From Diversity to Inclusion

Creating an Inclusive Workplace for Internationally Trained Individuals (ITIs)

A Guide for Employers

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Introduction

Many employers of small and medium-sized businesses find it challenging to meet their staffing needs because of a shortage of knowledge and skills in the labour market. This shortage exists even in the best of economic climates and can make it very difficult for employers to achieve their business goals and boost their profit margins. An effective way of addressing the shortage is to utilize the transferrable skills available in Internationally Trained Individuals* (ITIs). This guide offers practical information and suggestions to empower employers to confidently tap into this important labour source and enhance their businesses.

*In this guide, Internationally Trained Individuals (ITIs) refer to refugees and immigrants who have been educated and/or trained outside Canada.

Purpose

The guide aims to help employers of small to medium-sized businesses:

▸ enhance their recruiting and hiring processes to more successfully attract ITIs
▸ enhance their workplace environment by making it more equitable and inclusive to help in the retention of ITIs
▸ understand the influences of culture on one's perspective and behaviour
▸ locate resources that are currently offered in Alberta to facilitate the selection and retention of ITIs.

Approach

Equity is different from equality in that it provides for a tailored means to an end that results in the same outcomes for all. Having a workplace that is diverse is just the first step in the process and does not automatically make a workplace inclusive. Inclusion is about involving diverse individuals and promoting better participation for them in all aspects of the organization. Fostering a work environment of inclusion, where every member feels valued and is assured of opportunities for success, is important and helps make the workplace more respectful, stable, and productive. The guide promotes equity and inclusion in the workplace and encourages the adoption of an employment equity approach, which can offer big dividends.

When you have diversity in your workplace, you have taken the first step. The next step is inclusion – valuing and involving your diverse personnel and increasing their participation.

Taking steps to removing barriers that disadvantage a group of employees promotes fairer and more equitable access to the outcomes that others can more easily access.

An Inclusive Approach to Diversity

▸ Recognize differences and barriers.
▸ Recognize the need for equity and inclusion.
▸ Devise equitable ways to help facilitate the integration of ITIs.
▸ Involve diversity and promote inclusion through better participation.

What are your current business practices?

Check the practices that are currently applicable to you. If you are currently implementing eight or more of the following, you are well on your way to promoting inclusion and equity in your workplace. This guide will help you further improve your employment equity approach.

	Current Practices	
1.	We consider internationally trained individuals for positions at all levels.	☐
2.	Our employees receive opportunities for skills training at every level.	☐
3.	We demonstrate respect towards the different cultures that are present in our organization.	☐
4.	We empathize with the difficulties that our internationally trained employees might have in integrating into the workplace and provide the training that they might need.	☐
5.	We empathize with the difficulties our internationally trained employees might have in being accepted as valuable members of the organization.	☐
6.	We have intercultural competence training in place for all employees, including management, to facilitate the integration of our internationally trained employees.	☐
7.	We know that we have a legal obligation to make reasonable accommodations for individual employees' needs under the provisions of the Alberta's Human Rights, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Act.	☐
8.	We understand that we cannot ask any questions that are against the human rights legislation when we are interviewing potential candidates for a job. We follow this strictly when we are interviewing ITIs.	☐
9.	We have policies, procedures, and practices that ensure that our employees are treated equitably.	☐
10.	We recognize that there are differences among cultures, and we adjust our communication to the needs of a person from a different culture.	☐
11.	We show our internationally trained employees the same respect we show other employees in the organization by watching our tone and body language.	☐
12.	We seek suggestions from our employees about improvements to the workplace environment.	☐

Recruiting and Hiring ITIs

Working Towards Achieving Equity in Recruiting and Hiring ITIs

Many employers across Canada are looking to meet their staffing needs by hiring Internationally Trained Individuals (ITIs). The successful hiring and retaining of personnel from this growing talent pool often means making adjustments to some of the processes and policies in the following areas:

▸ how personnel are attracted, selected, and hired

▸ how personnel are retained, integrated, and motivated

The starting point to planning for the above changes is to recognize the barriers that ITIs face in finding and maintaining employment in Canada. Recognizing these barriers will help determine the changes required to facilitate the employment of ITIs. This section discusses the most common barriers that ITIs face, some considerations for changes to help remove the barriers, and some effective practices for recruiting and hiring ITIs.

Common Barriers for ITIs to Finding Employment

International credentials

One of the foremost barriers that ITIs face is having their international credentials accepted by potential employers. This is mainly because employers are unsure of the standards of education in other countries. The following are some points to consider in order to help ease the impact of this barrier on ITIs:

▸ Be informed about the process of checking international credentials. A popular credential recognition service in Alberta is International Qualification Assessment Service (https://work.alberta.ca/Immigration/contact-iqas.html)

▸ Have a clear list of required credentials for the position you want to hire.

▸ Review the list to check how essential Canadian credentials are to the job. Consider other possible ways ITIs can prove their qualifications; for example, paid internships and short contracts.

▸ Consider accepting local references from volunteer organizations and schools. International employment references can also be checked with the help of some companies such as First Advantage. https://www.fadv.com/global/north-america/canada.aspx

Once the above points have been considered and the appropriate actions taken, review and revise the job description and hiring process accordingly.

Language

Language is another barrier for ITIs. The language skills of ITIs can vary depending on the level of education and on whether English was the medium of instruction in their country of origin. The following are some points to consider in order to help ease the impact of this barrier on ITIs:

▸ Determine what level of language is actually required for the job and the language skills crucial to the job; for example, written communication, oral communication, and listening and reading comprehension.

The Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks has a list of can-do statements that might help in articulating the language level http://www.language.ca/index.cfm?Voir=sections&Id=17369&M=4038&Repertoire_No=2137991327

The following website can help with articulating the language skills required for a particular occupation. The site provides descriptions on how workers use essential skills in many occupations. http://www.esdc.gc.ca/en/essential_skills/profiles/index.page

▸ If the level of the language proficiency that is required for the position is not very high, consider matching a new employee with a "language buddy," a person who speaks the same language and can act as a translator for the first few months of employment or until the new employee is more confident with his/her language skills.

The language buddy system can also be an informal way for new employees with a low-language proficiency to become more fluent in English.

▸ Determine how essential easily comprehensible pronunciation is to the job. Good pronunciation will be more important when the job requires a higher level of interaction with customers, clients, and coworkers.

▸ Consider subsidizing language classes offered by the institutions in your area, or arrange for language classes to be conducted on site. The following are popular supports and resources offered by Bow Valley College:

  ▸ Part-time Language Skills Courses
  ▸ Full-time LINC and ELL programs
  ▸ Regional English language learning
  ▸ Regional LINC
  ▸ LINC Home Study
  http://www.bowvalleycollege.ca/programs-and-courses/english-language-learning.html

The following website has useful information for language training: https://work.alberta.ca/Immigration/language-training.html

Once the above points have been considered and the appropriate actions taken, review and revise the job description and hiring process accordingly.

Canadian work experience

Employers generally require Canadian work experience because they feel that a person with Canadian work experience will have a developed set of soft skills and an understanding of the Canadian workplace culture. However, this requirement makes it very difficult for ITIs to land their first job in their field and gain the necessary work experience.

