

# The SAGE Encyclopedia of Intercultural Competence

## Intercultural Training Creativity

Contributors: Dianne Hofner Saphiere

Editors: Janet M. Bennett

Book Title: The SAGE Encyclopedia of Intercultural Competence

Chapter Title: "Intercultural Training Creativity"

Pub. Date: 2015

Access Date: December 01, 2015

Publishing Company: SAGE Publications, Inc.

City: Thousand Oaks,

Print ISBN: 9781452244280

Online ISBN: 9781483346267

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483346267.n172>

Print pages: 529-531

©2015 SAGE Publications, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

This PDF has been generated from SAGE knowledge. Please note that the pagination of the online version will vary from the pagination of the print book.

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483346267.n172>

Creativity in intercultural training is the ability to move learners beyond their traditional mind-sets in a manner that engages the whole person, is applicable to their lives and work, and both supports and challenges the development of their intercultural competence. Training that fails to engage and stimulate will fall short of enabling participants to achieve their learning objectives. Creativity is both what the trainer must bring to the environment and what the learner must be able to access in order to be competent. Without it, training will be of little use to the learner.

This entry explains why creativity is crucial in intercultural training; the elements of creativity in intercultural training; and the common prerequisites for developing, and strategies for maintaining, creativity in intercultural training.

## Why Creativity Is Crucial in Intercultural Training

The very quality that intercultural training aims to develop—intercultural competence—demands creativity. Participants in intercultural training need to learn to experience new and different realities, to temporarily set aside their previous experience and be able to imagine the world as others experience it. Effective intercultural training provides the skills to reflect on and make meaning from new experiences. It offers strategies for continuing to learn, effective dialogue, resolving conflicts, and building trusting relationships. Creativity and innovation in the training process are imperative given the enormity of the task and the limited time generally allotted for intercultural training.

It is vital that intercultural training be designed and facilitated in such a way that the participants are able to understand and relate key learning points to the context of their lives and work. They need to be able to use what they learn in their daily [p. 529 ↓] undertakings. Thus, originality is required to ensure that training is appropriate to its context.

Cross-cultural effectiveness is context specific. For example, effectiveness in one multicultural team does not ensure or predict effectiveness in another; each team is a

unique composition of personalities, goals, processes, and environment. Thus, it is risky to assume that there are any universally correct ways to behave in a cross-culturally effective manner. Positivist or prescriptive approaches to intercultural training fall short in preparing learners for an ever-changing landscape.

Culture is a complex, dynamic process. Too often, however, culture is thought of as a reified “thing.” Cultures change depending on the person perceiving the culture and also because people within a culture are constantly varying their behavior. The boundaries we perceive, the differentiations we make between one group of people and another, between different cultures, enable us to discern culturally appropriate behavioral patterns. The goal of intercultural training is to help learners effectively navigate those different cultural patterns. This often requires creativity on the part of the learners—to think beyond their “natural” cultural responses.

Intercultural trainers must be adept at sharing culture-specific information, tendencies, and guidelines and at demonstrating the importance of culture, without exaggerating differences or stereotyping. Effective training will enable learners to see people as unique individuals influenced by multiple cultures (based on nationality, ethnicity, gender, age/generation, sexual orientation, spiritual tradition, socioeconomic status, etc.).

Intercultural training holistically involves knowledge (head), emotions and motivation (heart), and skills (hands). It is crucial that all three of these elements be adequately addressed in the training environment, which takes a skilled and creative facilitator.

## Elements of Creativity in Intercultural Training

Creativity is required in all phases of intercultural training. We are all inherently biased and have our own strengths, weaknesses, perspectives, and experiences gained from the cultures in which we have been raised. Those who train need to transcend their own biases in order to enable learners to transcend theirs. A training program in which learners perceive the relevance of intercultural skills to their lives, both personal and

professional, is one that creatively and effectively links context, needs, learning styles, design, and facilitation.

Successful intercultural training design is grounded in intercultural theory and research, as well as incorporating data derived from needs assessment. Based on the synthesis of this information and the learning objectives, a trainer selects and sequences appropriate exercises and activities. These may include custom activities developed to help achieve specific learning objectives or existing activities that have been adapted for the specific situation. Activities must be developed in such a way as to be comfortable and safe yet challenging and encouraging of growth.

There is definitely an art to the facilitation of intercultural training. It must give learners the sense of confidence and safety they need to experiment with new behaviors and values while simultaneously motivating them to try what might be uncomfortable or unfamiliar behaviors. A successful facilitator is able to navigate the emotions and challenges of group dynamics that frequently arise in intercultural training. Learners may become emotional—upset, angry, hurt, or offended—and a skilled facilitator is able to respond creatively in a way that calms, as well as guides, the learner.

The development of intercultural competence requires ongoing, structured learning; reflection; and practice. Creativity is necessary to devise ways to engage learners in this process and help them experiment with new behaviors in a safe environment.

## Common Prerequisites for and Maintenance of the Creativity Needed for Intercultural Training

The prerequisites for demonstrating creativity in intercultural training are a solid grounding in intercultural theory, a broad interdisciplinary background, and the practical application of skills in assessment, design, development, group facilitation, evaluation, and follow-up. Those new to the practice of intercultural training often have keen insights that feed the creative insights. However, experience in the field, in terms of

both group [p. 530 ↓ ] facilitation and personal intercultural sojourns, is also crucial. Often the best and most creative outcomes emerge when dyads or small teams of practitioners work together. Other factors that stimulate and maintain trainer creativity include ongoing professional development, feedback from mentors, focus groups with past participants, coaching, and regular reflection. Because so much of the success of intercultural training depends on its perceived applicability to learners, familiarity with the context (beyond the needs assessment) is invaluable.

It takes creativity to look at the world through the learner's eyes, apply the appropriate theoretical framework, and design and deliver effective intercultural training.

**See also** [Co-Creation of Meaning](#); [Communication Accommodation Theory](#); [Constructivism](#); [Developmental Theory](#); [Dimensions of Diversity](#); [Essential Principles for Intercultural Training](#); [Hybridity](#); [Learning Styles Across Cultures](#); [Resistance to Change](#); [Simulations and Games](#)

Dianne Hofner Saphiere

<http://dx.doi.org/10.4135/9781483346267.n172>

Further Readings

Bennett, M. J. (2013). *Basic concepts of intercultural communication: Paradigms, principles, and practices* (2nd ed.). Boston, MA: Nicholas Brealey.

Maddux, W. W., & Galinsky, A. D. (2009). Cultural borders and mental barriers: The relationship between living abroad and creativity. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 96 (5), 1047–1061.

Martin, J. N., & Nakayama, T. K. (2010). *Intercultural communication in contexts* (5th ed.). Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill.

Sorrells, K. (2013). *Intercultural communication, globalization and social justice*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.