



Cultural Diversity History

First introduced in 2000 by the Department of Health and Human Services' Office of Minority Health, and then updated in 2010, the National Standards for Culturally and Linguistically Appropriate Services in Health Care work to increase cultural competence in the health care industry. Among these standards is a cultural diversity training recommendation. Since then, a number of federal agencies, including the Joint Commission on Accreditation of Health Care Organizations and the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, have adopted the national standards and require health care professionals to receive cultural competence training.

Workforce Diversity Training

- Internal training focuses on the beliefs, attitudes and expectations of a culturally diverse workforce. The emphasis is on teamwork, developing good interpersonal relationships and maintaining effective work performance.
- Cultural diversity is essential to maintaining a balanced organization. In global organizations whose operations include business dealings and affiliations in other countries, understanding cultural differences is key to successful business partnerships.
- Employees should be aware of the importance of respecting the cultural differences of others, and employers can offer training to increase awareness and to better equip employees to function in a diverse workplace.

Importance of Cultural Diversity

- Recognizing and respecting cultural differences in the workplace is essential to a company's organizational structure and the health of its human resources.
- Companies with employees of culturally diverse backgrounds recognize the benefits of having people with different perspectives, problem-solving skills and creativity.
- Many companies benefit from multilingual employees.
- Training is key to helping employees with different backgrounds understand and respect each other's differences so they learn to collaborate and achieve the company's goals.

Common Diversity Issues

- It is not uncommon for companies to hire employees of various nationalities and ethnic groups.
- Issues such as differences in pay or differing treatment of employees because of cultural differences could be perceived as discrimination.
- By emphasizing awareness of and promoting sensitivity to cultural issues, employers can show they recognize the contributions and value of all workers.

Importance of Cultural Competence

- Cultural competence relates to the quality of the day-to-day interactions and relationships between health care providers and patients.
- Unlike workforce diversity training, which affects patients indirectly, cultural competence affects patients directly.
- For example, the quality of patient interactions, including communication, determines how well or whether a patient is able to communicate symptoms, follow instructions and participate in his care. It also affects whether a patient feels respected or disrespected, as both an individual and a member of a cultural group.

Cultural Competence Training

- Working with a diverse patient population requires ongoing training that provides workers with specific knowledge, abilities and skills.
- For example, health care workers must understand common cultural barriers to preventing and treating conditions or disease.
- When interacting with patients, an ability to ask questions tactfully and respectfully and negotiate between a patient's cultural interpretation of a condition or disease and treatment expectations and options is crucial to good patient care.
- Practical skills such as using a telephone or working with an interpreter are also important.

Employee Relations

- The lack of cultural diversity or the perception of disrespect for other cultures can be detrimental to partnerships.
- Organizational leaders can benefit from understanding the differences in the way operations at other organizations are structured.
- Cultural differences are not limited to ethnicity and race relations; they extend to areas of religious views, sexuality and even differences in geographical differences pertaining to the location of one's upbringing.
- Consideration should be given to each of these areas when evaluating the organizational balance.
- Managers should demonstrate sensitivity to employees who express concern regarding the ability to interact with others in the group.
- In some cases, communication may be hindered due to cultural differences.
- Moving past these barriers requires training and sensitivity to the differences of the employees and ensuring that other employees recognize this importance as well.

Prevention and Education

- A complete understanding of cultural diversity is imperative for successful business operations.
- Mandatory diversity training for managers should be incorporated as part of a developmental learning process to ensure managers can effectively deal with diversity issues.
- By staying abreast of federal guidelines governing employment discrimination and the importance of cultural diversity and employment practices, managers become equipped on how to handle conflicts in the organization that may stem from these differences.
- Managers with an understanding of the importance of cultural diversity also can key in on employee relations and retention.

Workplace Discrimination Laws

- A company's leaders are charged with ensuring compliance with federal laws that govern the equal treatment of employees regardless of race, ethnicity, religious views and many other individual traits.
- When employees believe they are treated differently because of their individualism, this perception could lead to legal trouble for the company.
- The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission prohibits companies from discriminating against employees for any reason.
- Allegations of discrimination in the workplace, if proved, could result in financial penalties for the company.
- The EEOC website provides information about employment laws and ways to avoid discrimination for both employers and employees. www.eeoc.gov.