If Canadian work experience is not a requirement from a regulatory body, there are some other viable methods that can help ease the impact of this barrier on ITIs.

Consider the following:

▸ Have a clearly articulated list of competencies, knowledge, skills, and attributes required for the job that you are recruiting for.

▸ Review the list to see if it can potentially exclude ITIs and revise it accordingly. For example, determine what transferrable skills are gained through work experience in your sector and ask for experience in the field instead of Canadian work experience.

▸ Employ from institutions that offer bridging programs. Bridging programs are generally aimed at ITIs who have both education and experience in their fields but need help in developing some Canadian-specific knowledge and skills for their successful employment here.

▸ Bridging programs offered in Alberta:

http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/Calgary-etcs-immigrant-bridging-excerpt.pdf

http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/Edmonton-etcs-Immigrant-Bridging.pdf

▸ Have internship programs in place.

▸ Provide short term contracts to see how people perform and hire on the basis of their performance.

Once the above points have been considered and the appropriate actions taken, review and revise the job description and hiring process accordingly.

Here are some more tips to help you:

▸ http://www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca/employment/employer_info.asp

▸ http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/learning/removing-canadian-experience-barrier/removing-canadian-experience-barrier-elearning-employers

▸ https://www.stepupbc.ca/develop-your-non-profit-workforce-diversity/attract-and-hire-immigrants#.V45ogvkrKUk

▸ http://alis.alberta.ca/wr/wpr/resources.html

Soft skills and an understanding of workplace culture

Employers prefer to hire a candidate who has the appropriate soft skills and is familiar with the general workplace culture in Canada. This is because they want to be sure the person will fit in and integrate into their organization more easily.

Soft skills are the interpersonal skills that are essential for the effective and competent execution of workplace interactions and duties in culturally and socially acceptable ways. Some examples of soft skills are time-management, team work, and self-direction. The ability to demonstrate both the soft skills that are valued in workplaces in Canada and the knowledge of the general workplace culture here is closely tied to work experience in this country. Therefore, it creates a barrier for ITIs to finding suitable employment.

Consider the following to help reduce this barrier:

▸ Clearly articulate your organization's culture and values, and make sure they are available in easily accessible guidelines and policies.

▸ Determine both the general soft skills your organization values and the specific soft skills required for each job. An example of a general soft skill is making decisions, and an example of a more specific, related soft skill is assessing and managing risks.

▸ Determine the kinds of support you need to have in place when somebody does not fully meet the criteria. Examples of support could be on-the-job training, in-house mentorship programs, and in-house online webinars. If in-house programs are not a viable option, explore other avenues. Many educational institutions also offer training. Some examples of such programs offered online by Bow Valley College are:

▸ Workplace Communication for Rural Immigrants

▸ Language for Work

▸ Fit in Fast
http://www.bowvalleycollege.ca/programs-and-courses/english-language-learning/online-courses.html
(Refer to the section on resources for more information.)

Effective Practices for Recruiting and Hiring ITIs

The following are some effective practices for attracting and selecting ITIs:

Attracting ITIs in Employee Search

▸ Prepare a clear competency-based job description, which clearly states the knowledge, skills, and behaviour required for the job.

▸ Review your current employee-search networks to maximize your chances of attracting ITIs. Apart from data banks and job fairs, also consider the following

   ▸ Campus recruitment and co-op programs

   ▸ Intern and practicum placements

   ▸ Institutions that offer bridging programs

   ▸ Local community organizations and immigrant serving agencies

   ▸ Referrals from within your current internationally trained employees

   ▸ Government sources and embassies

▸ Provide your employee-search networks with clearly articulated workplace norms and expectations.

▸ Develop special programs like paid or unpaid internships and work placements within your organization. Such programs help address inequity issues by helping ITIs overcome barriers such as the requirement of Canadian work experience.

▸ Review your current recruitment process for any bias that might deter attracting ITIs.

Job Ads

▸ Keep the language in your job ads plain and easy to understand.

▸ Consider using community newspapers and publications and immigrant serving agencies to place your job ads.

▸ Keep the criteria inclusive and unbiased. Consider the following:

   ▸ List soft skills (e.g., taking initiative, identifying problems and solutions, teamwork) that are required for the job.

   ▸ Have clear competency-based job descriptions that focus on the critical skills and competencies required for the job.

   ▸ If job experience is essential, ask for it, but do not focus only on Canadian experience.

   ▸ If references are required, consider accepting local references from volunteer work and attendance in school. State this in the job ad.

   ▸ Clearly state that you welcome applicants with international qualifications and experience.

   ▸ Clearly state the job duties and the experience, knowledge, and skills required.

   ▸ If using international credential assessment services to assess international credentials, provide a link in the job ad.

   ▸ Specify language requirements and specific language skills needed for the job.

Selection Best Practices

Screening

Review your current screening process to make it fair and unbiased.

▸ Do not screen out applicants' international credentials and experience.

▸ Do not screen out applicants based on employment gaps; these may have occurred due to world events.

▸ Consider having the person(s) who are in charge of screening to view only a number identifier instead of a name. Research has shown that unfamiliar and ethnic names are often screened out.

▸ Have clear evaluation criteria for screening based on the job description.

Interviews

Review your interview process and techniques for bias.

▸ Inform candidates about the interview process and techniques prior to the interview. Do not assume that they are familiar with the processes and techniques used in Canada. In your email notification for an interview, provide information on your interview process and online links to sample interviews that conform to the techniques you use.

▸ People in many cultures are uncomfortable about promoting themselves and have a cultural preference for humility and modesty. Ask appropriate questions to elicit the information you need about their performance and duties.

▸ Review your interview questions for culture and language bias. Reframe questions like, "Tell me about yourself," to "Tell me about your professional experience."

▸ Be aware of areas of questioning that are inappropriate and do not conform to fair and equitable hiring practices.

▸ Be aware that communication styles, eye contact, and gestures vary from culture to culture. Do not judge candidates on these. Stay focused on the competencies required for the job and do not judge candidates according to interview skills alone.

▸ Whenever possible, provide hiring personnel with intercultural training to help them be more flexible and adaptable to different communication styles and to value differences and the transferability of skills.

▸ Strive towards having an interview panel that is experienced and self-aware of their own prejudices and biases towards accents and stereotypes.

▸ Strive towards educating and training interviewers to be self-aware of their own body language, to check assumptions, and to be open-minded and sensitive to cultural differences; for example, it is perfectly normal and acceptable in some cultures to have a longer processing and response time than Canadians are used to. Someone who is not trained in intercultural communication might misinterpret the silence to mean that the person is unable to answer the question. The way people organize

their ideas while communicating also varies. In some cultures, the preferred communication style may be more indirect and circular or roundabout. If the interviewers are not aware of this, they might assume that the interviewee is being evasive because the preferred communication style in Canada is more direct and linear.

▸ Many Canadians tend to judge others on the strength of a handshake. An important point to note is that not many cultures use the handshake as a greeting. As a consequence, people from some cultures may not necessarily be comfortable shaking hands and may not demonstrate a "good" handshake. Even in cultures where a handshake is a customary greeting, the firmness of a handshake may not be important, or it may only be a common practice among people of the same gender. Shaking hands with the people of the same gender may also be influenced by religious practices. Interviewers who are aware of these differences are generally less likely to discriminate on grounds such as a "weak" handshake or a hesitancy to shake hands.

