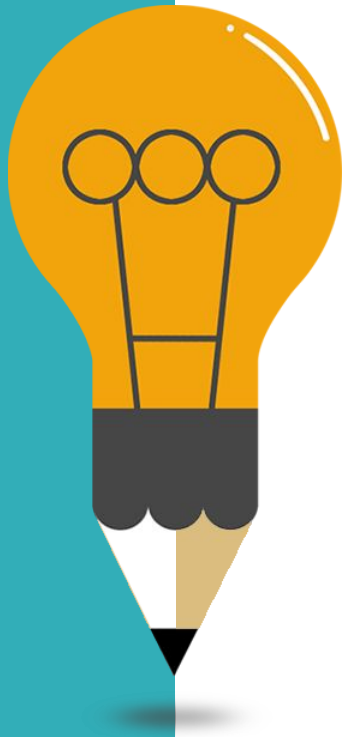

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Ενότητα 2

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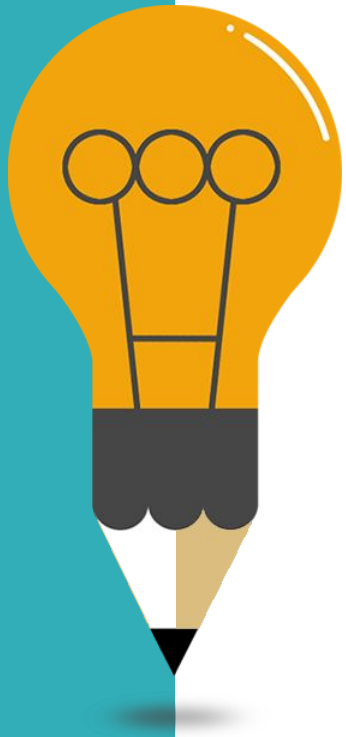

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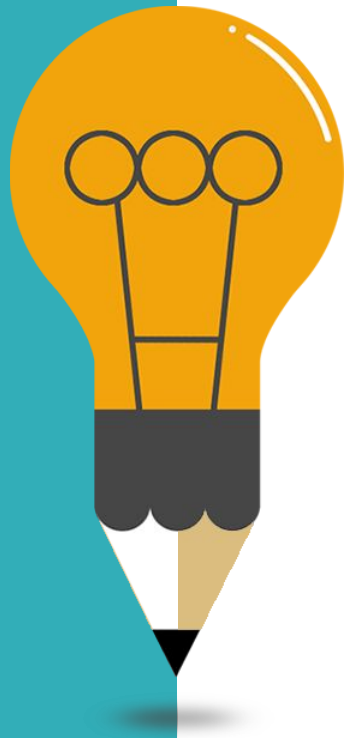

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Introduction

In today's globalized world, intercultural communication has become increasingly important. As people from different cultural backgrounds come together for work, study, and other activities, developing intercultural skills that enable effective communication and collaboration is essential. These skills are important for achieving career success, building strong relationships, and promoting mutual understanding and respect. In this presentation, we will explore the key intercultural skills, their importance in today's world and explore different aspects of cultural awareness.

Intercultural skills

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- Cultural awareness
- Empathy, tolerance and respect
- Adaptability, flexibility and openness
- Critical thinking
- Language knowledge

> *Intercultural skills are a measure of one's efficacy at communicating and interacting with people from a variety of backgrounds, cultures and identities, affected by cultural differences.*

They include a broad spectre of skills, some of which are listed on the left. This presentation focuses on cultural awareness, but you can find more information about critical thinking, flexibility and constructive dialogue in the following modules.



Why are intercultural skills important?

Personal life

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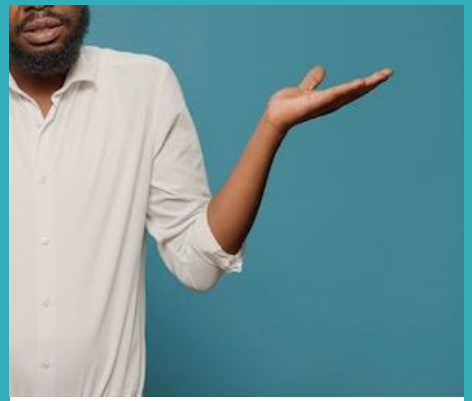
Building relationships

Intercultural skills help build deep, meaningful relationships with people from different backgrounds by understanding and respecting cultural differences.



