



Working with Newcomers

Tips for culturally-diverse
Canadian organizations

COMPANION RESOURCE GUIDE



Alberta Workforce Essential Skills

Skilled people. Safe, profitable workplaces.

Working with Newcomers: Tips for culturally-diverse Canadian organizations

- Participant Workbook
- Facilitator Guide
- Companion Resource Guide

Working with Newcomers: Tips for Culturally-Diverse Canadian Organizations is a set of three resources designed to help culturally and linguistically diverse organizations function better. The resource aims to increase an organization's capacity in assisting newcomers with integration. It provides solutions to the most common challenges, and gives understanding to harness opportunities.

This resource will contribute to an increase in quality, productivity and employee satisfaction through:

- fewer misunderstandings
- less workplace friction
- more efficient use of time

To request a workshop, to download the PDF versions, or to order copies of the manuals, please visit the AWES website: www.awes.ca

Participant Workbook and Facilitator Guide

The Participant Workbook is for participants in a workshop, and it can be supported with the information in the Companion Resource Guide. The Facilitator Guide accompanies both resources as a support for trainers using the materials.

Companion Resource Guide

This guide can be used together with the Participant Workbook and the Facilitator Guide for face-to-face training in workshops. In addition to supporting the workshops, this guide can also be used for organizations with limited opportunities for training.

Acknowledgments

Funding for the creation and piloting of this resource was generously provided by Alberta Employment and Immigration, now Alberta Human Services. By investing in this research, the funders have highlighted the pressing need to build capacity and develop resources to equip employers.

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Alberta Workforce Essential Skills (AWES) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to building a competent, adaptable and innovative workforce through workplace essential skills initiatives.

Working with Newcomers

A note to management teams

This guide is designed to give insights and practical solutions to organizations with culturally and linguistically diverse workforces. It is intended to enable management teams to bridge language and cultural gaps, support newcomer integration and ensure more effective business operations.

It will give you:

- tips for bridging cultural and language gaps
- insights into various cultural behaviours in a workplace
- answers to some of the most frequently asked questions about working with newcomers
- strategies for managing common challenges in a culturally-diverse organization
- resources to distribute to newcomers and Canadian-born employees

The resource will contribute to an increase in quality, productivity and employee satisfaction through:

- fewer misunderstandings
- less workplace friction
- more efficient use of time

The resource is designed as a self-directed learning solution for organizations with limited opportunities for training. The guide can also be used together with the participant workbook and the facilitator guide for face-to-face training in workshops.

The tips are a response to data collected from more than 500 surveys, questionnaires and interviews conducted across multiple sectors. This occurred between 2006 and 2010 during various research and training initiatives to support newcomer integration.

The information in this resource is a departure point. It is intended to support established learning and development initiatives. It doesn't exhaust all the insights, possibilities and opportunities for working with newcomers to Canada. Instead, the tips and explanations are meant to raise awareness and equip teams with the basics for better cross-cultural interactions. The resource should encourage more effective dialogues within diverse teams so that solutions reflect the uniqueness of each scenario and organization.

For further information, please contact Alberta Workforce Essential Skills Society (AWES). Telephone 403-392-0944

A word on integration

A common definition for newcomer integration is not easy to find. On the one hand, integration could be described as the sense of “fit” that employers and employees are aiming for so that work is done well and interpersonal relations are good. Integration is also described as a “two-way street,” which creates the idea of people working together for change. As time changes, definitions will likely also change. To date, the following can be stated about workplace integration for newcomers to Canada:

- **Integration has different contexts**

such as social (community involvement), economic (gaining meaningful employment), and workplace (meeting job expectations). Therefore, approaches can be very different.

- **Integration is adaptation, not assimilation.**

Whereas assimilation is tied to the loss of cultural and language identity, integration is grounded in multiculturalism – the ongoing recognition that newcomers have diverse backgrounds. Adaptation means expanding cultural behaviours and language skills, not replacing them. In fact, first language and culture can be an advantage in a multicultural organization. Therefore, a newcomer can adapt to a new workplace without losing his or her cultural identity.

- **Everyone adapts.**

Cultures differ across occupations and organizations, not just countries and regions. For example, working with youth has different “cultural rules” than working as an engineer or an industrial electrician. Even leaving a company or team, to start with a new organization or group, requires making adaptations to the new group. For everyone, the ability to adapt varies depending on the stages of adjustment and the quality of support.

- **To start integration, newcomers adapt to their workplaces.**

At a basic level, this means adjusting to the culture of their occupations and organizations in Canada. Integration also requires mastering both the technical and interpersonal aspects of English for work. Even people originating from other English-speaking cultures, such as England or India, need to adapt.

- **To support integration, organizations adapt wherever expedient.**

At a more efficient level, integration includes adjustments made by employers to welcome newcomers while maintaining optimal market performance. At the minimum, this suggests an organization has a clear understanding of their own workplace norms and a practical way of communicating these to newcomers through user-friendly mechanisms. From a “smarter, not harder” perspective, it means building capacity in all team members to understand and negotiate differences. Why? Because working in a diverse workforce is the one thing everyone has in common, whether newcomer or Canadian born.

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Part 1

Tip Sheets for Working with Newcomers

How to get the most out of part 1

This first part is a set of four tip sheets. They are a user-friendly resource for all employees in an organization. They are written in plain language so that employees with lower English skills can also benefit from them. They could be used in at least six ways.

- **Orientations** – The sheets can be distributed to employees during orientation, or related training, as a set of basic guidelines for working on a diverse team. This is especially useful for small and medium-sized companies that may have less time and resources for company-wide training initiatives.
- **Public notice boards** – The sheets can put up on public notice boards for employees to read, such as in a lunch or meeting room. A separate sheet could be attached for people to make comments or pose and respond to questions in a spirit of respect and curiosity. This is a good start to demystifying diversity, difference, integration and language learning.
- **Newsletters** – Key parts of the sheets could be included as a special section in newsletters to raise awareness, solicit feedback or generate constructive discussion. It could be supported with diversity facts from your organization or short articles about specific employees.
- **Team meetings** – The sheets would be effective as a guiding resource for team discussions or tool box talks. They can raise awareness of language and intercultural issues, and help teams find the solutions. They can anchor conversations between coworkers to a common base of basic diversity knowledge. They can provide people with the words and ideas to talk more openly about issues in concrete terms.
- **Workshops** – The guide, together with the participant workbook, could also be used as a key resource in a workshop delivered by a competent facilitator to raise awareness and build capacity in employees to work on a diverse team.
- **A good springboard** – The tip sheets form a strong foundation for all other learning in cultural and language diversity. They will enable employees to expand their knowledge and skills using other resources, depending on their needs.