▸ When possible, arrange for face-to-face interviews. Even ITIs who are fluent in English may not be confident about talking on the phone, especially if they are new to Canada.

Resources

- Interviewing tips
  https://nsbs.org/sites/default/files/ftp/EQ120407_HiringIntrvwGuide.pdf

- Suggestions for removing barriers for hiring ITIs
  https://www.stepupbc.ca/sites/default/files/downloadable-material/Attract-and-hire-immigrants.pdf

- The Employer's Roadmap: Hiring and retaining internationally trained workers
  http://www.hireimmigrantsottawa.ca/downloads/roadmap_Eng.pdf

- The Employer's Roadmap to hiring and retaining internationally trained workers
  http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/publications/employers/roadmap/

- Navigating interviews – videos with supporting guides
  https://www.norquest.ca/norquest-centres/centre-for-intercultural-education/projects/completed-projects/navigating-the-interview.aspx

- Capacity-building and access to best practices in assisting newcomers to gain and retain employment
  http://criec.ca/strategies/champions/
  http://criec.ca/strategies/champions/organizations/
  http://eriec.ca/resources/employers/

- Hire Immigrants: Supporting investment in immigrant talent and business worldwide
  http://www.hireimmigrants.ca/resources-tools/local-resources/alberta/

- Immigrant bridging
  http://www.humanservices.alberta.ca/documents/Calgary-etcs-immigrant-bridging-excerpt.pdf

- Pre-employment inquiries
  http://www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca/publications/bulletins_sheets_booklets/sheets/hr_and_employment/pre_employment_inquiries.asp

- Essentials to workplace integration – a handbook
  http://www.talentpoolhub.com/#!essentials-to-workplace-integration/c162

- Checking international references
  https://www.fadv.com/company/locations.aspx
  https://www.csiscreening.com/

- Beyond Canadian experience
  http://www.beyondcanadianexperience.com/what-we-do#videos

- Resources for including immigrants in the workforce
  http://www.talentpoolhub.com/#!immigrants/c1ubu

- Immigrant and employer success stories
  http://settlementcalgary.com/voicesofcalgary

- Help for Employers
  http://www.albertacanada.com/employers.aspx

- Employer Guidelines
  http://www.albertacanada.com/opportunity/employers/employer-guidelines.aspx

Building Inclusion into Orientation and Onboarding

Having a good orientation and onboarding process in place is essential to the successful integration and retention of new employees and is a sound investment in terms of both time and money. Orientation is the first stage of the onboarding process and primarily serves to familiarize new employees with their job responsibilities, organizational procedures and policies, pay and benefits package, facilities, and the relevant software and tools. Onboarding, on the other hand, continues well past the orientation phase and aims at acclimatizing new employees to the workplace culture. The focus is to help new employees integrate and meet the goals of the organization.

An effective orientation and onboarding process that includes the needs of ITIs requires careful planning because it may mean making adjustments to the processes and policies already in place. The starting point is to recognize and clearly articulate the challenges employers face with integrating ITIs. These challenges differ from one organization to another, but there are some common challenges that many small to medium-sized organizations face.

This section discusses these common challenges and offers some suggestions for making the orientation and onboarding process more inclusive by accommodating the specific needs of ITIs.

Common Challenges for Employers in Retaining and Integrating ITIs

1. Language

Many employers find that their new ITI hires have some challenges with language. Below is a list of the main concerns that employers have and some planning considerations to help address these concerns during the orientation and onboarding process.

Common concerns	Suggestions for addressing the concerns
Understanding: ▸ **organizational policies and procedures** ▸ **important safety and emergency policies and procedures** ▸ **payroll deductions and benefits**	It is good practice to provide new hires with documents that outline organizational and safety policies and procedures and payroll deduction and benefits. These documents can be made more accessible to ITIs by using simpler and plainer English. For example, acronyms, jargon, and long sentences can be barriers to easy comprehension. Review and revise any existing documents to make them more accessible to ITIs. ▸ Alberta Workplace Essential Skills (AWES) offers workshops on plain language principles and workplace integration: http://www.awes.ca/services/workplace-training/ ▸ Assign a language buddy/mentor so that the new ITI hire can easily access a colleague for clarifying information. ▸ Schedule question and answer sessions in the first few weeks. Such sessions will provide valuable opportunities to clarify any information that has not been understood during the orientation. ▸ If feasible, consider hiring an ESL instructor who can offer customized instruction that incorporates information about payroll deductions and benefits and the organization's policies and procedures. ▸ Have important safety signs and emergency procedures translated into the different languages that are understood by the ITIs in the organization.

Common concerns	Suggestions for addressing the concerns

Understanding instructions and directives from supervisors	▸ Provide all supervisors with the following basic information to help facilitate comprehension of instructions:
	  ▸ Communicate the instructions in simple, direct sentences using plain English. Avoid acronyms, slang and jargon.
	  ▸ Talk at a slower pace and enunciate clearly.
	  ▸ Start and end with the most important action needed.
	  ▸ Clarify and confirm information frequently.
	  ▸ Ask open-ended questions to check comprehension.
	  ▸ Be self-aware of tone and body language while doing the above.
	▸ Have a system of regular feedback in place. Good onboarding practices allow for two-way communication.

Communicating effectively with:
  ▸ **coworkers and supervisors**
  ▸ **customers and clients**
	▸ Communication is influenced by one's culture, and it can easily cause misunderstandings at work. Communication includes both verbal and non-verbal aspects. Refer to the section "Becoming Comfortable with Differences" for more information.
	▸ Provide intercultural competency training for all employees to help increase awareness of the potential pitfalls in intercultural communication. For example, jokes generally contain cultural references and nuances of language that ITIs may not be familiar with. Because of this, jokes have the potential to make a newcomer feel like an outsider. Jokes can also include some sensitive content that may be offensive to some cultures.

Common concerns	Suggestions for addressing the concerns
Communicating effectively with: ▸ **coworkers and supervisors** ▸ **customers and clients**	▸ Written communication can also pose many of the same challenges as verbal communication. If regular reports and correspondence are an essential part of the position, allow time and resources for a basic introduction to the organization's expectations around the different types of written communication. Provide completed examples, where possible. ▸ Even ITIs with a fair command of the language might not feel confident about talking on the telephone. Have a manual with telephone etiquette and examples of how to answer and end calls. ▸ Encourage an attitude of open-mindedness towards different pronunciation and vocabulary use within the organization.

2. Culture

Many employers are concerned that ITIs do not integrate easily into the new workplace. Creating an inclusive workplace environment can go a long way towards facilitating the integration of ITIs by reducing acculturative stress. Acculturative stress is the stress caused by acculturation, which is the process of learning and becoming familiar with a new culture. Employers can help reduce this acculturative stress in three main ways:

▸ Have clearly articulated mission and value statements
▸ Use the organization values to guide the onboarding process to help ITIs become familiar with the workplace culture more quickly and easily.
▸ Provide diversity training for all employees.

