

# Intercultural Competence



**Dr Kseniya Rubicondo**  
Intercultural Policy Expert

[ballarat.vic.gov.au](http://ballarat.vic.gov.au)



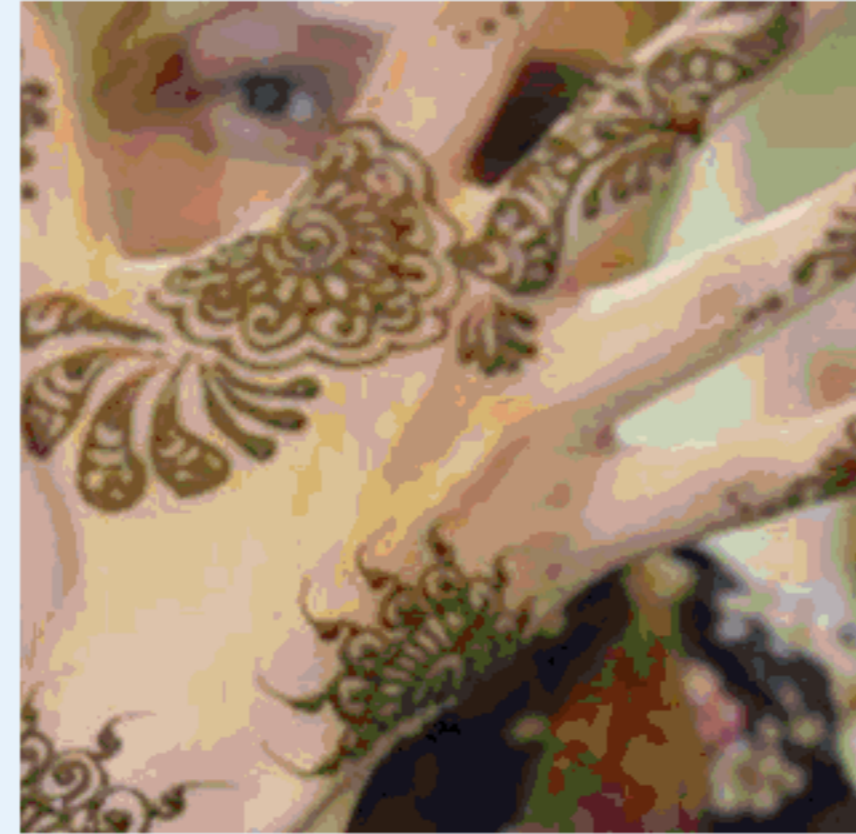
## Acknowledgement of Traditional Owners

City of Ballarat respectfully acknowledges the Wadawurrung and Dja Dja Wurrung people as Traditional Owners and Custodians of the land on which we work and live, and pays respect to their Elders past and present.

We acknowledge their significant cultural heritage, their fundamental spiritual connection to Country, and value their contribution to our diverse community.

# Contents

<b>Introduction</b>	<b>7</b>
<b>Why Intercultural Competence?</b>	<b>8-17</b>
<b>Developmental Model</b>	<b>18-27</b>
<b>Intercultural Competence Paradigm</b>	<b>28-35</b>
<b>The Story Circle</b>	<b>36-38</b>
<b>Conclusions</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Glossary of Terms</b>	<b>40</b>
<b>Guidelines for the Facilitator</b>	<b>41</b>
<b>References</b>	<b>42</b>



**Dr. Rubicondo is a professional in the fields of public affairs and urban policy development. The most part of her career she has dedicated to urban economic policy development, impact evaluation and diversity management.**

## Acknowledgments

This manual was developed in the framework of the Intercity Cooperation Project "Introducing and Engaging Diversity Globally, implemented by partner cities: Melitopol (Ukraine), Ballarat (Australia) and with the support of the Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities Programme.

I am grateful to the teams of the Cities of Melitopol and Ballarat for their outstanding support and effective cooperation. My thanks go out to Mr. Sergei Minko - former Mayor of Melitopol, Ms. Irina Slavova - Director of the Melitopol Development Agency, Ms. Jenny Fink - Executive Manager Learning and Community Hubs of the City of Ballarat, Ms. Frances Salenga - Coordinator Intercultural Services of the City of Ballarat, Prof. Anatolii Solonenko - Rector of Melitopol State Pedagogical University, Prof. Lyudmila Afanasieva - Director of the Center of Sociological Studies of Melitopol State Pedagogical University.

A great appreciation for enabling this intercultural cooperation, supporting and encouraging it along its implementation, goes to Ms. Irena Guidikova, Head of Inclusion and Anti-Discrimination Division and Ms. Ivana d'Alessandro, Head of the Intercultural Cities Unit at the Council of Europe and to all ICC Programme team members.

For analytical, operational support and media coverage, I feel a deep sense of gratitude to Ms. Natalia Irashina - Manager, Melitopol Development Agency, Ms. Ekaterina Kornienko - officer at the Melitopol City Hall, Ms. Natalia Glebova - Research Associate at the Center of Sociological Studies of Melitopol State Pedagogical University, Mr. Andrew Orlov - Lecturer at the Melitopol State Pedagogical University, Mr. Oleksandr Sorokin - independent entrepreneur from Melitopol.

For engaging local teams of trainers and participants, I would like to recognise the local coordinators of the following intercultural cities: Ms. Lyudmila Afanasieva (Melitopol), Ms. Tetiana Gnativ (Lutsk) Ms. Tatiana Markova (Odessa), Ms. Elena Shulika (Pavlograd), Ms. Yuliia Kashpruk (Vinnytsia), Ms Antonia Kokhan (Sumy) and Ms Frances Salenga (Ballarat).

I am also grateful for the thoughtful feedback from nearly 100 participants in my seminars on Intercultural Competence on both sides of the globe - in Ukraine, Australia and Japan - and for the inspiration I received from the local ICC Competence Trainers while working on this manual. And, of course, this manual has been made available to you in its excellent and easy-to-use format, thanks to Ballarat Graphic Designer Tanya Lea.

*Kseniya Rubicondo*

**Dr. Kseniya Rubicondo**  
Intercultural Policy Expert



**“... He who cannot change the very fabric of his thought will never be able to change reality, and will never, therefore make any progress.”**

Anwar Sadat

## Introduction

This manual is the product of a series of Intercultural Competence seminars carried out in the framework of the Intercity Cooperation Project: “Introducing and Engaging Diversity Globally”, which was jointly implemented by the Intercultural Cities of Melitopol (Ukraine) and Ballarat (Australia).

The project aims to assist municipal administrators, police, media, internally displaced persons, minority and religious groups representatives, youth, and other residents of partner cities to improve their Intercultural Competence Skills by participating in local workshops, delivered by local trainers who were formed through a series of online seminars - ‘Training for Trainers’ - provided by the author of this manual.

This training resource contains the materials, exercises and approaches used in the online seminars as well as practical advice on the application of the Story Circle Methodology for addressing issues of intercultural competence within a community or organisation.

# Why Intercultural Competence?

Intercultural Competence is a nearly 70-year-old discipline. In an increasingly globalised world, communication with people from different cultural backgrounds has become the norm rather than the exception. Diversity in society is increasingly evident especially in education and business environments, the learning of languages to a greater extent, living and working with people from different cultural backgrounds, brings us to consider the need for intercultural competence. The success of countries, on the world stage depends to a large degree to a growing extent on the individual and the collective ability to communicate competently with people from other countries.



Not so long ago, the only people who received Intercultural Competence Training were expatriates, people who were going to live and work abroad - corporate executives, military personnel, exchange students, missionaries, development workers, and so on. However, in recent years, with the growing diversity of our society, it has become increasingly common to provide Intercultural Competence Training to people in their own country, city, or organisation, to individuals who are not going anywhere, but interact regularly with people from different cultures, represented by international partners, students, migrants and their families, refugees, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), tourists, colleagues and visitors from other countries.

Intercultural competence is particularly important for the member cities of the Council of Europe's Intercultural Cities (ICC) Programme. Since its inception, the programme has been aimed at building bridges between different cultures, promoting intercultural dialogue and mixing. In 2008, the Council of Europe's White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue "Living Together as Equals in Dignity" identified intercultural competence as "a crucial capability to be developed by every individual to enable them to participate in intercultural dialogue." Today, the ICC, Intercultural Competence represents a huge asset in achieving the objectives of the Programme.

Intercultural Competence is not acquired automatically. It must be learned, practiced and maintained throughout life. The need to develop intercultural competence raises a number of questions:

What is intercultural competence? How is it formed? What are the most important competences? How can it be developed? What characteristics of an individual help to achieve effective intercultural competence? Is an individual who is competent in one culture also competent in another culture? How can we improve intercultural competence?

Before answering these questions, it is important to understand what is meant by **interculturalism**.

Interculturalism is a way of life in society that promotes cross-cultural dialogue and interaction and counters tendencies towards self-segregation of cultures or ethnic groups.

Interculturalism implies going beyond the passive acceptance of multiculturalism - or the fact that many cultures effectively coexist in society - towards promoting dialogue and interaction between different cultures. It is based on the recognition of the differences and similarities between cultures.

## What is intercultural competence?

Competence is usually linked to the "application" of knowledge, and thus to the role played by experience and reflection in the construction of applicable and transferable knowledge. Competence is something that includes a certain mastery in dealing with unexpected and critical situations, in coping with something "diverse" and different from routine. Competence involves the mobilisation of our personal attitudes, relationships and emotions.

## Wait a minute... what is culture?

The everyday understanding of "culture" often refers to the fine arts, cultural goods and services, customary beliefs, social forms and material traits of racial, religious or social groups. One definition of culture, used in the context of cross-cultural communication, reads: "Culture is a set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, norms and social practices that affect the behaviors of a relatively large group." (Lustig and Koester, 2013).

# The Cultural Iceberg

Does this then mean that culture is learned, that it includes beliefs, values, norms and social practices, that it affects behaviour and that it involves large groups of people?