Avoiding misunderstandings

Lack of awareness and knowledge can lead to misunderstandings and disagreements, even unintentional.



Promoting mutual understanding

Understanding is essential for building peaceful and harmonious societies. We can better understand the world and become more empathetic towards others.



Enhancing personal growth

By stepping outside one's comfort zone and engaging with different people, we can learn new things about ourselves and our cultural background.

Why are intercultural skills important?

School life

Work life

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Improving teamwork

Being a part of a multicultural environment is a common occurrence, where building effective teamwork and relationships is needed for sucessful and pleasant collaboration.



Promoting diversity and inclusion

By respecting and valuing different cultures and perspectives, environments where everyone feels included and valued are created.



Improving customer service

Intercultural skills can help employees understand and meet the needs of customers from different cultural backgrounds, improving customer satisfaction and loyalty.



Career success

In today's global economy, individuals that can effectively navigate cultural differences and work with people from diverse backgrounds are more likely to succeed.

Cultural awareness

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- Religion
- Individualism vs. Collectivism
- Communication styles
- Sense of time
- Authority

Understanding different cultural values, beliefs and practices enables individuals to avoid misunderstandings and adapt to different cultural contexts.

Learning about and understanding different cultures is the best way to improve intercultural skills, become more tolerable and open up to new experiences. In the following slides, you will find a short overview of the most common cultural differences.



! This section is only focusing on the 4 major religions.

Religion

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Food and drinks

Different religions follow different dietary restrictions, such as:

- Muslims are prohibited from consuming pork, non-halal foods and alcohol.
- Christians generally have no restrictions. Some may choose to fast and avoid meat and alcohol during Lent.
- Jews follow a kosher diet, which prohibits eating certain animals, e.g. pigs, rabbits and shellfish, and follows strict guidelines for the preparation of food (harvesting, combining foods etc.).
- The majority of Hindus are lacto-vegetarian, with some eating meat but always avoiding beef due to

Beliefs and values

Even though most religions share common values such as compassion or solidarity, there are slight differences:

- Muslims put a strong emphasis on hospitality and caring for neighbours.
- Christians value forgiveness, helping those in need and communities.
- Jewish communities appreciate tradition, as well as education and intellectual pursuits.
- Hindus place a strong emphasis on family and social obligations.

Physical contact

In some religions (e.g. Islam, Judaism), physical contact between members of the opposite sex who are not family members or married is considered inappropriate and sometimes forbidden.

Meanwhile, other religions have no specific restrictions (e.g. Christianity, Hinduism). However, physical affection before marriage can sometimes be frowned upon.

! Note that these are generalizations, and individuals may have varying beliefs and practices based on their own interpretations of their religion. It's important to respect their personal boundaries and cultural norms, and to avoid making assumptions.

Religion

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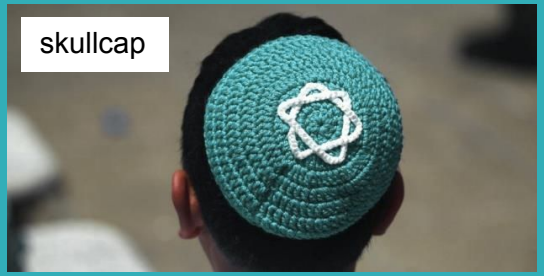
Clothes and appearance

Clothing restrictions can be used as a sign of respect, modesty, spiritual significance and tradition, and include:

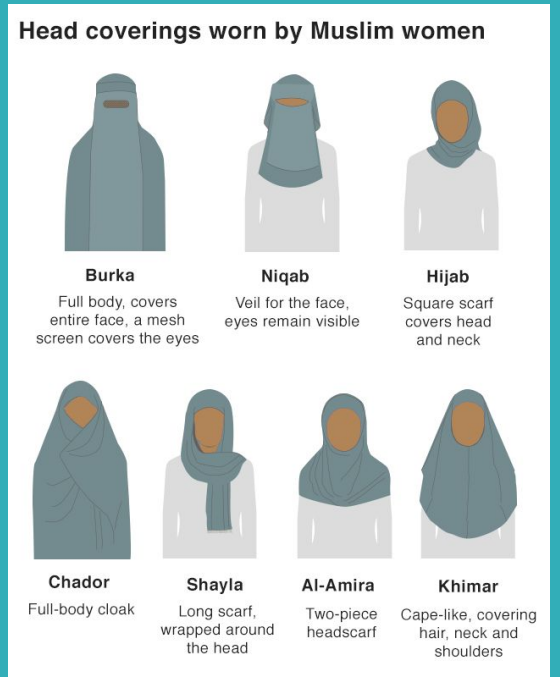
- Muslim women are required to dress modestly, covering their hair and bodies with loose-fitting clothing (a headscarf, dress or coat).
- Orthodox Jewish women often cover their hair with a scarf or wig and dress modestly, while men wear a yarmulke (skullcap) to show reverence to God.
- Traditional Hindu clothing varies depending on the region, but may include a saree, salwar kameez, or dhoti. In some Hindu traditions, it is also customary for women to wear a bindi or mangalsutra as a symbol of their marital status.
- There are no specific clothing restrictions in Christianity, but some denominations











! The world mainly follows the Gregorian (Christian solar) calendar, which differs from the Islamic lunar, Hindu lunar and Jewish luni-solar calendar. Their celebrations therefore do not fall on the same global date every year.

Religion

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(some of the biggest) holidays and celebrations

Islam

- Ramadan – represents a month of fasting (from sunrise to sunset).
- Eid al-Fitr – a 3-day celebration marking the end of Ramadan.
- Eid al-Adha – a 4-day celebration of Abraham‘s devotion and Ishameal‘s survival.

Hinduism

- Diwali – a 5-day festival of lights (Oct./Nov.)
- Holi – a 2-day festival welcoming spring, full of colour and love (Feb./March)
- Navratri – a 9-day celebration worshipping the manifestations of Goddess Durga by fasting. The 10th day is called Dussehra (March/April)
- Krishna Janmashtami – celebrates the birth of Lord Krishna (Aug./Sept.)
- Maha Shivratri – celebrates the marriage of Lord Shiva with

Judaism

- Passover – commemorates the Israelites’ emancipation and exodus from Egypt. It lasts for seven or eight days (usually in April).
- Rosh Hashanah – celebrates the Jewish New Year and lasts for two days (Sept./Oct.)
- Yom Kippur – the Day of Atonement, which includes fasting and prayer (Sept./Oct.)
- Hanukkah – the festival of lights that lasts 8 nights (usually in December)

Christianity

- Easter Sunday – celebrated in the spring, it commemorates the resurrection of Jesus Christ. It follows Lent, a 40-day period of fasting.
- Christmas – signifies the birth of Jesus Christ. (December 25th)
- All Saints‘ Day– honours all the saints and martyrs of the Christian faith (November 1st)
- Other important holidays include Good Friday, Epiphany, Pentecost and

How individuals view themselves and the community around them, plays a big role in their daily lives, values, relationships and work. Neither principle is inherently better or worse than the other.

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Individualism

Individualism is the principle which focuses on human independence and freedom. It is generally against external interferences regarding personal choices. Individualism argues that conforming to others (via religion or tradition, for example) can dictate individuals' limitations.

- **CORE VALUES:** autonomy, independence, uniqueness, self-expression
- **RELATIONSHIPS:** Individuals from individualistic cultures are more likely to express their opinions and assert themselves in group settings, which may be perceived as rude or confrontational in cultures that prioritize harmony and social relationships. It can also lead to a sense of competition rather than cooperation. This can create a culture that values personal success over the common good.
- Western cultures such as North, West and Central Europe, North America, Australia

Collectivism

Collectivism is the principle of prioritizing group cohesion over individual pursuits. It views long-term relationships as essential since it promotes group goals. It is against individual objectives as it advocates sacrifice for the greater good.

- **CORE VALUES:** harmony, security, reliability, devotion to duty, good social relationships
- **RELATIONSHIPS:** in collectivistic cultures, relationships tend to be more group-focused, and individuals may prioritize the needs and goals of the group or the relationship over their desires. They also put greater emphasis on teamwork and collaboration. Harmony and avoiding conflict are prioritized, which may be perceived as passive or indirect in cultures that value assertiveness and direct communication.
- East and South Europe, Asia, Middle East, South America, Africa

! Note that these are generalizations and do not necessarily apply to every specific culture within the listed

Communication styles

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Communication between cultures differs in three aspects: language, nonverbal communication and social norms, which are closely interconnected and affect one another.

