

# Connecting Banks and Communities Through Cultural Agility

## Workshop Facilitation & Discussion Guide

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# What Is Cultural Agility?

People use a variety of terms to describe the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully navigate cultural differences. Common terms include: cultural intelligence, cultural competence, cultural responsiveness, etc. In the field of health care, Melanie Tervalon has observed that what is needed is less a sense of cultural competence than a sense of cultural humility.

We prefer the term cultural agility because it implicitly recognizes and honors the fact that there are cultural differences and that, in order to navigate those differences successfully, one must be open to a wide variety of human differences and agile or flexible in dealing with them. This requires a kind of dual consciousness that understands one's own culture and cultural assumptions as well as a basic understanding of cross-cultural differences and the ability to adapt or modify one's behavior to effectively relate to culturally diverse others. Minority groups readily understand the need to "code switch" (decipher the "code" of the majority culture and adapt their behavior accordingly when necessary while remaining true to their own culture and cultural identity). Cultural agility might be considered to be the process whereby people in the majority acquire and employ these same skills to build trust and relationship in an increasingly diverse world.

## **Cultural Agility Defined**

Cultural agility may be defined as an ongoing process by which individuals and organizations respond respectfully and effectively to people of all cultures, languages, classes, races, sexes, ethnic backgrounds, religions, sexual orientations, abilities and other diversity factors "in a manner that recognizes, affirms and values the worth of individuals, families and communities and protects and preserves the dignity of each." (National Association of Social Workers, 2001)

Operationally speaking, culturally agile organizations and individuals are able to integrate and transform knowledge about diverse groups of people into "specific standards, policies, practices, and attitudes used in appropriate cultural settings to increase the quality of services; thereby producing better outcomes." (Davis & Donald, 1997)

## **The Cross Model of Cultural Competence or Cultural Agility**

There are many developmental models of cultural competence in the multi-disciplinary field of diversity. However, a commonly used and referenced model has been the Cross Model. The Cross Model of Cultural Competence by Terry Cross (1988) offers both an institutional and individual framework to help gauge progress on various diversity initiatives. It describes cultural competency as a movement along a continuum that is based on the premise of respect and appreciation of individuals and cultural differences. It is important to note that institutions and individuals can be at different stages of development simultaneously on the Cross continuum. For example, an institution or an individual may be at the Basic Culturally Competent stage with regard to gender issues but be at the Cultural Incapacity stage with regard to race or sexual orientation issues.

### **The Cross Model consists of six stages:**

1. Cultural Destructiveness
2. Cultural Incapacity
3. Cultural Blindness
4. Cultural Pre-Competence or Agility
5. Basic Cultural Competence or Agility; and
6. Advanced Cultural Competence

**Cultural Destructiveness-** Individuals in this phase: a) view cultures other than their own as a problem; b) assume that their culture is superior and all others are inferior; c) believe that other cultures should behave more like the majority or mainstream. The most negative end of the continuum, cultural destructiveness is represented by attitudes, policies and practices which are destructive to other cultures and consequently to individuals within those cultures. The most extreme example of this orientation are programs which actively participate in cultural genocide--the purposeful destruction of a culture. Examples would include the boarding schools mandated in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries by the Bureau of Indian Affairs in the United States which attempted to destroy the language, culture and traditions of many Native American tribes.

**Cultural Incapacity-** Individuals in this phase: a) lack cultural awareness and skills; b) may have been brought up in a homogenous society and taught to behave in certain ways that were never questioned; c) believe in the superiority of their own culture and adopt a paternalistic attitude toward all others; d) act towards culturally diverse others largely on the basis of stereotypes as opposed to experience with culturally diverse members of

other groups. Institutionally, organizations at this position on the continuum do not intentionally seek to be culturally destructive but rather lack the capacity to help minority clients or communities. The characteristics of cultural incapacity include: discriminatory hiring practices, subtle messages to people of color that they are not valued or welcome, and generally lower expectations of minority clients.

**Cultural Blindness-** Individuals in this phase: a) recognize that people are different but fail to appreciate what difference those differences make in others day to day experience of the world or the workforce; b) prefer to believe that all people are basically the same and play by the same rules; and c) believe that all people should be treated in same way regardless of race, gender or other language, culture, or religious differences. Culturally blind institutions or agencies are characterized by the belief that helping approaches traditionally used by the dominant culture are universally applicable; if the system worked as it should, all people--regardless of race or culture--would be serviced with equal effectiveness. This view reflects a well-intended liberal philosophy; however, the consequences of such a belief is to make services so ethnocentric as to render them virtually useless to all but the most assimilated people of color.

Such services ignore cultural strengths, encourage assimilation and blame the victims for their problems. Members of minority communities are viewed from the cultural deprivation model which asserts that problems are the result of inadequate cultural resources. Outcomes are usually measured by how closely the client approximates a middle class non-minority existence. Institutional racism restricts minority access to professional training, staff positions and services.

Eligibility for services is often ethnocentric. For example, foster care licensing standards in many states restrict licensure of extended family systems occupying one home. These agencies may participate in special projects with minority populations when monies are specifically available or with the intent of "rescuing" people of color. Unfortunately, such minority projects are often conducted without community guidance and are the first casualties when funds run short. Culturally blind organizations suffer from a deficit of information about culturally diverse communities and often lack the avenues through which they can obtain needed information. While these organizations often view themselves as unbiased and responsive to minority needs, their ethnocentrism is reflected in attitude, policy and practice.

**Cultural Pre-Competence-** Individuals in this phase: a) recognize that important cultural differences exist; b) are open to learning about other cultures and c) realize their shortcomings in interacting with culturally diverse others. However, these individuals are not open to critically reflecting on their own culture and rely on culturally diverse others to educate them about their experiences rather than seeking to educate themselves about these differences. At the organizational level, this phase may lead institutions to address diversity issues by hiring diverse staff, offering diversity or cultural sensitivity training,

and adding people of color or cultural diversity to the organization's board of directors. In short, diversity is present but real inclusion and appreciation of differences is not.

**Basic Cultural Competence or Agility-** Individuals in this phase: a) accept and appreciate cultural differences; b) are willing to engage in personal introspection about their own biases and culture; c) understand the need to adapt their behavior (including communication, behavior and conflict styles) when dealing with culturally diverse others. However, they are unclear about exactly how to modify their behavior to interact effectively with culturally diverse others.

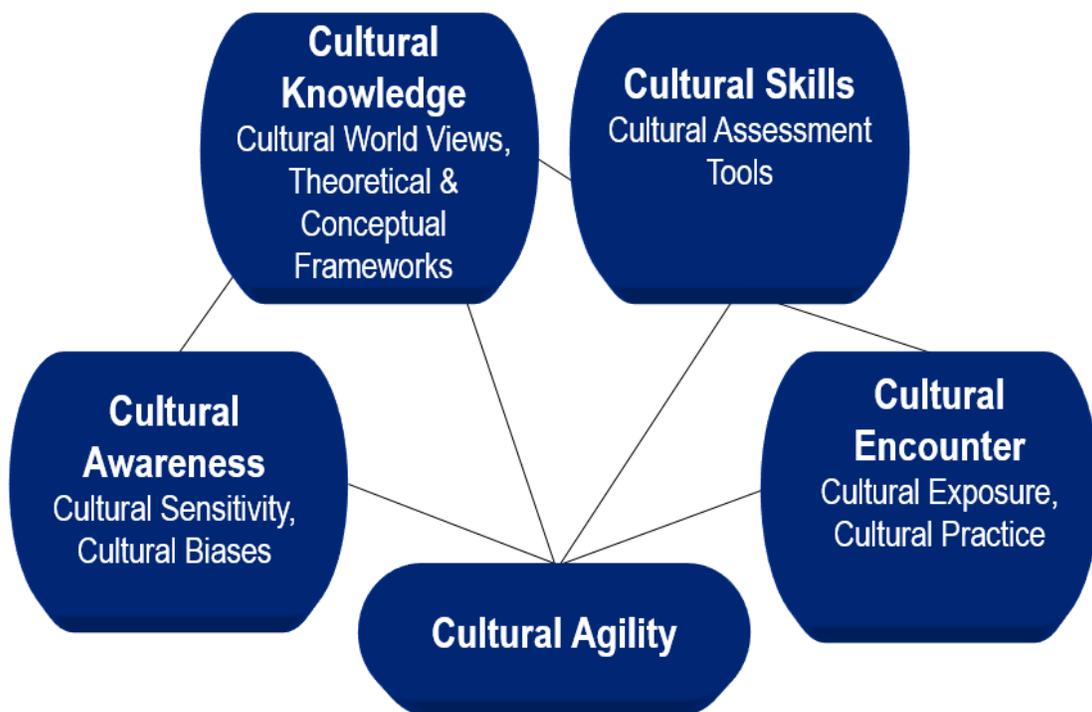
Culturally agile organizations are characterized by acceptance and respect for difference, continuing self-assessment regarding culture, careful attention to the dynamics of difference, continuous expansion of cultural knowledge and resources, and a variety of adaptations to service models in order to better meet the needs of minority populations. The culturally agile organization works to increase the cultural agility of its employees and particularly its managers and senior leaders, seeks advice and consultation from minority and historically disadvantaged communities and actively decides what it is and is not capable of providing to diverse clients.

**Advanced Cultural Competence or Agility-** The most positive end of the scale is advanced cultural agility or proficiency. Individuals at this phase not only accept and appreciate cultural differences but know how to accommodate these differences by modifying their communication, behavior and conflict styles. They may well have integrated positive attributes from other cultures into their own personal cultural framework and have well-developed skills for successful multicultural interactions. They advocate for and act as allies for other culturally diverse individuals at work.

The culturally agile or proficient organization adapts their systems, policies and practices to the needs of multicultural employees and clients. Executives and management come from a variety of cultural backgrounds and perspectives and understand how to manage a culturally diverse workforce and adapt products and services to diverse segments of multicultural markets. The organization hires staff who are specialists in culturally competent practice but makes clear that cultural agility is everyone's responsibility. Finally, the culturally agile organization not only seeks to continuously improve its own cultural agility but works in the broader societal and political spheres to improve relations between all people and cultures.

## Cultural Agility – Leadership Skills

1. How does one become a culturally agile leader? While there are many ideas, models and theories, one of the best comes from Dr. Josepha Campinha-Bacote. To Campinha-Bacote, cultural agility “is a *process of becoming* culturally agile, not *being* culturally agile.”
2. To Campinha-Bacote, cultural agility is comprised of four key components: cultural awareness, cultural knowledge, cultural skills and putting those skills to work through cross-cultural encounters. Visually, her model could be depicted like this:



3. Each of the four elements of the Campinha-Bacote model are explained below:

***Cultural awareness*** is defined as the process of conducting a self-examination of one's own personal cultural assumptions, stereotypes and biases towards other cultures. It includes an in-depth exploration of one's professional culture and assumptions.

***Cultural knowledge*** is defined as the process by which the leader or professional acquires a general understanding or framework of cross-cultural value differences (culture general) as well as culture-specific knowledge of specific cultural characteristics, behaviors and traditions that could affect relationships with a particular cultural group of workers or clients.

***Cultural skill*** is the ability to show demonstrated mastery of a variety of diversity-related or cross-cultural skills directly related to working effectively across cultures. While experts differ on the contents of this skill set, it is likely to contain skills on three different levels: intrapersonal, interpersonal or group-based and organizational.

***Cultural encounters*** is the process by which the culturally agile leader or professional directly engages in face-to-face cultural interactions with culturally diverse workers and clients in order to improve organizational effectiveness, customer service and satisfaction and the greater social good.