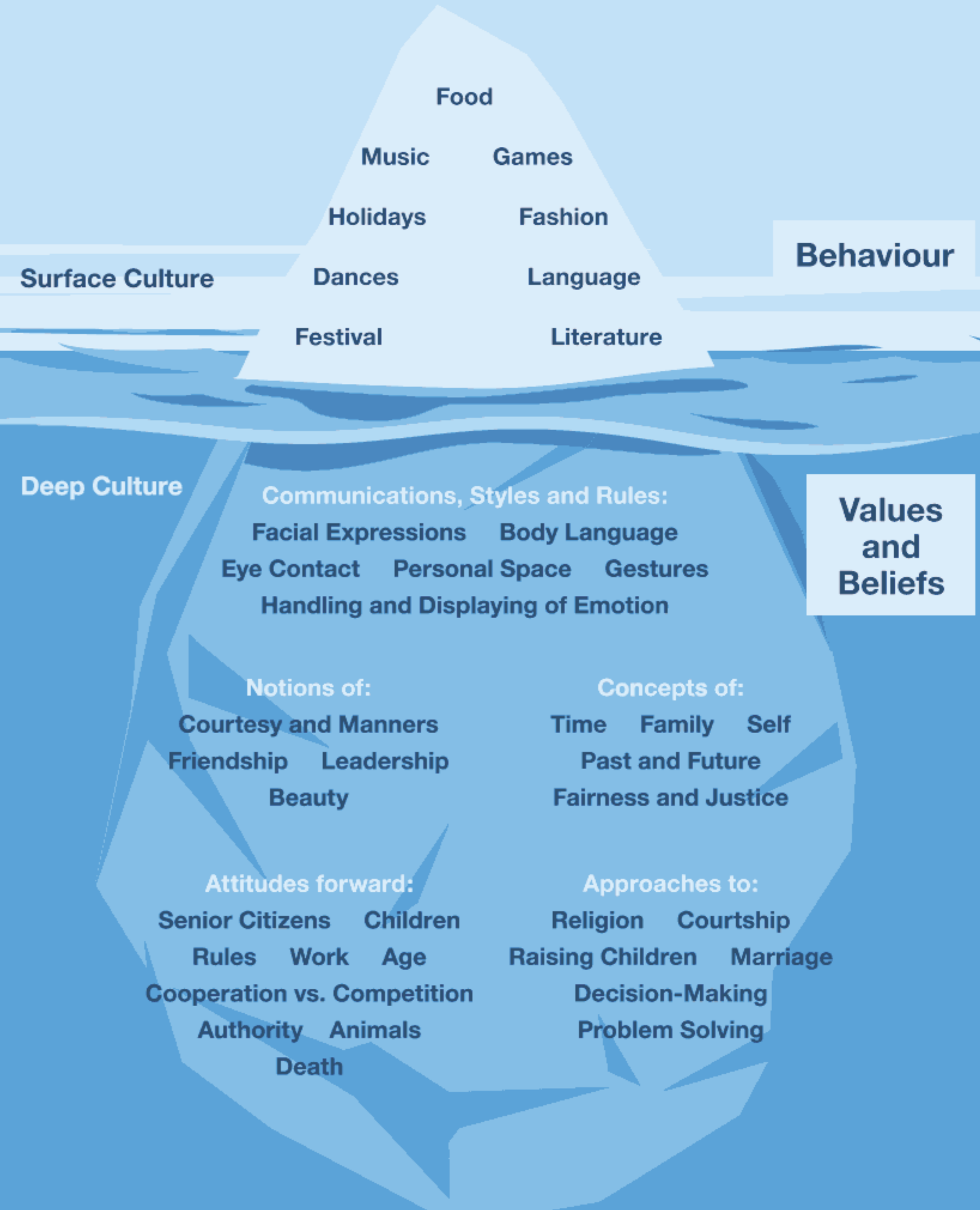
According to Edward T. Hall, things are even more complicated. Hall (1976) compares culture to an iceberg, where the visible above the water part is much smaller - only about 10% - than the invisible underwater part. The external, or conscious part of culture is what we can see is only the tip of the iceberg and includes behaviours and only some beliefs.

The inner, or subconscious, part of culture lies beneath the surface and includes the beliefs, values and attitudes that underlie the behaviour. Below the waterline are subjective elements, the core values of a culture. These are primarily learned ideas about what is good, right, desirable and acceptable, as well as what is bad, wrong, undesirable and unacceptable.

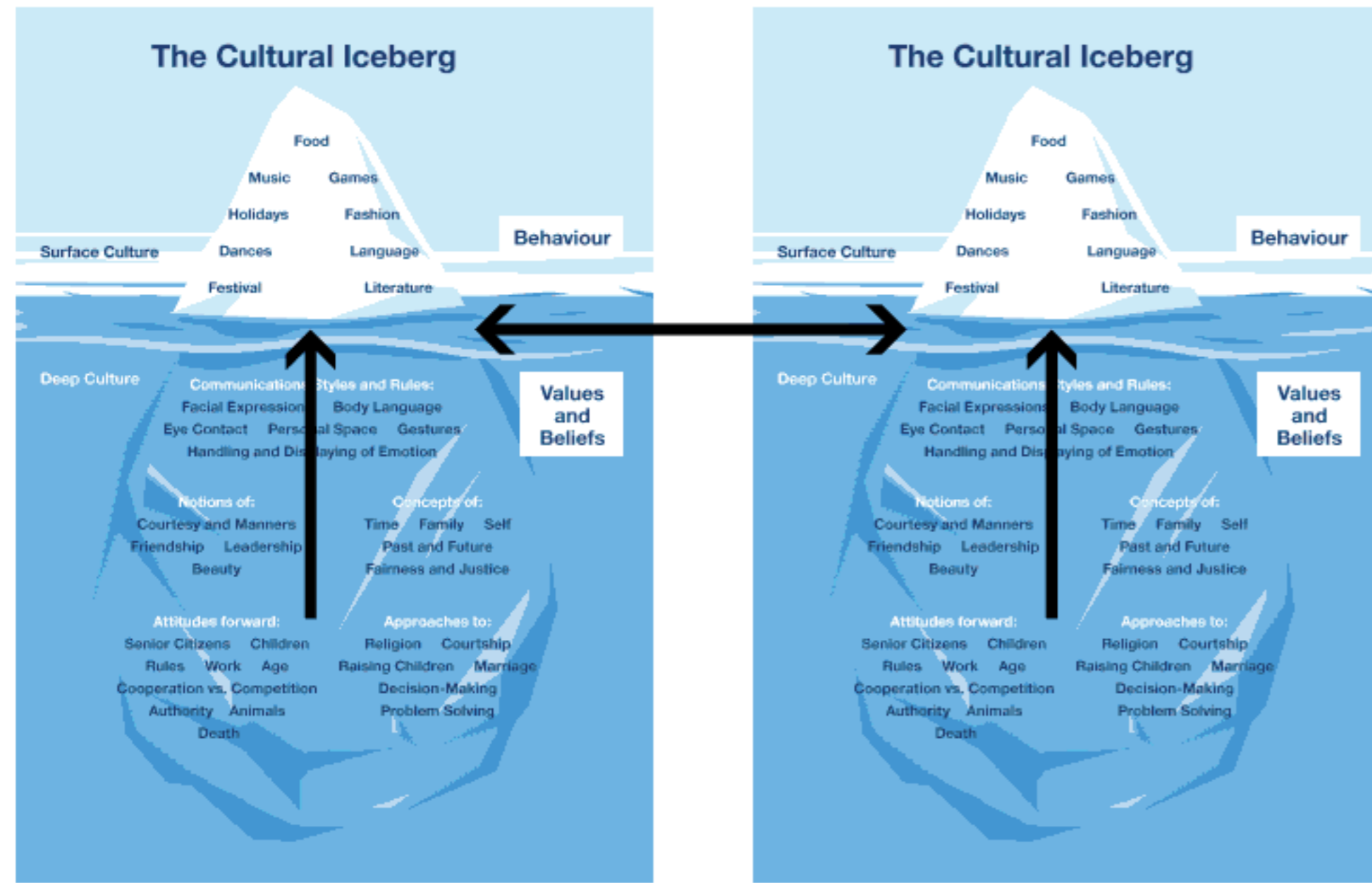
We are often unaware of these elements and their role. But their violation frequently evokes deep emotions in an individual. In many cases, different cultural groups share similar core values - such as "honesty", "respect" or "family" - but these are often interpreted differently in diverse situations and incorporated uniquely into the specific attitudes we apply in everyday situations.

When we encounter a new culture for the first time, only the most transparent behaviours are visible. It is only when we spend more time with this new culture that the underlying beliefs, values and attitudes can be discovered. Hall's model implies that we cannot judge a culture based solely on what we see in the first place. It takes time to get to know individuals from another culture. Only by interacting with them can we discover and understand the values and beliefs that underlie the behaviour of that society.

Essentially, regardless of the cultural group we belong to, each of us is a cultural iceberg. Thus, when at least two icebergs meet, it is worth reflecting on what can be done to avoid a "crash" to ensure a peaceful coexistence?



## When two 'culture icebergs' meet



When you (left iceberg) interact with a person from another culture (right iceberg), you enter into this interaction with the values and assumptions (underwater) with which you were raised and which gave you a set of typical, normal, natural and logical (above the water) behaviours.

You are now interacting with a person from another culture (right iceberg) who will have values and assumptions (underwater) that are different from your own. To the extent that these values and assumptions are different from yours, this person will likely have a different set of typical, normal, natural, and logical (above water) behaviours from yours.

Just as your behaviour (left iceberg above water) makes perfect sense to you (left iceberg underwater), the behaviour of the other person (right iceberg above water) - which could be very different from yours - nevertheless makes perfect sense to him or her. The key point here is that since people from different cultures naturally have different values and assumptions, they naturally have behaviours that are also different but nevertheless normal and logical in their respective cultures. In other words, when people from different cultures do something that makes absolutely no sense to you, that may even be offensive or frustrating to you, it is almost guaranteed that it makes perfect sense to them, and vice versa.

## Context is important

Another layer of complexity that adds to the understanding of different cultures is context. Before trying to understand a person's origins, it is important to put their cultural behavior in context. There are a few points that need to be highlighted here:

**Not everything is different** about or with someone from another culture. There are ways in which we are alike. There are certain universal assumptions and values, and therefore behaviours, which we sometimes call human nature. In other words, there are many things you already know about someone from another culture and many things people from other cultures already know about you.

**Cultural information will not always apply** in the same way to every individual from a particular culture. Although we are all the same in some ways (universal box in Figure 1 below?) and are similar to the people from our culture in some ways (cultural box), each of us is also unique in some ways (personal box).

Hence, we cannot take information we have learned about a person and assume that it applies to everyone in his or her culture.

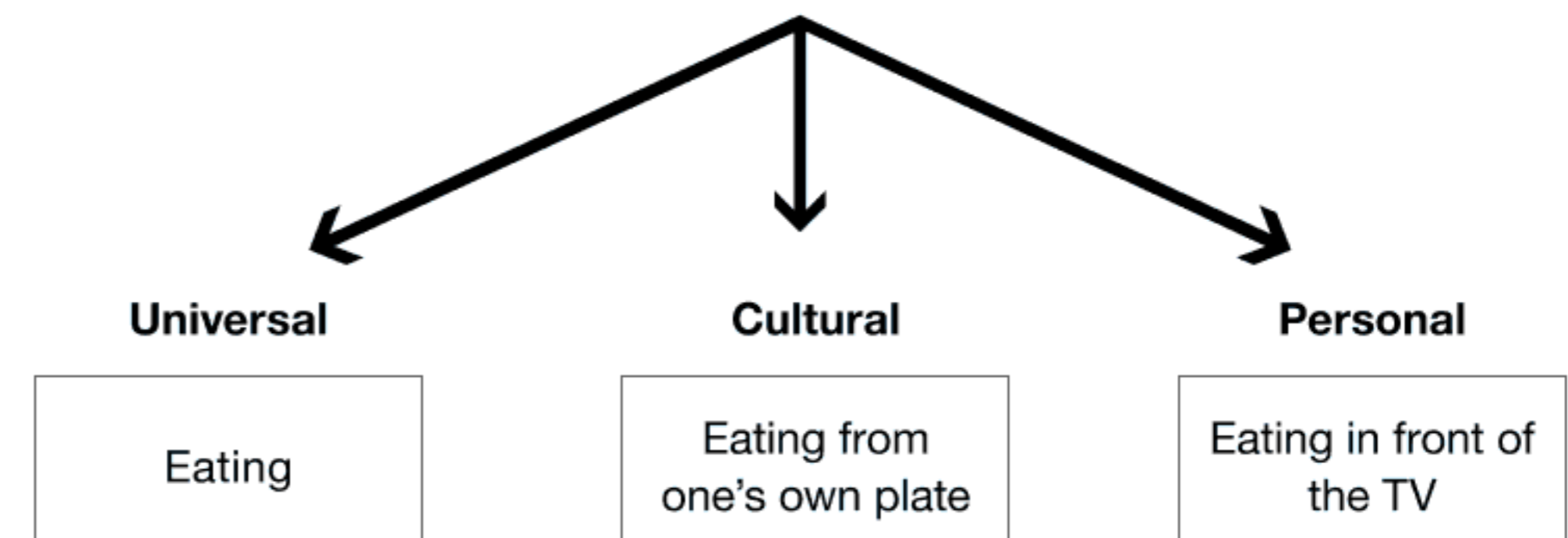
Similarly, cultural information is true in general, but we never meet a 'general person' or find ourselves in a 'general situation'; hence we cannot assume that cultural information applies to all individuals in a given culture.

The three-box figure below **allows a trainer to make two very important points:**

1. when talking about culture, one can generalise;
2. when generalising, one can be specific about a group, but would only be coincidentally accurate about any single person from that group. It is important to make this point about generalising as a trainer because it usually reduces concerns about stereotyping.

