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CIT4VET – Open Online Catalogue of  
Intercultural Tools for Vocational  
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## IO 2: Guidelines for Practical Application of Intercultural Aspects in VET Context

### **PART B: Guidelines on dealing with cultural diversity in your training sessions**

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#### 0. Introduction

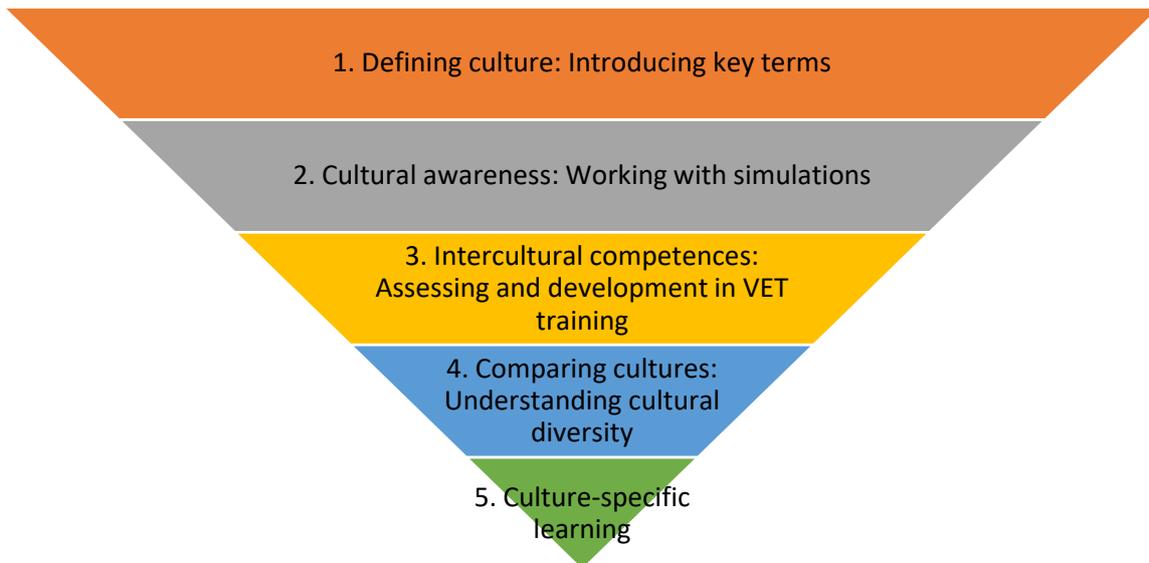
As a vocational educator or trainer, you may often wish you knew more about culture, and how it influences people's behaviour. Perhaps you are delivering communication skills training to culturally diverse groups, and you wonder how you might make everybody feel comfortable asking questions and engaging in discussions. Perhaps you work as a team trainer in the IT sector, and in some of your teams, factions have formed consisting of people from the same countries. Maybe you work in the healthcare sector, and your colleagues need to better communicate with patients from other cultures. VET in today's culturally diverse work environment poses a range of new challenges and questions, for example:

- How can I ensure a good learning experience for everybody? Cultural factors should not get in the way, but I do not want to address cultural differences head on.
- The group of participants has issues with its cultural diversity. How can I support them in dealing with their differences?
- Participants are aware that cultural backgrounds can be very diverse, but they do not know how to deal with the differences. How can I help them feel more comfortable addressing their differences?
- I would like to support my client with a training on dealing constructively with cultural differences – how can I do that?

The CIT4VET platform offers ideas and insights, tools and theory that will help you deal with questions like those above. In this section of the CIT4VET material, you will find guidelines on how to address the role of culture and cultural diversity in your training.

The structure of the guidelines was inspired by the *SuGar Funnel* developed by Susanne Dranaz and Gary Thomas (2019) to provide a systematic overview on typical methods and contents of intercultural training. It is a tool for intercultural training design, connecting training goals,

contents and methods and suggesting a sequence for addressing them. The funnel starts with culture general topics as introductory material fitting a variety of training objectives and formats, and it ends with culture specific topics with learner-specific goals and formats.



### 1. Defining culture: Introducing key terms

When delivering an intercultural training, you will need to introduce some key concepts and theoretical assumptions. In this section, we present different ways in which you could introduce concepts and theory in an engaging, interactive way.

### 2. Cultural awareness: Working with simulations

This section explains the concept of cultural awareness, and why it is important. You will learn about cultural simulations as an engaging and challenging method for raising your learners' cultural awareness in an intercultural training. We discuss the risks of working with simulations, how to manage those risks, and present a checklist for working with simulations and exercises in general. In addition, you will find a detailed example of a concrete cultural simulation and references to additional simulations that have been developed by intercultural professionals.

### 3. Intercultural competences: Assessment and development in VET training

In this section, we discuss the importance of intercultural competences in intercultural training: By developing these competences, your learners can start to translate their increased cultural awareness and knowledge of cultures into meaningful action. The section will help you decide which intercultural competences to focus on in your training, and how to select between available instruments for assessing intercultural competences. Where applicable, we will point out the exercises and learning material for training these competences that are provided in the CIT4VET database.

#### 4. Comparing cultures: Understanding cultural diversity

This section provides examples of how you could introduce the cultural concepts of the 'onion' or 'iceberg' models of culture to a group of learners in an interactive, engaging process that keeps their attention on the practical implications of the session. You will also find helpful tips for introducing the more demanding models of dimensions of cultural differences, the best ones of which are based on thorough research. We also illustrate the practical implications of theoretical models, using the example of the cultural dimension of Low power distance / High power distance proposed by Geert Hofstede (2005; Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov, 2017). You will find links to questionnaires for your learners to explore the cultural dimensions in more detail, and an example of a critical incident, with debrief questions, illustrating the impact of the cultural dimensions Low power distance / High power distance.

#### 5. Culture-specific learning

If your learners want to gain a more in-depth understanding of one or a few specific countries and their cultural contexts, this section will be of interest to you. Culture-specific information is helpful for gaining country-related insights into religious backgrounds, historical developments as well as political and social institutions and how they function. There are different methods to design such a training, including case studies and critical incidents (discussed briefly in Section 4), and techniques based on the cultural standards approach (see, for example, Kinast, Schroll-Machl, Thomas and Weston-Horsmann, 2010). Often learners expect to receive a list of Do's and Don'ts about a country. In this section, we therefore discuss how to deal with Do's and Don'ts in a culture-specific session in a meaningful and constructive way.