The tip sheets are a great way to give teams the right words and ideas to discuss how to overcome communication breakdowns and build rapport, despite differences.

Making Sense of Immigration

Tip Sheet

The following tips will help you when working with recent newcomers. Practice the ones that are most relevant.

Recognize the important role immigrants play in building the Canadian economy

Newcomers to Canada enable employers to have enough workers. Canada has ongoing labour shortages because our workforce is aging very quickly and fewer babies are being born. Even when the economy is not so strong, labor shortages continue in specific jobs. For the years ahead, the need for workers in the Canadian economy will be met mostly through skilled immigrants.

Imagine a reversal of roles

If you are used to the Canadian workplace, imagine for a moment you were to immigrate to a country like Brazil, Somalia, Russia or China. How much would you be able to prepare before immigrating? What changes would you be willing to make after you arrive? How would you integrate and master the language so that you could work in your profession? How would you know which colleague(s) to ask for help? Who would be qualified to mentor you properly? By imagining yourself as an immigrant, you can build patience with newcomers, which will help you to avoid conflict and find solutions together.

Get to know newcomers

Get to know people and their cultures. Act on your curiosity rather than thinking you might offend someone. Showing interest in another person's background creates a welcoming community at work. It also makes newcomers curious about the Canadian workplace culture, which makes it easier for them to learn and adapt.

Understand the challenges in mastering English and adapting to a new culture

Upon arrival in Canada, 50% of newcomers believe mastering English for work will take them 1 to 2 years. In a study at an Alberta college, when learners were asked this same question again one year later, their responses changed to over half believing it would take at least 3-5 years. In addition, most workplace cultures can be difficult to figure out. They are not written down. They are not universal. Adapting can be difficult for newcomers without support from trusted, knowledgeable people. The more you understand your own workplace culture, the more you will be able to equip newcomers. When employees are set up for success, the company succeeds.

Bridging Communication Gaps

Tip Sheet

The following tips will help you when working with recent newcomers. Practice the ones that are most relevant.

Use plain English

Use simple word choices and whenever possible avoid idioms, slang, occupational jargon, expletives, colloquialisms, and complex humour like sarcasm.

Speak slowly, not loudly

Pause briefly between your thought groups in each sentence, like news anchors do on TV. It is easier for listeners to process what you say.

Use marker words

Separate your ideas with words like ‘first’, ‘then’, ‘next’, ‘after that’, ‘at the end’ etc. It becomes easier to connect your ideas.

Repeat key words

Be aware of your key words and ideas so that you can repeat them. This reinforces the listener’s understanding.

Be linear

Begin with the end. What do I want the person to know or do at the end of the conversation? Organize your thoughts before you speak so that you are clear, specific, and to the point.

Use gestures and visuals

Gestures can support basic ideas. Drawings and other visuals can explain more complex details. Write it down if necessary.

Listen actively

Pay attention. Show that you are listening. Allow the person to finish. Provide feedback. If pronunciation challenges make it difficult to understand, try mentally repeating the person’s words as they speak. Confirm what you did understand. Then ask the person to repeat slowly what you didn’t understand.

Use a translator as a last option

Take the time to use English at work. Only use a translator when absolutely necessary. It is worthwhile to make it a habit of putting English first. Unless customers or safety issues are involved, the daily patience of using English, and not giving up, will be worthwhile in the future.

Encourage others

Create a culture of encouragement on teams so that people are not worried about ‘losing face’ if their English is incorrect. Encourage co-workers when their communication improves or when you see them trying to use English. Give constructive feedback to help them grow. Encouragement builds confidence in newcomers.

Bridging Cultural Gaps

Tip Sheet

The following tips will help you when working with recent newcomers. Practice the ones that are most relevant.

Ask open-ended questions

“Losing face”, due to not understanding, may worry some newcomers. Therefore, avoid using yes and no answer-questions. For example, instead of saying “Do you understand?” ask “What are you going to do first?” or “What are the three things we need to get done?”

Adapt to different communication styles

Culture can influence communication, such as the degree of directness, or the amount of emotion and personal disclosure etc. Sometimes this good for a team, and at other times it can stop people from working well together. Training may be necessary to develop better communication skills on teams.

Look for indirect communication

Because people may not want to offend or “lose face”, they may communicate indirectly. You might need to “read between the lines”, or understand the hidden meanings in body language such as smiles, sighs, or even laughs. Ask. Be curious.

Be aware of personal space

Culture, religion and gender can significantly influence norms of personal space and touch. Ask newcomers about their understandings of space, touch. Ask them about their previous workplace cultures. For the most part, newcomers are eager to talk about their cultures and previous workplaces.

Recognize different internal clocks

Culture wires the “internal clocks” of people differently. This might affect communication, deadlines and punctuality, multi-tasking etc. Even religious practices and community commitments can set the rhythms of work. Ask newcomers about their ideas of time in the workplace. Compare your Canadian company norms with their cultural backgrounds to raise everyone’s awareness of differences. Get to know newcomers so that you can talk about issues. Stay curious.

Understand how hierarchy affects behaviour

People from more hierarchical work cultures might act differently with supervisors. For example, they may not show lots of initiative – always waiting to be told what to do. In a leadership role, they might seem “bossy.” Compare and contrast the leader-subordinate relationship in their culture with your own workplace. Discuss how trust, credibility, rapport and respect are built in your workplace.

Notice how credibility is built

Credibility affects trust and respect. It might be built through work accomplishments or personal character, by education, leadership positions and important responsibilities, family and influential people, money and possessions, age etc. How is credibility built on your team? Brainstorm with your team. Start a discussion at lunch.

Notice how rapport is developed

Become more aware of how people build relationship at work, of how much personal information they share and the things they talk about. Bring newcomers into conversations. Explain sports and other popular culture. Be curious about other cultures. Chat. Ask. Find out. Share what you learn with others on your team.