To help participants in your training experience their differences in values, beliefs, norms, interpretation of symbols, and social expressions, you, as the trainer, can offer the following interactive exercise.

## TYPES OF BEHAVIOUR



## Interactive exercise

**Ask participants to choose one of the seven interpretations below, that in their opinion best describes the situation in the picture. Then count the number of supporters of each interpretation.**



### Trainer's note:

In the picture, the situation and behaviour of people are the same, but many different interpretations can be made of the same situation depending on people's experience, values, beliefs, interpretation of symbols, even if - possibly - the majority of the participants in your training share the same identity or culture.

### How would you best describe the above situation?

1. Prayer before a meal, two people do not want to pray
2. People thinking hard to solve some problem
3. Difficult conversation
4. A meeting about to begin
5. A family that has just received a sad letter
6. A meeting. Two women on the left are talking on the side about a cellphone/mobile phone
7. People looking for a solution to a problem. The man on the left is hiding the important evidence and showing something unimportant to the others

As we can see, intercultural competence is a rather complex concept. Moreover, several of intercultural competence models coexist as they have been developed for different environments such as corporate, educational, administrative, etc.

Nowadays social science counts more than 30 such models. One of them is the UNESCO Intercultural Competences Tree (as pictured on the next page).

In the framework of the project "Introducing and Engaging Diversity Globally" implemented in the context of Intercultural Cities, *Intercultural Competence* is seen as a complex set of abilities, knowledge, attitudes and skills, that enable an individual to perform appropriately and effectively when interacting with people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. (Fantini, 2009 and Portera, 2014)

In order to further develop these skills, it is important to understand where an individual or a group of people is positioned in terms of their cultural awareness, i.e. how they perceive the cultural (or identity) differences of people from different backgrounds.

For example, do they recognize that meaningful differences exist between individuals from diverse cultures and do they respect these differences, or do they feel threatened or intimidated by these differences?

In the next Chapter, we will consider the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (Bennet, 1986) as a tool that facilitates understanding of the positioning of an individual or a group in terms of their cultural awareness.

The Developmental Model represents a horizontal axis of the Intercultural Competence Paradigm, developed in this training manual as a frame of reference in relation to which behavioural judgements can be made on the basis of greater cultural awareness and more effective and respectful interaction achieved with people of different cultural backgrounds.

The vertical axis of the Intercultural Competence Paradigm corresponds to the Culture Map, which we will discuss in the Developmental Model of this manual.



# Intercultural Competence Tree

**Roots:** Culture (Identity, Values, Attitudes, Beliefs) and Communication (Language, Dialogue, Nonverbal behaviour).

**Trunk:** Cultural Diversity, Human Rights, Intercultural Dialogue.

**Branches:** Operational steps (Clarifying, Teaching, Promoting and Enacting Intercultural Competences).

**Leaves:** Intercultural Responsibility, Intercultural Literacy, Resilience, Cultural Shifting, Intercultural Citizenship, Conviviality, Reflexivity, Creativity, Liquidity, Contextualisation Cues, Transvaluation, Ubuntu, Semantic Availability, Warm Ideas, Skills, Uchi Soto, Multilingualism, Disposition, Emotions, Knowledge, Translation, Intercultural Communicative Competence.

Some of the leaves have been left free so that this Intercultural Competence Tree, which is very much alive, can be complemented by the rich diversity of contexts available worldwide.

## The Intercultural Competences Tree a visual conceptualisation

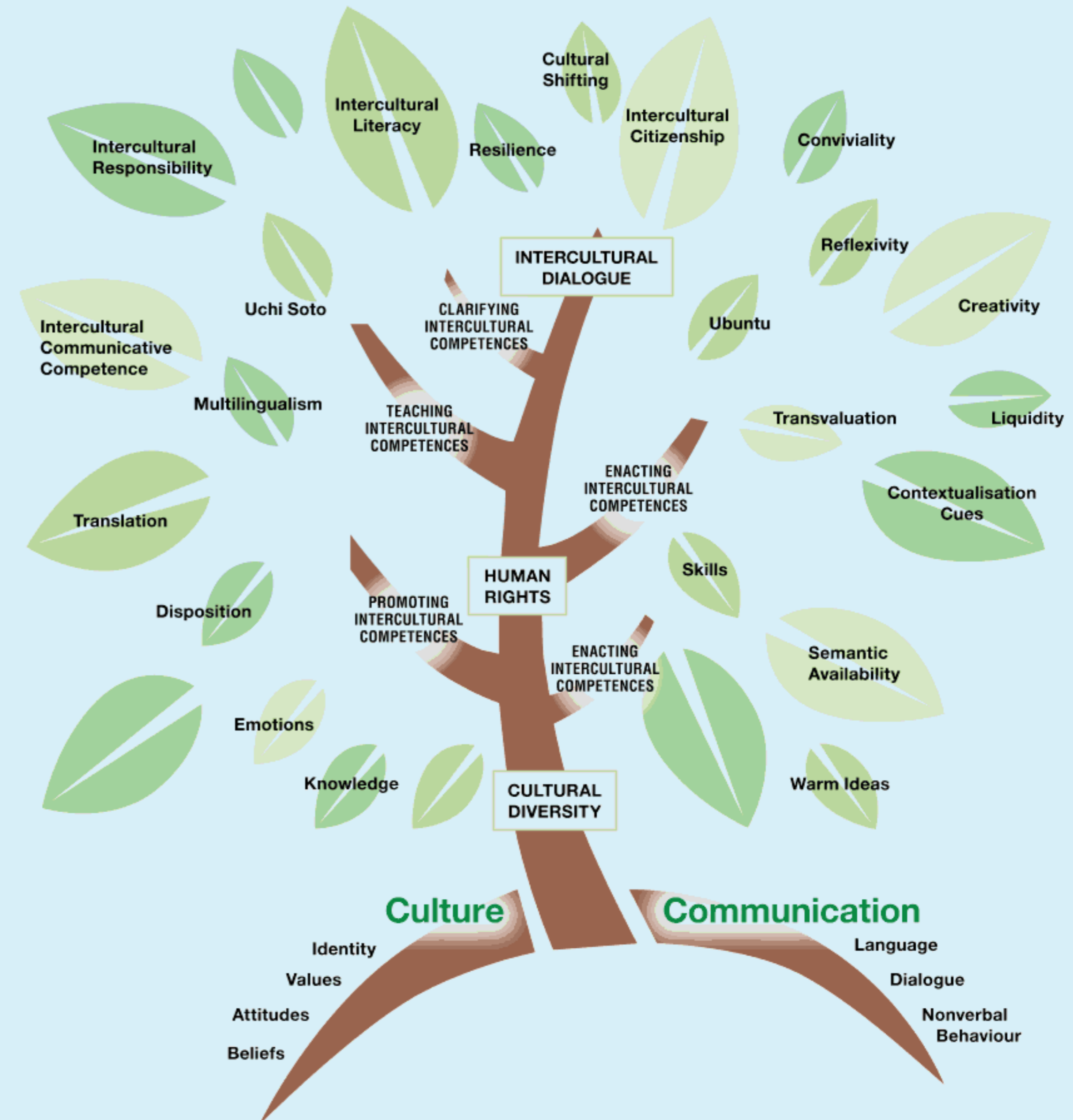


Figure 2. Source: Intercultural Competences: Conceptual and Operational Framework, UNESCO, 2013

# Developmental Model

## Horizontal Axis of Intercultural The Competence Paradigm

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity is now widely accepted as a tool for the classification of cultural differences that best correspond to the nature of intercultural interaction, which is the basis of intercultural competence.

The model was developed by Milton Bennett (1986) to explain the reactions of people as they engage with culturally different others. Bennett observed that individuals cope with cultural differences in certain predictable ways, which he divided into six developmental stages: three **ethno-centric** and three **ethno-relative**. Each of the stages builds on the previous ones.

The developmental model describes the ways in which people experience, interpret, and interact across cultural differences at an individual level, and it proposes a developmental continuum along which people can progress toward a deeper understanding and appreciation of cultural difference.

Hence, the Developmental Model comprises three ethno-centric stages where one's culture is experienced as central to reality (**Denial, Defense, Minimisation**), and three ethno-relative stages, where one's culture is experienced in the context of other cultures (**Acceptance, Adaptation, Integration**). As people become more intercultural competent, they move from ethno-centric to ethno-relative stages. This transition enables them to have more sophisticated intercultural experiences, and vice versa, more refined intercultural experiences allow for a better transition.

This section reviews the six stages of the Developmental Model in detail and provides hints on how to identify each of them and how to move from one stage to the next.



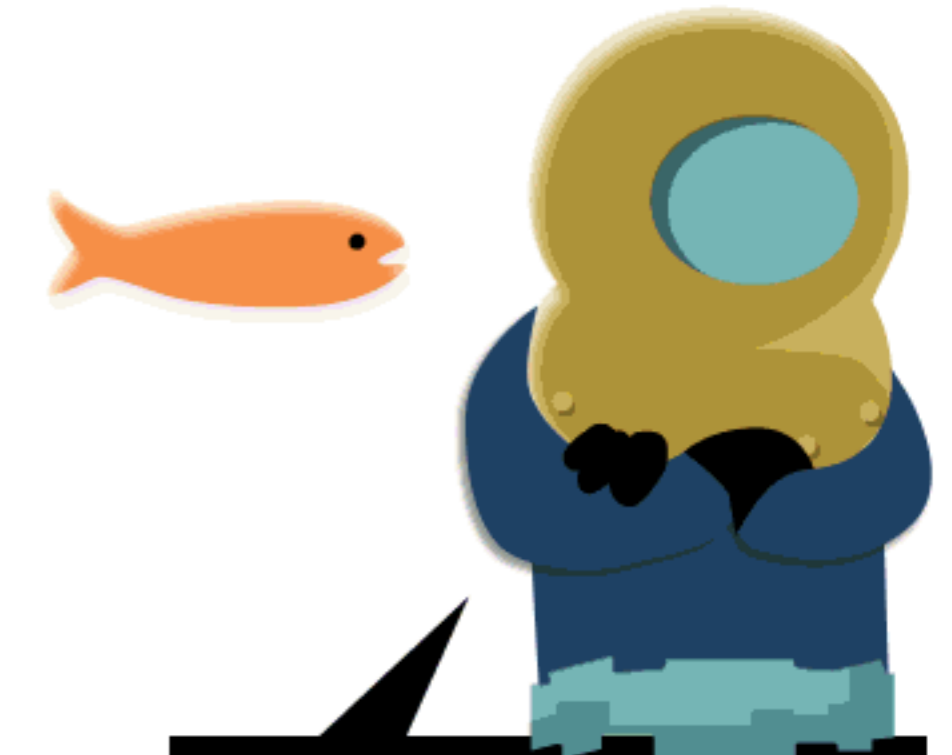
# Denial Stage

People in the **Denial Stage** are not aware of cultural differences. They know how things are done in their own culture and assume that in other places and/or groups it is more or less the same. Since individuals in this stage assume that cultural differences do not exist, they generally lose interest in the topic of culture.

### Typical expressions of individuals in the Denial stage are:

- “All big cities are the same - lots of buildings, too many cars and Starbucks”
- “I have never had much contact with other cultures and the subject does not appeal to me”
- “I have never experienced culture shock”
- “As long as we all speak the same language, there's no problem”

To move from this stage to the next, individuals are encouraged to learn to recognize the existence of other cultures and become aware of cultural differences.



I don't see differences at all.

# Defense Stage

In the **Defense Stage**, individuals become aware of cultural differences and are often threatened or intimidated by them. For them, the world is divided between “us” and “them”.