We wish you an enjoyable learning session!

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Hofstede, G., 2005. *Culture's Consequences*. Newbury Park: Sage.

Kinast, E., Schroll-Machl, S., Thomas, A. and Weston-Horsmann, C., 2010. *Handbook of Intercultural Communication and Cooperation*. Göttingen, Niedersachsen: Vandenhoeck et Ruprecht.

## 1. Defining culture: Introducing key terms

As a VET trainer delivering intercultural training and focusing on enhancing intercultural skills and competences of your participants, you may notice that it can be helpful to introduce key

terms, definitions and introductory theory elements for participants to gain a deeper understanding of the topic they are working on. Here we will describe three ways of introducing the terms in an interactive way.

### 1. Flipped Classroom

Introduction of the key term XXXX (for example 'culture').

1. Divide your participants in pairs or small groups.
2. Ask your participants to discuss in their group what XXXX (for example 'culture') means for them.
3. Ask them to write down briefly on one or two cards (a single word or a short phrase would be enough) what is their common understanding - or maybe different understanding - of the term. Or you could use flip-chart paper that the participants can share in a plenum format with everyone when they have finished their discussions in their groups.
4. Tell your participants to be prepared to share their findings with the entire group.
5. When you think your participants have arrived at a conclusion, ask them to share their thoughts with the entire group.
6. Let participants show their card(s) and explain what they wrote. As an alternative method you can gather a card from a participant and pin it on a board. The participant explains what he/she wrote while you pin the card. You repeat this procedure till all participants have shared their cards.
7. Thank your participants for their contributions.
8. Tell your participants that you will now introduce one (or more) well known definition(s) of the term. Explain that aspects of what they gathered are contained in the definition you will present.
9. If you have diverse groups of participants in your training you might ask them to first define the concept of culture and then add some specific examples from their own cultural background; for example, specific traditions, customs and values. This adds a more applied option to the theory.

Sometimes participants in trainings may feel overwhelmed by too much theory. Introducing definitions of key terms or other parts of theory in an "active way" involving participants by asking them to share their thoughts and contributions helps to reduce the negative attitude some participants may have. This didactic approach mirrors the "flipped classroom" idea: you follow up with the theory after the participants have discussed the concept. After having shared their thoughts, participants will be curious and ready to compare their contribution with the acknowledged one.

## 2. Share your stories

To introduce the concept of culture, ask learners to work in small groups and to tell each other about a situation where they wished they had known more about culture. Secondly you ask them to select the best story for plenary report back. The group have about 15 minutes to do so.

After the 15 minutes, you collect from each group the story they like best. You may also want them to write down a title for their story on a large post-it or on flipchart paper, so that you can later refer to it.

Next, you ask the group how they would define culture. Usually, they will list aspects of culture like *religion, tradition, norms, and values*, which you write down on the flipchart. Once they have listed enough aspects, you can then introduce the definition of culture that you find most appropriate. Expect them to ask which group your definition of culture refers to. In the Training Materials of the CIT4VET website, you will find, under *Module 1: Concepts of Culture*, how different authors have suggested to deal with this question [<https://cit4vet.erasmus.site/module-1-the-concept-of-culture/>]

Through the story-telling format, learners can get to know and learn from each other about their intercultural experiences and reflections about cultural diversity. The stories they select will provide interesting examples to refer back to later in the course and will also help you assess how quickly you can lead the group to the more demanding and complex topics of your intercultural training.

## 2. Cultural awareness: Working with simulations

### Introduction

The term “intercultural awareness” refers to the individual’s own understanding of cultural differences and similarities between people. Intercultural awareness is not equally pronounced in everyone and can be trained.

The term is associated with Milton J. Bennett's concept (DMIS model) that people go through different stages from "ethnocentric" to "ethnorelative" in their learning process towards greater intercultural sensitivity. In the first three "ethnocentric" stages, people are not or only little familiar with other cultures and thus not (1st stage) or only little aware of the differences between cultures. In the following three ethnorelative stages, otherness is increasingly perceived, accepted, and integrated (Ang-Stein 2015).

As intercultural trainer, why should you use simulations in your trainings?

In trainings, simulations can work as a door-opener helping participants to perceive intercultural experiences in a new way. Simulations are often used as a tool in intercultural training for engaging participants and enhancing intercultural awareness. Simulations are

embedded in the theory of experiential learning and therefore thought to be an appropriate method when cognitive and emotional learning shall be combined to support an action-oriented learning outcome. See Guide on Simulations <https://cit4vet.erasmus.site/developing-simulations-for-intercultural-trainings>

The use of simulations in trainings generates often a strong “AHA! Effect” (see Behrnd 2010), because simulations have the advantage of showing in an unmediated way differences and similarities in cultural values, rules, attitudes etc.

Thus, simulations are often done at the beginning of a training as to enhance curiosity by participants. They can also be applied in the second half of a training when it comes to exemplify different modes of action and attitudes between cultures.

What are the risks of implementing simulations in intercultural training?

When they work well, simulations are a very powerful tool that involves learning on the cognitive and the emotional level. But not always simulations seem to work. Here are some reasons:

1. Depending on their own cultural background, participants may engage easily in interactive exercises. Consider that some cultures are used to more formal learner-teacher interaction than other (see Hofstede 1999; Module 3 [Link to Module 3]).
2. Be prepared as a trainer to compensate for emotional reactions. As a trainer you need to understand that any behaviour or reaction by participants is acceptable and possible. The participants determine how far they allow themselves to get involved and how intense the experience should become. Hofstede (1999) cautions that “simulations are counterproductive if their objective conflicts with strong opinions held by participants” (see also Ang-Stein 2015). Be aware that the emotions of your participants may reflect also on you as a trainer. Be prepared to be confronted with feelings your participants raised in yourself. In this case it may be important to keep in mind a clear distinction between you and your participants.
3. Simulations may be ineffective when the scenario, the roles of participants, the task are either too complex or too simple or not appropriate for participants (see Hofstede 1999, Ang-Stein 2015). Participants may feel that in these cases a scenario is not realistic.
4. Simulations may not work when participants have not identified enough with their roles. In these cases they won’t “feel” the simulations. That means that the learning experience will not be intense enough on an emotional level.