Build trust, not silence

Get to know newcomers. Help them find that “fit” at work. Look for the right timing to talk and offer advice. You have lived here from the beginning – you have “lessons learned” to offer them. They, in turn, can expand your worldview more than a TV show ever could. Do as they say at National Geographic, “Live curious.”

Building Cultural Intelligence

Tip Sheet

The following tips will help you when working with recent newcomers. Practice the ones that are most relevant.

Stay curious

At National Geographic they say “Live curious.” Cultural curiosity can go beyond noticing different physical traits, forms of dress, food or rituals.

You can ask people about books, sports, music and raising kids. You can ask about growing up in another part of the world. Best memories. The role of parents and grandparents.

You can get into even more interesting discussions about relations on teams and with supervisors, what can and should not be talked about, how time is best used at work. How respect is shown in another language. How credibility and rapport are built at work. The conversation starters are endless.

When you make deposits of respectful curiosity into others, you build up trust, the most powerful resource on a team. Stay curious.

Suspend judgment

Have you ever had a cultural experience that was uncomfortable? You are not the first person. But you might be the first on your team to suspend judgment.

Suspending judgement means taking hold of your feelings, or emotions. Don't judge the situation as right or wrong, or even unimportant. It is like getting a rude email and waiting until the next day when you can think calmly about the right response.

In a difficult cultural moment, try to think about what the person's motivations might be. It is probably not meant to be rude or difficult. What you find is that human motivations are similar, but the way they come out can be very different.

A gentle response and a curious approach will get better reactions. Suspending judgement works.

Become mindful

Cultural intelligence means seeing both differences and similarities between people. What you should avoid is minimizing those differences, or over-emphasizing similarities.

Minimizing simply puts your own cultural norms onto others, because you think everyone is the same. Cultural norms are not universal. Even neighbours like the US and Canada differ in workplace cultures. In fact, culture hides itself best from its own followers.

Be mindful. Deepen your understanding of your own cultural norms. Go beyond the surface of things like dress, foods and sports to how you communicate, build credibility or make friends. Become mindful.

Be adaptive

Follow the golden rule: “do to other cultures as they would prefer.” This implies increasing your general and specific knowledge of the other cultures you work with. Even if it is a simple thing like adapting your eye contact or personal space, or a little more complex like adjusting your communication style. Why? Good relations. Less conflict. Better use of your time. Increased safety. Job quality. Respect and trust.

At the same time, if you recognize specific workplace norms need to be clearly shared with newcomers, don't keep silent. Draw on the trust you build with them and be open about differences.

Work to have a clear and common agreement on what behaviours and attitudes work best between you and your co-workers. Be adaptive too.

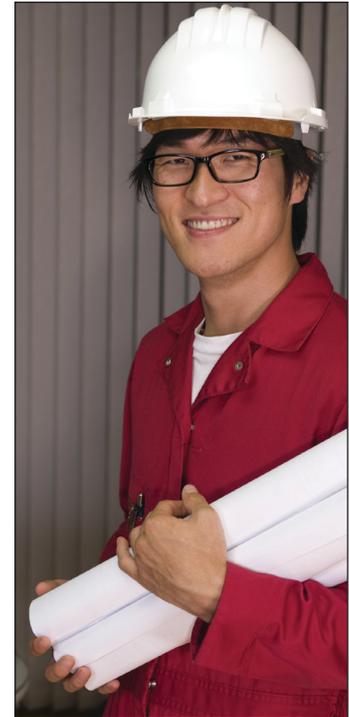
Part 2

Frequently Asked Questions

How to get the most out of part 2

This second part is a set of answers to FAQs that quickly deepens your understanding of the variety of motivations and reasons behind cultural and language differences in the workplace. The FAQs could be used in the following ways.

- **On day one** – The FAQs can be distributed to employees on their first day with a company or team. This is especially useful for small and medium-sized companies with limited access to sufficient face-to-face training for management teams.
- **To identify root causes** – The FAQs can enable mentors, coaches and leaders to understand the root causes of issues better, which results in better solutions. Behaviours rarely change without understanding motivations.
- **For one-on-ones** – The FAQs can be used in one-on-one meetings with newcomers, their team partners, or other employees. It enables leaders to have more productive discussions to troubleshoot language and cultural challenges, or to address performance expectations.
- **To resolve conflict** – A team member can use the FAQs to understand and resolve specific conflicts between teams or team members. The information can demystify issues between team members. They can create more patience and support between people by replacing assumptions with better insights.
- **At team meetings** – The FAQs can be used by leaders to answer questions better during team meetings and raise awareness of language and intercultural issues. They can provide a leader with the words and ideas to talk more effectively about concrete issues.
- **For workshops** – The guide, together with the participant workbook, could also be used as a key resource in a workshop delivered by a competent facilitator to raise awareness and build capacity in employees to work on a diverse team.



The FAQs help you get to root causes, which means better solutions.

Exploring the FAQs builds deeper understanding, patience and curiosity in people who lead diverse teams.

Making Sense of Immigration and Change

FAQs

Why is there so much immigration to Canada?

Canada, as well as nations like Germany, Russia, Italy, Japan and others, are experiencing important demographic changes due to aging workforces and low fertility rates (the average number of children born to a woman over her lifetime). This creates a global competition for skilled immigrants to meet increasing labour shortages. In every projected scenario starting in the 2010s, international net migration becomes Canada's only source of population growth as the fertility rate remains below the replacement level.

Why develop cultural intelligence?

Besides obvious reasons such as globalization and a rapidly diversifying workforce, becoming culturally competent enables a person to know whether a workplace issue or disagreement is due to cultural differences, language skills, personality types, personal reasons, etc. The solution won't be effective unless the cause is correctly identified.

Isn't there a universal workplace culture?

Although certain business practices are common, a universal workplace culture is not common. To think a universal workplace culture is like thinking that working with young people is the same as working with accountants or electricians. Despite some commonalities, occupations and organizations have their own unique cultures. On the one hand, respecting "diversity" is a business value – it means ignoring difference in some situations so that employees feel included and equal. On the other hand, valuing "cultural diversity" means recognizing cultural differences to avoid excluding people. Recognizing cultural differences requires adapting, negotiating and resolving difference, not ignoring it or being indifferent. Teams have to be intentional about "seeing" cultural differences that can be an advantage to an organization.