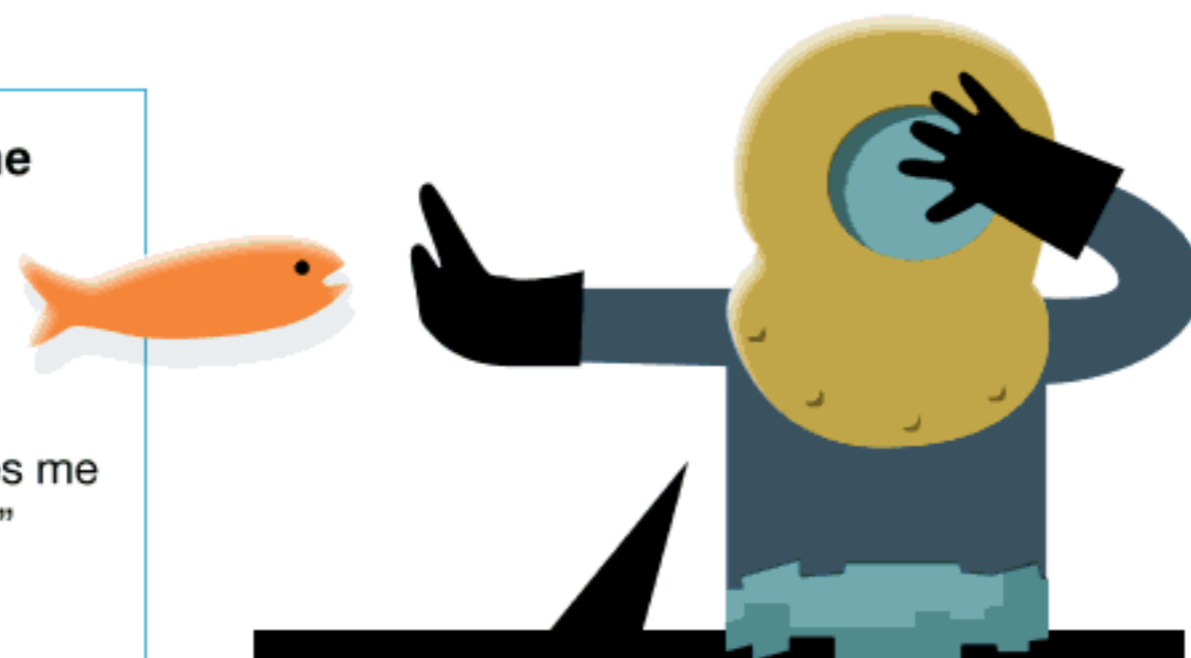
**There are two forms of Defense:**

- the form of Defense where individuals consider “us” to be better than “them” and
- the other form, called reversal, where individuals admire the other culture and regard their own culture as inferior.

**Typical sayings of individuals in the Defense stage are:**

- “I wish these people would just talk the way we do.”
- “When I mix with other cultures, it makes me realize how much better my country is.”
- “Boy, could we teach these people a lot of stuff.”
- “I wish I could give up my own cultural background and really be one of these people.” (reversal)

To move from this stage to the next, individuals have to be able to manage anxiety about other cultures as well as to embrace tolerance and patience for people from other cultures.



I see our differences, but I don't like them and my culture is better, I love me.

I see our differences, I like them and your culture is better, I love you.

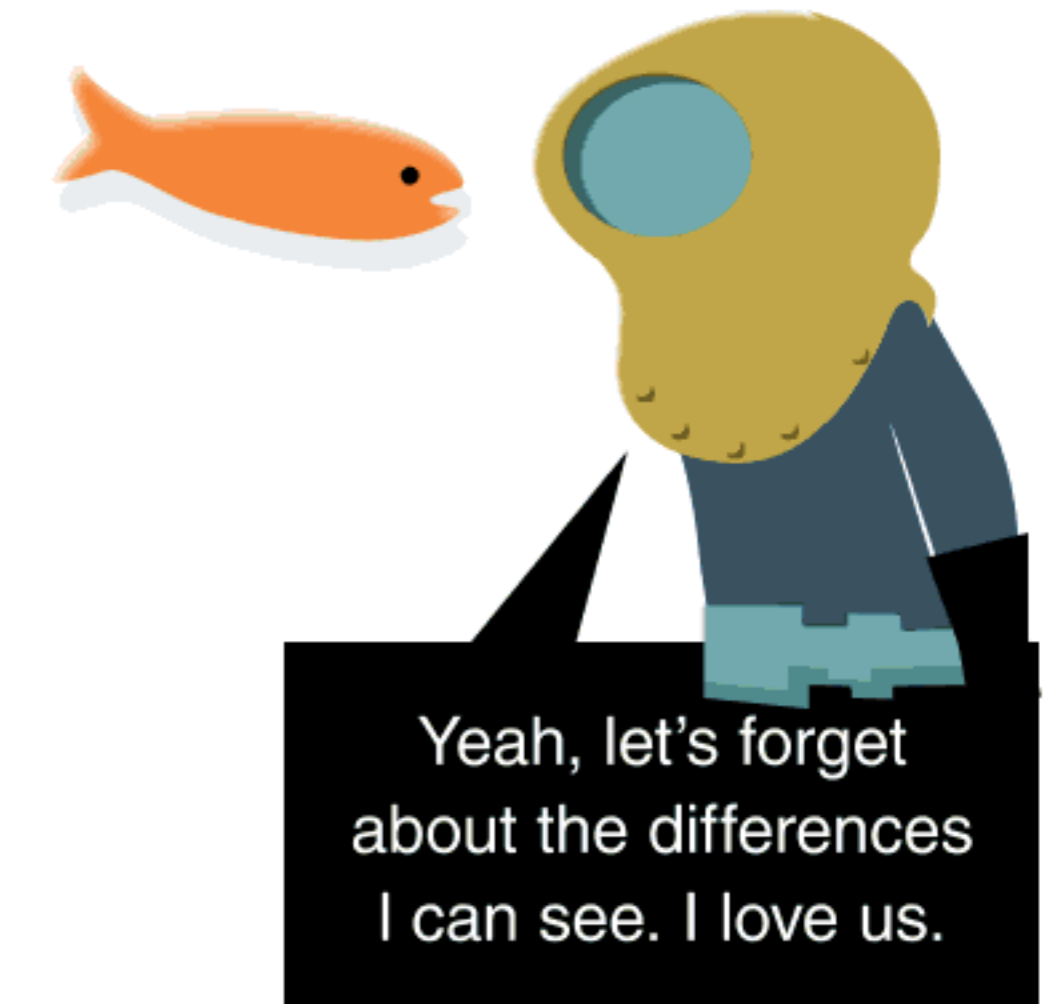
# Minimisation Stage

People in the **Minimisation Stage** think that since we are all human beings, everyone is basically the same. For them, cultural differences are insignificant. What matters most is that we are all humans and therefore have similar feelings, hopes and needs. People in this stage act according to the rule: treat others as you would like to be treated.

**Typical expressions of individuals in this stage are:**

- “It's a small world after all”
- “Customs are different, but when you really get to know people, you realise that they are basically the same as we are”
- “I have this intuitive sense of other people regardless of their culture.”
- “Technology brings cultural uniformity to the world”

This stage is often the most difficult to get through because people at this stage think they are doing very well. To move from this stage to the next, one has to develop cultural self-awareness and experience difference. It is also worth strengthening listening skills, open-mindedness, and work on the ability to perceive others accurately.



Yeah, let's forget about the differences I can see. I love us.

# Acceptance Stage

People who enter the **Acceptance Stage** are able to recognize that there are important differences between individuals from different cultures and to accept and respect those differences. However, at this stage, individuals do not yet feel confident about how to deal with these differences.

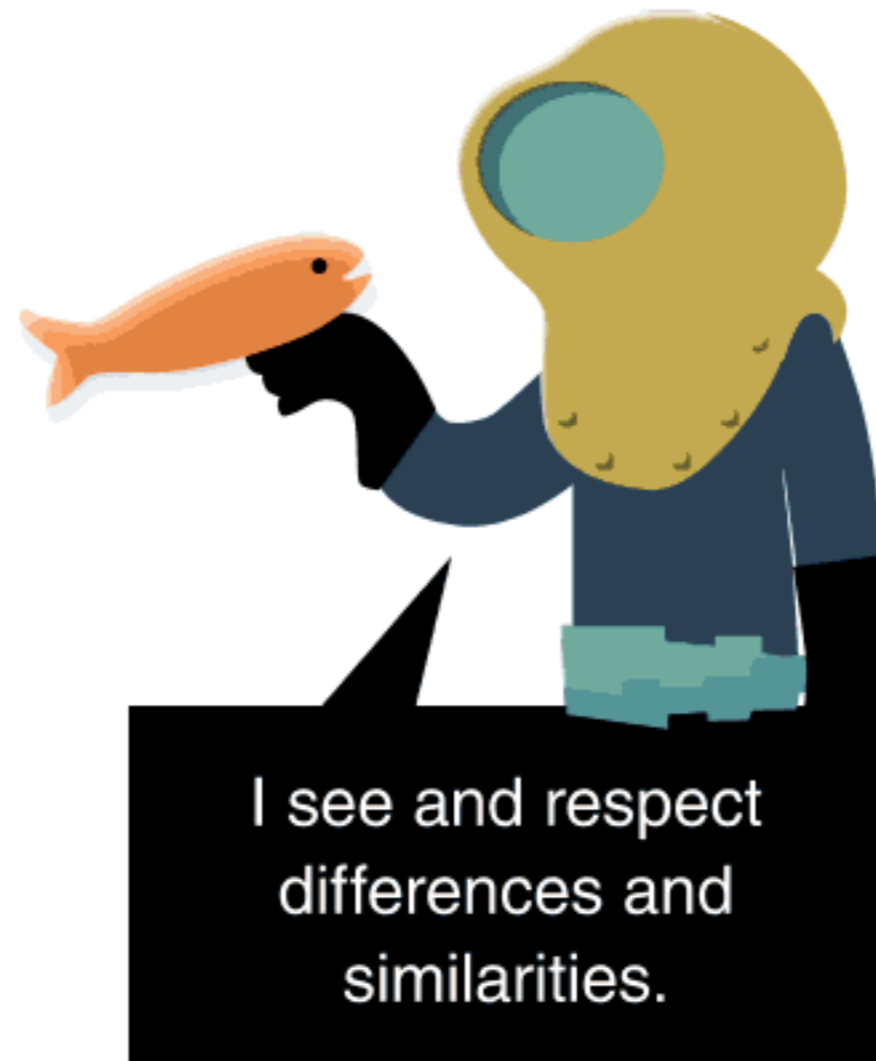
**Some typical quotes from people in the acceptance stage:**

“The more differences, the better, as diversity means more creative ideas”

“I always try to study a new culture before I visit the place or interact with people from that culture”

“Our new employee comes from culture X. Where can I learn about this culture to be more effective in cooperation?”

In order to move from this stage to the next, individuals are encouraged to acquire specific cultural knowledge. They are also advised to develop respect for the values and beliefs of others and maintain tolerance of ambiguity.



# Adaptation Stage

In the **Adaptation Stage**, people have acquired the necessary competence and experience to deal effectively with cultural differences. They are able to adapt their ways of interacting and communicating, as well as to adjust to the values that exist in other cultures. They are fully comfortable interacting with people who have different values and beliefs. **Culture is seen as a process of engaging with others, rather than as something one possesses.** At this stage, individuals have developed cultural empathy and act according to the rule: treat others as they wish to be treated.