How can you prevent the risks/ineffectiveness?

1. In order to be sure participants engage in a simulation activity, inquire, if possible, about their cultural background. If they are not used to interactive learning environment, give yourself time to explain why such a learning experience can be helpful for future intercultural encounters.

2. To engage participants in a simulation, invest time as trainer in a thorough development of the idea, the scenario, the roles etc. Adapt it to the needs of your participants (see also Behrnd 2010).
3. To be sure your participants engage in the simulation, give clear instructions, follow your participants during the phase they prepare their roles, make them identify with their role (Hofstede 1999).
4. Think in advance about the emotions your simulation may arouse. Be prepared to cope with them.
5. In order to prevent the simulation being ineffective, make sure your debrief questions are appropriate to your simulation and your participants. Make sure you give room for the expression of emotions (Hofstede 1999) and feed the interest of your participants about other cultures (Ang-Stein 2015).

#### What are the benefits for participants?

As a technique of experiential learning participants of a simulation can make new intercultural experiences in a safe setting (Hofstede/Pedersen 1999). Participants can learn on various levels:

Simulations can enhance personal growth by giving the opportunity to change behavioural patterns and attitudes towards other cultures. Participants of simulations experience that attitudes like openness, tolerance, flexibility, and empathy can be helpful in an intercultural encounter (see Behrnd 2010).

Participants of simulations can also practice communicative skills important in an intercultural encounter like question and listening techniques, feedback, direct-indirect communication strategies etc. (see Hofstede 1999).

Participant can also test and practice new action strategies like problem solving without having to fear social sanctions (see Behrnd 2010).

Thanks to their straightforward way of creating opportunities for new intercultural encounters as if in real life, simulations are a helpful tool in intercultural training. Framed correctly and adapted to the needs and learning objectives target group simulations work for almost all kinds of groups.

For some examples of some well-known simulations, for example BAFA BAFA or Derdians, please consult the CIT4VET database:

- Visiting the Derdians <https://cit4vet.erasmus.site/Derdians>
- BAFA BAFA <https://cit4vet.erasmus.site/BAFA>

Here are some more well-known simulations:

AFTER NAFTA – A cross-cultural negotiation exercise (Butler, 1996): a role-play for at least 2 participants. As the title says, the simulation can be used for letting participants experience different negotiation styles according to different cultural backgrounds.

ALBATROS (Gochenour, 1993): a role play for groups. Participants shall imagine a visit to the 'Island of Albatros' and are invited to observe the customs of the inhabitants while the inhabitants welcome them.

BARNGA (Thiagarajan & Steinwachs, 1990): a card game for groups. Participants experience how people act and react according to different values and rules.

ECOTONOS – A simulation for collaborating across cultures (1995): A complex role play that permits to experience new rules of behaviour, values, and cultural options.

For more details see also for example Fowler, S. M. and Pusch, M. D. (2010).

### Checklist moderator tasks for simulations and exercises in general

1. Did you select and prepare simulations, role-plays and exercises which are appropriate for reaching the learning goal?
2. Did you select and prepare simulations, role-plays and exercises which are appropriate for your target group?
3. Have you organised the material needed for the simulation or other exercises?
4. Have you prepared the instructions to hand out to your participants?
5. Have you thoroughly prepared your debrief phase? Are you ready to help to analyse the intercultural elements of the simulation or exercise and to assist the participants in reaching their conclusions?
6. Are you prepared to constantly observe and perceive the group process?
7. Are you prepared to animate and encourage the participants to be willing to participate in the exercise?
8. Are you prepared to assist your participants in gaining awareness of themselves, their usual behaviour, and attitudes?
9. Will you allow authentic self-determination by the participants, even when participants show doubt, resignation or refusal when participating in the exercise? These reactions are also helpful in illustrating cultural behaviour.



10. Are you prepared to answer questions on how participants can apply to and integrate in their cultural context and intercultural encounters?

### Example of a simulation

1. Title: **BAFA BAFA**

2. Goal of the simulation:

The goal of this simulation is raising and enhancing intercultural awareness as well as training intercultural cooperation.

This type of activity induces participants to reflect and explore new types of behaviour to be able to understand other cultures better. Participants need to be put into a situation where they must interact spontaneously so that they can experience new patterns of behaviour. The activity brings participants to look for new ways of recognising and overcoming intercultural challenges more easily.

3. The intercultural scenario:

The basic concept of the simulation consists of one group of participants representing one culture and another group representing another culture, and both having to understand each other.

Alpha and Beta represent two different cultures. Both groups visit each other and try to understand the respective social rules by interacting with one another. The Alpha culture is highly hierarchical and family oriented. Relationships and physical rapport are very important. Alphas are not very competitive.

The Beta culture is highly competitive. Their philosophy is “time is money”. The status of a person is related to the material wealth obtained by performing well at work. Betas like to trade and negotiate, they have even developed a particular trading language.

Sanctions occur when social norms are violated.

4. Tasks for participants/teams/trainers:

For teams: During the preparations, the groups are not allowed to see each other, as they are not allowed to find out the goals of the other side’s strategy nor the other group’s intercultural script. Each group receives written instructions and decides on how best to proceed.

The simulation ends when all participants from both groups have interacted with each other.

The task of the supervising trainer is to:

- Help split participants into 2 groups
- Distribute the scripts for group A and B
- Give a short introduction to the situation
- Ensure participants do not communicate before the activity
- Ensure that the groups behave according to their culture standards
- Moderate the post-simulation evaluation
- Collate the results in written form.