Below are the two main concerns that employers have and some planning considerations that might help address these concerns during the orientation and onboarding process.

Common concerns	Suggestions for addressing the concerns
Slower to fit in because they are unfamiliar with: ▸ workplace culture ▸ social culture	▸ Have a mission statement, value statements, and policies that clearly articulate your workplace culture. ▸ Encourage each department to come up with their own value statements that reinforce the workplace culture. ▸ Base the onboarding process on the value statements, so the norms are shared and the expectations are recognized. ▸ Provide diversity training at all levels of the organization, so all employees recognize and value differences among cultures. This helps make the workplace more inclusive by developing a positive attitude towards other cultures. It also reduces workplace conflict as people start to see their culture as relative to other cultures and recognize culture's impact on a person's way of thinking and behaviour. (Refer to the sections on "Being Comfortable with Differences" and "Developing Intercultural Competence" for more information.) ▸ Make intercultural competence a core value and include it in the onboarding process. [Refer to the sections on "Becoming Comfortable with Differences" (p.23) and "Developing Intercultural Competence" (p.38) for more information.] ▸ Include the values on the organization's website, so they are easily accessible to all employees.

Common concerns	Suggestions for addressing the concerns

Slower to fit in because they are unfamiliar with:
 	
▸ workplace culture
▸ social culture
	▸ Give clear guidelines on the performance review expectations, process, and techniques. Include self-awareness and intercultural competence goals as part of performance reviews. Examples may be:
	    ▸ Identifies strengths and challenges
	    ▸ Actively seeks out interactions with members of other cultures
	▸ Offer public acknowledgement and awards for the demonstration of intercultural competence.

Religious practices	Different cultures have different norms, beliefs, and practices. Some of the practices may be closely tied to religion. For example, employees may want to pray a certain number of times a day or attend congregational prayers on a certain day of the week. Others may want to leave early on Fridays because they observe Sabbath on Friday night. Wearing turbans and having beards may be very important to others. Some organizations have made accommodations for religious practices such as: ▸ providing a dedicated interfaith meditation space. ▸ being aware of dietary restrictions and providing alternative items at workplace events and social gatherings. ▸ having a work calendar that includes the major cultural and religious holidays. This helps avoid scheduling major meetings, training, and other events on those days. ▸ allowing for flexible scheduling; for example employees can exchange shifts or work extended hours in lieu of the time they need off. During the orientation, it can be made clear that it is the employee's responsibility to inform management if any accommodations are required. Employers can also take the initiative to investigate the kinds of accommodations other religions might require in a workplace. It is important to have anti-harassment policies in place, so employees are aware of what constitutes harassment.

3. Skills

New ITI hires might not demonstrate all the necessary skills that are required for the job. This concern can be addressed in the onboarding process by considering the following:

Technical skills	Research shows that many employers underutilize the technical skills of ITIs. This is often because ITIs demonstrate unfamiliarity with certain processes, systems, methods, instruments, or tools. When proper safety and other regulations are followed, job-shadowing and peer-to-peer practical training are very effective ways to help ITIs learn on the job.
	In many cultures, technical knowledge and skills are valued much more than soft skills. ITIs from such cultures may expect that more weighting will be applied to technical skills in evaluations and performance appraisals.
	The following handbook gives ideas and tools on how to improve employee development (technical and soft skills): http://alis.alberta.ca/pdf/cshop/skillsdesign.pdf
Soft skills	Soft skills are the interpersonal skills that are essential for the effective and competent execution of workplace interactions and duties in culturally and socially acceptable ways. Since they are culturally based, ITIs may need to be familiarized with the soft skills that are valued in the organization. To facilitate this, ‣ have clearly articulated value statements. ‣ identify clear competencies for each position. ‣ identify the soft skills that are required for each position. ‣ have a mentor or a buddy system in place to help the new hire navigate the new workplace culture. ‣ require soft skills goals to be included in performance reviews. ‣ include some training for the development of soft skills. This could include informal mentoring, formal in-house workshops, or in-house online courses. Local institutions may also provide soft-skills training. Some examples of such programs offered online by Bow Valley College are:

Soft Skills	▸ Fit in Fast https://coned.bowvalleycollege.ca/course/ella9883
	▸ Language for Work https://coned.bowvalleycollege.ca/course/ella9885
	▸ Provide opportunities for practising the soft skills; for example, team building exercises.
	▸ Provide tip sheets for soft skill development.

Resources

▸ Essentials to workplace integration – A handbook
http://www.talentpoolhub.com/#!essentials-to-workplace-integration/c162

▸ Workshops for employers
http://www.awes.ca/services/workplace-training/

▸ Integrating and retaining internationally trained workers
http://www.cfeep2p.com/video5_cfee.html

▸ A cultural competence toolkit
http://www.hrma.ca/wp-content/uploads/2012/08/itiguide.pdf

▸ Employer success stories
http://www.hireimmigrants.ca/success-stories/?small
http://www.hireimmigrants.ca/success-stories/?medium

▸ Employer resources for retention and training
http://www.cfeebc.org/resourcekeywords/retention-and-training/

▸ Employing a diverse workforce – Making it work
https://www.albertacanada.com/files/albertacanada/employdiverse.pdf

▸ Duty to accommodate
http://www.albertahumanrights.ab.ca/publications/bulletins_sheets_booklets/bulletins/duty_to_accommodate.asp

▸ Payroll
http://www.cra-arc.gc.ca/tx/bsnss/tpcs/pyrll/mply/menu-eng.html

▸ Employer road maps
http://web.talentpoolhub.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/07/a23874_62b9f87acd464af2964d8e182c95124d.pdf
http://www.hireimmigrants.ca/resources-tools/roadmap/
http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/resources/publications/employers/roadmap/
http://publications.gc.ca/site/archivee-archived.html?url=http://publications.gc.ca/collections/collection_2010/cic/Ci4-16-2010-eng.pdf

▸ Creating an inclusive and supportive workplace environment
http://hrcouncil.ca/hr-toolkit/diversity-supportive-environment.cfm

▸ Interactive tools and resources for employers looking to diversify their workforce
http://albertaglobaltalent.ca

Becoming Comfortable with Differences

Our culture influences how we think, view the world, and behave. Because we learn our culture at a very young age, we are not usually conscious of its influence on us. Beliefs, values, behaviours, and norms can vary from one culture to another. We perceive behaviour as "appropriate" and "normal" when it conforms to our culture's values, beliefs, and norms. When the behaviour does not fit into our notion of what is appropriate and normal, we might get offended or judgmental. This is often the root cause for discord when people from different cultures work together.

Many people assume that identifying similarities with another culture and focusing on them brings about an acceptance of, and an affinity towards, that culture. Identifying similarities is certainly a step towards building a bridge because it establishes commonalities, but we need to go beyond that to demonstrate respect for another culture. We need to acknowledge the differences.

When we focus only on the similarities, there is a good chance that we are ignoring the differences that give the other culture its unique identity. When we do not acknowledge the differences, we are in danger of minimizing and devaluing them; what we may be conveying is that we think our culture is better and that we deem it valid to use it as a yardstick to measure the other. Recognizing and acknowledging that there are other perspectives validates those other perspectives, and this is a very important step towards breaking away from the mold of viewing other cultures purely from our own cultural perspective.