Customer Service

- Cultural diversity training and education is important to support the customer service efforts of an organization.
- Providing quality customer service across many cultures requires a solid understanding of what different cultures consider appropriate behavior.
- Diversity training will help businesses understand what barriers are affecting key customer relationships as well as improve communication between employees and their clients.

Tips on Culture Diversity in the Workplace

- Attempts at cultural diversity in the workplace have been met with mixed reviews, according to AdminSecret.com.
- To a small business owner, diversification may mean hiring only a handful of workers from different cultural backgrounds.
- However, due to the highly interdependent nature of the small-business work force, it is critical that diversity is implemented successfully.

Learn to Communicate

- You may need to communicate differently with workers from other cultures.
- For example, some cultures do not openly praise workers in front of others, preferring that it be done in private.
- You may need to read and study about the differences in your worker home culture to build trust and avoid offending them.

Train Frequently

- To ensure that workers fully understand policies and procedures, you may need to spend additional time on training and orientation so that there are no ambiguities.
- For example, you may need to spend extra time covering areas such as sexual harassment or general behavior so employees are clear as to how you expect them to act.
- If you have a dress code, you may also need to clarify what attire is appropriate.
- Cultural diversity training can help employees improve their performance by creating a workplace free of judgments and stereotypes. Although employees may have certain opinions about their co-workers, diversity training will help employees recognize the behaviors that could possibly create a hostile or uncomfortable work environment.
- Educational activities about cultural variations also provide employees with a level of understanding about other cultures they may not have had before.

Orient Current Workers

- You may also need to spend some time getting your current workers to accept a more diverse work force.
- This may include sensitivity or diversity training that allows employees to understand the difficulties people from different cultures may have in adapting.
- You should also attempt to identify any issues your current workers may have with the implementation of a multicultural work force.

Assign Mentors

- Some of your workers may have an easier time and will be more receptive to adapting to a diverse work culture than others.
- These individuals could fill a valuable role as mentors.

- Pair them with workers from different cultures to provide training and help with assimilation into the work environment.
- Finding common ground in an environment rich with varying opinions and perspectives can be challenging to some employees.
- Education initiatives that teach employees how to succeed and perform optimally across a multi-cultural workforce can directly support diversity efforts in the workplace.
- Diversity education encourages thoughtfulness and consideration between co-workers of different nationalities and backgrounds.

Leadership Role

- The business owner and managers, bear the ultimate responsibility for developing a more diverse work culture.
- If they show strong leadership during this adjustment period by demonstrating commitment to diversity and including everyone in the process, the chances of attaining success in diversification are likely to increase.
- Supervisors are in a position where they have to manage the diverse perspectives of workers and customers.
- Managers are obligated to treat their people equally, but sometimes fall short of communicating effectively with individuals from diverse backgrounds or experiences.
- Training that focuses on managing a diverse workforce will help supervisors connect with all team members and include every worker in the activities that support the agency's bottom line.

Examples of Cultural Differences in the Workplace

- Workplace diversity trainers often mention that there are more similarities among employees than there are differences; however, despite the many common attributes employees share, there still exist cultural differences.
- Culture is defined as a set of values, practices, traditions or beliefs a group shares, whether due to age, race or ethnicity, religion or gender.
- Other factors that contribute to workplace diversity and cultural differences in the workplace are differences attributable to work styles, education or disability.

Generations

- There are cultural differences attributable to employees' generations.
- A diverse workplace includes employees considered traditionalists, baby boomers, Generation X, Generation Y and Millennials.
- Each generation has distinct characteristics.
- For example, employees considered baby boomers tend to link their personal identity to their profession or the kind of work they do. Baby boomers are also characterized as being committed, yet unafraid of changing employers when there's an opportunity for career growth and advancement. Employees considered belonging to Generation Y, on the other hand, also value professional development, but they are tech-savvy, accustomed to diversity and value flexibility in working conditions.