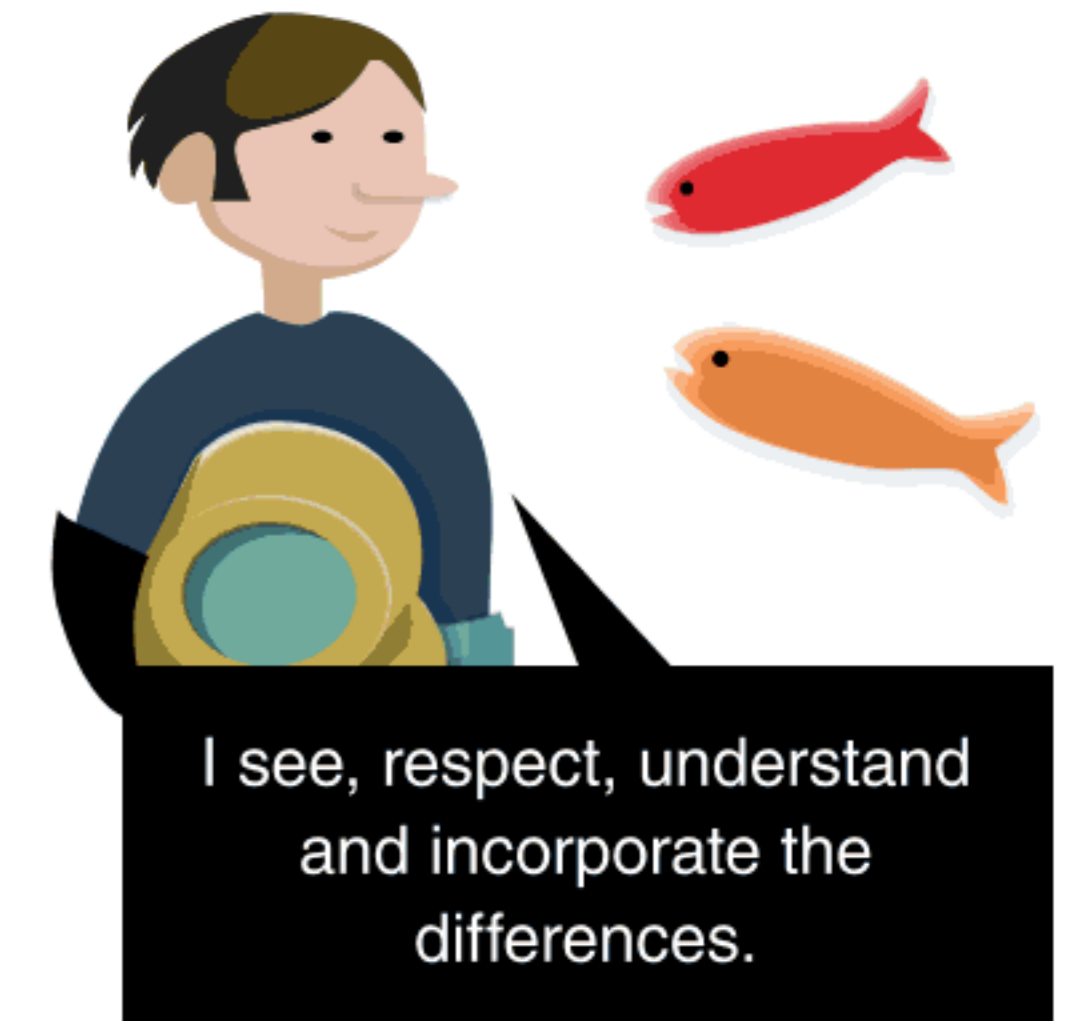
**Typical statements for individuals in the Adaptation stage:**

“Whatever the situation, I can usually approach it from a variety of cultural perspectives”

“I can uphold my values and behave in a culturally appropriate way”

“I greet people from my culture and people from other cultures differently, depending on how different cultures show respect”.

In order to achieve Adaptation and to move to the next stage, it is important to be able to empathize with other cultures. One will also have to develop risk-taking and problem-solving skills, and to learn to be flexible with other cultures.



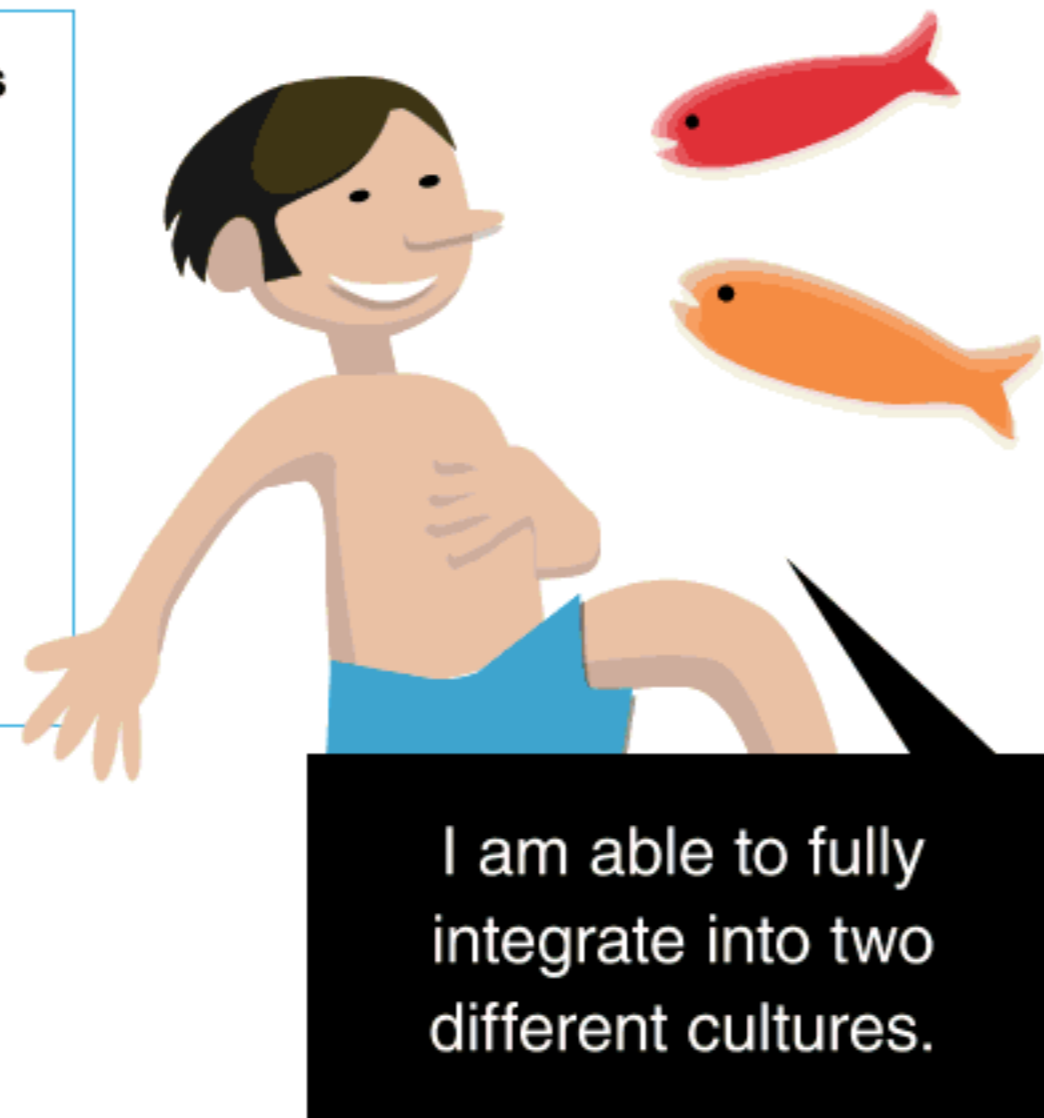
# Integration Stage

In Integration Stage, the individuals have a developed sense of belonging to two or more cultural groups. They are comfortable with cultural relativity and are able to identify an appropriate response depending on the context or a situation.

Integration is the final stage of the Developmental Model, rarely achieved. In this stage, the individual is able to bring other cultural experiences in and out of his or her own worldview, or to integrate this experience into his or her identity in a given situation. At the same time, people with this vision often maintain a marginal self-identity and consider themselves to be continually “on the move”. These people are often cultural mediators. They are able to help others understand different cultures and promote unity between them.

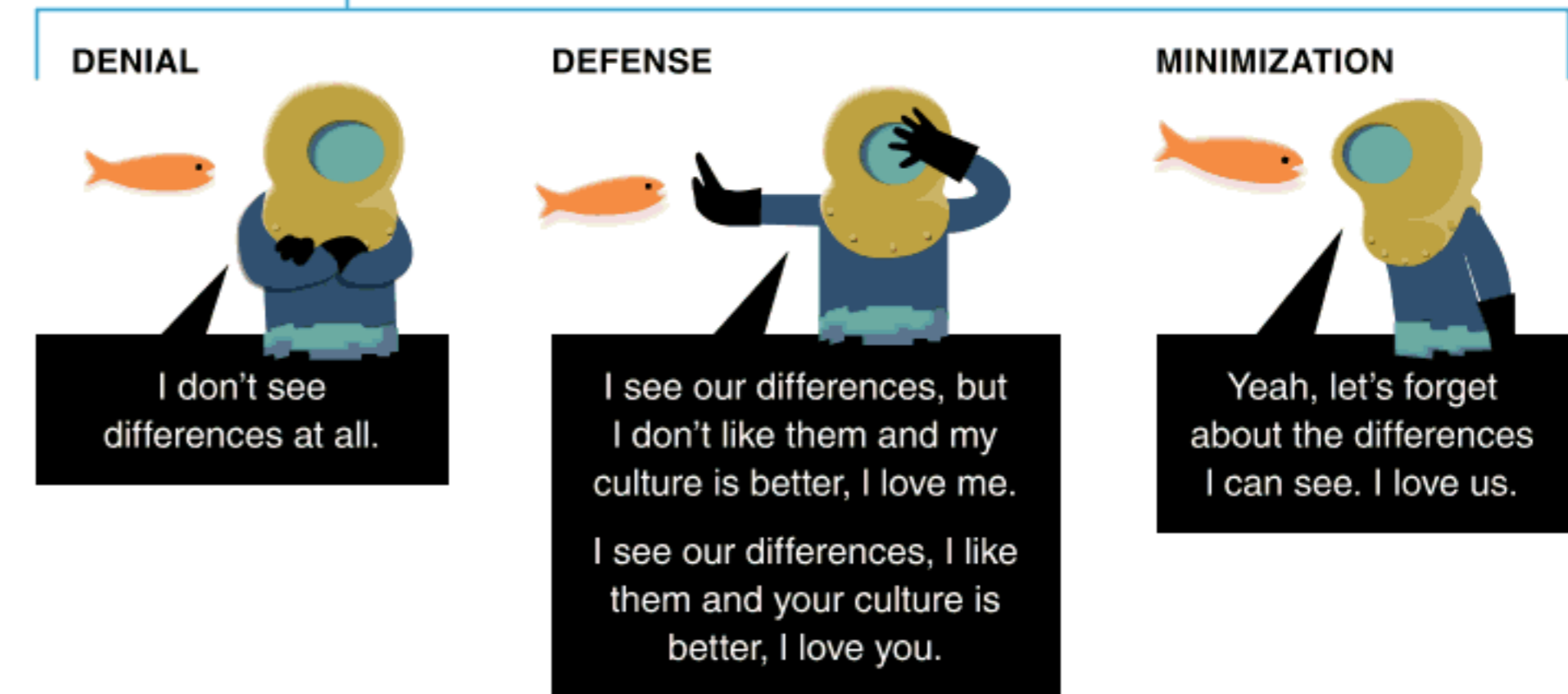
**Typical expressions for individuals in the Integration stage are:**

- “Sometimes I don’t feel like I fit anywhere”
- “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”