Who changes in a culturally-diverse organization?

The short answer is everyone, since change is a normal part of organizational life. The long answer is "it's complicated." Each organization is different, as are the demands upon people as teams diversify. From a business standpoint, change requires staying up-to-date

with markets and customers, while meeting safety and environmental requirements. For newcomers, change means learning the unwritten rules, as well using their diversity to contribute to business improvement. Using cultural diversity as a business advantage requires good training and ongoing dialogue. For native-born Canadians, a diversifying workforce requires investing in new skills to know when to leverage diversity, accommodate difference and, at times, provide support where adaptation is operationally essential. Perhaps the more strategic question is "What do we need to know and do to support and accelerate the integration of newcomers into our workplace?"

How long does it take newcomers to "fit" at work?

Finding the "fit" depends on the stages of adjustment a newcomer experiences, as well as good mechanisms to smooth their transition into an organization. Without good supports, newcomers often get "stuck" in stages of change. Generally, the stronger the language and diversity supports, the faster and smoother a newcomer's transition can be. Also, if co-workers have even a basic understanding of a newcomer's cultural and language challenges, the sense of "belonging" can come faster through their active support. Best practice means making good resources and/or training available to all employees.

How do I avoid offending?

Experience with newcomers and Canadian-born employees suggests that "minding your own business" is counterproductive. In some organizations, respecting personal privacy can mean staying with small talk and avoiding conversations about backgrounds, stories and dreams. Although everybody has limits to what they are comfortable talking about, newcomers are generally proud of their backgrounds and want to share their stories and journeys to Canada. Besides some sensitive topics such as gender, politics and religion, the more that people tell their stories, the less mysterious they seem. Perhaps the better question is "How can I get to know newcomers better?"

How long does it take to learn English?

Upon arrival in Canada, 50% of newcomers believe mastering English will take them about 1 to 2 years. In a study at an Alberta college, when learners were asked this question again one year later, their responses changed to over half believing it would take at least 3 to 5 years. In addition, culture influences how English is used. Workplace cultures can be difficult to figure out. They are not written down. They are not universal. Adapting can be difficult without support from trusted and knowledgeable people.

Why not learn enough English before immigrating?

Most newcomers begin learning English before immigrating. However, because they are not in a daily English-speaking context, there are very few chances to practice English and little demand to speak it. Therefore, there is usually a sharp “learning curve” when they arrive in Canada. If you are used to the Canadian workplace, imagine for a moment that you immigrated to a country such as Brazil, Somalia, Russia or China. How much would you be able to prepare before you immigrated?

Why not try to speak more English at work and at home?

At least two tensions occur in a newcomer. First, using English to master it versus the mental fatigue from using it. At times, newcomers just need to use their mother tongue in order to get their energy back. Second, it is difficult to adapt to any culture, especially when there is no handbook. The two cultures and two languages will need to find a healthy balance in each person. How long this takes depends on each person, but it can be accelerated through supports and open discussions. Using a first language is often the main way for newcomers to ensure their children understand their heritage. Often, the first language is the only way to communicate authentically and fully in a family, to show affection and resolve conflicts, etc. English, like any language, is complex. No one can move to English as their language of full expression without going through the process of learning, reflecting and adapting. This takes time.

What makes it difficult to understand someone?

Accents are influenced by physical factors. The vocal cords grow like a muscle as a child copies the first language of the family. Accents are difficult to change but they don't always limit speech clarity. Non-native speakers of English can keep their accents, even as they adapt certain pronunciation to speak clearer. For example, you might fully understand a person speaking English with a slight Spanish accent. Yet, you might hear a Canadian say the same thing, and not understand because the person speaks too fast. The way a person pronounces words and sentences can be changed. For example, ideas should be organized into a logical order, marker words can clearly separate ideas, speech can be slower, more pauses can be used to bring more clarity, etc. These clear speech principles apply to both native and non-native English speakers when they communicate.

Working Together on a Culturally-Diverse Team

FAQs

Culture and personality

Why is there friction?

Is it personality or culture?

A common assumption is personality conflicts.

In a cross-cultural context, both culture and personality can be contributing factors. Sometimes they reinforce each other and it is difficult to separate them. At other times, English skills, stage of life, personal factors such as family responsibilities, community issues, etc. may contribute to problems. Building organizational capacity to identify the right cause(s) is essential. Otherwise, it is not easy to work together to find the corresponding solution(s). A good place to start with personality types is through a Google search for MBTI, and Geert Hofstede's cultural dimensions for culture.

Time

Why do some persons not stick to deadlines, schedules and time limits?

Common assumptions are a lack of time management skills or an unsuitable work ethic.

Culture has an effect on how people use time. For some in the workplace, time is money. For others, time is people. Some work to live, others live to work. This difference means that team members may need to have an open discussion to find a balance between their different views on using time. Punctuality may need to bend to the needs of people, such as finishing conversations. Alternatively, people might seem abrupt or rude because they rush off to be on time. Culture creates "internal clocks" inside of people. This can make some work ethics look slow or lazy and others seem stressful. Deadlines can be missed from too much attention to detail or quality. Other times, work is done poorly due to too little attention to quality. Most people are unaware of their "internal clocks." Have the discussion on your team about time.

Body language

Why do some people avoid eye contact?

A common assumption is lack of confidence.

Some cultures raise children to look someone in the eye as a sign of respect during conversation. Other cultures avoid direct eye contact for respect. The first group interprets a lack of eye contact as a lack of confidence or even a sign of dishonesty. The second group views strong eye contact as too aggressive. They might interpret it as being too informal with strangers or people in authority. In all cross-cultural situations, it is good to wait for the right opportunity to talk to the person openly and respectfully about differences. Remember, showing curiosity is a good way to start difficult conversations.

Why do some colleagues touch my arm, grab my hand or stand in my personal space when talking to me?

Common assumptions are disrespect, aggressiveness or even harassment.

Touch and personal space have culturally conditioned behaviours. They are used to build relationship and trust between people. When people touch or stand too close they are likely trying to engage you more in the conversation or to show that they are listening. Alternatively, when they step away from you they are implying that you need to respect their personal space. Also, religion can affect interactions between people, especially across genders e.g. handshakes, eye contact, smiles etc.