5. Script for team or person A:

The Alphas' cultural script:

- Physical contact: Alphas like physical contact and like to touch each other. Avoiding physical contact means "I don't like you".
- Internal social relationships and hierarchies: Social rank is very important to Alphas.
- Greetings: Among each other, Alphas shake the left arm of the counterpart just below the elbow and say "How is your family?" They never do this with strangers. Strangers are touched by the right arm.
- Relationships to strangers: Alphas are friendly and polite to strangers. Respecting correct greeting forms is very important to them.
- Communication and language habits: Alphas must touch each other before starting a conversation. Alphas enjoy talking about family. Elder members of the group lead the conversation.
- Relationships between genders: Alpha women can only start greeting formalities with other Alpha females, Alpha men can greet men and women. Breaking this rule is a great offence.
- Alpha goals: Alpha like to collect and trade small items. These items are also the Alpha group's currency.

6. Script for team or person B:

The Betas' cultural script:

- Physical contact: Betas avoid physical contact and find it unpleasant. They won't trade with anybody who touches them on the shoulder.
- Greeting: Betas greet with a friendly nod of the head.

- Internal social relationships and hierarchies: For Betas, social rank does not play a great role. Men and women are equal. However, Betas are very competitive. Personal and social value is related to the material wealth obtained by hard work.
  - Relationships to strangers: Betas don't behave differently to strangers than they do among each other. Strangers are welcomed.
  - Communication and language habits: Betas like to talk about work.
  - Relationships between genders: There are no gender differences.
  - Beta goals: Betas like to trade. They are very interested in the small items the Alphas trade with. Betas have similar ones.
7. (If required) Script for team or person C:
8. Interaction rules:
- As described in the script of team or person A and B
9. Comments:
- Most important is the evaluation of the cognitive and emotional experiences in a discussion after the simulation which should involve all the participants. The following topics can be points of reflection:
- Personal cultural experience with the culture of the Alphas and Betas: Was it possible to identify with the different roles?
  - Experience of a foreign culture in general: How was the process of understanding of the new culture.
  - Experience in interaction: which phases did the process go through?
  - Conflict experiences: Which conflicts did arise and how could they be handled?
10. Source:
- This simulation exists in various adaptations. The original one is from Garry Shirts. You can find it in Shirts, Garry (1977). *BAFA BAFA: A Cross-cultural Simulation*. Simulation Training Systems: Del Mar.
- The one shown here was inspired by the one which can be found following this link: <http://intercultural-learning.eu/Portfolio-Item/bafa-bafa/>
- An explainer video can be found here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vi4nVs077Rc>

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### 3. Intercultural competences: Assessment and development in VET training

#### Introduction

In Section 1 to 3, we have explored how learners can become more aware of cultural differences and familiarize themselves with models of cultural differences. In this section, we discuss intercultural competences in VET training. Intercultural competences help to translate cultural awareness and knowledge into meaningful action.

Competences are clusters of knowledge, skills, and attitudes (KSA). Competence models have been popular in personnel selection and development since the 1980ies, when it became

increasingly clear that job demands were changing so fast that it was no longer sufficient to have in-depth knowledge about the job: Prior knowledge about the job became outdated too quickly. In addition to their job knowledge, employees therefore also had to be able to respond to new situations and deal with the dynamic, unpredictable, and complex nature of their work. They needed specific sets of competences for responding to these continuously changing situations.

In discussing managerial resourcefulness, Kanungo and Misra (1992) define competences as “abilities to engage in cognitive activities that enhance adaptive functioning in face of a complex and unpredictable job environment. They help to decide what, when and how to utilise skills to engage in cognitive self-controlling adaptive responses” (p. 1322).

Intercultural competences serve a similar purpose: What do people need to know and be able to do to be effective in intercultural interactions? More than 200 intercultural competences have been proposed (see Spitzberg and Changnon, 2009, for a review) and numerous articles, books and book chapters have been written on the topic; we have listed some recent overviews at the end of this section. You may also be interested in the discussion of empirically tested intercultural training methods by Mazziotta, Rohmann and Piper (2016).

The goal of this section is to help you decide which intercultural competences to focus on in your training, and how to select between available instruments for assessing them. Where possible, we will refer to exercises and learning material provided in the CIT4VET database.

### How can you systematically select intercultural competences relevant to your training?

When comparing different approaches to intercultural competences and their development, keep in mind that intercultural competences are a means to an end, not an end in themselves: They help learners to be more effective in their intercultural interactions, that is, to achieve goals and solve problems together with people from other cultures. To be interculturally effective, we need to pay attention to three criteria (Kealey, 1989; Thomas and Fitzsimmons, 2008):

1. The need to establish and develop meaningful relationships with culturally different others
2. The need to accomplish task-specific objectives in a new cultural setting, and/or in culturally diverse environments
3. The need to adjust to the new cultural environment, to feel at ease and in balance

The three criteria have also been referred to as *connecting*, *performing*, and *enjoying* (Brinkmann and van Weerdenburg 2014). In the following we will use these terms.



## Intercultural competences needed to connect to culturally different others

To connect to people whose cultural background differs from ours, competences like intercultural sensitivity and intercultural communication are essential. *Intercultural sensitivity* – and related competences like cultural empathy – refers to a person’s awareness of their own and other cultures, their ability to empathise with people from other cultures, and to look at an event or behaviour from one or more cultural perspectives. The competence can be developed through training elements that we discuss in Section 1, 2 and 3 of the guidelines. You will also find numerous links in the CIT4VET database to exercises and step-by-step manuals for increasing your learners’ intercultural sensitivity. One exercise that we have found particularly useful is *Parents’ Values Exercise and Behaviour at Work*, developed by Dr Douglas Stuart. You may also be interested in the *Jigsaw Classroom* developed by Eliot Aronson (see, for example, Aronson, Blaney, Stephin, Sikes and Snapp, 1978), *Enacting cultural interests* (Brannon and Walton, 2013) and *Fast Friends* (Page-Gould, Mendoza-Denton and Tropp, 2008) as methods that have proven to increase a person’s ability to connect to culturally different others. All four exercises are listed in the CIT4VET database.