Education

- Differences exist between employees who equate academic credentials with success and employees whose vocational and on-the-job training enabled their career progression.
- The cultural differences between these two groups may be a source of conflict in some workplace issues when there's disagreement about theory versus practice in achieving organizational goals.
- For instance, an employee who believes that a college degree prepared him for managing the processes and techniques of employees in the skilled trades may not be as effective as he thinks when compared to employees with years of practical knowledge and experience.

Personal Background

- Where an employee lives or has lived can contribute to cultural differences in the workplace.
- Many people would agree that there is a distinct difference between the employee from a small town and the employee from a large metropolis. New York, for example, is known for its fast pace and the hectic speed of business transactions. Conversely, an employee from a small, Southern town may not approach her job duties with the same haste as someone who is employed by the same company from a large city where there's a sense of urgency attached to every job task.

Ethnicity

- Ethnicity or national origin are often examples of cultural differences in the workplace, particularly where communication, language barriers or the manner in which business is conducted are obviously different.
- Affinity groups have gained popularity in large organizations or professional associations, such as the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce or in-house groups whose members are underrepresented ethnicities, such as the Chinese Culture Network at Eli Lilly. The pharmaceutical conglomerate organizes affinity groups to bridge cultural differences and establish productive working relationships within the workplace and throughout its global locations. In his article "Winning with Diversity," author Jason Forsythe explains that Eli Lilly's many affinity groups are necessary: "Because the company currently markets products in 156 countries and has affiliates in many of them, multicultural competency is a priority."

How to Resolve Cultural Communications in the Workplace

- Differences in race, sex, religious beliefs, lifestyle and sexual orientation are among many cultural differences that may affect how people communicate in the workplace.
- Resolving communications problems caused by cultural differences requires patience, understanding and respect.
- A major mistake is forming opinions before even engaging in communications.
- Opinions reached before an opportunity to discuss the matter makes resolving conflict difficult.

Respect

- Treating people as individuals regardless of culture is sometimes a key to resolving communication issues.
- For example, it is improper to assume that a woman takes a certain position on a subject because she is a woman. Such generalizations can cause conflict in communication.
- Not all people who are members of the same culture will react to communication in the same way or offer the same opinion on a subject.
- However, it is true that cultural backgrounds may affect how people act, behave and communicate.
- But that does not mean people of a certain culture will all communicate or react to events in the same way.

Knowledge

- Learning more about other lifestyles and cultures helps people avoid conflict in communication, particularly in multicultural settings. Information on cultural awareness is widely available in books at public libraries.
- Open and honest discussions about cultural differences with friends and colleagues are helpful as well.
- Learning more about cultural differences helps avoid jumping to unfair or wrong assumptions about a person's statements or other communication efforts.

Blame

- Conflict in communications between cultures also is avoidable when all parties resist assigning blame.
- Two companies merging staffs in a business transaction may have different styles of managing and working. Putting the teams together can cause an immediate clash of cultures, with problems intensified if both sides always blames the other for problems and breakdown in communication.
- Simply placing the blame on others is not constructive and can make communication problems worse.

Listening Skills

- Focusing on listening well with an open mind also helps resolve cultural communications problems.
- Paying close attention to words used in a conversation or other form of communication can help resolve these problems.
- It's also important to pay attention to the context of the discussion and the tone of the communication.

Cultural Diversity Policy 2.42

- The Agency will provide care to patients and families regardless of their cultural background and beliefs.
- Cultural considerations for all patients/clients shall be respected and observed. Where such considerations impede the provision of prescribed health care or treatment, personnel shall notify the supervisor and physician in an effort to accommodate the patient/client.
- Different cultural backgrounds, beliefs and religions impact the patient's lifestyles, habits, and view of health and healing. Employees must be able to identify differences in their own beliefs and the patient's beliefs and find ways to support the patient.
- Upon admission, staff will identify the patient's individual beliefs based on their cultural background and develop the plan of care accordingly.
- The Agency will not assign personnel unwilling to comply with the Agency's policy, due to cultural values or religious beliefs, to situations where their actions may be in conflict with the prescribed treatment or the needs of the patient.
- Cultural diversity training will be completed for all employees at time of orientation and annually thereafter.