Hierarchy

Why do some individuals show very little initiative at work?

A common assumption is lack of ability.

Everyone has initiative and everyone is culturally conditioned how and when to show it. In very hierarchical cultures, taking initiative at work can have negative consequences. Instead, people wait for managers to direct their daily work, or even their careers. “Micro-managing” is an accepted norm. In less hierarchical workplace cultures, like Canada, initiative is highly valued. Employees don’t expect to be micro-managed. A newcomer may need support to transition to more responsibility and ownership of work and career.

Why do certain people always defer to their supervisor?

A common assumption is a lack of competence.

In some hierarchical cultures, managers make all the decisions. Subordinates only contribute when asked. Decisions are rarely challenged, or “loss of face” may occur. Without some coaching, a newcomer may never feel confident to challenge or correct colleagues and clients, respectfully. They may not know when to take the lead on an issue or to come up with the solution.

Why do some colleagues give unexpected gifts, or seem ingratiating?

A common assumption is ingratiation.

Culture can influence gift giving. At times, it might be due to special circumstances such as the birth of a child. It might be a sign of respect for an authority figure such as an invitation to dinner. The gift giver may expect a future favour. Whatever the reason, it is a good idea to have a discussion about the norms for gift giving in a Canadian workplace.

Feedback

Why do some individuals not take feedback well?

A common assumption is headstrong behaviour.

People might become defensive towards direct feedback because they interpret this as a “loss of face.” If you are indirect, they may be used to more direct feedback and miss your meaning completely. Finding out how colleagues are used to getting feedback might surprise you. A conversation with a newcomer about how you prefer to give feedback is also helpful. Then a compromise or solution can be found.

Why do some people not speak up at meetings?

Common assumptions are shyness or lack of competence.

A newcomer might be used to deferring to senior people, even if they know something is wrong or inaccurate. They may be waiting to be asked for their opinion or expertise versus speaking up freely. Alternatively, they may not feel confident in their English to challenge with the right words, in the right way. Meeting participation is a key skill. Using an experienced consultant in language and intercultural training is often the best way to equip employees.

Why do some persons say they understand when they don’t?

Common assumptions are shyness or lack of competence.

In some cultures, it is important not to “lose face.” You could imply your lack of understanding, but you don’t make it plain to everyone. If you don’t understand, you figure it out yourself, or ask a coworker later. It is important to speak to a newcomer about this, to compare and contrast their cultural approach and the Canadian way, to find the best strategies to get clarification, and to suggest what questions to ask and what words to use. Simply hoping that this issue will change over time is not effective. Saving and losing face are cultural norms that take time to unlearn and replace with more effective strategies for the Canadian workplace. Have the conversation on your teams.

Uncertainty

Why do certain individuals resist unfamiliar roles or tasks?

A common assumption is inflexibility.

Different cultures have different attitudes towards uncertainty. Backgrounds, together with economic, political, religious and social realities shape approaches to uncertainty – whether to avoid or overcome it. Some newcomers may need much more support and information to take on new challenges. This is also true of certain personality types. Be aware of uncertainty avoidance in your teams.

Why is it difficult for some people to work with the opposite gender?

A common assumption is disrespectfulness.

This might be due to a particular cultural or religious background. It may be not wanting to work together, or as simple as avoiding eye contact and touch, such as a handshake. Most importantly, a manager should find out from the person whether it is a cultural reality or just a cultural unfamiliarity, which could be changed through coaching. The person may lack the experience in how to act, what to say and how to say it to the opposite person, gender or ethnicity. Building rapport or credibility and setting boundaries in these situations might be unfamiliar to them. Open dialogue with trusted people can support a newcomer in finding familiarity with the norms of the Canadian workplace. Accommodations can be made or other options explored if necessary.

Belonging

Why do some cultural groups form cliques, stick together at breaks, and speak only their language?

A common assumption is not wanting to integrate.

Speaking English all day for non-native speakers can be exhausting. It is healthy for newcomers to take a break with friends in their first language if they have been listening to discussions in English all day. They are likely not speaking behind anyone's back. Instead, it is an essential way to recharge for the rest of the day. Which language is used on works teams, or when other languages can be used, depends a lot on team cohesiveness and safety. There is no formula. Typically, the preferred language evolves naturally. When an issue occurs, the manager and team need to be flexible. More specific guidelines may need to be established. It is good to have an open but guided team discussion on when, where and why to use English at work. Get input from everyone, including newcomers.

Why don't some newcomers try to be more involved in social events at work?

A common assumption is not wanting to integrate.

Often, newcomers need to be encouraged to attend socials because they feel they don't have enough English. Also, they might have family or community commitments. They may have extra part-time jobs to support their families. They may be attending studies when socials occur. They may not realize that they are expected to participate at some level. Give them a verbal invite, and make them feel welcome when they come.

Part 3

Strategies for Work Teams

How to get the most out of part 3

This part builds on part 2 by providing work teams with practical strategies for overcoming communication and intercultural challenges in the workplace.

- **On day one** – The FAQs can be distributed to employees on their first day with a company or team. This is especially useful for small and medium-sized companies with limited access to sufficient face-to-face training for management teams.
- **To identify root causes** – The FAQs can enable mentors, coaches and leaders to understand the root causes of issues better, which results in better solutions. Behaviours rarely change without understanding motivations.
- **For one-on-ones** – The FAQs can be used in one-on-one meetings with newcomers, their team partners, or other employees. It enables leaders to have more productive discussions to troubleshoot language and cultural challenges, or to address performance expectations.
- **To resolve conflict** – A team member can use the FAQs to understand and resolve specific conflicts between teams or team members. The information can demystify issues between team members. They can create more patience and support between people by replacing assumptions with better insights.
- **At team meetings** – The FAQs can be used by leaders to answer questions better during team meetings and raise awareness of language and intercultural issues. They can provide a leader with the words and ideas to talk more effectively about concrete issues.
- **For workshops** – The guide, together with the participant workbook, could also be used as a key resource in a workshop delivered by a competent facilitator to raise awareness and build capacity in employees to work on a diverse team.



The strategies are designed to bring team culture into open discussion so that everyone has a common understanding of everything.

