



Guiding Principles for Successful Outcomes Across Cultural Differences

Successful outcomes across cultural difference are more likely to occur when agreed upon guiding principles are used. These guidelines have also been used as tools to lead organizational change efforts.

“Try On” is an invitation to be open-minded to others’ ideas, feelings, worldviews and ways of doing things so that greater exploration and understanding are possible. The invitation also includes feeling free to take those things that “fit” and to leave or file away those things that do not fit.

It is OK to Disagree assumes that disagreement is not only inevitable but can help individuals and groups produce better outcomes. By acknowledging what we have in common **and** by recognizing, understanding and appreciating what is different between us, individuals can shift the pressure to “be”, “think”, or “act” the same into permission to generate all possible ideas and strategies. This guideline assumes we can disagree and still stay connected and do great work.

“It’s not OK to blame, shame or attack self or others” assumes that most of us have learned well how to show our disagreement by making the other person wrong. This happens in direct, indirect, verbal, and non-verbal ways. When we attack, shame, or blame others, and ourselves we are less likely to take in what others are sharing and less likely to problem-solve across our difference.

“Practice self-focus” assumes that learning about differences can be accelerated and maximized when we listen to internal thoughts, feelings, and reactions. When we find ourselves getting irritated with someone about cultural differences, we can blame and shame them or ourselves, or we can figure out internally what is causing our irritation. An effective tool for practicing self-focus is using “I”, rather than “we”, “you” or “one” statements. When we intend to refer to others, be specific about who those others are by name or group. In addition, when speaking about our own experience or opinion, use “I have found...” or, “I think, I feel, I believe...” and include feeling words, e.g. mad, sad, scared, happy, empowered, and relieved, etc.

“Notice both the “process and content” means notice both, “what we say”, “how” and “why” we say or do something and how the members of the group react. For example, notice who is active and who is not, who is comfortable and who is not, who is interested and who is not, including ourselves. It can make a difference in the results and the experience to ask about and delineate both the process and content including sharing our own thoughts and feelings.

“Practice “both/and” thinking” invites us to see that more than one reality or perspective can be true at the same time (diunital thinking) rather than seeing reality as strictly either/or, right or wrong, good or bad, this or that, (dichotomous thinking). Using “both/and thinking” can be extremely helpful in reconciling differences and conflicts that do not present easy solutions.

“Be aware of both the intent and impact of your actions” invites us to consider that in cross-cultural interactions, our intent might not match our impact. When we have a negative impact on others across culture, ensuring a successful outcome requires changing that negative impact. This guideline requires a willingness to take risks and to exchange and receive honest feedback about the impact of our words, policies, and actions on others. It is possible to be well intentioned AND still say, do, implement, and allow hurtful things. To be successful across difference, it is immensely helpful to be willing to shift our behaviors and actions such that people who are different from us feel fully valued and included.

“Confidentiality” invites us to honor personal sharing and to not repeat personal details outside of the group. Confidentiality assumes that feeling free to share in one setting, does not translate into comfort in other settings. So, if we want to bring up information related to a person’s sharing in other settings, it is important to privately ask the person if it is acceptable to do so. Confidentiality also assumes that we will not use something someone has shared to hurt them, get them, or punish them later. This is especially important for work groups or teams involving multiple staff or organizational levels. Participants are encouraged to freely share their learnings about theory, practice, and themselves in any setting of their choice.

Individuals and organizations have found these guiding principles (guidelines) to be helpful in identifying, implementing, and tracking personal and organizational change from a diversity, inclusion, and equity perspective. We ask that you assess which of these principles you are using well, and which are you finding more difficult, both personally and organizationally. Recognizing, understanding, appreciating, and fully utilizing all cultural perspectives increases the likelihood that successful outcomes will occur in our organizations and businesses.

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