This section discusses some of the main areas of differences that can influence the integration and acceptance of ITIs in a Canadian workplace. Understanding these areas of differences can help identify the:

▸ training needs for ITIs to empower them to integrate more effectively by understanding the workplace culture and developing their intercultural competence (IC)
▸ training needs for supervisors and existing employees to empower them to interact more effectively with people from different cultures by developing their IC.

Intercultural training is best presented as an opportunity to develop an important skillset for being more effective in the workplace. Include the development of noticing skills in the training, so all employees are empowered to intentionally and actively pay attention to their own and others' behaviours.

[Refer to the section "Developing Intercultural Competence" (p.38) for more information.]

Time

Different cultures interpret and understand time in different ways. The clock takes precedence in some cultures, and in others, events and relationships take precedence. People who go by the clock are careful about scheduled appointments and the start time and finish time of meetings and other important events. They also tend to think of time in smaller segments of about five minutes. On the other hand, some cultures put a lot of value on relationships. They view time as something less regimented and more fluid, allowing for a natural conclusion of an event. People who are more event-focused generally think in larger segments of time. This difference in how time is viewed can influence one's perception of:

▸ work hours
▸ arranging and scheduling workloads, and thereby, meeting deadlines
▸ keeping to start and end times of meetings and appointments
▸ taking time off for family and other personal reasons.

Tips to mitigate misunderstandings about time:

▸ Be explicit about the organization's expectations of work hours, break times, and meeting deadlines in onboarding documents.
▸ Make timelines an important focus for projects. Make the timelines realistic and reasonable with time dedicated for wiggle room.
▸ Provide IC training for both supervisors and current employees. Include differences in the perceptions of time in the training.
▸ Provide IC training to all employees during the onboarding process. Include differences in the perceptions of time in the training.

[Refer to the section "Developing Intercultural Competence" (p. 38) for more information.]

Feedback

The way feedback is given varies from one culture to another. Depending on one's cultural orientation, the employee may view the feedback given by a Canadian supervisor as either too indirect or too direct. Three elements of feedback can potentially cause confusion to a newcomer to the Canadian workplace – the method of feedback, the indirect language that is used, and the expectation that feedback is a two-way process.

In many Canadian workplaces, when supervisors give feedback, they generally start and end their feedback with positive remarks that focus on the strengths of the employee. They tend to keep the main part of the feedback and the important action points for development in the middle. Many management books and training manuals propagate this method as being more psychologically conducive to receiving and acting on feedback. However, when cultural orientations and expectations are different, people may focus more on the part that they expect to carry the main message. They might focus their attention only on the positive messaging and ignore the crux of the feedback.

Another element of feedback that can cause confusion is the softening or mitigating language used to make directives more palatable to the receiver of the feedback. This type of delivery is preferred in Canada because it conforms to two very important Canadian values – low power distance and individualism. Low power distance is a preference for a more equal distribution of power. Individualism, on the other hand, is about the personal freedom to make choices and decisions. Because these values are important in the culture, Canadian supervisors may make an effort to couch their suggestions in very polite and indirect language so that they do not sound like they are giving orders and are not at risk of offending the receiver of the feedback. When ITIs are not familiar with these values and norms, they may

not understand the seriousness of feedback such as, "We might want to make more of an effort to be punctual."

ITIs may not always be familiar with the Canadian expectation that the person receiving the feedback will take part in the feedback process, especially in more formal feedback contexts such as a performance appraisal. If ITIs are from cultures that value a large power distance, they may be reluctant to take part in the feedback process because they do not want to seem like they are undermining the supervisor's authority. A Canadian supervisor might misinterpret this as a demonstration of poor attitude and lack of initiative. On the other hand, ITIs may come from cultures where it is acceptable to take part in the feedback process, but where it is natural to explain, ask for specifics, and respond in a more direct and emotionally expressive way. A Canadian supervisor might misinterpret this as a demonstration of argumentative, defensive, or non-compliant behaviour.

Tips to mitigate misunderstandings about expectations of feedback and its process:

- Be explicit about the organization's performance appraisal process during onboarding, including the roles that supervisors and employees play.
- Avoid giving feedback in front of other employees.
- Provide IC training to both supervisors and current employees. Include differences in the expectations of feedback in the training.
- Provide IC training to all employees during the onboarding process. Include differences in the perceptions and expectations of feedback in the training.

[Refer to the section "Developing Intercultural Competence" (p.38) for more information.]

Taking Initiative

Most Canadian employers expect employees to take initiative and carry out tasks with little supervision. This may not be the case in other cultures, where there is often an expectation that employees only act on the directives and approval of a supervisor. ITIs from such cultures may not readily participate in decision-making by offering suggestions or solutions. They might only present a problem and defer to the supervisor to come up with the solution because, in their cultural norm, offering a suggestion or solution might be viewed as presumptuous or indicative of insubordination.

Tips to help all employees understand the organization's culture on taking initiative:

▸ Explain the organization's expectations on taking initiative during the orientation and onboarding process. Provide concrete examples or case studies to illustrate the expectations of taking initiative and the effective ways of doing so.

▸ Encourage supervisors to actively seek out suggestions and solutions from employees.

▸ Provide IC training to both supervisors and current employees.

▸ Provide IC training to all employees during the onboarding process.

▸ In the training, include information about the organization's expectations of taking initiative as well as effective ways of doing so.

[Refer to the section "Developing Intercultural Competence" (p. 38) for more information.]

Boundaries

Culture also determines when boundaries are crossed. Boundaries refer to a culturally-determined space around a person, a person's desk at work, or a person's affairs and private life. When any of these boundaries are crossed, a person may react in a negative way. However, it is easy to offend people when one is unaware of where those boundary lines are drawn.

People in some cultures maintain a bigger space between themselves and the person with whom they are interacting. However, in some cultures, the distance is much smaller and, people stand or sit closer to people when they are interacting. Yet, in other cultures, people might maintain a bigger distance only when conversing with a member of another gender or a stranger. Some cultures are also comfortable with physical contact and are therefore, more comfortable touching each other. In other cultures, physical contact is frowned upon, especially in contexts that are more formal.

Many cultures that are space-conscious will consider an employee's desk to be his/her private space. If people are unaware of the cultural expectations for what constitutes a person's private space in an open-office format, they might feel at liberty to borrow a book or a document without permission, rifle through papers, or even open a desk drawer to look for something.

Another boundary line that is not clearly marked out for newcomers to a culture is what matters people consider as private or public. The notion of small talk is closely related to this. Appropriate topics for small talk and conversation starters are culturally determined. For example, in some cultures, it is completely appropriate to ask about or discuss a health condition, talk about earnings, or ask why someone has not started a family.

In some cultures, people will readily invite casual acquaintances and coworkers to their home for a visit or a meal. They might also expect a reciprocal invitation. However, this is not necessarily the case in Canada, where people are generally more reserved and might prefer to meet coworkers for after-work drinks at a restaurant. A newcomer may also be uncertain about who picks up the tab and might expect the person who made the suggestion in the first place to do so.