*Intercultural communication* can refer to a range of different aspects of intercultural work (Thomas and Fitzsimmons, 2008): to a method used in anthropology, to entire approaches and philosophies about what intercultural interaction is all about, to the process of communicating with culturally different others and to a competence that helps learners to be interculturally effective. Here we use the term intercultural communication as referring to the intercultural competence. The CIT4VET database presents a range of methods designed to help learners develop this competence. A classic and valuable exercise has been developed by Dr Janet Bennett (Institute for Intercultural Communication Portland, Oregon), the *Description Interpretation Evaluation* or *D-I-E exercise*. Additional tools are, for example, the *Humour Profiler*<sup>®</sup> and the *Feedback Profiler*<sup>®</sup> developed by Intercultures (Berlin, Germany).

## Intercultural competences for performing in an intercultural role

Empirical studies show that intercultural sensitivity, intercultural communication and similar competences also help learners to meet the *performance* criterion of intercultural effectiveness (see, for example, the meta-analysis of expatriate performance by Mol, Born, Willemsen and van der Molen, 2005, and the review by Thomas and Fitzsimmons, 2008). Early studies on cross-cultural negotiation and conflict-management also show how success depends on skilfully using a variety of politeness strategies for managing social distance, and on managing the ‘face’ needs of the other party (see, for example, Ting-Toomey, 1994, and van der Wijst, 1996).

In addition to these other-oriented intercultural competences, personality traits like *emotional stability*, *flexibility* and *conscientiousness* enhance performance in intercultural settings (Mol et al., 2005). These traits can be assessed with personality assessment instruments based on the so-called ‘Big Five’ personality model. Emotional stability and flexibility can also be assessed by an intercultural assessment tool, the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (van der Zee and van Oudenhoven, 2000, 2001; van Oudenhoven and van der Zee, 2002; van der Zee, van

Oudenhoven, Ponterotto and Fietzer, 2013), which we will discuss in more detail below. As these are personality traits and not intercultural competences, learners may interpret their results to mean that they cannot change or develop these traits and may no longer be motivated to attempt changing their behaviour as a result. If you wish to assess personality traits in your intercultural training, you will therefore need to carefully plan how you will debrief the results and integrate the assessment with the training objectives and design.

Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars (2002) apply insights from conflict management theory to dilemmas arising from different cultural value orientations. They developed the *Dilemma Reconciliation* technique to train their clients in developing reconciled sustainable solutions to their cultural dilemmas. The competence *building commitment*, proposed by Brinkmann and van Weerdenburg (2014) and assessed by the Intercultural Readiness Check they developed, also focuses on the performance criterion of intercultural effectiveness; their *Intercultural Conflict Management Suit-Case@*, also listed in the CIT4VET database, is designed to help learners develop this competence. You may furthermore find it useful to familiarise learners with different decision-making techniques so that they can explore which techniques work best for their culturally diverse groups and teams (see, for example, the link to *Decision-making techniques for groups* in the database).

The CIT4VET database also contains links to programs, websites and methods developed for specific professions and industries, which you may find useful for designing an intercultural training that meets the specific performance needs of your client groups, for example:

- *Working supportively with Refugees*  
[https://cit4vet.erasmus.site/Working supportively](https://cit4vet.erasmus.site/Working%20supportively)
- *InterMobil – Intercultural competence training for SMEs hosting European mobilities*  
<https://cit4vet.erasmus.site/Intermobil>
- *Interhealth: Intercultural competences of healthcare professionals*  
<https://cit4vet.erasmus.site/Interhealth>
- *Vocal in Need – online modules for people dealing with refugees*  
<https://vocal.erasmus.site/>
- *Vocal medical: health care emergency staff dealing with intercultural matters:*  
<http://vocal-medical.eu/>

## Intercultural competences for enjoying intercultural interactions

The enjoyment criterion has its roots in expatriate research. Moving to a different country, expatriates and their partners and families may find it challenging to adjust to the new surroundings. Personality traits and competences like *tolerance of ambiguity*, *open-mindedness*, *cultural empathy*, *intercultural sensitivity*, *intercultural communication*, *extroversion*, *emotional stability*, *self-monitoring*, *flexibility*, *managing uncertainty* and *attributional complexity* have been found to help expatriates adjust to the new place (Brinkmann and van Weerdenburg, 2014; Hechanova, Beehr and Christiansen, 2003; Thomas and Fitzsimmons, 2008; van Bakel, 2012; van Oudenhoven and van der Zee, 2002; van der Zee and van Oudenhoven, 2000, 2001). If your learners are confronted with cultural differences in

combination with a substantial change in their life (as is the case with expatriates, who move to a new country), then it may be worth considering which of these competences you may want to address in your intercultural training. After all, before we can enjoy intercultural interaction, we must first feel sufficiently confident that we can adjust to whatever changes we are confronted with.

Some of the enjoyment competences are regularly addressed in intercultural training, for example, intercultural sensitivity and intercultural communication; we have already mentioned the links in the database to exercises and programs proposed to develop these competences. Competences like open-mindedness, tolerance of ambiguity, and attributional complexity have also received considerable attention in intercultural training. One of the earliest techniques developed to enhance attributional complexity were *cultural assimilators* or critical incidents (Fiedler, Mitchell and Triandis, 1971; for a more recent study see Herfst, van Oudenhoven and Timmerman, 2008). Critical incidents are short intercultural scenarios inviting learners to decide how they would approach the situation. The more they know about the cultures involved, and the more accurately they can assess the intentions and motives of the fictitious parties in the scenario, the more appropriate their approach will be.

### Assessing intercultural competences

Numerous instruments for assessing intercultural competences have been developed. For overviews and critical discussions, please see Fantini (2009), Matsumoto and Hwang (2013), Thomas et al. (2015), Thomas and Fitzsimmons (2008), and Wiersinga (2003), and the special issues on intercultural competence in the *International Journal of Intercultural Relations* (Arasaratnam and Deardorff, 2015) and the *European Journal of International Management* (Richter, van Bakel, Schlaegel and Lemmergaard, 2020). In the CIT4VET database, we have selected four instruments to illustrate different aspects of a person's functioning that may contribute to intercultural effectiveness. The table below briefly presents each instrument together with the link to the CIT4VET database. As is the case with most (intercultural) assessment instruments, use of the instruments is not free of charge. Costs may be involved for both getting certified and using the instruments after certification.

