

Your Passport to Professionalism: Module 9

Professional Culture: difference in the workplace

Steps in this module:

**1. Learn: Respond and comment in Whom Do You See?**

**2. Learn: Complete the 3 Perception Profiles**

**3. Go to “Earn Your Stamp” and submit that page to your supervisor for a**

**discussion.**

Step 1—Learn

Introduction

Have you ever felt like you are talking to a brick wall? That experience is usually based on differences between the message sender and receiver, and there are many areas of difference to consider. They include differences in culture, perception, socio-economic status, language use, stereotypes, communication styles, nonverbal communication, values, and approaches to problem-solving.

We all make automatic assumptions about others by creating stories in our head based on little to no actual information. We hold views and standards that are based on our own group. That is called ethnocentrism. When we overgeneralize about a person based on his or her identity group without seeing the person as an individual, we stereotype them. We all prejudge others based on limited knowledge, understanding, and contact. And we carry out our prejudices through actions and words that discriminate against others.

The series of reflections that follow are designed to sensitize you to some of the ways that your reactions to differences - between you and your co-workers, customers, and supervisors - can hinder your success on the job. First you’ll think about your perceptions, and then you’ll consider those of others. To earn your stamp, you’ll discuss with a supervisor how these ideas play out in your work environment.

**Whom do you see?**

Often we make decisions—positive and negative— about people before we even talk to them. Based on what you see in the pictures, what do you think are some stereotypes that people might make about these people in the pictures — who they are or what they are like. Would you want to meet them? Spend time with them? Work with them? Go to social events with them?

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
|  | http://albertqian.com/wp-content/uploads/2013/05/college-student-credit-card-marketing.gif |  |
| http://www.bodycandy.com/blog/wp-content/uploads/2011/04/Punk-Guy.jpg | http://www.rgbstock.com/cache1nI9Hh/users/m/mo/mokra/300/miscpqa.jpg | http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/photo/2013-09/25/132750280_11n.jpg |
| http://www.ulc.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/10/preist1.jpg | http://a.abcnews.com/images/US/140709_dvo_st_lee_16x9_992.jpg |  |

On what basis did you come up with an impression of the people in these pictures? Do you see how much visual impressions can influence your initial opinion about others? Though we might not have the same impressions or reactions, we’re all very adept at coming up with opinions about people based on their looks. In other words, we all stereotype others.

**What impression are you trying to make?**

Students dress very informally on campus, but you are a representative of the organization when you are at work. Your boss wants you to project the appropriate message. We all dress according to the culture we affiliate with. Maybe you dress like others on your team, in your club, in the lab, or reflecting your hobbies. Sometimes those cultures clash with what is expected on the job. It’s interesting that bosses are often surprised at what students choose to wear, and students are surprised at what bothers bosses.

Here are some comments from employers from a recent survey:

* “He looks like he just woke up: hair a mess, unshaven, and wearing old clothes.”
* “She shows way too much skin: low cut blouse, very short skirt…it’s actually embarrassing.”
* “Evidently all he owns are t-shirts and holey shorts. An ironed button shirt and slacks are all I ask.”
* “I know the popular style is to wear tight clothing, but I don’t want to see every wrinkle or bulge beneath their clothes.”
* “He needs to shower before work.”
* “I can smell her perfume all the way across the room and in my office.”

Many students just dress the way they like. But stop and think about what your boss wants. Be aware of the work culture around appearance.

“Business casual (see photo above right)” is appropriate for most organizational settings. Some organizations are much more formal. Many are less formal. If you ever have to ask yourself “Is this okay to wear in the office?” then it’s probably not. Be sure to dress the part and keep your boss happy. Remember, how you dress projects culture. It’s rare that you will go wrong dressing on the conservative side. High fashion can get you in trouble.

**Stop and Think:**

* Your outward appearance projects an inner reality. What image do you try to project by your outward appearance?
* Who is likely to get the wrong impression from your outward persona? In what ways would their opinion be incorrect?
* What criteria do you want people to use to judge you?

To keep your stereotypes from getting in the way of dealings with customers or with co-workers, use this simple ICE method of checking your stereotypes.

1. **I**dentify your perception/stereotype about the person.

2. **C**heck to see if it is actually true by interacting honestly and openly with the person.

3. **E**valuate your first response and see if you can find a more informed response

**Learning Activity 2.** Perception Profiles

Profile 1 Using the chart below, complete these steps:

1) Briefly describe how YOU feel when someone on the job behaves as described.