Understanding Each Other

What to do when a newcomer doesn't understand you

If a newcomer doesn't understand your spoken message, use the following guidelines:

1. Front load your message – put the most important point first by focusing only on what you want the person to do or know.
2. Make sure you are using plain language, and avoid slang, colloquialisms and idiomatic phrases.
3. Speak slower not louder. Pause between ideas. Use marker words.
4. Ask the person what they did understand, and then what they didn't understand.
5. Re-explain the difficult part, keep it simple but don't lose the key meaning of your message.
6. Write the most important points down in sequence.
7. Use gestures and visuals if necessary.
8. Use a translator, if nothing else works.
9. Always confirm the person's understanding with open-ended questions, such as "What should we do first?"

What to do when you don't understand a newcomer's pronunciation

If the following pronunciation challenges make it difficult to concentrate or to follow a message, use the strategies that follow:

- **Shortening words** – Listen. Is the person is shortening long words? If so, adjust your listening. The reason a newcomer shortens words is to sound more like a native-speaker. This causes the person to drop the middle syllables of words sometimes, which makes it difficult to understand. Encourage the person to speak slower, to say each word clearly, to focus on communicating a clear message, not on speaking fast.

- **Dropping word-endings** – Listen. Is the person is dropping the ends of words, and then adjust your listening. Some languages don't have the hard word endings in English – the "p/t/k" or the "b/d/g". Either add the endings in your own head, or encourage the person to speak slower and emphasize the English word endings. If necessary, show them how. They are likely not aware of it.
- **Speaking too fast** – A non-native speaker may be speaking extra fast to hide grammar mistakes. In their own language, making grammar mistakes in spoken speech may be unacceptable. Let them know that in English, speaking a message clearly is more important than speaking fast. Being clear usually gives more credibility than speaking fast.

If it is still difficult to understand, try the following:

- Mentally repeat the person's words as they speak. This is a good way to keep your attention on the meaning in the message.
- Confirm what you did understand and then ask the person to repeat slowly what is still unclear.

How to understand a newcomer who speaks very little English

When you don't understand a spoken message because the newcomer speaks only a little English:

1. Tell the person what you did understand, using their words.
2. In plain language, ask the person to explain again what you didn't understand.
3. Ask the person to use simple language.
4. Get the person to speak slowly and clearly if you still don't understand.
5. Repeat it back to the person to check accuracy.
6. Write it down if you need to.
7. Thank the person for their patience.

Understanding Each Other continued

How to check a newcomer has understood you clearly

If you know a newcomer usually finds it difficult to understand you, use the following guidelines:

1. Before you start, invite the person to ask questions at anytime they don't understand.
2. Tell the person you are going to stop sometimes and ask him or her to repeat back or to answer a question. Tell the person that you would like him or her to ask questions at those moments as well.
3. If in doubt, always check the person has understood by asking open-ended questions. Avoid "yes" and "no" answer-questions. Instead, ask the person to explain what they are going to do, or get him or her to show you.
4. Later, ask follow-up questions on details, such as safety related concerns, to check their understanding and progress.
5. Watch for body language and indirect signals, such as smiles and laughs or head movements, that suggest the person is not understanding.
6. Think of what you have not mentioned that you assume the newcomer knows.
7. Write it down, or support yourself with gestures and visuals, or use a translator if nothing else works.
8. Ask the person to give you an update at a specific time soon afterwards to avoid going too far in their work with a mistake.

Establishing a Common Team Culture

How to identify a common team culture

Have a brainstorming session with the team, or even with a work partner, to identify everyone's definitions of the following norms. Once a team discussion happens, members can begin to agree on team norms, through both formal and informal conversations. It might be useful to use an experienced consultant to facilitate such a team discussion, or to be quite familiar with the information in this resource.

- What is credibility in our team? How is credibility built? When and/or how is it lost? How do you get back credibility?
- How do we point out our coworkers mistakes? What words and sentences are respectful for pointing out mistakes? Which mistakes affect credibility?
- How do we build rapport, or good relationships, on our team?
- How do we define trust? How do we build trust? How is trust broken?
- What are other culturally-defined ways of building credibility, rapport and trust that are unfamiliar and/or ineffective in the Canadian workplace?

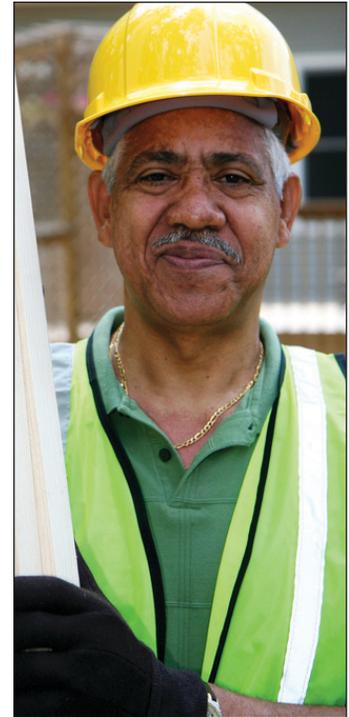
Part 4

Tips for Management Teams

How to get the most out of part 4

This part builds on part 2 by providing work teams with practical strategies for overcoming communication and intercultural challenges in the workplace.

- **On day one** – The FAQs can be distributed to employees on their first day with a company or team. This is especially useful for small and medium-sized companies with limited access to sufficient face-to-face training for management teams.
- **To identify root causes** – The FAQs can enable mentors, coaches and leaders to understand the root causes of issues better, which results in better solutions. Behaviours rarely change without understanding motivations.
- **For one-on-ones** – The FAQs can be used in one-on-one meetings with newcomers, their team partners, or other employees. It enables leaders to have more productive discussions to troubleshoot language and cultural challenges, or to address performance expectations.
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- **At team meetings** – The FAQs can be used by leaders to answer questions better during team meetings and raise awareness of language and intercultural issues. They can provide a leader with the words and ideas to talk more effectively about concrete issues.
- **For workshops** – The guide, together with the participant workbook, could also be used as a key resource in a workshop delivered by a competent facilitator to raise awareness and build capacity in employees to work on a diverse team.



The tips for management teams give the confidence to try a new strategy, or even the deep confirmation that what you have been doing so far is actually right.

Managing Performance

How to manage sensitive performance issues

Every performance issue has a unique set of factors that created it. Therefore, each issue will require its own unique combination of steps and solutions. The following guidelines are a good starting point to approach performance issues related to language, culture or integration:

Step 1 – Determine how severe the problem is. Are co-workers complaining? Is it affecting the person's performance? Is it affecting the performance of colleagues, the team or clients? Is it a safety issue?