01 Language

- Directness – culture can influence whether verbal directness (in which verbal messages reveal the speaker's true intentions and wants, and the focus is on accomplishing a task) is valued (e.g. in Western cultures such as North America, Europe, Australia) or considered rude (e.g. in Asia, Middle East, Latin America, Africa).
- Formality – culture can influence whether personal warmth and small talk (e.g. Western cultures) or respect and formality are more valued (e.g. Asia, Middle East, Europe, Africa). Level of formality mostly depends on the situation.
- Context – In low-context cultures, words convey most of the meaning, and a clear message is expected (e.g. Western cultures). In high-context cultures, meaning is conveyed by more subtle verbal and non-verbal cues, and can be hidden (e.g. Asia, Middle East, Medditeranean, Latin America, Africa).

02 Social Norms

Social norms are closely connected to the style of language and the individualistic/collectivistic mindset.

- Self-disclosure – culture can influence whether talking to others about difficult personal situations is acceptable (e.g. in Western cultures, Latin America). Individuals from Asia, Middle East and Africa may disclose little about themselves and feel uncomfortable when asked to open up about personal problems in general. Similar to this is also emotional expressiveness. Some cultures feel more comfortable expressing sadness or anger. Meanwhile, others find strong emotions of any kind inappropriate.
- Topics – some cultures perceive certain topics (e.g. sex, politics, death, religion, money, mental health) as taboo and do not talk openly about them (e.g. Asia, Middle East, Africa). Western cultures tend to be more open and accepting of different views.

! Note that these are generalizations and do not necessarily apply to every specific culture within the listed

Communication styles

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03 Nonverbal communication

- Tone, volume and speed of speech – culture can influence how loudly it is appropriate to talk, the tone and level of expressiveness in the voice, and the speed of speech. Loud, fast, and expressive speech is common in some cultures (e.g. African, Caribbean, Latino, Arab, Mediterranean) but could be considered rude or aggressive in others. Asian, North American, and Northern and Central European cultures tend to be more soft-spoken.

- Gestures – generally, the connection between other nonverbal characteristics of speech and gestures is close. However, specific gestures have different meanings in different cultures, which can unintentionally lead to miscommunication. A well-meant thumbs up in most Western cultures is deeply insulting in the Middle East and West Africa. Similarly, an OK gesture is offensive in Brazil, and a „Come here“ finger gesture is only used for dogs in Asia. This, too, applies to greetings – while a handshake might be an expectation for some (e.g. in Western cultures), it is forbidden (e.g. in Muslim, Amish and Jewish cultures) or seen as invasive for others (e.g. in East Asia). There is also a difference in the firmness and longevity of a handshake. Expressive facial gestures and expressions are more common and have more meaning in the Mediterranean, Middle Eastern, Latin American and South Asian cultures.

- Eye contact – direct eye contact is highly valued, both when speaking and listening in Western cultures. Meanwhile, it is seen as a lack of respect, a challenge to authority and rude in most Asian, African and Latin American cultures. It can also be understood as flirtatious between members of the opposite sex in the Middle East.

- Space –the distance between speakers and physical touch are understood differently across cultures. More personal space and less touching are preferred in Western cultures and Asia, while proximity (e.g. in the Middle East), hugging and even

Sense of time

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Time orientation

The way we look at different eras reflects our understanding of time.

- **Past-oriented cultures** (e.g. Italian, British, Chinese) don't have long-term perspectives and avoid risks from introducing changes. Tradition is greatly valued.
- **Present-oriented cultures** (e.g. Latin American, African) do not dwell on the past. They rely on immediate results and tend not to have detailed plans for the future.
- **Future-oriented cultures** (e.g. American) live in the present to the fullest — but are oriented towards future events. They thoroughly plan their lives with no time wasted.

Role of time

People in different cultures have different understandings of using time in non-verbal communication.

- **Polychronic approach** (used in Latin America, Africa, Middle East, Mediterranean, South Asia) focuses on family and people. Schedules and plans are flexible and spontaneous, being late is not frowned upon, work relationships are strong, multitasking is normal.
- **Monochronic approach** (used in Western cultures and some East Asian countries) focuses on time. Plans are thoroughly scheduled, being late is judged, deadlines are not missed, building relationships at work is seen as a waste of time.