Tips to mitigate misunderstandings around boundaries:

- Provide IC training to both supervisors and current employees.
- Provide IC training to all employees during the onboarding process.
- In the training, include information about the differences in how cultures perceive boundaries.

[Refer to the section "Developing Intercultural Competence" (p.38) for more information.]

Communication

1. Oral Communication

Oral communication can cause potential miscommunication and misunderstandings in:

- ▶ meetings
- ▶ team discussions
- ▶ discussions with supervisors
- ▶ dealings with customers and clients
- ▶ informal chats with coworkers
- ▶ presentations.

The three inter-related factors of oral communication that can cause challenges are:

- ▶ what is conveyed
- ▶ when/where, to whom, and why something is conveyed
- ▶ how it is conveyed.

What is conveyed

Grammar, sentence construction, vocabulary, and pronunciation can seriously affect what a person means to convey. They can also affect comprehension of the message. It is obvious that ITIs with a lower language proficiency will face problems in these areas. However, even ITIs who are fluent in English can have some challenges. They may not be familiar with the connotation or interpretation of certain words or phrases in their new culture. They may not readily understand more culture-specific vocabulary such as idioms, specialized industry-specific jargon, and slang.

A strong accent can also be a challenge for some ITIs. Several factors can affect pronunciation and make their accent difficult to understand: stressing the wrong syllable in a word, stressing the wrong word(s) in a sentence, using the wrong intonation, or dropping or adding a word ending. When ITIs are newcomers, they may also have problems understanding a Canadian accent because it might be unfamiliar to them.

Supplementary ESL instruction and exposure to the language usually help ITIs overcome the above challenges. However, the following are some useful tips for communicating with ITIs who have a lower level of language proficiency:

- ▶ use simple sentences and less complex words
- ▶ avoid slang and idioms
- ▶ enunciate clearly
- ▶ check comprehension of both parties by actively clarifying and confirming
- ▶ restate important information in other ways
- ▶ start and end with the most important action item
- ▶ use words to clearly mark repetition, digression, important steps, etc. For example, if you want to digress from the main message to another point, make this clear with both an introductory and an exit phrase such as "Before I continue, I want to remind you that…" or "Now, going back to the point I was making, …"
- ▶ slow down, if you tend to speak at a quicker pace
- ▶ be open to different grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. Having an open mind will help overcome confusion around understanding accents that are unfamiliar.

Where/when, why, and to whom it is conveyed

Culture plays a big part here. The rules that govern these aspects are not just learned by studying grammar and vocabulary. ITIs need to have the necessary underlying cultural information to modify and regulate their language to meet the local cultural expectations around context (formal, semi-formal, informal), purpose (meetings, presentations, etc.), and audience (client, co-worker, supervisor). For example, an ITI who comes from a culture that values a high power distance and accepts that power is distributed unequally, may demonstrate behaviour and language to his/her boss that is considered excessively formal in the local culture. This could lead to an assumption that he/she is being servile or ingratiating.

Something that is perfectly appropriate in a specific context and situation in one culture can be entirely inappropriate in another. The same applies to purpose and audience. When someone does not meet the cultural expectations in these areas, people tend to be less forgiving because they make assumptions and judge others based on their own culture's values and norms.

How it is conveyed

Culture also plays a big role here. The following factors can affect how the message is conveyed:

1. Style

Some cultures prefer a more direct way of communicating. People from such cultures will use straightforward and precise language and feel that it is their responsibility to get the message across to the listener. They are not comfortable with long pauses and periods of silence and generally make an effort to fill the silence.

Other cultures place more value on not offending others. People from such cultures prefer a more indirect way of communicating and usually resort to more diplomatic language accompanied by other subtle messages that are conveyed through pauses, silence, gestures, and other forms of non-verbal communication. They consider silence, hesitation, and pauses as important parts of communication. They put the onus on the listener to interpret and decode the message by paying attention to both the verbal and non-verbal aspects.

A person who prefers a more direct style of communication may pay attention to only the words and overlook the cues from the more subtle features of communication used by the person who prefers a more indirect style of communication. He/she might also assume that the person is being dishonest or might even miss the actual message entirely by taking the words only at face value.

Another cultural difference in style is how emotionally expressive people are when they talk. Some cultures value communication that is emotionally restrained and others value communication that is more emotionally expressive. People from cultures with a preference for emotional restraint tend to speak in a more even volume and tone. However, people from cultures that are emotionally expressive tend to be louder, more animated, and more

passionate when they speak. Depending where the culture is on the continuum of preference for emotional restraint or expressiveness, there will be even greater variations of tone and volume.

People who come from cultures that value emotional restraint may be very offended by people who are emotionally expressive. They might think that they are lacking in maturity or being rude and argumentative. Conversely, people from more expressive cultures tend to judge emotionally-restrained communication as cold or distant.

People from some of the more expressive cultures also tend to talk in an overlapping style and are more comfortable with interruptions and talking at the same time. When there is a difference in cultural expectations of how much time must lapse between when a person stops speaking and when another takes up the conversation, there is often room for misunderstandings. Depending on one's cultural orientation, too short a pause can be perceived as an interruption and too long a pause might lead to an assumption that the person is either ignorant on the subject or does not want to contribute to the discussion.

2. Eye Contact

In Canada, many people tend to judge others by the eye contact that they make during an interaction. If there is insufficient eye contact, they tend to assume that the person is being dishonest. This can be a problem because eye contact and the length of time one holds the eye contact (gaze) are culturally determined.

Some cultures prefer very little or no eye contact, especially between superiors and subordinates. In other cultures, people avoid eye contact when talking to another gender. The gaze can also vary. This can also lead to misunderstandings. For example, in cultures that prefer a shorter gaze, a longer gaze might signal a crossing of boundaries.

3. Organization

Some cultures value an objective and linear way of thinking. People from such cultures tend to begin with facts, figures, and models when they want to illustrate a point. They generally organize their thoughts and present them in a linear way, point by point. They have a clear introduction and conclusion. The vocabulary used is also more straightforward and more polarized (e.g., love vs. hate) (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012).

Other cultures value a more subjective and circular way of thinking and reasoning. Even cultures that are more subjective and circular in the way they organize their thoughts can differ from each other. Some prefer to use more dramatic and demonstrative vocabulary and resort to digressions and repetitions to reinforce their point. Others prefer a more sedate and subtle approach to reinforcing their point. They might not have a clear introduction and often leave the conclusion to the listener to interpret. They may also prefer less polarized and more indirect vocabulary (Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012).

4. Gestures and facial expressions

Some facial expressions are universal, but when and how people display them are culturally determined. Some cultures value emotional restraint and may not encourage an active display of facial expressions. Others that are more expressive may encourage more

display. Depending on the cultural orientation, these differences can cause a person to judge the other by thinking of them as either immature or not being straightforward.

Gestures tend to be culture-specific and can vary from one culture to another. The simple Canadian gesture of crooking the finger and beckoning a person is regarded as being extremely insulting in some cultures, where such a gesture is only used when beckoning someone in a very arrogant and derogatory way.

Tips on mitigating misunderstanding in oral communication:

▸ Provide IC training for both supervisors and current employees.

▸ Provide IC training to all employees during the onboarding process.

