of other cultures, staff members are less likely to insult or disrespect customers or visiting businesspeople by mistake.

Time differences: How different people view time and the importance of being on time for scheduled meetings and events can seriously affect business relationships:

Polychronics: Hispanics, Asians, and Middle Easterners are among those who are group oriented and future oriented. They tend to view deadlines as suggestions rather than as impenetrable barriers, so they may not show up for appointments on time. They often view monochronics as aggressive and pushy when it comes to time.

Monochronics: Americans, the Swiss, and Germans are individualistic and present focused. Deadlines are hard and fast. They tend to view polychronics as passive, disorganized, and perhaps even unreliable and disrespectful of their time.

Competitiveness versus cooperation: Some cultures, such as Americans and Brits, tend to be competitive, while Hispanics and Asians are cooperative. Cooperative cultures usually make business decisions as a group, whereas competitive cultures are more likely to make decisions as individuals.

Individualist versus collectivist: In individualistic cultures, such as those in the U.S., Australia, and England, you’re expected to look after yourself and your family. These cultures value directness and freely speak their minds. In collectivist cultures, such as Asia and Latin America, people are integrated into strong, cohesive groups that protect everyone in the group in exchange for unquestioned loyalty.

High-context versus low-context cultures: High-context cultures, including the Japanese, Chinese, Arabs, and Greeks, rely more on context and subtle cues for communications. More is implied than overtly stated, and words are secondary to context. Low-context cultures, including Americans, Scandinavians, Germans, and the Swiss, tend to be more obvious in their communications. Words are explicit and are crucial to understanding.

Meeting and greeting: People don’t all meet and greet in the same way. Your employees must know how to properly welcome customers or businesspeople. This important ritual sets the tone for a successful business relationship.

Proxemics: The science of personal space, which affects how close you stand to another person while conversing. Proxemics may be culturally determined. Let customers and businesspeople set their own comfort zones.

Physical contact: People around the world differ in the amount of physical contact they make during a business interaction. Staff must adjust to the level of physical contact that the customer or businessperson sets.

Negotiating versus non-negotiating cultures: One big challenge that staff must be trained to overcome is the constant negotiating of some cultures. They must understand that haggling is a way of life in many parts of the world, and they need to be prepared to handle it.
Conclusion

Employees can be culturally competent by going through continuous process in which they try to become aware of their own culture self and attitudes towards other cultures. Acquiring knowledge of clients culture and create a cultural context for the presenting problem. Based on the knowledge they have to develop skills of managing with culturally different people. Thus Cultural competence is a developmental process that evolves over an extended period. Both individuals and organizations are at various levels of awareness, knowledge and skills along the cultural competence continuum.

References

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