2) Then put yourself in his or her place. Imagine an alternate reason, different from yours, that the person might have for behaving that way.

| Actions You Notice | Step 1.  What this means to you | Step 2. What this might mean to the other person | Step 3. How might you work with other person who does this? |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Is vague about what they want. |  |  |  |
| Avoids conflict - will not address difficult issues |  |  |  |
| Only does the tasks that they are told to do |  |  |  |
| Stands very close when talking to you. |  |  |  |
| Works on homework while on the job. |  |  |  |
| Likes to spend time chatting before getting to the task at hand. |  |  |  |
| Dresses up to come to work. |  |  |  |
| Regularly arrives late. |  |  |  |
| A person you work with texts or checks into Facebook during meetings. |  |  |  |
| A coworker takes personal calls on the job or in meetings. |  |  |  |
| Someone you work with comes to meetings unprepared. |  |  |  |
| Not completing paperwork |  |  |  |

Profile2



Western and Eastern cultures differ in several ways. Here is one theorist’s interpretation about the range of values and behaviors found in the world. The group on the left reflects more of an eastern sensibility; on the right are the values and behaviors that tend to be dominant in western cultures.

Of course, people are unique: it would be a mistake to say that everyone from the east has all of the characteristics on the left and westerners have all the characteristics on the right. Nevertheless, these common characteristics are useful for thinking about the ways that people differ and how we might work together in spite of them.

Circle the numbers that represents your current values – what you are most comfortable with as a working style.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **EASTERN** |  |  |  |  |  | **WESTERN** |
| **Introverted** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | **Extroverted** |
| **Indirect** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | **Direct** |
| **Non-verbal** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | **Verbal** |
| **Implied opinions** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | **Confrontational opinions** |
| **Cooperation** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | **Competition** |
| **Goal: Contribution to the workplace** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | **Goal: Advancement in the workplace** |
| **Patience, persistence** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | **Urgency, immediacy** |
| **Third person (we, us)** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | **First person (I, me)** |
| **Sharing** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | **Owning** |
| **Value the process** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | **Value the product** |
| **Quality** | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 | **Quantity** |

Step 1: Circle the number on the continuum that reflects the culture you were raised in.

Step 1: Put X’s on the same continuum that reflects where you are now in each category.

Profile3

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **1. Inidivduality-Interdependence** | | |  | |  |  | |  | |  |
| **Individualism**. The individual is very distinct from the group; the individual strives for independence. | 1 | 2 | | 3 | | | 4 | | 5 | **Interdependence**. The individual is closely tied to groups (e.g., family); interdependence is desirable. |
| **2. Gender** |  |  | | |  |  | |  | |  |
| **Equality of the sexes.** Relationships based on equality. | 1 | 2 | | 3 | | | 4 | | 5 | **Male superiority.** Relationships based on authority, hierarchy. |
| **3. Gender Interactions** | | | | | |  | |  | |  |
| **Open role behavior**. May have very similar relationships with both males and females. | 1 | 2 | | 3 | | | 4 | | 5 | **Specific role behavior.** Relationships between men and women are very different from same-gender relationships. |
| **4. Mobility** |  | |  | |  |  | |  | |  |
| **High Mobility.** May be friends because we live near people, but let the friendship lapse when we move. | 1 | 2 | | 3 | | | 4 | | 5 | **Low Mobility.** People move less frequently, relationships less tied to where you live. |
| **5. Social Reciprocity** |  | |  | |  |  | |  | |  |
| **Independence.** The goal is not to be indebted, to “pay people back.” | 1 | 2 | | 3 | | | 4 | | 5 | **Complementary-obligatory.** Being socially obliged to someone is desirable. |
| **6. Group Memberships** |  | |  | |  |  | |  | |  |
| **Belong to many groups**. Identification with a given group may be brief; individual identity is more important than group associations. | 1 | 2 | | 3 | | | 4 | | 5 | **Belong to few groups**. Identification with a group may be lasting; group associations are more important than individual identity. |
| **7. Formality** |  | |  | |  |  | |  | |  |
| **Informal.** Get to know people quickly. | 1 | 2 | | 3 | | | 4 | | 5 | **Formal.** Get to know people more slowly. |

*The items on the left are more descriptive of American majority culture. The items on the right represent the opposite cultural preferences. The closer you align with the left column the less likely you will be to experience cultural stress in the workplace. This does not mean that the American majority culture is superior – it simply means you will likely face these values in the workplace.*

Step 3—Earn Your Stamp

***Reflection*  Date: Name:**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Module 1: Culture in the Workplace | |
| A. List 3 ways you or a friend have been misunderstood in the past based on culture | B. What are some cultural difference you have observed at work?  1.  2.  3. |
| C. Devise a strategy for developing intercultural competence in each situation you have observed differences in work culture.  1.  2.  3. | |