▸ Include information about the cultural differences in oral communication in the training.

[Refer to the section "Developing Intercultural Competence" (p.38) for more information.]

2. Written Communication

Written communication is cause for potential miscommunication and misunderstandings in:

- email and memos
- social media
- text messages.

The three main areas of written communication that can cause challenges are:

- what is conveyed
- when/where, to whom, and why something is conveyed
- how it is conveyed.

What is conveyed

Grammar, sentence construction, vocabulary, and punctuation can seriously affect what a person means to convey. They can also affect comprehension of the message. It is obvious that ITIs with a lower language proficiency will face problems in these areas. However, even ITIs who are fluent in English can have some challenges. They may not always understand a connotation or interpretation of a word as used in their new culture. They may not readily understand more culture-specific vocabulary such as idioms, specialized industrial jargon, and slang. They might also use certain words and phrases in ways unfamiliar to the Canadian reader.

Punctuation can be a problem, too. In languages with different punctuation rules, commas might replace periods. The rules of capitalization may also be different.

Supplementary ESL instruction and exposure to the language usually help overcome the above challenges. However, the following are some useful tips for communicating with ITIs who are not very proficient in the language:

- use simple sentences and less complex words
- avoid slang and idioms
- rephrase and restate important information
- highlight the most important action item by using a marker phrase like, "Most importantly"
- use shorter paragraphs
- use bullets to list items more clearly

When/where, why, and to whom it is conveyed

Context, situation, purpose, and audience dictate what is appropriate and what modifications to language have to be made. Culture determines what modifications need to be made to the content to suit these conditions. A person who is new to a culture may not have enough cultural information to make the appropriate modifications and might present writing that appears inappropriate for a purpose, context, or audience. For example, he/she might be too casual or too formal in an email to a coworker.

How it is conveyed

The main cultural differences that cause challenges in written communication are in the following areas:

1. Organization

In Canada, writers are responsible for making ideas clear to the reader. The ideas are organized in a linear way, point by point. The writing is focused, and there are clear paragraphs that have a central point, which is supported by details. The details generally come after the main idea. Words and phrases are generally used to help make the organization clear to the reader. However, in some cultures, there is a preference for organizing and presenting ideas in a more circular and indirect way. The details may come first and the main idea later. Digressions to other seemingly unrelated details and repetitions can illustrate points. The main point may be stated indirectly after an explanation is offered. The reader is expected to make the connections; it might even be seen as insulting the reader's ability to comprehend if ideas are explained too clearly.

2. Subjective vs. objective

In Canada, there is a general expectation that business documents and correspondence are objective. Data and facts generally illustrate points and form a basis for further explanation. People are not comfortable with effusive, flowery language and an overt display of emotion in business documents and correspondence. In other cultures, however, writing is more subjective and emotional and can contain a lot of metaphors and flowery language. A person from such a culture may sound verbose or false in an email.

3. An understanding of the format and structure of documents and correspondence

ITIs who have experience in the field will most likely be familiar with the types of documents and correspondence that are commonly used in the field. However, there may be differences in the format and structure of the documents and correspondence between cultures. ITIs may also not be familiar with the technology and software used to present or complete certain documents.

Tips on mitigating intercultural misunderstandings in written communication:

a. Help ITIs understand the organization's expectations of how reports and other documents are presented by familiarizing them with templates and examples. Also, familiarize them with the software being used. Make time for this in the onboarding process.

b. Provide IC training for both supervisors and current employees.

c. Provide IC training to all employees during the onboarding process.

d. Include information about the cultural differences in written communication in the training.

[Refer to the section "Developing Intercultural Competence" (p.38) for more information.]

Conflict Style

Conflict can arise out of many situations and contexts in the workplace. In an intercultural work environment, it can also arise out of a lack of knowledge and appreciation of the differences among cultures.

What causes conflict

Our cultures provide us with the framework of what is right and wrong. This framework ingrains in us a set of values, beliefs, and norms to such an extent that it develops in us a perspective and outlook with which we view the rest of the world. It is from this vantage point that we tend to perceive and judge the "digressions" of others. According to intercultural communication experts Ting-Toomey and Chung (2012), the two value dimensions that have an impact on intercultural workplace conflict are:

1. **Large vs. small power distance**
   Cultures that value a large power distance tend to be comfortable with hierarchy and an unequal distribution of power. People from such cultures expect to be told what to do by their supervisors, whereas cultures that value a small power distance tend to prefer a more equal distribution of power and are not comfortable with an overt display of status at work. People from such cultures are more informal in the workplace and expect equal rights.

2. **Individualism vs. collectivism**
   Cultures that value individualism tend to believe that individual rights are more important than group rights. In such cultures, an individual is expected to be independent. On the other hand, cultures that value collectivism tend to believe that group rights trump individual rights. Group harmony is very significant in these cultures, and a lot of effort is put into maintaining it at all times.

Apart from a clash of values, conflict can also arise from personal or team goals not being met. Emotional security can also be a cause for conflict. For example, a person may be afraid that a coworker is being favoured by his/her boss.

How conflict is dealt with

The way people express themselves and interact in a conflict situation is also very important because it affects the outcome. The way we deal with conflict is learned through our culture and life experience and is greatly influenced by our communication style:

- Direct or indirect
- Expressive or emotionally restrained

According to Hammer (2009a), this establishes four different conflict styles:

1. Discussion
   People with this style use direct communication strategies but exhibit a more emotionally restrained demeanor during conflict.

2. Engagement
   People with this style use direct communication strategies but engage in a more emotionally expressive way during the conflict.

3. Accommodation
   People with this style use indirect communication strategies and prefer emotional restraint.

4. Dynamic
   People with this style use indirect communication strategies but are emotionally expressive.

The normative conflict style in Canada is the Discussion style and supervisors with this style are very likely to judge and marginalize people with other conflict styles. For example, they might judge people who have the Engagement style as rude and aggressive.

Tips on being more effective in a conflict situation:

- Learn how culture can impact both communication and conflict styles.
- Learn more about the values that are important to the cultures represented in the organization.
- Learn about the preferred communication and conflict styles in the cultures represented in the organization.
- Disseminate information about the organization's expectations of how conflicts should be handled.
- Encourage all employees to become self-aware of their own biases and perceptions so that they are capable of checking their assumptions.
- Practice mindful listening by paying attention to both the verbal and non-verbal aspects of the other person's communication. Clarify your understanding and assumptions by framing your questions in culturally appropriate ways.
- Intentionally modify and adapt your communication and behaviour to make it more appropriate to your audience and more effective in the context.
- Reframe the situation to a more positive one. For example, if you perceive a complaint, reframe it as a suggestion.
- Help all employees discover their own conflict style and develop strategies for better conflict management. One way to do this is to provide opportunities to take the Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory and complete a training session to become aware of other styles. Read more about the Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory at http://www.icsinventory.com/

  You can also contact the Centre for Excellence in Immigrant and Intercultural Advancement (CEIIA) at Bow Valley College for further information and training (403.410.3413).

