

Cultural Competence Diversity and Social Injustice

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I grew up in a loving home where my parents were present for my brother and me. They made sure that we attended worship services and Sunday school, and faith became part of how I understood family, responsibility, and endurance. My grandmother was the strongest Christian example in my life. She seemed to know God not only through words but through the way she faced hardship. I admired her because she could remain cheerful after experiencing prejudice and being called the “n” word repeatedly. When I asked how she continued without becoming consumed by bitterness, she explained that God had given her strength and had remained faithful throughout her life.

Her response did not mean that racism was harmless or that religious faith removed the responsibility to challenge injustice. She had learned to survive a society that often failed to protect her dignity. Her faith gave her an internal source of worth that racist language could not define. As I became older, I began to understand that cultural competence requires both interpersonal respect and awareness of the historical systems that make some people repeatedly carry the burden of adaptation. Asking a person to forgive or remain cheerful is not enough. Individuals and institutions must also confront the behavior and unequal conditions that cause harm.

The Skills I Try to Practice

The skills I exercise toward other people include self-awareness, understanding, communication, respect, and cultural competence. These abilities are related but distinct. Self-awareness requires examining how my background shapes what I consider normal. Understanding involves learning about another person’s experiences without assuming that one example explains an entire group. Communication includes listening, asking respectful questions, and clarifying meaning. Respect recognizes the person’s dignity even when we disagree. Cultural competence brings these skills together in action.

People often feel comfortable with those who resemble them in race, age, ethnicity, religion, gender, language, education, or social experience. Familiarity reduces uncertainty, but preference for familiarity can become exclusion. A workplace, church, classroom, or neighborhood may claim to welcome everyone while informal networks remain closed to people who appear different. Human tendencies do not excuse discrimination. Awareness allows us to notice the moment when comfort becomes a barrier to fairness.

Understanding Diversity Beyond Race and Gender

I have learned that diversity extends beyond race and gender. People differ through age, disability, religion, language, nationality, immigration status, socioeconomic position, education, family structure, sexual orientation, rural or urban background, military experience, health, and many other aspects of identity. These dimensions interact. A Black woman with a disability may experience institutions differently from a Black man without a disability, while two immigrants from the same country may differ through class, generation, religion, or reason for migration.

Recognizing complexity prevents tokenism. One employee should not be expected to speak for an entire racial or religious group. Cultural competence means creating opportunities for individuals to explain their own needs and perspectives. It also means recognizing patterns. Treating every case as completely individual can hide discrimination that repeatedly affects a group. The challenge is to see both the person and the larger context.

Socialization, Stereotypes, and Responsibility

All people learn behaviors and assumptions through family, school, media, religion, neighborhood, and institutions. Because socialization is powerful, any of us may absorb stereotypes or participate in exclusion without consciously choosing hatred. This does not mean that everyone is equally a victim and perpetrator. Some prejudices are supported by greater institutional power and produce more serious consequences. A biased thought and a discriminatory hiring system are not identical.

Responsibility begins when we recognize a stereotype and examine its source. We can ask whether the belief is supported by evidence, whether we apply the same standard to other groups, and how it affects our behavior. An apology is meaningful when it is followed by correction. Cultural growth is not proven by claiming never to notice difference. It is shown by responding to difference without reducing a person to it.

Hogan's Four Skills of Cultural Diversity

The original reflection refers to Hogan's four skills of cultural diversity as a framework that helped develop cultural competence. Hogan's model emphasizes awareness, understanding, acceptance or appreciation, and behavior or skill. The precise wording may vary across editions and instructional use, but the progression is useful. People first become aware of culture and bias, then seek understanding, develop respect for difference, and translate learning into effective action (Hogan, 2007).

Awareness

Awareness includes recognizing **personal identity, privilege**, discomfort, and automatic assumptions. My grandmother's experience made racism visible to me, but awareness also requires noticing forms of injustice I have not experienced directly. I should not wait until a person suffers publicly before learning about the barriers affecting that community.

Awareness is uncomfortable because it may challenge the image we hold of ourselves. A person can value fairness and still act on bias. Accepting that possibility allows improvement. Denying it protects self-image while leaving behavior unchanged.

Understanding

Understanding develops through history, conversation, literature, observation, and evidence. It asks why practices have meaning and how institutions affect people. For example, distrust of healthcare among some communities cannot be dismissed as ignorance without considering discrimination, experimentation, unequal treatment, cost, and communication failures.

Understanding should remain humble. Learning about a culture from a book does not give the learner authority over people who live within it. Knowledge creates better questions rather than final certainty.

Acceptance and Appreciation

Acceptance means recognizing that difference does not make another person inferior. Appreciation goes further by valuing the knowledge and perspective diversity can contribute. It should not become exoticism, in which food, clothing, or festivals are celebrated while discrimination is ignored. A culture is not a decoration for an institutional event.

Respect also allows internal diversity and criticism. People may value a tradition while challenging harmful elements. Cultural competence does not require agreeing with every practice. It requires discussing concerns without insulting the entire community and applying ethical standards consistently.

Behavior and Skill

Cultural competence becomes real through behavior. A manager can use structured hiring criteria, an educator can choose inclusive examples, a clinician can obtain an interpreter, and a church can examine whether leadership reflects the congregation. Skills include adapting communication, managing conflict, interrupting biased comments, and designing accessible processes.

Good intentions are insufficient when systems remain exclusionary. A person may sincerely respect immigrants but provide important information only in difficult English. Behavioral competence asks what change would allow participation.

Perception and Culture

Perception is the process through which people organize and interpret information to create meaning. The original essay correctly states that two individuals can encounter the same situation and understand it differently. Culture influences which details receive attention, how emotion is expressed, how authority is approached, and what behavior appears respectful.

Eye contact provides a simple example. In some settings, direct eye contact communicates confidence and honesty. In others, prolonged eye contact with an elder or authority figure may appear disrespectful. A teacher who treats one standard as universal may misjudge a student's character. The solution is not to memorize rigid national rules, because individuals differ. It is to notice ambiguity and seek context.

Perception also operates through racialized expectations. The same behavior may be called assertive in one employee and aggressive in another. A child's normal mistake may be interpreted as dangerous because of race. Cultural competence requires examining whether labels change according to who performs the behavior.

Communication Across Difference

Communication includes words, tone, silence, timing, gesture, and assumptions about what should be stated directly. A culturally competent communicator avoids unnecessary jargon, checks understanding, and allows more than one method of participation. Listening should not be preparation for rebuttal; it should be an effort to understand what the person means.

When language differs, a qualified interpreter may be necessary. Family members can offer support, but asking a child to interpret medical, legal, or financial information can create errors and emotional burden. Written materials should be accessible, and people should have time to ask questions.

Conflict is inevitable in diverse settings. Respectful dialogue does not require pretending that a racist statement is merely another viewpoint. Boundaries should protect dignity. The goal is to correct harmful behavior while leaving room for learning where possible.

Christian Faith and Cultural Competence

My Christian background teaches that every person has inherent value and that faith should produce

love, justice, humility, and service. Jesus repeatedly crossed social boundaries and treated marginalized people as morally significant. These teachings can motivate Christians to challenge racism and welcome people from different backgrounds.

Christian communities must also examine their own history. Churches have sometimes supported segregation, colonialism, antisemitism, and gender inequality, while other Christians organized abolition, civil rights, relief, and reconciliation. Faith cannot be used only to comfort victims while protecting unjust systems. My grandmother's strength should inspire action against the conditions she had to endure.

Working with people from different religions also requires humility. Cultural competence does not mean attempting to convert every professional or social interaction into a religious argument. A Christian can remain faithful while respecting the rights and conscience of Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists, nonreligious people, and others.

From Cultural Competence to Cultural Humility

The term cultural competence can imply that culture is a subject one eventually masters. Cultural humility provides an important correction. It emphasizes lifelong self-evaluation, recognition of power differences, and partnership. No person completes cultural learning because societies and individuals continue to change (Hook et al., 2013; Tervalon & Murray-García, 1998).

Cultural humility allows me to say, "I do not know; please help me understand," without making the other person responsible for all my education. I can research first, listen, and remain open to correction. This approach reduces the risk of using partial knowledge with excessive confidence.

Social Injustice Is Structural as Well as Personal

The racial slur directed at my grandmother was an interpersonal act, but it existed within a larger history of segregation and unequal opportunity. Social injustice appears through housing, schooling, policing, employment, healthcare, voting, environmental exposure, and representation. Cultural training that focuses only on polite language cannot correct these systems.

Organizations should review outcomes. Who is hired, promoted, disciplined, heard, or excluded? Are facilities accessible? Do policies disadvantage caregivers or religious minorities unnecessarily? Data do not explain every difference, but they can reveal patterns requiring investigation.

Equity is not favoritism. It recognizes that identical treatment can preserve unequal barriers. Providing a ramp, interpreter, or flexible religious accommodation allows participation rather than creating an unfair advantage.

Responding to Racist Language

When someone uses a racial slur, silence can communicate acceptance. A response should prioritize the targeted person's safety and wishes. Depending on context, one can state that the language is unacceptable, document the incident, report it, or seek institutional action. The burden should not fall entirely on the person harmed.

Correction can be direct without becoming performative. The goal is not to prove that the responder is morally superior. It is to stop harm, support accountability, and change the conditions allowing repetition. Where the person who caused harm is willing to learn, education may be part of the response, but consequences may still be necessary.

Practical Commitments

I can strengthen cultural competence by reading beyond familiar perspectives, building relationships across difference, examining the media I consume, and requesting feedback. In group settings, I can notice who has not spoken and create opportunities without placing anyone on display. I can pronounce names carefully, avoid assumptions about family or religion, and challenge stereotypes.

I can also support institutional change. This includes transparent hiring, accessible services, anti-harassment procedures, fair evaluation, and leadership accountability. Cultural competence is not an individual personality trait alone; it is a quality of systems.

Conclusion

My understanding of cultural competence begins with my family and especially with my grandmother. Her Christian faith helped her endure racism without allowing hateful language to define her. Her strength inspires me, but it also reminds me that victims should not be expected to carry injustice gracefully while others remain silent.

Awareness, understanding, communication, respect, and effective behavior help people work across differences. Hogan's skills provide a progression from recognizing culture to practicing competence. Perception varies, and what appears obvious through one cultural framework may be interpreted differently through another.

Diversity includes race, gender, age, disability, religion, language, class, nationality, geography, and other identities. Cultural competence must therefore remain flexible and humble. Its purpose is not to erase difference or achieve perfect knowledge. It is to build relationships and institutions in which every person's dignity is protected and injustice is addressed rather than normalized.

References

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