Step 2 – Identify the potential cause(s). Is it a language or cultural issue? Are there any personal or professional factors? Are there any other external factors to consider? Is the person aware of the issue? Does the person understand the situation?

Step 3 – Consider how the newcomer might be used to similar issues being handled in his/her previous workplace? Talk with people from the same cultural background to find out about the problem from their cultural perspective. You may need to adapt your approach slightly, if it will help the newcomer to be more open to confronting the issue. Be mindful of personal information and relevant freedom of information policies when you talk to other newcomers.

Step 4 – Decide who should provide the feedback. Who does the person respect and trust? A mentor, supervisor, department head, human resource manager, a co-worker? A male or a female, a person from the same background, or someone external to the organization such as a trainer or consultant? Is there anyone else who should be present?

Step 5 – Whoever meets with the person should be well-prepared. Develop the thoughts to be presented and the questions to be asked. Plan to speak in plain language.

Step 6 – When meeting, relate the issue to work expectations. Present it in a supportive manner.

Step 7 – Use open-ended questions, asking the person to contribute to the solution.

Step 8 – Be prepared to provide the right coaching and/or mentoring if necessary.

Step 9 – Follow up at a near-future date.

Step 10 – From the beginning, build your understanding of cultural and language differences, as well as your relationships with newcomers, so that the trust already exists before you need to have a difficult conversation about work performance.

Differentiating between culture, personality and other causes

Sometimes it can be difficult to determine if a performance issue is due to culture or personality types. The following guidelines are a good starting point to get to the root cause of issues and come up with the right solution:

- One of the best ways to determine whether an issue has a cultural cause is to enquire how the issue would be interpreted in the other cultural context. Together with the newcomer, compare and contrast the ways and expectations the issue would be understood.
- Talk to other people from that cultural background. What are the expectations, behaviours and norms in the other culture? What would the consequences be for not following those norms? Then contrast these with the Canadian context.
- Change can be difficult even when the consequences are clear. This exercise in comparing and contrasting enables people to see alternative approaches to work that are equally valid. Because newcomers may come from cultural backgrounds where workplace norms were different, they are sometimes concerned about the consequences of taking unfamiliar action, how it will be interpreted, and the effect it will have on their job stability and credibility.
- Become more familiar with the most reliable personality type profiles such as Myers Briggs, Strengths Development Inventory and True Colors. They are easy to access online through a Google search. Even a good online research can give you the basics to work with. Then it gets easier to distinguish between personality and culture with a good understanding of the core intercultural concepts like communications styles, time and hierarchy.

Developing Key Competencies

How to encourage participation and build confidence in newcomers

The best way to increase newcomer participation and confidence in the workplace is through good training and mentoring programs with facilitators and mentors who have been specifically trained to support newcomers. Just providing more opportunities to participate is not very effective without good coaching support. The newcomer likely needs to learn the skills before practicing them e.g. how to sequence a work update at a team meeting. If you notice a lack of these core competencies, provide support in the following ways:

1. Make notes of what happened, what was lacking in competencies, and what you wanted the person to do or say.
2. Then have a one-on-one meeting with the person where you can refer to specific examples. Without examples, it is difficult for the person to know exactly what you mean by participating more or showing more confidence, etc.
3. Compare and contrast their previous work context and the current Canadian workplace. Discuss differences and expectations. This is often a good way to determine whether the problem is cultural or personal, or both.
4. Take a coaching role by providing detailed examples or role modeling better practices for the newcomer. Do some role playing together.
5. Recommend a good training program at a college, or introduce a customized training program for newcomers in your workplace.
6. Access the training resources that are freely downloadable on the AWES website.

How to move beyond unrealistic career expectations

At times, a newcomer may have unrealistic expectations for career development. The person may expect too much too soon. A newcomer may overestimate how much of their knowledge and skills is transferable into the Canadian context. A person may be unaware of how much change needs to happen in their English ability, communication skills, intercultural skills, and/or interpersonal communication, etc. This time of transition can be very challenging, especially for newcomers who were very skilled and respected in their previous jobs.

- In this case, the person needs an honest, accurate and detailed assessment of their gaps. The newcomer needs to know what to develop to achieve success. A consultant might be useful to develop this skill in the management team.
- The newcomer will need a supportive environment to close those gaps, and a structured performance plan with continuous specific feedback from trusted mentors. Open dialogue with managers will also be key.
- The person will need clear achievable goals that become small victories to build upon. Often, the same role and responsibilities the person had in their previous country are not possible. New career goals need to be imagined.
- At times, the management team and the employee will need to be honest enough to recognize that each person is on a personal career journey, and that not everyone is ready to make the necessary changes. In this situation, other options may need to be considered.

Developing Key Competencies continued

How to develop initiative

Taking initiative means assessing and doing things independently. For example, it might mean asking for a new work assignment instead of waiting at your desk for your supervisor to come and tell you. It might be figuring out a way to record what you are learning at work so that you can reference it quickly, instead of asking repeatedly. Taking the initiative could be speaking up at a meeting when you know a mistake is being made. A lack of initiative often originates in very hierarchical workplace backgrounds, where supervisors have much more control over day-to-day decisions and activities.

1. Start by realizing everyone has initiative.
The difficulty starts in adapting to the new expectations for showing initiative.
2. Establish expectations during the interview process is a good idea. The newcomer needs a clear understanding of the soft and/or hard skills the management team thinks are key to the position. The cultural interpretations of these should be discussed so that the definitions and expectations are the same. A personal development plan should be created together with a manager at the start of employment. The newcomer needs to contribute goals, ideas and solutions to the plan so that he/she takes ownership of learning.
3. Schedule regular one-on-one sessions with immediate supervisors, managers and/or mentors. Because previous experience of workplace hierarchy affects how much initiative a newcomer uses, having a conversation about manager-subordinate relations is often necessary. It can be very effective to do a compare and contrast between the manager-subordinate expectations in Canada and those in the newcomer's previous work background. Find out what the norms are for manager-subordinate relationships in that other culture.
4. Discuss with the newcomer very specific incidents where he or she should have shown initiative. Explain what he or she should have done. Find out what the expectations would have been like in their previous workplaces. Highlight and talk about the differences, instead of focusing on similarities.
5. Coach the person with the specific words, sentences, ideas or actions that he or she should know for the future.
6. Time the support well. Sometimes the newcomer may need more support at the beginning of employment, while others may need support at other times. The clear expectations and support in learning will enable newcomers to take a more self-directed approach to their career development.
7. Have patience. At times, the management team and the employee will need to be honest enough to recognize that each person is on a personal career journey, and that not everyone is ready to make the necessary changes. In this situation, a learning plan may not be the solution.

