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Cultural Competence Module 6

Cross-Cultural Communication Styles and Differences

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Module 6: Cross-Cultural Communication Style and Differences

Module Estimated Time: 30-45 minutes

Statement of Purpose:

The purpose of this module is to introduce concept of Verbal Communication Styles and the differences that may exist across cultures. Students will learn how communication styles such as Direct vs. Indirect, Formal vs. Informal, Turn Taking/Pause, and Animation/Emotion may differ across individual and cultural groups. Finally, this module will give students an opportunity to understand and identify how cultural communication styles frequently lead to misunderstandings and feelings of frustration based on the different interpretation of the conveyed message.

Objectives:

Upon the completion of this module, the learner will:

1. Be introduced to specific types of Verbal Communication Styles
2. Have practiced with different Verbal Communication Styles
3. Have a higher level of awareness on the patterns for Communication styles and how these affect cross-cultural communication
4. Have practiced identifying and interpreting communication patterns

Terminology

Culture
Cross-cultural interactions
Character
Misinterpretations
Misunderstandings
Universal concepts
Cultural Responsiveness
Attitudes
To elicit
Perspectives
Directness
Indirectness
Communication styles
Communication Patterns

Stereotype
Generalization
Animation
Emotion
Tone
Volume
Identity Orientation
Turn Taking
Pause time
Touch
Vocal Patterns
Stress
Rhythm
Paralanguage

1. **Verbal Communication Styles (Introductory Lecture)**
   Open this session by introducing Verbal Communication Styles as an integral part of culture

Time: 2 minutes

Materials: None

Cross-Cultural Communication is one of the most problematic areas across many groups, including internal and external clients of healthcare organizations.

This is mostly due to the level of diversity that exists within groups of people who communicate. Communication is an essential part of culture, or better, culture is communication because communication is one way to express our behaviors and our behaviors are shaped by culture.

Culture and communication cannot be separated. Communication problems, lack of understanding or misunderstandings can be the source of much frustration, particularly in healthcare. Cultural competence becomes a very important tool to reduce the gap of miscommunications or negative feelings associated with them.

In this lesson, we will focus on Styles of Communication specifically Direct vs. Indirect, Formal vs. Informal, Turn Taking/Pause, Animation/ Emotion.

2. **Cross-Cultural Communication Styles and Differences (Lecture)**
   Introduce different patterns of Communication Styles: Direct vs. Indirect; Formality vs. Informality; Turn Taking/Pause; Animation/Emotion.

Time: 10 minutes

Materials: Laptop/Computer
LCD Projector/Screen
Remote Presentation Clicker
PowerPoint of Module 6

Preparation: Before class, prepare laptop, screen and LCD projector. Have clicker at hand to advance PowerPoint Slides.

Lecture Content - Use the points below to frame your lecture

Slide 1

- Verbal communication primarily relies on spoken words, visual aids and non-verbal elements to support the transfer of meaningful messages. Differences in cross-cultural communication overlap all three areas.

- Our lesson today will address different communication styles that are expressed through verbal communication. Specifically, we will be addressing generalizations related to Communications Styles as they relate to Directness vs. Indirectness, Formality vs. Informality, Turn Taking/Pause, and Animation/ Emotion. We will compare and contrast these through reference to specific ethnic groups.

  - Please keep in mind that these are generalizations and, as with all generalizations, it is important to verify with the individual cultural group or individual before drawing some conclusions and stereotyping.

Slide 2

- Direct Communication Style focuses on explicit meaning of words and dealing directly with conflict. Direct Communicators believe that "what needs to be said should be said". Communication is seen as linear by moving through specific points in a logical manner. The meaning of the conversation is straightforward with little need of attention to the context.

- Anglo-Americans tend to speak very directly, relying on a more linear, logic and technical rather than metaphorical information. This is also typical of Low Context Style Communication.

Slide 3

- An important goal of cultures with Indirect Communication Style is to keep the harmony in that nobody should be embarrassed and "lose face". In this style not everything needs to be said, but can be implied. Public problem solving is avoided, as it is typically dealt with in a private setting.

- Another example of Indirect Communication involves High Context Style, where all details are an essential part of meaning. Communication is Indirect here in that a person has to discover meaning by uncovering layer after layer of details.

- Native American and Asian Cultures usually prefer indirectness as a way of passive resistance to avoid conflict and reduce the chance of dissension or disagreement.

Slide 4

- So how do individuals with Direct Communication Style view those who have an Indirect Communication Style and vice-versa?

- People who have a Direct Communication Style think Indirect Communicators are evasive, are not honest, are not solidly grounded, have no opinion; they are problem solvers, but increase tension by avoiding issues

- On the other hand, people who have an Indirect Communication Style think Direct Communicators are insensitive, rude and ill-mannered, harsh and insulting, and they create more tension by dealing directly with issues.

Slide 5

- Formality vs. Informality are additional communication styles that we can differentiate between cultural groups and that, if not properly understood, can lead to misinterpretations of the intention behind meaning and general misunderstandings.

- The Spanish speaking culture in general uses a formal style of communication. Honorifics, or formal titles, are typically used when addressing certain professionals or individuals that represent a higher social status.

- A formal style of communication puts emphasis on good manners.

Slide 6

- Contrarily, Informal Style emphasizes being courteous in a casual manner, by use of first names of acquaintances, for example, or a belief that we are all equal, and social and class status are not preferential markers in how we address people.

- Americans in general prefer an informal style of communication.