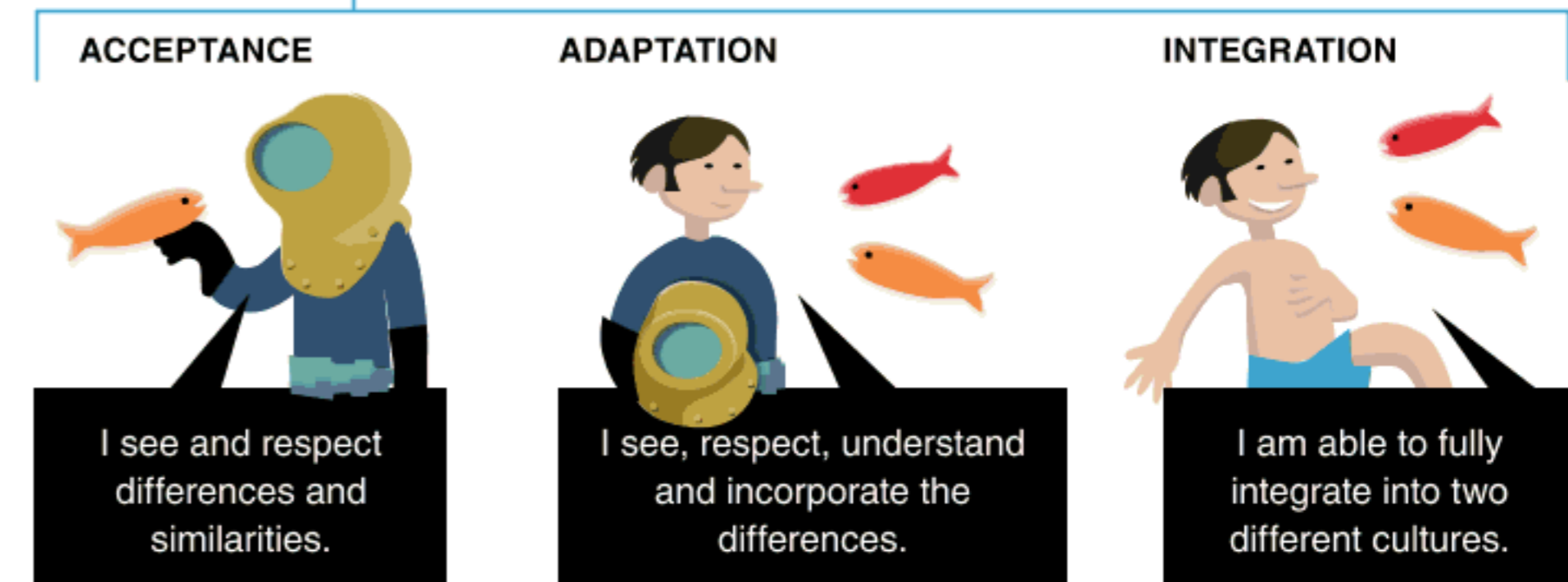


# Developmental Model

## 3 ETHNO-CENTRIC STAGES



## 3 ETHNO-RELATIVE STAGES



**Summary:** the Developmental Model comprises three ethno-centric stages where one’s culture is experienced as central to reality (Denial, Defense, Minimisation), and three ethno-relative stages, where one’s culture is experienced in the context of other cultures (Acceptance, Adaptation, Integration).

As people become more intercultural competent, they move from ethno-centric to ethno-relative stages. This transition enables them to have more sophisticated intercultural experiences, and vice versa, more refined intercultural experiences allow for a better transition.

## How do interculturally competent people behave?

In addition to the well-structured Developmental Model, social scientists have identified a group of characteristics that interculturally competent individuals possess.

These characteristics include emotional stability, social initiative, flexibility, the ability to develop cultural self-awareness, to be patient and tolerant of differences, to be open-minded, open to cross-cultural learning and to people from other cultures, the ability to be free of bias or prejudice, to show empathy for other cultures, to respect cultural diversity, to see the value of other cultural perspectives, curiosity involving a willingness to take risks and to step out of one's comfort zone, the ability to tolerate ambiguity and uncertainty.

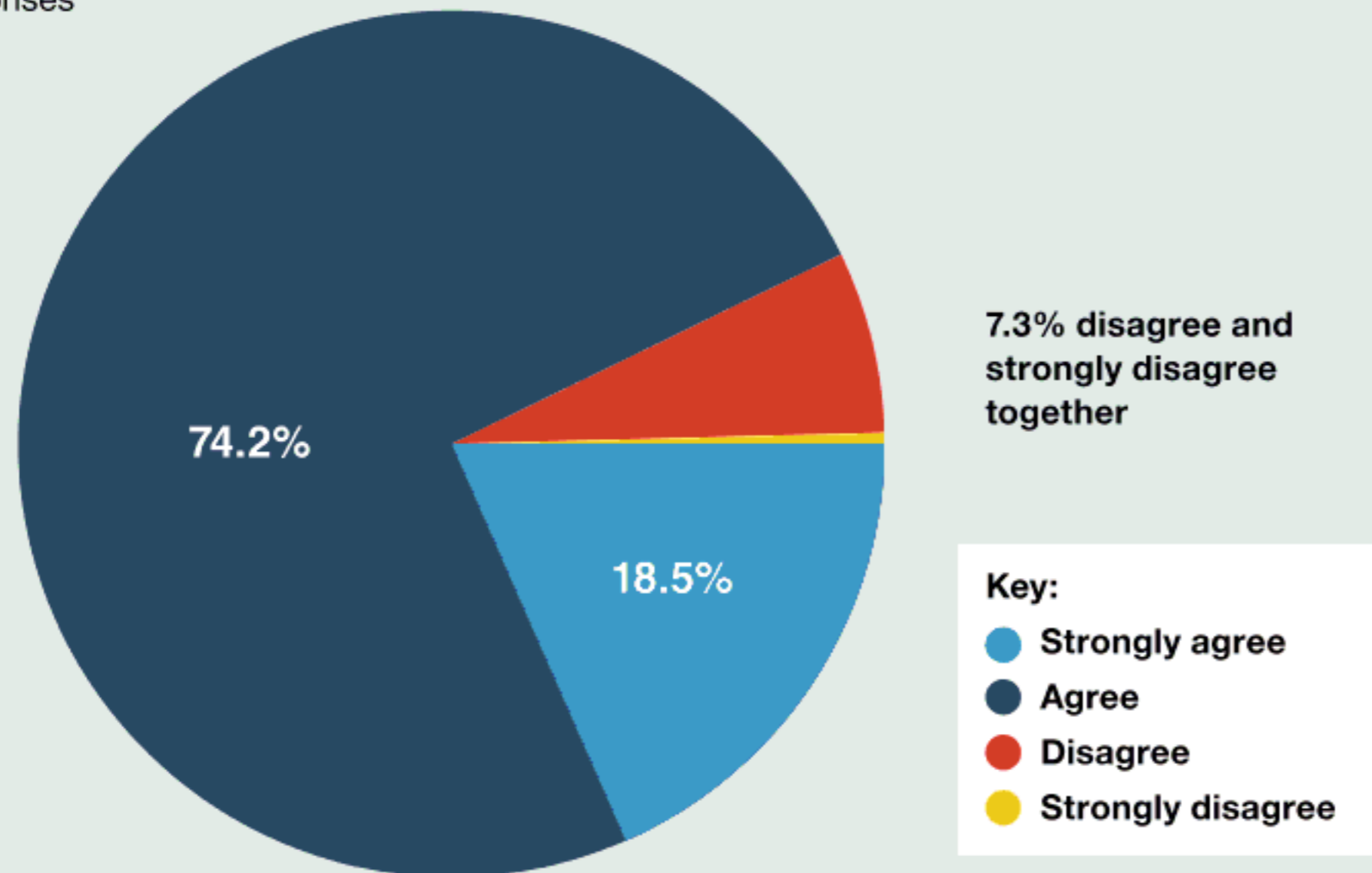
The list is quite long, but many scholars agree that motivation and the desire to cooperate are essential for interculturally competent people. Motivation determines whether and to what extent a person is willing to learn about cultural differences and to understand others accurately (Ceci 1996), and desire to cooperate prompts people to work together to the same valued end.

In a survey conducted within "Introducing and Engaging Diversity Globally" project in July 2020, more than 500 respondents from 15 Australian and Ukrainian Intercultural Cities were asked if they consider themselves as interculturally competent individuals. Nearly 93% of them answered this question positively (Graph 1). At the same time, even higher number - almost 96% - also agreed that they need to improve their intercultural competence skills.



## Do you consider yourself an interculturally competent person?

504 responses



Graph 1. Extract from the project survey data, July 2020

## Keys to cultural awareness:

Although the tendency in this training is to avoid "Do's" and "Don'ts", because every intercultural interaction occurs in a specific context and necessitates a different response, some advice from literature is still valuable as summarised below:

- learn to separate observation from interpretation
- suspend your attribution of meaning to someone's behaviour until you know enough about their culture
- do not assume you understand any nonverbal signals or behaviour unless you are familiar with the culture
- do not take a stranger's nonverbal behaviour personally, even if it is insulting in your culture, and be aware that your own nonverbal communication patterns may be insulting in some cultures

- remember that stereotypes are a major obstacle to communication between cultures and therefore
- try not to get people into patterns based on your previous experience.

### Steps to overcome the barrier of stereotyping:

**Triangle:** awareness-knowledge-skills

- make every effort to increase **awareness** of your own preconceptions and stereotypes about the cultures you encounter
- take your time to **learn** about the other cultures, and
- **reinterpret** behaviour of representatives of that culture from their cultural perspective **adapting** your own stereotypes to fit your new experiences.

# ICC Competence Paradigm

## The Culture Map as the Vertical Axis

This Chapter focuses on commonalities and differences between cultures. It seeks to address some practical aspects of how to better understand and deal with different cultures, to help participants explore and test the Culture Map - the areas of cultural variation that compose a vertical axis of Intercultural Competence Paradigm (the Developmental Model being its horizontal axis).

The materials provided in this chapter will help training participants identify and become aware of their own culture, learn to appreciate the differences between their own culture and that of others, and provide them with an opportunity to delve deeper into the challenges encountered in a community or a workplace with respect to intercultural competence.



## Discussion time

Suggest to participants to bring one or two examples of misunderstandings between themselves and someone from a different culture, from their own experience.

Ask them if the examples they brought can be classified using the six stages of the Developmental Model discussed in the previous chapter. If so, how? Is there anything missing?

## Interactive exercise

Suggest that participants imagine the following situation (A Welcome at the Airport - Hofstede, 2002) and ask them to choose an option (one out of five) that best reflects their thoughts at this time. After a few minutes, let them vote on each option to estimate one or two options preferred by participants.

### **Ask participants the following or similar questions:**

Why did you choose this particular option? Can the options provided be classified using the six stages of the Developmental Model? If so, how (give an example)? Is there anything missing?



## Imagine the following situation:

### **A Welcome at the Airport**

You are heading to a formal/business meeting with someone you have never met before. When you arrive at the airport, a warmly smiling woman wearing jeans and sandals is holding up a sign with your name on it. What do you think?

### **Please choose an option below that reflects best your thoughts at this moment**

1. She must be a secretary
2. She is probably the person with whom I will have the meeting
3. It is wonderful to be welcomed so warmly
4. How dare someone meet me in such an informal outfit
5. There must be an error, because I was expecting a formal-looking gentleman

# The Culture Map

It is absolutely normal if, during the interactive exercise provided on the previous page, participants find that the Development Model is insufficient to describe a multidimensional real-life situation.

Intercultural interaction always occurs in a multivariate setting. In order to more adequately understand and describe this interaction, it is necessary not only to take into account cultural awareness (stage) of an individual, but also to be able to compare the positioning of one culture in relation to another.

And this is where the Culture Map comes to play, as it describes our interactions in a broader – group or societal – context.

The Map is based on Erin Meyer's (2016) approach that compares the position of one culture (nationality) in relation to another on a scale. It addresses some practical aspects of how to deepen our understanding of different cultures in a community or organization by illustrating how culture – or established within a group set of norms and behaviors – can influence the effectiveness of our daily interactions and performance.