Developing Key Competencies continued

How to help find motivation

A newcomer may know that learning and development are important to the organization, but have very little motivation beyond doing their basic duties. Their quality of work might be very low.

A lack of motivation to develop within an organization could be due to a variety of factors:

- Low English skills might be a factor. Some newcomers feel that they are not good at learning languages. The language distance between English and their mother-tongue could feel too far. They may even believe their inability is genetic, unaware that motivation is usually the most important factor in reaching any goal in life. There may even be a lack of suitable workplace language programming at local educational institutes.
- Adapting to the culture may be a conscious or unconscious difficulty. Newcomers may find the mainstream culture difficult to understand or to get used to. On the other hand, they may not even be aware of differences. The person may feel resistant to change or undervalued when their approaches to building credibility at work are not acknowledged, or have the opposite effect.
- Personal challenges can affect work, such as family problems, challenges with children adjusting to school, difficulties in their communities.
- Job dissatisfaction occurs if their role is too easy. The person might feel stuck in a “foot-in-the-door” job with no way out. They may not know there are future career options once they prove themselves in that first role. There may be ongoing confusion about which career direction to take and what learning is needed to get there.
- Differing workplace learning expectations may occur. Employees are usually expected to grow as the company grows. However, a newcomer's previous employers might not have given a chance for their employees to provide input on career development. Newcomers may not know that life-long learning is important to a Canadian employer. They may not know that accessing learning is largely the employee's responsibility. They might feel that technical learning is more important than learning non-technical skills that support career development.

Adapt the following guidelines to each situation where a newcomer requires assistance in regaining motivation in their career goals and personal excellence.

1. Before meeting with the person, decide exactly how you are going to explain “lack of motivation.” Write down examples of what behaviours show a “lack of motivation” at work. Make a note of the expectations for change and examples of what “having motivation” looks like.
2. Meet with the person. Find out the biggest challenges that he or she is experiencing. Listen to what the individual thinks the solutions might be. Ask if the person would be open to advice, or to talking with other people in the organization who might be able to help. Respond accordingly.
3. Keep the discussion open. Explain your concerns about motivation to learn and grow, and the need to grow with the organization. Explain the expectations. Talking with a trusted manager or mentor can help a newcomer find solutions and overcome obstacles.
4. Start setting clear goals with practical steps to overcome the obstacles.
5. Meet with the person regularly to review progress and solutions until the person has enough momentum to direct their development more independently.
6. At times, only an external consultant who is skilled in language, cultural and integration issues can provide the most effective support.
7. In some situations, the management team and the employee will need to recognize that each person is on a personal career journey, and that not everyone is ready to make the necessary changes. In this situation, other options may need to be considered.

Building Welcoming Workplaces

How to build a welcoming workplace

The following set of best practices for a “welcoming workplace” have been used successfully by many organizations across Canada with culturally and linguistically diverse workforces.

- Inspire a curious workforce. Get to know people and their cultures. Act on your curiosity rather than thinking you might offend someone. Showing interest affirms a newcomers’s heritage and creates a welcoming community at work. In turn, it stimulates their own curiosity about the Canadian workplace culture and makes it easier to learn and to adapt. Bring newcomers into conversations so that they don’t feel as much need to stay in their cultural groups at work.
- Create an informed workforce. Statistics Canada makes it clear that immigration will continue to be the key source of our economic growth. A low replacement fertility rate and an aging population make Canada and many other nations heavily dependent on skilled immigrants. The assumption that immigrants take jobs from Canadians can only be addressed with plain information from good sources. Make the information available through channels that work best in your workplace.
- Provide high quality training and/or resources for all employees. Case studies in Canada suggest that the most welcoming workplaces provide all employees with high quality training that builds the skills to work in a culturally and linguistically diverse workforce. Both newcomers and Canadian-born employees benefit from developing the competence to bridge cultural and language distances. Experience has shown that organizations that avoid building this competence have much higher rates of unresolved issues that negatively affect the most vital business functions.
- Equip immediate supervisors. The leaders who work directly with newcomers daily (versus managers that oversee the supervisors) often require the most competence to work with cultural and language differences.
- Build strong mentoring programs. Ensure all mentors participate in training that enables them to mentor across cultural and language differences. Recognize this skill as vital to the success of any good mentoring program for your organization.
- Provide newcomers with access to high quality language programs that build their English and communication skills. Contract skilled trainers to provide English, cultural and integration courses. Alternatively, identify quality programming at educational institutes and partner with them to enroll your newcomers into the right courses.
- Make information accessible to newcomers. Write workplace documents and correspondence in plain language. Use simple word choices. Whenever possible, avoid idioms, slang, occupational jargon, expletives, colloquialisms and complex humour like sarcasm. Provide good notes and visuals prior to orientations, training sessions and meetings.
- Set up an intercultural advisory committee. If the scope of the committee is clear and the organization’s diversity is well represented, it can be a source of insight and strategic advice to management teams.
- Develop good working relationships. Learn a few words in a different language, such as greetings. Use the words to build rapport with others. Get to know a newcomer’s name. Write it down, remember it, use it the next time you see him or her. Find out how the kids are doing in school. Remember the names of the children. At lunch or during coffee breaks, take an interest in the life of a newcomer’s country of origin and their culture.
- Make sure all employees know the difference between equity and equality. Respecting “diversity” as a business value means ignoring certain differences such as race in order to be inclusive of all employees i.e. equity. On the other hand, valuing “cultural diversity” means recognizing cultural differences appropriately to avoid excluding people i.e. equality. Recognizing cultural differences requires adapting, negotiating and resolving differences, not ignoring them or being indifferent. It takes effort to leverage cultural differences to the advantage of teams and organizations.



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