Slide 7

- So, how do Formal Communicators see Informal Communicators and vice-versa?

- Formal Communicators may feel that Informal Communicators lack good manners and respect and may also see them as very superficial individuals. Depending on how strong the values around formality, Formal Communicators may be reluctant to establish trust once formality has been violated.

- On the other hand, Informal Communicator may see Formal Communicators as uptight and rigid, but do not have a problem with establishing trust because of the level of formality they observe.

Slide 8

- Whose turn it is to speak and how much silence is appropriate during a conversation are, once again, dictated by the cultural norms that shape the different communication styles.

- Where Linear, Direct and Informal Communication are acceptable cultural norms, Turn-Taking is typically signaled by the speaker looking directly at the listener and the speaker

ceasing to speak. Pause time is fairly brief as longer pauses make people uncomfortable as these are interpreted as a failure to communicate; interrupting is not polite.

- In indirect, formal speaking scenarios, sometimes nobody else speaks unless the speaker is completely through and a long silence has occurred. Silence is valued as a way to express that the listener is giving consideration or taking the time to process and digest what the speaker has said.

- Asian cultures in general value long pauses, whereas Americans tend to avoid them.

Slide 9

- Regardless of Direct or Indirect, Formal or Informal Communication Styles, some cultural groups' style of communication is based on the principle of High-Involvement, while others on the principle of High-Considerateness.

- Asian cultures adopt a "High-Considerateness" style in that people have to wait for their turn to speak. Overlaps such as interruptions are seen as a sign to stop if another person starts simultaneously speaking.

- Latin Communicators, on the other hand, very much rely on the "High-Involvement" style, where fast rate of speech, avoidance of inter-turn pauses and simultaneous talking is seen as a high level of interest from the listener. Speakers do not stop speaking or "give up the floor" because listeners may interject by not waiting for their turn to speak.

Slide 10

- Lastly, the degree of Emotion/Animation that the speaker has is very important in discerning different cross-cultural communication styles.

- Expressive Communicators, in general, show feelings and emotions and prefer less personal space. Their involvement with relationships is high and, because of this, the degree of subjectivity is also high. Southern Europeans and African Americans tend to prefer this style of communication.

- A more Neutral Style of Communication, contrarily, stresses detail and fact rather than emotions. These speakers require a larger personal space and come across as unemotional, reserved, rational and logical. Anglo-Americans and Northern Europeans tend to adopt a Neutral Style over an Expressive Style, particularly in the professional setting.

3. What is Your Style? (Activity in Triads)

Students will be able to observe, categorize and document peers' Communication Styles

Time: 5 minutes

Materials: Handout for Module 6 - Observer's Handout

Preparation: Instruct students to choose two partners to work with. Once in triads, explain that one person will be the "Observer" while the other two debate over a particular topic of the Observer's choice. Give Handout for Module 6 to all students whose role is "Observer".

Suggested directions to all:

"Please work with two partners and decide which of you three should be the "Observer". The other two will be engaging in a debate on a particular topic of the Observer's choice based on the suggestions provided on the Observer's Handout.

Suggested directions to Observers:

"Please read your instructions on the handout and pick a topic for your partners to discuss/debate."

4. How Different are We? (Whole Class Reporting/Discussion)

Students report their observations based on the activity, "What is your Style?" and receive feedback from other students.

Time: 3-5-minutes

Materials: Handout for Module 6 – Observer's Handout

Ask Observers to report on Communication Styles of the other two students:

- *What topic did you present to the students you observed?*
- *Based on what you observed, did both share the same Communication Style?*
- *What led to this conclusion?*

5. Final Thoughts on Cross-Cultural Communication Styles (Closing Lecture)

Instructor reviews the link between Verbal Communication Styles and Culture and recaps on the importance of being aware of the communication differences when interacting with other people, especially co-workers and clients who may come from a different cultural background.

Time: 2 minutes

Materials: None

Close this lesson with these points:

- Communication is universal in that we all share the need to communicate and we do so in ways that are culturally learned. At times, misunderstandings may occur due to the cultural gap between those who engage in communication. This gap may cause for us to stereotype and judge and simply tune people out by dismissing the importance of what they are saying.
- These communication differences are not right or wrong, they are simply different and difficult to decipher when their cultural context is unknown to us. To reduce stress and feelings of discomfort, it is important to be aware of the diversity that surrounds us. We should keep an open mind to learning different meanings and intentions behind the way that people from different cultures communicate. This is particularly significant when working in a very diverse environment and we are in constant contact with co-workers or clients who may not be very knowledgeable of the cultural rules that govern the way to communicate in the dominant culture.

Module 6 - Observer's Instructions

1) Please pick one of the following topics for debate and present it to the two students in your group.

a) Arranged marriage vs. love marriage - is one better than the other?
b) Marijuana: does it have medical value and should it be legalized?
c) Do we have direct influence over our future or is divine intervention a part of it?

2) Use the area below to make your observations on the different Communication Styles of Student A and Student B in your group. Watch for elements of Formal vs. Informal, Direct vs. Indirect, Turn-Taking/Pauses, and an example of Emotion/Animation that the two students adopt during their conversation and write them down.

Student A Name _____ Student B Name _____

Formal vs. Informal

Examples:

Formal vs. Informal

Examples:

Turn-Taking/Pauses

Examples:

Turn-Taking/Pauses

Examples:

Direct vs. Indirect

Examples:

Direct vs. Indirect

Examples:

Animation/Emotion vs. Neutral

Examples:

Animation/Emotion vs. Neutral

Examples: