

A PUBLICATION OF COOK ROSS INC.

Cultural Communication Guide

4th Edition

SAMPLE



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Introduction

Top performing businesses and organizations know that the demands of global commerce require mature diversity management skills. Customers and co-workers come from a variety of backgrounds, and their customs, thinking, behavior, values, and communication styles vary accordingly. Our cultural understanding and literacy, along with our assumptions about business etiquette are being challenged by major demographic shifts that bring us face to face with new people and unfamiliar ideas. Successfully navigating the ever-evolving workforce and marketplace requires effective and respectful communication between people with different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

No matter how well we attempt to understand each other, we are increasingly finding that communication is hard. Within the workplace we are often surprised at how differently people approach their jobs. Unfamiliarity with cultural communication styles can lead to misinterpretation, misunderstanding and even unintentional insult.

The Cultural Communication Guide identifies areas of key differences and subtle distinctions among cultural communities which, when unknown, may compromise trust and cooperation. We highlight communication tendencies observable among many U.S. cultural groups as a tool for fostering cross-cultural interactions that are comfortable, meaningful and inclusive.

It is very important to note that this Guide provides information about broad cultural frameworks, dispositions, and archetypes. These categories are intended to help provide answers and insights into the question: What makes people do what they do? Archetypes are deeply imprinted (learned or inherited) unconscious ideas, patterns of thought, beliefs or behaviors that broadly apply to a large group of people. They are not assumed to apply to each individual group member.

Remember that cultural patterns are not universal. We must all be vigilant to avoid generalizations and stereotypes about cultural groups. Variations within and among cultures always exist. In addition to these variations, in our multicultural world, millions of people identify with multiple cultural identities. It is important to maintain respect for the infinite complexity of each unique human being which always defies simple categorization.

NOTE: In establishing the categories for this guide, we have used a combination of those established by the U.S. Office of Management & Budget for the 2000 Census and common Western geopolitical terms. We do so for ease of navigation, and acknowledge that these may be controversial to some readers.

Guidelines for Cross-Cultural Communication

1. Learn from generalizations about other cultures, but don't use those generalizations to stereotype, oversimplify or categorize.
2. Don't assume that there is only one right way (*your way*) to communicate.
3. Don't assume that breakdowns in communication occur because **others** are wrong or unyielding.
4. Listen actively and empathetically.
5. Stop, suspend judgment and attempt to look at the situation as an outsider.
6. Beware of your assumptions. Invite individuals to self-identify.

Important Awareness for Removing Cross-Cultural Communication Barriers

1. Be aware of rules regarding spatial distance between speakers during conversation.
2. Be aware that cultures may vary in what they consider humorous or taboo.
3. Be aware of different rules for taking turns during conversations.
4. Be aware that cultures may use different standards for loudness, speed of delivery, silence, gestures, attentiveness and response time.

Tips for Increasing the Effectiveness of Cross-Cultural Communication

1. Use common words.
2. Follow basic rules of grammar.
3. Avoid slang.
4. Repeat basic ideas, without shouting.
5. Paraphrase important points.
6. Check for understanding.

American Indian/Native American & Alaskan Native

Notes	<p>Native Americans are a highly heterogeneous group of between 2.37 million (American Indian) and 4.5 million (mixed American Indian and other ancestries) people. Comprised of more than 500 tribes and 200 native societies, they reside primarily in metropolitan areas, with a third living on tribal lands largely in New Mexico, Arizona, Utah, North/South Dakota and Montana. The most numerous tribes are Cherokee, Navajo, Sioux and Chippewa. Native Americans vary widely in terms of language, family/social structure, acculturation, employment and education level. Members of this group may self-identify as Native American, American Indian or by tribal names.</p>	
People & Relationships	Relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tend to consider being in relationship with family, clan and tribe as “the” way of being in the world. • Often nurture respectful relationships through sharing. • May be hesitant to trust those outside the group.
	Expression of Feelings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are generally emotionally restrained but comfortable conveying feelings to members of family or clan. • May speak dispassionately about issues of great importance to themselves. • Tend to express emotions through metaphors, legends and physical symptoms.
	Power Distance/ Deference to Authority	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likely to perceive considerable social distance between elders/tribal authorities and others. • Often show great respect to elders and those in authority.
	Individualism/ Collectivism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tend to see individual as rooted in collective identity which includes ancestors, present family, clan and the unborn. • May view individual accomplishments as less important than contribution to group. • Depending on tribe, the family/clan may center on either males or females; Navajo are matriarchal. • May believe that no person has the right to speak for another.
	Conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often avoid people with whom conflict exists; dislike being pushed toward resolution. • Sometimes respond with silence to allegations or accusations. • May use third parties to negotiate compromises.
	Face Saving	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tend to be conscious of individual and family honor/dignity. • Likely to act deliberately to prevent insulting or imposing. • May be reluctant to confront; loss of self-control damages reputation.
	Taboo Subjects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May not discuss personal matters. • One should ask how person self-identifies; not assuming they considers him/herself American Indian/Native American.
Reasoning	Approaches to Knowing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most believe that knowledge of nature confers understanding. • May seek knowing in the ways of the ancestors.
	Decision Making	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individuals often make decisions based on implications for family or clan well-being. • Tribal kinship structures determine who makes decisions. • Elders and tribal leaders often make decisions for the group.