## Dimensions of the Culture Map

- **Communication:** explicit vs. implicit
- **Decision making:** consensual vs. top down
- **Space:** proximity vs. distance
- **Reasoning (persuading):** deductive vs. inductive
- **Discord:** confrontational vs. confrontation avoidance
- **Trust:** task vs. relationship
- **Look (appearance):** formal vs. casual
- **Leadership:** egalitarian vs. hierarchical
- **Time (management):** structured vs. flexible
- **Feedback (evaluation):** direct vs. indirect negative feedback



● **Communication:** explicit vs. implicit  
*Explicit or Low context:* communication is precise, simple and clear. Messages are expressed and understood at face value. Repetition is appreciated if it helps clarify the communication.

*Implicit or High context:* communication is sophisticated, nuanced and layered. Messages are both spoken and read between the lines. Messages are often implied but not plainly explained.

- **Reasoning (persuading):** deductive vs. inductive  
*Deductive/ Concept first (from general principle to concrete, special case):* develop a theory or complex concept before presenting a fact, statement, opinion; begin a message by building up a theoretical argument before moving on to a conclusion. The underlying conceptual principles are valued.  
*Inductive/ A fact first:* begin with a fact, statement, or opinion and later add concepts to back up/explain the conclusion as necessary; begin a report with an executive summary or bullet points. Discussions are approached in a practical concrete manner.
- **Feedback (evaluation):** direct vs. indirect negative feedback  
 See example  
<https://erinmeyer.com/media/videos/>
- **Leadership:** egalitarian vs. hierarchical  
*Egalitarian:* The boss is viewed as a facilitator among equals. Organisational structure is flat. Communication often skips hierarchical lines, you can disagree with your boss.  
*Hierarchical:* a large distance between the boss and a subordinate. The boss leads from the front. Status is important. Organisational structure is multi-layered and fixed. Communication follows a set of hierarchical rules. Communication happens through the established appropriate channels.

- **Trust:** task vs. relationship  
*Task-based:* your confidence in someone else's abilities to do a job or perform a task is created through having worked together before. I enjoy working with you - I trust you.  
*Relationship-based:* your confidence in someone else's abilities to do a job comes from your affective relationship with a person you have socialised with. Trust is built through sharing meals, evening drinks, discussions at coffee machine. Work relationships build up slowly over long term. I've shared personal time with you, I know others well who trust you - I trust you.
- **Decision making:** consensual vs. top down  
*Consensual:* a creative and dynamic way of reaching agreement between all members of a group that strives to incorporate everyone's perspectives, needs, and ultimately their permission. Everyone takes part in shaping the decision until a compromise is reached that reasonably satisfies everyone.  
*Top-down:* approach to making decisions on the basis of formal positions of authority.





**Time (management):**

structured vs. flexible

*Structured or Linear:* time is seen as a linear sequence it is important that everything happens according to the schedule – project tasks are completed one after another, one thing at a time. Emphasis is on promptness and a good organisation over flexibility.

*Flexible:* schedules are not that important. Time is less tangible and it is possible for many events to happen at the same time, change in tasks as opportunities arise is tolerated, and interruptions are accepted. The focus is on adaptability and flexibility over promptness and organisation.

**Look (appearance):** formal vs. casual

*Formal* (beautified - in some cultures more for women, in some – for men) vs *Casual* (relaxed, natural).

Some cultures assign hierarchical positioning based on the way a person looks, e.g. they place a more casually dressed individual lower in a hierarchy/ organisation.

**Discord:** confrontational vs. confrontation avoidance

*Confrontational:* disagreement and debate are positively viewed and accepted by the team or organisation. Open confrontation is appropriate and will not negatively affect the relationship.

*Confrontation avoidance:* disagreement and debate are negatively viewed by the team or organisation. Open confrontation is inappropriate and will break group harmony and negatively affect the relationship.

*Discussion Time:* Invite participants to discuss one of the Culture Map dimensions of your choice. For example:

**Space:** proximity vs. distance

It is considered that some cultures – for example, Southern European, Asian, Middle Eastern – to maintain closer physical distance between each other in everyday interactions, than in other cultures – for example, Northern Europeans, Americans.

Do you agree with this? What is your own experience?

What is the acceptable physical distance between colleagues, friends, family members in your culture?

What would you do if someone from a different culture breached the accepted physical distance?

**Note:** The distance “borders” on page illustration was designed by American psychologists.

Other cultures may have different distances or sizes of intimate, personal and social circles.

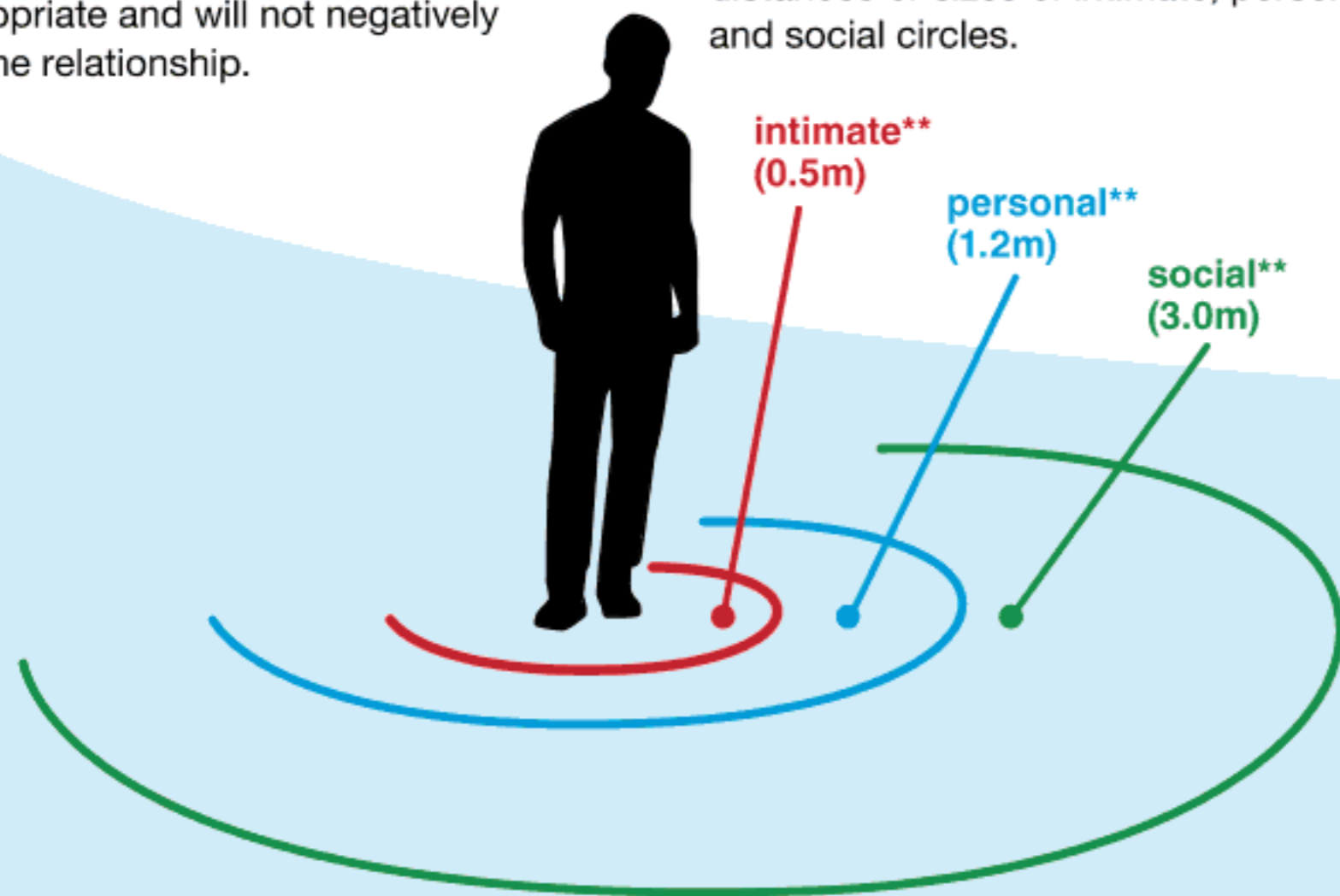


Illustration: Physical Distance  
Source: www.michaelseitchik.com

**Conclusion**

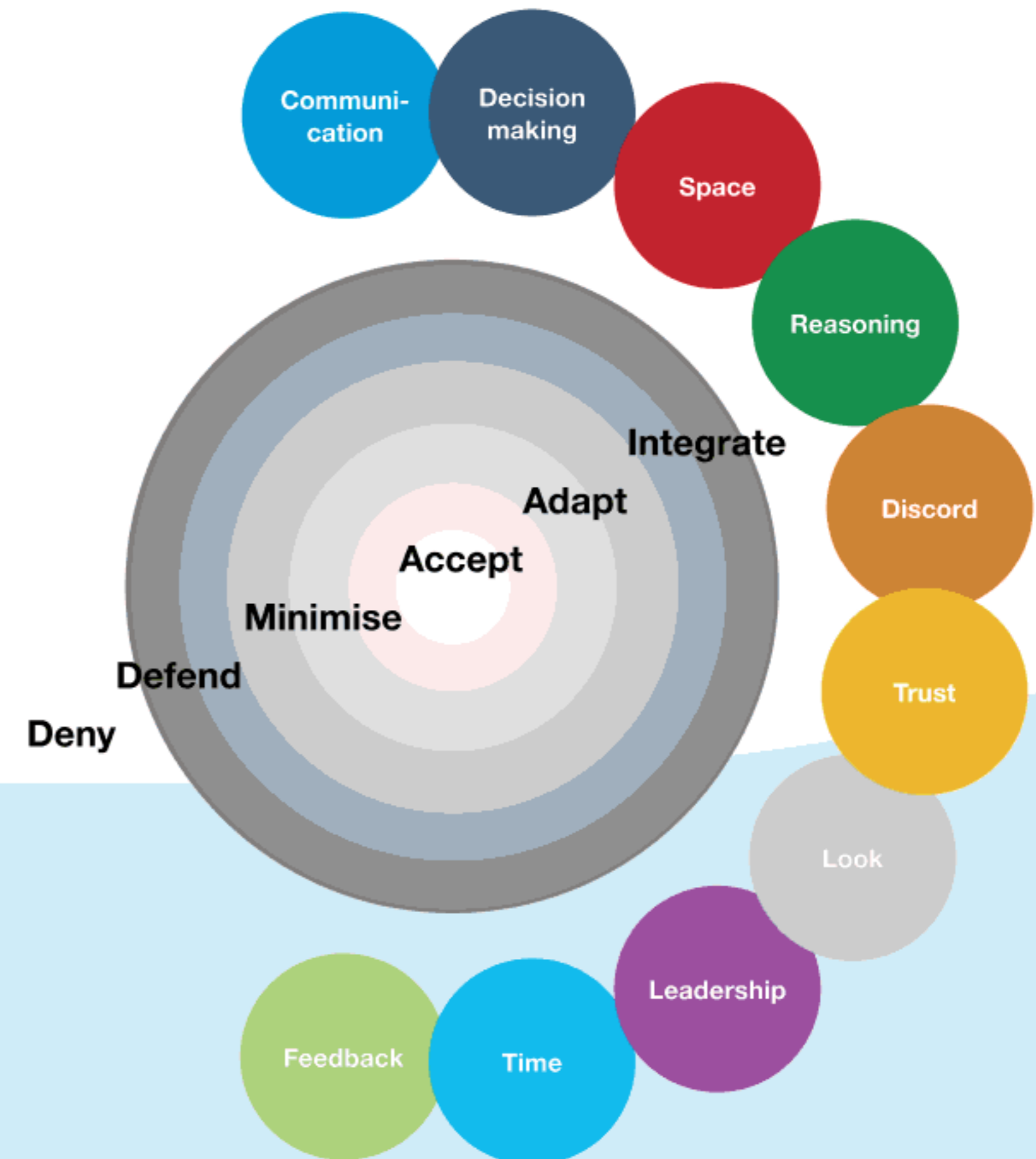
Together with the Developmental Model, discussed in Chapter 2, that facilitates our understanding of the stage of cultural awareness of an individual or a group, the Culture Map, which helps us to compare the positioning of one culture in relation to another, form what we call Intercultural Competence Paradigm, where the horizontal axis (Developmental Model) and the vertical axis (the Culture Map) cross.