## **Specific Cultural Agility Skills (Critical Measures)**

1. Culturally inquisitive, manages own biases
2. Capable of perspective shifting
1. Hire, retain, manage and mentor a diverse workforce
2. Trust-building with diverse employees, clients
3. Cross-cultural communication
4. Diversity-related team-building
5. Inter-racial and cross-cultural conflict resolution
6. Issue-spots diversity-related employment law matters that could create liability
7. Masters the art of diversity-related complaint handling

# **Global Leadership Skills (Adapted From Ernest Gundling)**

## **Interpersonal**

- Establishing credibility (across genders, races and cultures)
- Giving and receiving feedback in ways that account for cultural differences
- Obtaining information
- Evaluating people/performance (talent management)
- Managing interpersonal/cross-cultural conflict

## **Group**

- Cross-cultural negotiation
- Cross-cultural sales and marketing
- Training and development
- Building and managing effective global teams

## **Organizational**

- Change Management
- Product/Service Innovation
- Knowledge Transfer
- Strategic Planning
- Succession Planning
- Mergers and Acquisitions (Cultural Implications)

## Managing Cross-Cultural Conflict

1. Among the most important of the cultural agility skills is the ability to manage and resolve diversity-related or cross-cultural conflict.
2. This skill is so central because, despite the many advantages of culturally diverse workplaces, one of the central disadvantages is that culturally diverse workplaces experience more conflict and people use different conflict styles to deal with that conflict.
3. For a bibliography of articles relating to gender-based conflict style differences, click here:  
<http://www.mediationworks.com/mti/certconf/bib-gender.htm>
4. For an excellent discussion of the differences between American-born African Americans and White (Anglo-Saxon Protestant) conflict styles, see:
  - Black and White: Styles in Conflict, Thomas Kochman, 1983. (Maintaining that whites' conflict style can be characterized as "Peace Before Truth" while Blacks' conflict style can be characterized as "Truth Before Peace.") Buy the book at:  
<http://www.amazon.com/Black-Styles-Conflict-Thomas-Kochman/dp/0226449556>
  - Visit Thomas Kochman's website at Talking Cultural Diversity (Kochman Mavrelis, Associates, Inc.):  
<http://www.talkingculturaldiversity.com/>

- For a free download from Kochman on the differences between Black and White Communication and Conflict Styles, click here: [http://www.kmiversity.com/shop/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/AfricanAmerican\\_CommunicationStyle\\_v1.pdf](http://www.kmiversity.com/shop/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/AfricanAmerican_CommunicationStyle_v1.pdf)
6. The problem with many American-based conflict resolution models is that they don't account for diversity-related and especially cultural differences in conflict styles. (See, e.g. the Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument) American conflict resolution models focus on the need for directness but fail to appreciate that many other cultures (China, India for example) have indirect conflict styles.
  7. In our view, the best intercultural conflict style model and assessment instrument that we have seen is the Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory created by Mitchell Hammer of Hammer Consulting. The ICS has been internationally normed to address both direct and indirect conflict styles and is being used by leading corporations the world over to address conflict style differences in the workforce and with culturally diverse customers and patients. The ICS is a proprietary instrument of Mitchell R. Hammer, Ph.D. and is licensed and distributed by Hammer Consulting.
    - For the website of Hammer Consulting click here: <http://www.icsinventory.com/index.php>
    - For information on licensing the Intercultural Conflict Style Inventory, click here: [http://www.icsinventory.com/ics\\_inv.php](http://www.icsinventory.com/ics_inv.php)
    - For a more detailed description of the ICS inventory, prepared by Mitch Hammer, click here: <http://www.icsinventory.com/pdf/detailed-framework.pdf>
  8. For an excellent book on resolving intercultural conflict in the workplace, read "Managing Intercultural Conflict Effectively by Stella Ting-Toomey and John G. Oetzel. Copy right 2001. Sage Publications