Punctuality, Waiting, Silence

Depending on the culture's approach, the three aspects of time differ:

- **Puntcuality** – in polychronic cultures, being late is normal, while in some strict monochronic (e.g. Germany, Japan, USA,) only arriving early means being on time.
- **Waiting,** queuing and delays are everyday things in polychronic cultures. In monochronic, people think of waiting as losing precious time and money.
- **Silence** – polychronic cultures think of silence as valuable time where one can reconsider their decisions. Asian cultures never interrupt and show disagreement with silence. Meanwhile,

Authority

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Attitude towards authority and hierarchy

Different cultures view authority differently. Some place a high value on hierarchical structures, while others prioritize equality and cooperation. In some cultures, such as most Western (Northern and Central European, Northern American, Australian, Israeli), children are taught from a young age that the boss, teacher or parent is just a facilitator among equals. And in those cultures, it is very appropriate to disagree with or challenge the boss.

In other parts of the world, where hierarchy and authority are deeply respected, such as South and East Asia, Middle East, Russia and some Latin American and African countries, children learn from a very young age to submit to the person in charge. In these cultures, it would be considered inappropriate or to be a bad follower if you were also to contradict the person who was senior to you.

Decision-making

Attitude towards authority and the perspective of individualism/collectivism also affect decision-making. In strongly consensual cultures, such as some Southeast and East Asian, Middle Eastern and European, many people are involved in the decision-making process. The decision takes a long time to be made by consensus, and then after the decision is made, it doesn't change. In comparison, in nonconsensual cultures, which prioritize authority and power over the consent of individuals or groups (e.g. North Korea, Saudi Arabia, Russia, China, Iran), decisions may be made very quickly, often by the boss. Views on authority and decision-making are not always connected, as seen in the USA, where disagreeing with the boss is acceptable until he makes a decision.

How to navigate multicultural environments

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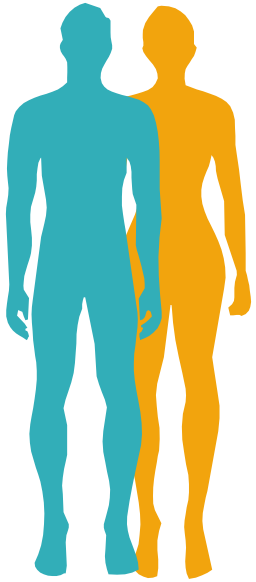
Be flexible

Have a non-judgmental attitude

Be patient and take into account miscommunication (do not take things personally)

Learn about the specifics of different cultures you interact with



Treat everyone with the same respect

Actively listen to others and try to understand what they‘re saying

Check if everyone understands the same way

Do not reinforce stereotypes

Read more here: https://www.commisceo-global.com/blog/33-tips-on-working-in-multicultural-teams

How to improve your skills

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01

Be self-aware

A good first step to improve your intercultural skills is to learn about your own culture and realize how it influences the way you act and communicate. Reflect on the way you present yourself and the attitude you display. Ask yourself if someone could misinterpret any of your actions or words.

02

Educate yourself

You can find resources that can help you learn about other cultures such as books, podcasts and documentaries. Try following creators on social media from different backgrounds to learn about their personal experience. If you have the means, traveling (which doesn‘t necessarily have to be abroad) is also an excellent way to immerse in a different culture and experience it yourself.

03

Listen and observe

You can benefit from listening to the message and observing nonverbal cues. Common nonverbal cues (such as a thumbs up or a nod) can mean different things in different cultures, and you could misinterpret them if you observe them without considering the verbal message that accompanies them.

04

Get involved in intercultural acitivities

Joining or organizing different activities can expand your knowledge - you can organize a lunch where each attendee brings a traditional dish. Food is an excellent conversation starter and gives you the occasion to share about yourself. Another idea is to start a diversity calendar - share celebrations and holidays to keep track and celebrate with others.

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Conclusion

Understanding different cultures (developing one‘s cultural awareness) and being able to communicate and work effectively with people from diverse backgrounds is a crucial skill for personal and professional success.

Intercultural competence begins with ourselves. If we are aware of our values and live them, we can classify each other's actions and reactions better and react efficiently to them.

> *Treat others the way you want to be treated.*

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Thank you