American Indian/Native American & Alaskan Native

Communication Patterns	Greetings	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Customarily shake hands lightly and briefly. • Traditionally address elders by relational titles (grandmother/father, aunt/uncle, etc.). • May use title and individual/clan name.
	Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Generally communicate quietly and slowly with many inflections. • Likely to consider speaking quickly and interrupting, especially elders, to be rude. • May take conversational turns, with several moments of silence between speakers. • Tend to value polite and attentive listening. • Often use stories, metaphors and analogies to convey messages.
	Gestures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Typically gesture infrequently, except when telling stories. • Pointing fingers may be seen as impolite; may indicate directions with mouth.
	Eye Contact	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Most often believe that making direct eye contact is rude and invasive, even among friends. • Likely to look directly when listening to a story-teller.
	Time Orientation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tend to feel that time is always present and related to seasons. • Generally undertake activities when appropriate people and things have come together, not according to a schedule. • Often oriented to the present and past; planning for individual future may be seen as selfish.
	Direct/Indirect	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Likely to prefer indirect statements. • Elders may be very direct with those younger than themselves.
	Contextual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tend to be highly sensitive to non-verbal communication.
	Personal Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May be more comfortable sitting side-by-side when in conversation. • Frequently need 2-3 feet distance between themselves and outsiders. • Typically only touch family and close friends.
Work Styles	Competition vs. Cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Tend to place great value on cooperation. • May discourage individual advancement and taking oneself too seriously. • Tend to be uncomfortable with competitive discussions or events.
	Task Completion	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Often put maintaining relationships ahead of completing task.
	Tolerance for Change and Uncertainty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • May mistrust ideas and changes suggested by outsiders.

Diversity & Inclusion and Cultural Competency

Cook Ross Inc. is a national leader in diversity, inclusion and cultural competency consulting and training services. We increase profit, performance and collaboration by transforming organizational cultures, strengthening leadership, and leveraging diversity, inclusion & cultural competency.

Cook Ross Products and Services

Diversity and Inclusion

Our methodology is built around a transformative approach to Diversity and Inclusion Consulting – Reinventing Diversity for the 21st Century. This approach creates sustainable change in organizations by replacing race-based, US-centric, ‘us vs. them’ diversity training with a systems model that explores globalism, cultural intelligence and cultural flexibility, inherent human tendency toward bias, and unconscious organizational patterns that exist which impact the way employees, vendors, and customers from different cultures, ages, and backgrounds all relate to each other.

Cultural Competency

We believe that cultural competency can be learned and developed, and that it can lead to unprecedented growth and vastly improved productivity, morale, internal communication, leadership, and customer satisfaction. In helping organizations develop cultural competence, we can empower your employees with a set of new skills, enabling them to relate more positively to customers and each other.

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Cook Ross consultants are experts in transforming the cultures of organizations. Whether downsizing, expanding, developing new product lines, merging, revamping services, retraining, adapting to new technologies or changes in the marketplace, restructuring, or entering new businesses or new markets, Cook Ross can help you survive financially, meet new industry and marketplace realities; and create a more effective, productive workforce.

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- The Diversity Toolkit (www.thediversitytoolkit.com) - *Transform your diversity efforts into specific behavior change and improved organizational effectiveness.*
- CultureVision™ (www.crculturevision.com) - *Access to cultural competency in healthcare — in three clicks and five minutes.*



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