The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI; Hammer, 2011) helps learners to understand how they currently approach cultural differences. Based on Milton Bennett's (1986, 1993) Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, the IDI assumes a series of stages of intercultural competence development, from ethno-centric to ethno-relative stages. With each next stage, learners develop a richer and more differentiated understanding of their own and others' cultural background.

CIT4VET database: <https://cit4vet.erasmus.site/tool/?id=104>

Cultural Intelligence (CQ) refers to a specific approach to intercultural competences, i.e., one that explicitly includes meta-cognition as part of the competence set (Ang et al., 2007). The most

popular version of the questionnaires designed to measure CQ is the 20-item questionnaire developed by Soon Ang and Linn van Dyne, which we included in the database. More recently, an even shorter 10-item questionnaire has been developed by David C. Thomas et al. (2015). To our knowledge, the 10-item version is used only for research purposes.

CIT4VET database: <https://cit4vet.erasmus.site/tool/?id=96>

The Intercultural Readiness Check (IRC) was developed by Brinkmann and van Weerdenburg (2014; van der Zee and Brinkmann, 2004) to assess four intercultural competences (intercultural sensitivity, intercultural communication, building commitment and managing uncertainty). Individuals receive an individual written feedback report with scores on each competence, highlighting potential pitfalls and suggestions for further development in line with the resultant competence level. CIT4VET database: <https://cit4vet.erasmus.site/tool/?id=106>

The Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ) was developed by van der Zee and van Oudenhoven (2000, 2001; van Oudenhoven and van der Zee, 2002) to assess five behavioural dimensions important for effective intercultural interaction: cultural empathy, open mindedness, social initiative, emotional stability, and flexibility. Originally, the MPQ was designed for expatriate research and coaching but it is by now also more broadly used in intercultural training programmes.

CIT4VET database: <https://cit4vet.erasmus.site/tool/?id=109>

## Criteria for selecting an intercultural assessment instrument

When you use an intercultural assessment instrument in your intercultural training, you need to understand the impact it may have on your learners (this holds, of course, for any assessment instrument you may be using). Receiving feedback on competence assessment may be sensitive for learners in that they are informed about how well they are currently dealing with intercultural interactions. Their scores may be average or even lower than average; and regardless of how high or low their scores may be, learners may simply have expected higher scores than what the feedback report tells them. Learners may also be apprehensive of the outcome because they assume that they cannot develop these competences or because they do not know how. From a process perspective in intercultural training, you may also find it difficult to integrate personal confidential feedback on intercultural competences with keeping an entire group of learners focused and interested in your training: Some learners may still want to digest the feedback, while others have already put the report aside and eagerly await the next exercise. Depending on the objectives of the training, the needs of your learners and the content of the feedback, you may also need to reserve time to give one-on-one feedback to each learner individually, so you will need to plan

ahead of time when you will do this, and whether the additional time required for it has been negotiated with the client organisation.

When used well, however, intercultural assessment instruments allow you to make your intercultural intervention more insightful and personally relevant for learners, and to customise your training to meet the unique needs of different learners and groups of learners. If you want to work with intercultural assessment instruments, the following criteria will help you select from among the available instrument(s).

#### Robustness and suitability

Assessment instruments must suit your purpose and robustly assess what they claim to assess. So, ask yourself: Which competences do your learners need to be effective in their intercultural work context, and which instrument assesses these competences? For whom is the instrument suited, for example, for students, refugees, health care workers, or international managers? Are the terms and concepts clearly defined, and is it clear and empirically tested how the instrument contributes to intercultural development? Do the authors provide information about the reliability of the scales assessing a given competence, and the construct and predictive validity of the instrument? Has the instrument been used in research published in peer review journals?

#### User friendliness

Ask for sample reports of different instruments and compare them in terms of the clarity, quality, and depth of the written feedback. Will the reports encourage learners to develop the competences, and which steps they could take to do so? In which languages are questionnaire and report available, how expensive is the certification course and the individual assessments you can purchase later? Will you receive additional learning tools to support you in using the instrument in your intercultural training? Can you generate a report of an entire group, for example, to understand specific needs and strengths of your learners and client organisation? What is your impression of the service provided to you as a potential customer? Will you be able to join groups of other users for shared learning and exchange?

We hope that the above discussion will support you in deciding which intercultural competences you want to address in your training, and which instruments you may want to invest into for assessing your learners' developmental needs.

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## 4. Comparing cultures: Understanding cultural diversity

### 1. Introduction

As intercultural trainer, why should you use cultural models in your training?

The **iceberg model**, the **onion model** and the **cultural dimensions** are essential in any intercultural course as these models make it possible to compare various cultures. You can use all these models to explain differences and similarities when you are comparing cultures. Diversity of cultures can be explained by the fact that we are all dealing with the same challenges: how to find food and shelter, how to structure our society, etc. The solutions that a specific group of people might apply will differ from group to group.

Please have a look at the training materials <https://cit4vet.erasmus.site/training-materials> “cultural models” for further information.

What are the risks of using cultural models in intercultural training?

1. The cultural models of the iceberg and the onion model can be misunderstood if instructions and explanations are unclear at the start of the training session.
2. The iceberg model is not about which cultural aspects are visible and invisible, but about the cultural aspects that we are conscious about and that we are unconscious about.
3. Cultural dimensions need to be viewed in a critical perspective and cannot be applied in an “absolute” way.

How can you prevent the risks/ineffectiveness?

1. Make sure that you explain the exercises at the start of the training session – outline the learning outcomes and what would you like to achieve from the session?
2. Debriefing after the training session is vital – as a facilitator you will need to assist the participants to reflect on their experiences.

What are the benefits to the participants?

These step by step training sessions illustrate how you can apply the theoretical knowledge of cultural models/cultural dimensions in a practical way, using group work, discussion, reflection/debriefing and presenting as essential tools. Theory is only valuable if the participants can make sense of it and can apply it in their day-to-day interactions.

These models try to explain the differences and similarities when comparing various cultures, raising awareness of cultural diversity and the importance to us when interacting with other people.

## 2. Specific examples of training sessions:

Here are three specific examples of how you can introduce the models and dimensions in your training.