Resources

▸ Let's talk: A guide to resolving workplace conflict
https://alis.alberta.ca/pdf/cshop/letstalk.pdf

▸ Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory
http://www.icsinventory.com/

▸ Cultural information on Canada from Global Affairs Canada
https://www.international.gc.ca/cil-cai/country_insights-apercus_pays/ci-ic_ca.aspx?lang=eng

▸ Dimensions of national culture
https://geert-hofstede.com/national-culture.html

▸ Tools and publications from Alberta Workforce Essential Skills
http://www.awes.ca/services/tools-and-publications/

▸ Workshops for employers from Alberta Workforce Essential Skills
http://www.awes.ca/services/workplace-training/

▸ Non-verbal communication modes
https://www.andrews.edu/~tidwell/bsad560/NonVerbal.html

▸ Diversity and inclusion in the workplace – an interactive web resource for employers
http://www.work.alberta.ca/apps/fqr/course

Developing Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence (IC) is crucial in today's work environment. When there is a culture of expectation that only the newcomers to an organization must make changes in order to fit in, there is a danger of propagating the idea of assimilation. When we expect assimilation in the workplace, we perceive our culture as the benchmark standard and expect newcomers to give up their ways and adopt ours. We also ignore the need for reciprocal changes that are imperative to the more inclusive environment of integration. When there is a culture of integration, both the newcomers and the current members of the organization, are expected to make the necessary changes that are required for a harmonious working relationship. Integration helps make the workplace more equitable and inclusive. Establishing an inclusive workplace culture through the development of intercultural competence at all levels in an organization can help:

‣ foster a climate of respect and acceptance

‣ reduce workplace conflict

‣ increase the overall productivity of employees

‣ facilitate the acceptance and the retention of ITIs.

Culture

Culture can be defined as, "a learned meaning system that consists of patterns of traditions, beliefs, values, norms, meanings, and symbols that are passed on from one generation to the next and are shared to varying degrees by interacting members of a community."*

There are three levels of culture, and some levels of culture are more visible than others.* They are:

‣ Surface-level culture

‣ Intermediate-level culture

‣ Deep-level culture

*Ting-Toomey & Chung, 2012

The three levels of culture have an impact on cross-cultural adjustments for both the ITIs and the other employees. The aspects of surface-level culture are obvious and are easier to adjust to. However, the intermediate-level and the deep-level cultures are the blind-spot areas because they contain the less obvious and unspoken norms and values of a culture. As a consequence, it is these two areas that can have the most serious repercussions on workplace interactions, thereby potentially resulting in:

‣ workplace conflict

‣ absenteeism

‣ high turnover and poor retention.

The iceberg analogy below is often used to illustrate this:

Clearly visible (above the waterline) — examples: music, dress, food

Somewhat visible but murky (just below the waterline) — symbols, meanings, and norms (Examples: gestures, interpretations of words, idioms)

Not visible (well below waterline) — traditions, beliefs, and values

Figure 1. Illustration of the iceberg analogy of the three levels of culture

Difference Between Stereotypes and Generalizations

Both stereotypes and generalizations are broad descriptive statements and are often used when talking about cultures. Stereotypes are interpretations of a group that are very limited in perspective. They are negative statements that put all individuals of a culture into the same mold. On the other hand, generalizations are based on facts and studies and provide us with a framework that we can use to talk about a culture in general terms. Individual variations to the norm always exist within cultures, but generalizations refer to a culture's propensity towards a particular value, belief, or a behavioural norm.

Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence (IC) is a learned skill and is acquired over an extended period of time. It comprises three essential elements:

- ▸ Attitudes (valuing other cultures, being open to and curious about differences, and being comfortable with differences)
- ▸ Knowledge (includes both knowledge of other cultures and knowledge of one's own culture)
- ▸ Skills (listening, observing, and using critical-thinking skills to evaluate)

According to Deardorff (2006), having the necessary attitudes, knowledge, and skills leads to an internal shift in perspective. This shift in internal perspective then enables one to communicate and behave appropriately and effectively when dealing with people from other cultures.

Developing Intercultural Competence

Intercultural competence is developed in stages. According to Hammer (2009b), the stages one goes through during intercultural development are:

Monocultural Perspective (My culture is the standard.)	Transitional Perspective (My culture is the standard, but I recognize and value our similarities.)	Intercultural Perspective (My culture is relative to other cultures.)
Denial → Polarization	→ Minimization →	Acceptance → Adaptation

Denial

Individuals at this stage:

- feel disinterested in other cultures
- avoid interactions with people from other cultures
- have stereotypical notions of other cultures

Effect on workplace environment

- When there is a culture of denial in a workplace, employees from non-dominant cultures feel ignored.

Polarization

This perspective can exhibit in two different ways:

Defense:

Individuals are judgemental about other cultures and view other cultures as inferior to their own. They are not comfortable with their environment being diverse.

Minimization

Individuals at this stage of intercultural development still have a predominately ethnocentric perspective, but they seek out similarities in cultural and universal values.

Individuals of the dominant culture most likely take this perspective when they do not have enough awareness of their own culture and other cultures.

Individuals from non-dominant cultures might use this as a strategy to be accepted by members of the dominant culture.

Effect on workplace environment:

- When there is a culture of minimization in a workplace, employees from non-dominant cultures feel that some of their needs are recognized.

Acceptance

Individuals at this stage:

- have made an internal cognitive shift in their perspective
- have a deeper understanding of other cultures
- recognize and value both similarities and differences
- are curious and want to learn about other cultures
- have an awareness of their own cultural orientation
- are able to reflect on their own feelings and interactions with other cultures
- do not have the necessary skills to deal appropriately and effectively with differences.

Monocultural Perspective (My culture is the standard.)	Transitional Perspective (My culture is the standard, but I recognize and value our similarities.)	Intercultural Perspective (My culture is relative to other cultures.)
Reversal: Individuals devalue their own culture and glorify the other culture. **Effect on workplace environment:** ▸ When there is a culture of polarization in a workplace, employees from non-dominant cultures feel unsettled and ill–at–ease.		**Effect on workplace environment:** ▸ When there is a culture of acceptance in a workplace, employees from non-dominant cultures feel that their needs are recognized and acknowledged. **Adaptation** Individuals at this stage: ▸ successfully leverage the internal cognitive shift they made at the acceptance stage to demonstrate an external change in behaviour ▸ behave effectively and appropriately in intercultural contexts ▸ have a deep understanding of other cultural frameworks ▸ may show low tolerance to people at the other developmental stages. **Effect on workplace environment:** ▸ When there is a culture of adaptation in a workplace, employees from non-dominant cultures feel secure in the inclusive environment where diversity is actively valued and diverse individuals are engaged and involved.

Adapted visualization of M.R. Hammer's Intercultural Development Continuum

Developing IC is crucial to building an inclusive workplace environment. The stage of development that an individual, or a group of employees, is in clearly provides insight into their perspective and their ability to interact appropriately and effectively in an intercultural workplace context.

To learn more about intercultural development and where you and your employees are on the intercultural development continuum, take the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI). Learn more at:

https://idiinventory.com/products/the-intercultural-development-inventory-idi/

Bow Valley College has IDI Qualified Administrators who can interpret and provide feedback on individual and group IDI profiles of intercultural competence. Bow Valley College can also offer customized training for your employees. For more information, contact: 403.410.3413.

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