

Appendix A:

Building Cross-Cultural Competency

Background

As AODA Partnership Coordinators, we meet and develop relationships with small and medium sized business organizations on a daily basis in our multicultural province. In 2015, the Canadian economy totaled 1.17 million employer businesses according to Statistics Canada. Of these, 1.14 million **(97.9 percent)** were small businesses with **Ontario having the highest number of small businesses** at slightly over 407 thousand businesses.

“Studying culture without experiencing culture shock is like practicing swimming without experiencing water.” – Geert Hofstede

Many of these small businesses are owned and operated by new Canadians and immigrants. As we have conducted outreach to inform small businesses about the AODA, we discovered cross-cultural barriers in communicating with them. The following document provides tips on best practices in cross cultural communication.



What is a Culture? Culture is the “lens” through which one views the world. It is central to what you see, how you make sense of what you see, and how you express yourself. Culture is not inherent, but learned through time. Culture is the basis for self-identity and community which makes it dynamic.

What is Intercultural Communication?

The study and application of knowledge is about “cultural perceptions and symbol systems” of people from different cultures. This communication style refers to making people aware and be able to adopt others’ cultures when communicating between two or more parties. Evidently, our organizations are now more diverse then ever which is why incorporating cross-cultural competency into the workplace has become very important.

Who is a Cultural Informant?

A cultural informant (CI) is a term used in the field of anthropology used to describe individual(s) from the culture that is being observed to shed light on relevant ethnographic questions. Cultural informants are usually trusted friends, colleagues, and confidantes who know the culture in depth and are willing to communicate in a non-analytic manner. Within our team, all of us are a cultural informant to each other as we can share our knowledge and experience of a certain culture and geographical region.

Importance of Developing Cross Cultural Competency

Globalization is the cross border movement of people, goods and data; bringing a mix of cultures into contact with one another leading to the increase of potential cross cultural communication. The benefits of globalization include:

- Improving the contribution of employees in a diverse workforce
- More job opportunities and talent improvisation



Differences to Consider in Cross Cultural Communication

- ✚ Physical distance
- ✚ Use of First Names and Titles
- ✚ Volume Of speech
- ✚ Use of facial expressions

- ✚ Frequency of eye contact
- ✚ Assertiveness
- ✚ Use of hands while talking
- ✚ Speed of speech

Geert Hofstede's High & Low Context Culture

Who is Geert Hofstede?

Geert Hofstede is a Dutch social psychologist well known for his research on cross-cultural groups and organizations. Geert Hofstede created a study on how to compare and differentiate cultures based on “high” and “low” context cultures.

High context cultures: These cultures rely on developing close relationships with people over time. They need more time to make decisions and perform transactions. They will never say “no” directly to you because they value and respect your relationship and hesitate to not agree with something that you have said. There are a lot of “read-between-the-lines” scenarios.

Examples of high context cultures:

- ✚ Japan, China, India, Thailand, and other countries located in Asia
- ✚ Brazil, Argentina, Peru, and other countries located in South America
- ✚ Somalia, Nigeria, South Africa, Ethiopia, Kenya and other countries located in Africa
- ✚ Iraq, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Yemen and the majority of the Middle East.

Low context cultures: These cultures tend to be individualistic and rely on direct communication with the opposite party. Members of low-context cultures have many relationships that last for a short amount of time or exist for a specific reason. Following procedures and keeping sight of the goal are important in accomplishing any transaction whereas high context cultures do not keep sight of the goal as they prioritize to value their relationships with others instead. In contrast to high context cultures, verbal messages tend to be explicit, direct and concise in low context cultures.



Regional Model of Public Education and Outreach

Examples of low context cultures:

- ✚ Canada and the USA
- ✚ Germany (very low context)
- ✚ Australia/New Zealand
- ✚ United Kingdom/Ireland
- ✚ Switzerland
- ✚ Scandinavia

Tips to Address Cultural Differences

- ✚ Observe the style, décor, and set up of the business you visit
- ✚ Ask a Cultural Informant (CI) nearby, they tend to have great expertise on a culture you might want to know more about!
- ✚ Observe non-verbal communication such as gesture, tone of voice, physical distance and facial expressions.
- ✚ Be respectful of differences
- ✚ Practice mindfulness
- ✚ Eye contact awareness – certain cultures believe looking into the other person’s eyes is disrespectful when conversing.
 - For example, cultures from a high context region such as India, China and the Middle East consider looking directly into someone’s eyes in a conversation is too direct, and at times – disrespectful.
 - On the other hand, low context culture regions such as Canada and the USA consider direct eye contact to be a sign of respect, and demonstrates that you are engaged in a conversation with the other party.
- ✚ English/French might not be someone’s first language. Speak slowly, use simple words, and try to be as precise as possible.
- ✚ If you notice a business owner or employee does not speak English/French, always make sure to ask to speak to someone else who might be operating the business. Ask for a business card or even a phone number of that individual.