### A) Iceberg model

1. The first step can be that you explain the theoretical background of these models – please see training materials <https://cit4vet.erasmus.site/training-materials> “cultural models” for further details.
2. The second step is facilitating a practical session in order to use the theoretical knowledge; this can happen, for example, in group work. You need to divide the learners into groups to encourage individual learners to move outside their comfort zone. If there are 30 people in the group, consider organising it into ten groups of three people. One way of ensuring that people mingle into new groups is to organise this group of 30 by assigning a number (1-10) to each person. Then all the ‘ones’ will form a team, all the ‘twos’ will form a team and so on. This is encouraging to work with new people and not “just” with the familiar colleagues or friends
3. The third step involves explaining the goals of this session: These models are useful in order to increase our sensitivity of cultural values and demonstrate that not everyone has the same values and they make it also possible to compare and contrast various cultures.
4. During the training session on the **Iceberg model** you focus the discussion by each group on categorising various cultural aspects either above the waterline (cultural aspects we are conscious about) or underneath it (cultural aspects we are unconscious about). Flipchart paper could be provided. It is best if you start the discussion with an example; *we can be conscious about customs in a specific culture and place this above the waterline, but values and norms are hidden cultural aspects underneath the waterline.*
5. When the learners have completed their task, you will ask each group to show and share their findings and explain in detail WHY they have chosen to place a specific cultural aspect above or underneath the waterline. You discuss the results with all the learners (plenum).

6. The last step is a debriefing session with everyone and a summary of possible learning outcomes.

You could ask the following questions during this session: Did everyone agree with the results from the group work discussions? If not, please state the reason for your opinion. Are there examples that can be placed both above and underneath the waterline? What have you learned from this session? What practical tips can you use when you are working in diverse teams or are dealing with people from cultural backgrounds other than yours?

You should discuss possible learning outcomes with the learners before and after the exercise:

*By the end of this session, you will learn:*

- how to appreciate cultural diversity,
- to be able to compare various cultures,
- to understand your own cultural background,
- to evaluate how useful the application of "cultural dimensions" is to your relationship with other people.

You might conclude this session by showing some of the links in the teaching materials and use this summary in order to demonstrate how much of our behaviour can be influenced by cultural aspects: "Crucially, the cultural aspects on the visible part of the iceberg are influenced by the sub-surface values, beliefs, notions, attitudes and assumptions."

(<http://opengecko.com/interculturalism/visualising-the-iceberg-model-of-culture/>)

#### B) Onion model

You can explain the **Onion model** to the learners in a similar fashion by using group work as a methodology and follow the steps of the training session above.

At the end, you can ask the learners if they think that the Iceberg model and the Onion model are giving the same message about cultural values. Also ask the learners which model they prefer and the reason why.

#### C) Cultural dimensions

1. The first step involves explaining the theoretical background of the cultural dimensions – please see training materials <https://cit4vet.erasmus.site/training-materials/> "cultural models" for further details.

2. The second step involves facilitating a practical session to use the theoretical knowledge; this can happen, for example, in group work. Please see detailed description above for the Iceberg model.

3. The third step involves explaining the goals of this session: The cultural dimensions are useful to increase our sensitivity of cultural values and demonstrate that not everyone has the same values.

You could start the actual training session with a questionnaire:

<http://archive.ecml.at/mtp2/icopromo/results/Lucru/Files/1%20Awareness%20of%20the%20self%20and%20the%20other/d%20Preferences%202.pdf>

You ask the learners in groups to complete their own survey and compare their results with each other. When the learners have finished their tasks of completing their own questionnaire you will ask each group to show and share their findings and explain in detail WHY they have chosen specific preferences. You discuss the results with all the learners (plenum).

You could follow up by a detailed discussion on some specific examples of cultural dimension and once more discussing what are the “preferences” of the learners and the reason why.

For example, the learners understanding of “Power distance” and their attitude to authority could be a discussion facilitated by you using group work. (Further examples are given in the teaching materials <https://cit4vet.erasmus.site/training-materials/> “cultural models”.)

*Low power distance:*

- Minimise power and status difference
- People in higher positions can be questioned
- The extended family might not play a significant role

*High power distance:*

- Distance between the powerful & less powerful is accepted as “natural”
- Clear rules regarding the order of dependencies and the responsibilities of the powerful for the dependent
- Hierarchical inequalities are essential for the society and its well-being

The last step is a debriefing session with all and a summary of possible learning outcomes. Possible questions that you could ask: In what way were your group members agreeing or disagreeing with “your” preferences. Do you know why this similarity/difference could happen? Do you think that the questionnaire is a useful tool? What have you learned from this session? What practical tips can you use when you are working in diverse teams or are dealing with people from cultural backgrounds other than yours?

You should discuss possible learning outcomes with the learners before and after the exercise:

*By the end of this session, you will learn:*

- how to appreciate cultural diversity,
- to be able to compare various cultures,
- to understand your own cultural background,
- to evaluate how useful the application of “cultural dimensions” is to your relationship with other people.

You might conclude this session by showing some of the links in the teaching materials and use this summary in order to demonstrate how much of our behaviour can be influenced by cultural aspects: “... knows that cultural differences can act as a barrier to communication, and

that they could affect his ability to build connections and motivate people.”

[https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR\\_66.htm](https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newLDR_66.htm)

An important debriefing aspect is that you remind the learners at the end of this session to keep a critical view about the cultural dimension and not apply them in an “absolute” way: You have to emphasise that cultural value dimensions are only a tool for comparing and contrasting various cultures; tell the participants that they have to stay flexible as putting other people into strict categories would defeat the purpose of the exercises and end up being an act of stereotyping. There are always exceptions to mainstream behaviour and thinking.

Using **case studies** is a perfect tool to explore the practical value of cultural dimension. Below is one example to illustrate how you can use a case study for discussion.