Interculturally competent people are aware of the elements of these two axes

and consciously navigate the intercultural universe accounting for cultural variance and responding appropriately to real-life situations, which are often spontaneous and unpredictable.

Intercultural Competence Paradigm is a frame of reference that helps individuals make well-informed behavioral judgments based on greater cultural awareness and to achieve a more effective and respectful interaction with people from different cultural backgrounds.

**ICC COMPETENCE PARADIGM**



Above graphics: As elaborated by author.

# The Story Circles

## Practical Approach

Interactive intercultural training tools are legion - Simulations, Role-Playing, Case Studies, Group Activities (games, discussions, structured learning exercises), Online Tools, Coaching. And yet, Story Circles remains one of the most effective practical tools for developing and practicing intercultural competence skills that can be used with different groups of people in many contexts around the world.

This approach can be used outside of any formal or instructional setting, it requires few or no resources and can be facilitated by people who may not have a strong intercultural background or knowledge of intercultural theory. In addition, the importance and power of storytelling is recognised in many cultures around the world.



## First...

the Story Circles approach focuses on the fundamental elements of intercultural skills development, including respect, awareness of self and others, reflection, sharing, empathy and relationship building.



## Second...

multiple intercultural competence objectives can be achieved through the Story Circles approach. These include but are not limited to cultivating curiosity about similarities and differences with others, acquiring greater cultural self-awareness, developing empathy and building relationships with culturally different people, respecting others, practicing listening for understanding.

## Finally...

the Story Circles approach helps groups of people to listen, explore a range of ideas, to better understand and learn from each other, to refine their own stories and re-evaluate their meaning in the broader context. Typically, in a supportive group environment of a Story Circle, new ideas are generated, and new insights are revealed.



**The Story Circles is an approach used to address intercultural issues and challenges in a facilitator-led group by collecting participants' narratives on a given topic (theme or issue).**

Although the topics of a Story Circle may vary depending on the facilitator's objective, a set of rules defined by this approach must be strictly observed.

**What is a story?** A story is a narrative of events drawn from the personal experience of the narrator. A story can be fashioned from a memory, a dream, a reflection, a moment in time, etc. A story usually has a plot, characters, a beginning, a development and an end, a certain atmosphere.

**What is and is not a story?** A story is not a lecture, an argument, a debate, or an intellectualisation, although these elements may be part of a story.

**Story Circles** involve an informal exchange beforehand and take place in a quiet space where interruptions are unlikely to occur. They usually consist of 5 to 15 people sitting in a circle, without a notepad, pocket notebook, etc., and in such a way that each participant has a good view of all the other participants. Story Circles have a facilitator who begins, monitors, and ends the Circle. The facilitator sets time during which the Story Circle will take place. The purpose of a Story Circle is also defined by the facilitator and agreed upon by the participants. There must be silences between stories. A Story Circle is as much about listening as it is about telling.



**The facilitator invites participants to active listening, as it is one of the most important features of a Story Circle. Make sure there are no phones, chats or side discussions. Listen carefully!**

**Remember:** What is said in the circle remains in the circle. Each participant must speak to the end, within a given time. Participants take turns speaking. No questions, criticisms, cross-references or comments are accepted during story telling. Silence is normal. If someone is struggling with what to say, do not rush them. Each participant has to tell her/his story, no one can just sit and listen. Participants do not speak from notes, and do not "prepare" their own stories during the stories of others. Spontaneity is important! All stories have value, there are no right or wrong stories



# Story Circles Rules

**Time for each story - 3-5 minutes** Make sure that in your Story Circle you account for the 5 key strategies for effective cross-cultural communication.

**Know the rules:** Facilitator reminds participants about the following:

- Respect yourself and others
- Avoid judgments, although it is quite natural, and keep the stories confidential
- Do not take offense at what or how something is said
- Refrain from judgmental or critical comments
- Pursue positive intentions
- Tell the story only from your own experience, not on behalf of others
- Choose a comfortable style of storytelling for you (sitting, standing, with or without gestures)
- Treat people in your group like your fellow-humans
- Maintain your interest and focused listening

## L-E-A-R-N

1. Listen
2. Effectively communicate
3. Avoid ambiguity
4. Respect differences
5. No judgment



## The Story Circles: example

Please follow the Facilitator's Guide in Appendix 1 of this manual. The topic or theme of your Story Circle depends on your objective.

**Prompt:** Tell us about the most challenging intercultural experience you have ever had.

After the stories have been told, initiate the discussion asking the participants some questions, for example:

- Were there any commonalities in the stories heard? Are there any significant differences?
- What do you remember? What stood out for you?
- What feelings and ideas you may have had?
- Can we draw any general conclusions from everything we have heard?

**Conclusions:** Draw conclusions and identify steps to follow:

1. Participants can be grouped (3-5 people) and asked to write down their key conclusions on post-it notes/paper, select the best two, based on consensus, and present them to the rest of the group.
2. If participants represent one organisation or community group, they can be asked to develop an action plan that identifies the elements of intercultural competences (or other, depending on the scenario) that they would like to focus on, and lists the specific steps they will take to improve these elements/situations.
3. It is important to continue to follow up, to interact with participants after the training, to monitor their progress.

**Timing:** This is a sample schedule for a 1.5 hour Story Circle:

- 0:00** facilitator introduces process to everyone
- 0:10** allow 5 minutes to get into small groups
- 0:15** allow 3 minutes for each story (with a brief introduction and a group of 8, this will equal to approximately 30 minutes)
- 0:45** allow 15 minutes to reflect together on the stories shared
- 1:00** reassemble into the large group
- 1:05** allow 15 minutes to share and discuss
- 1:20** end

# Glossary of Terms

## **Cultural diversity**

Cultural diversity is about acknowledgment, recognising differences and cultural differences. It supports the idea that every person can make a unique and positive contribution to the larger society because of their differences. Learning about other cultures helps us understand different perspectives within the world in which we live and helps dispel negative stereotypes and personal biases about different groups.

## **Culture**

Culture is a set of shared attitudes, values, goals, customary beliefs, social forms, material traits and social practices that characterises a group of individuals.

## **Equity**

Equity ensures that those who are behind (socially, economically, politically, geographically, etc.) in relation to others receive a little more support and stimulus so that they can reach their full potential and be on an equal ground with everyone else.

## **Interculturalism**

Interculturalism is the way of life in society that supports cross-cultural dialogue and interaction and counters tendencies towards self-segregation of cultures or ethnic groups.

## **Intercultural competence**

Intercultural competence is a complex set of abilities, knowledge, attitudes and skills, that allow an individual to perform appropriately and effectively when interacting with people of different linguistic and cultural backgrounds (Fantini, 2009 and Portera, 2014).

## **Intercultural Competence Paradigm**

Intercultural Competence Paradigm is a frame of reference (model), in relation to which behavioural judgments can be made in order to interact with people from different cultural backgrounds in an appropriate and effective way.

## **Multiculturalism**

Multiculturalism is a system of beliefs and behaviours that recognises and respects the presence of all diverse groups in an organisation or society, acknowledges and values their socio-cultural differences, and encourages and enables their continued contribution within an inclusive cultural context which empowers all within the organisation or society.

## **Social Cohesion**

Social Cohesion according to the Council of Europe's definition is "the capacity of a society to ensure the welfare of all its members, minimising disparities and avoiding polarisation. A cohesive society is a mutually supportive community of free individuals pursuing these common goals by democratic means."

## **Stereotypes**

Stereotypes consist in attributing a number of simplified and standardised characteristics (ways of being and behaving) to all those who share a particular feature (same gender, nationality, religion, profession, etc.).

# Guidelines for the Facilitator

## **The Story Circles approach**

1. Describe the purpose of the Story Circle (to find new ways to connect with the audience of participants). Ask participants to quickly name the typical elements of a story – narrative, plot, characters, etc.
2. Explain the rules of the Story Circle and answer any questions the participants may have. Inform that you will share the prompt in a moment.
3. Explain how much time each person will have to tell a story. Aim for a 5-minute introduction, 30 minutes to tell stories, and 10 minutes for the conclusion. Therefore, if there are 10 participants, allow 3 minutes per person. The facilitator should time the stories and explain the signal that he/she will give (raised hand) when there is a minute or 30sec are left till the end.
4. Remind people that stories can be about any experience, any situation. All stories have value, and there is no right or wrong story.
5. State the prompt (topic) and begin! You may ask for a volunteer to begin or you may start telling your own story.
6. After the first story, wait for the next person to begin her/his story. This rotation continues until everyone has told a story. You may also call on the participants in a clockwise direction. If you do this, remember that silence is okay, and state the rule that someone can "pass" their turn but that the circle will return to them after everyone else has spoken.
7. After everyone has spoken, ask what common themes emerged from the stories and let the group discuss them for about 10 minutes.
8. At the end, invite the group to reflect on the stories.
9. Were there any common themes? Any significant differences? What, if anything, stood out for you the most? What touched you the most? What feelings and ideas sparked?

# References

Adler, P. *Beyond Cultural Identity: Reflections on Multiculturalism*. Culture Learning, East-West Center Press, Richard Brislin, Editor, 1977, pp. 24-41

A New Strategy for Social Cohesion. Revised strategy for Social Cohesion approved by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, 31 March 2004. [https://www.coe.int/t/dg3/socialpolicies/socialcohesiondev/source/RevisedStrategy\\_en.pdf](https://www.coe.int/t/dg3/socialpolicies/socialcohesiondev/source/RevisedStrategy_en.pdf)

Bennett, M. 1986. A developmental approach to training for intercultural sensitivity. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* 10, no.2: 179-95

Bennett, M. 1993. Towards Ethnorelativism: A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. In M. Paige (Ed.), *Education for the intercultural experience*. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press

Bennett, M. 2004. Becoming interculturally competent. In J. Wurzel (Ed.), *Toward multiculturalism: A reader in multicultural education* (2nd ed., pp. 62-77). Newton, MA: Intercultural Resource

Bennett, M. 2013. *Basic concepts of intercultural communication: Paradigms, principles, & practices*. Boston: Intercultural Pres

Ceci, S. J. (1996). General intelligence and life success: An introduction to the special theme. *Psychology, Public Policy, and Law*, 2(3-4)

Deardorff, D. Editor, 2009. *The SAGE handbook of intercultural competence*. The SAGE Publications, Inc. ISBN 978-1-4129-6045-8

Hall, E. T. *Beyond Culture*. Anchor Books, Doubleday, 1976. ISBN 0-385-12474-0

Hofstede, G. 2002. *Exploring culture: exercises, stories, and synthetic cultures*. Intercultural Press, Inc. ISBN 1-877864-90-0

Larsen, C.A., 2013. *The Rise and Fall of Social Cohesion. The Construction and De-construction of Social Trust in the USA, UK, Sweden and Denmark*. Oxford: Oxford University Press

Meyer, E. 2014. *The Culture Map: Breaking Through the Invisible Boundaries of Global Business*. New York: Public Affairs

Rosado, C. 1997. *Toward a Definition of Multiculturalism*. in Delbert Baker, Editor. *Make Us One*. Boise, ID: Pacific Press

Stewart, J. 2002. *Bridges not Walls: a book about interpersonal communication*, Boston: McGraw-Hill

Thomas, A. Kinast E., Schroll-Machl S. (Editors). 2010. *Handbook of Intercultural Communication and Cooperation*. Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht GmbH & Co. KG, Göttingen

White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue "Living Together as Equals in Dignity", Council of Europe, Strasbourg, France 2008. [https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/source/white%20paper\\_final\\_revised\\_en.pdf](https://www.coe.int/t/dg4/intercultural/source/white%20paper_final_revised_en.pdf)