### Critical Incident Example

#### *Communication skills*

*Daichi Sato, a Japanese student in Ireland, had an appointment with his academic advisor to discuss his Social Sciences course. Half an hour before the appointment, a friend called and needed a ride to the train station. Daichi took his friend to the train station and was half an hour late to the appointment. Luckily, his adviser, Mr Moylan, was still in his office. Daichi knocked on the door, announced himself and went in. Mr Moylan offered him a seat but was not friendly or talkative. Daichi had not had an academic advisor before and did not know what to expect, so he waited for the adviser to start the conversation. After some minutes of talking about the weather and the locality, Mr Moylan asked Daichi what he wanted to do with his course. This was a silly question to Daichi because he wanted to get his degree, of course. Then Mr Moylan asked Daichi if he had read the department’s handout which listed all the graduate requirements. Daichi was not sure which paper this was, so he said, “Yes”. Mr Moylan waited, and Daichi waited. After a few minutes, the adviser asked if Daichi had made out his election worksheet. The next step, Mr Moylan explained, was for him to sign the sheet so Daichi could get registered. Daichi said, “Yes”, again although he had no idea which paper this was either. Mr Moylan was holding out his hand though and obviously expected Daichi to put something into it. Daichi did not know whether to give him something or shake hands, so he handed the adviser the armful of papers he had been given by various people since arriving at the university. At this point Mr Moylan was making loud exhaling noises. He handed the papers back to Daichi. Mr Moylan rummaged around his desk and found a small slip of paper which he told Daichi was the election worksheet. Daichi was to pick out the course he wanted to take, fill in the slip of paper, and come back for the adviser’s signature. Mr Moylan then handed Daichi a stapled document which he said was the department’s degree requirements. He said Daichi should read this before filling out the election sheet and before making another appointment with him. The adviser stood up and Daichi correctly interpreted this as an indication that the appointment was at an end. He stood up, shook hands with Mr Moylan, and left the office. Both felt the appointment had been unsatisfactory. Daichi later told his friends that his adviser had not been very friendly or helpful and that he would see him as little as possible. The adviser told his department chair that he really did not want to have many more foreign students as they took too much time. (source: Workshop by Debra Ali-Lawson at Bern university, Switzerland - adaptation)*

*Questions that you can ask:*

1. Identify which culture value dimensions are being expressed in this critical incident and discuss the reasons for your choice(s).
2. What assumptions and behaviours helped create the miscommunication?
3. What could everyone have done differently in order to prevent the miscommunication from occurring?

*Possible answers:*

- 1) Large power distance: who takes initiative? Independent behaviour expected by Mr. Moylan  
Communication style: direct (Mr Moylan) – indirect (Daichi)  
Communication style: specificity / diffuseness (Daichi)  
Being orientation: the focus is on being now and less on action (Daichi)  
Polychronic time: late for appointment (Daichi)  
Collectivism: friend is more important (Daichi)
- 2) Misunderstood as the academic advisor does not respond to challenges of cultural difference in his approach to sort the problem.
- 3) The academic advisor needs to be better informed about the diverse background of the international students. The students in return need to learn better how to communicate their needs to someone who does not share the same cultural background.

## 5. Culture specific learning

As a VET Trainer delivering an intercultural training you may want to share with your participants some notions about culture of a specific country, like Germany, Poland or Italy. Culture specific information is helpful for gaining country-related insights for example into religious backgrounds, historical developments as well as political and social institutions and their functionality (Barmeyer 2012, Lüsebrink 2016).

There are various methods to deliver culture specific inputs. Depending on the required complexity of the exercise, some trainers may choose a more elaborated approach like case studies or critical incidents (see Section 4 of the Guidelines for more details). A direct and easy way of releasing notions about cultural aspects of a country is by handing out a list of dos' and don'ts related to a specific country.

### What are do's and don'ts?

When one refers to dos' and don'ts in intercultural training one thinks of a list containing rules of behaviour and advice on certain aspects of daily life and working routine of a foreign country. For Germany for example these could be very brief phrases like "Don't be late for business meetings", "Be prepared to take off your shoes when entering a house", "Have direct eye contact also when meeting people you don't know" etc. Such lists have the purpose of

making people avoid inadequate behaviour that may lead to intercultural misunderstandings and in the worst case to a break off in communication.

Why can it be helpful to hand out a list of dos' and don'ts?

Many participants of intercultural trainings appreciate being provided with lists of dos' and don'ts. Dos' and Don'ts feed the need of participants for security when being in contact with new and unfamiliar cultures. It gives them the feeling of being able to cope with otherness and of knowing the other country only by observing the rules given in the list.

For trainers dos' and don'ts may be a handy way to provide participants with information pertinent to the intercultural topic discussed during the training. Especially for cultures and individuals with low ambiguity tolerance such a list can be a relief.

What are the risks of a list of dos' and don'ts?

While on the one hand providing a list may be reassuring for participants, on the other such lists should be handled with caution. Behaving according to a list of dos' and don'ts may prevent from misbehaving in a foreign country but will not permit to gain a deeper understanding of that culture (Kammhuber, 2000). Lists of this kind reduce cultural content into a nutshell. They are not meant to display the complexity of a culture and do not show ways how to enhance real understanding of a culture. So there is a risk for you as a trainer of reinforcing common places and stereotypes. You also need to consider that not all people in a specific culture behave in the same way. There are always exceptions; for example, there are people in Germany who tend to be late for their meetings.

How can you prevent the risks?

In an intercultural training, lists of dos' and don'ts should be combined with other awareness enhancing activities. Maybe start your training with a simulation (See Guide on Simulations and Guidelines), give some input about what culture is (See Training material and Guidelines), show similarities and differences between cultures (See XXX) and analyse some critical incidents across cultures with your participants. At the end of the training you can hand out a list of dos' and don'ts. But do not forget the correct framing. Although at the end of the training participants should be sensitised and culturally aware enough to understand the adequate relevance of a dos' and don'ts list, there still is the risk of stereotyping. During the training, however, they should have made enough intercultural experiences to know that intercultural competence cannot be identified with list of rules of behaviour. Nevertheless, remember them that in an intercultural encounter it is better to try to control your emotions, to observe unfamiliar behaviour and to ask questions than to judge immediately and interpret the behaviour that may appear 'strange' or 'awkward' to you. For some other person, this observable behaviour can be interpreted in a different way.

**To resume:** Lists of dos' and don'ts are useful if you consider the risks, frame them correctly and embed them in other awareness enhancing activities.



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