

# Intercultural Development Inventory Resource Guide

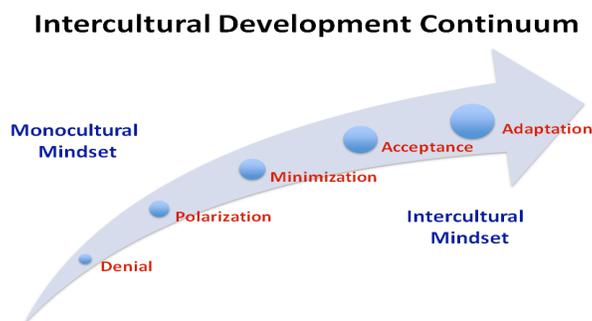
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## The Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC)<sup>1</sup> (IDI Handout) Mitchell R. Hammer, Ph.D.

The Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC) describes a set of orientations toward cultural difference and commonality that are arrayed along a continuum from the more monocultural mindsets of Denial and Polarization through the transitional orientation of Minimization to the intercultural or global mindsets of Acceptance and Adaptation. The capability of deeply shifting cultural perspective and bridging behavior across cultural differences is most fully achieved when one maintains an Adaptation perspective.



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### Denial

A Denial mindset reflects a more limited capability for understanding and appropriately responding to cultural differences in values, beliefs, perceptions, emotional responses, and behaviors. Denial consists of a *Disinterest* in other cultures and a more active *Avoidance* of cultural difference. Individuals with a Denial orientation often do not see differences in perceptions and behavior as “cultural.” A Denial orientation is characteristic of individuals who have limited experience with other cultural groups and therefore tend to operate with broad stereotypes and

<sup>1</sup> The Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC) assessed by the Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) is adapted from the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS). The original formulation of the DMIS is: Bennett, M.J., 1986, Towards ethnorelativism: A developmental model of intercultural sensitivity. In R.M. Paige (Ed.), *Cross-cultural orientation: New Conceptualizations and applications* (pp. 27-70). New York: University Press of America. Recent publications of the IDC model are: Hammer, M.R., 2009, The Intercultural Development Inventory: An Approach for assessing and building intercultural competence, In M.A. Moodian (Ed.), *Contemporary leadership and intercultural competence: Exploring the cross-cultural dynamics within organizations*, (pp. 203-108), Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; Hammer, M.R. (2011). Additional cross-cultural validity testing of the Intercultural Development Inventory. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 35, 474-487; Hammer, M.R., 2012, The Intercultural Development Inventory: A new frontier in assessment and development of intercultural competence (chapter 5), in M. Vande Berg, M. Paige & K. Lou (Eds.), *Student learning abroad*, Stylus Publications.

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generalizations about the cultural “other.” Those at Denial may also maintain a distance from other cultural groups and express little interest in learning about the cultural values and practices of diverse communities. This orientation tends to be associated more with members of a dominant culture as well as members of non-dominant groups who are relatively isolated from mainstream society because both may have more opportunity to remain relatively isolated from cultural diversity. By contrast, members of non-dominant groups who are more actively engaged within the larger, mainstream society are less likely to maintain a Denial orientation, because they more often need to engage cultural differences. When Denial is present in the workplace, cultural diversity oftentimes feels “ignored.”

The intercultural competence development strategy for Denial is to help the individual or group *notice and confront cultural differences*. This can focus on those less threatening, more easily observed aspects of human behavior in areas of clothing, food, music, art, dance as well nonverbal behavior, customs, dos and taboos. Development is achieved for the individual or group by interacting more with people from different cultures—under supportive conditions. Also, asking individuals and groups to notice perceptions and behaviors that they have in common with—and are different from—people from other cultural communities is also useful.

## **Polarization**

Polarization is an evaluative mindset that views cultural differences from an “us versus them” perspective. Polarization can take the form of *Defense* (“My cultural practices are superior to other cultural practices”) or *Reversal* (“Other cultures are better than mine”). Within Defense, cultural differences are often seen as divisive and threatening to one’s own “way of doing things.” Reversal is a mindset that values and may idealize other cultural practices while denigrating one’s own culture group. Reversal may also support the “cause” of an oppressed group, but this is done with little knowledge of what the “cause” means to people from the oppressed community. When Polarization is present in an organization, diversity typically feels “uncomfortable.”

The intercultural competence development strategy for individuals or groups at Polarization is to help them recognize when they are overemphasizing differences without fully understanding them; and, second, to help them search for commonalities and adopt a less evaluative stance toward understanding differences.

## **Minimization**

Minimization is a transitional mindset between the more Monocultural orientations of Denial and Polarization and the more Intercultural/Global worldviews of Acceptance and Adaptation. Minimization highlights commonalities in both human *Similarity* (basic needs) and *Universalism* (universal values and principles) that can mask a deeper understanding of cultural differences. Minimization can take one of two forms: (a) the highlighting of commonalities due to limited cultural self-understanding, which is more commonly experienced by dominant group members within a cultural community; or (b) the highlighting of commonalities as a *strategy* for navigating the values and practices largely determined by the dominant culture group, which is more often experienced by non-dominant group members within a larger cultural community. This latter strategy can have survival value for non-dominant culture members and often takes the form of “go along to get along.” When Minimization exists in organizations, diversity often feels “not heard.”

When responsibilities and tasks in an organization or educational institution can be accomplished successfully using commonality strategies without the need to attend to difference, Minimization mindsets are reinforced. The intercultural competence developmental strategy for Minimization is to increase cultural self-understanding,

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including awareness around power and privilege as well as other patterns of cultural difference (e.g., conflict resolution styles), culture-general frameworks (e.g., individualism/collectivism), and culture-specific patterns.

## Acceptance

Acceptance and Adaptation are intercultural/global mindsets. With an Acceptance orientation, individuals recognize and appreciate patterns of cultural difference and commonality in their own and other cultures. An Acceptance orientation is curious to learn how a cultural pattern of behavior makes sense within different cultural communities. This involves contrastive self-reflection between one's own culturally learned perceptions and behaviors and perceptions and practices of different cultural groups. While curious, individuals with an Acceptance mindset are not fully able to appropriately adapt to cultural difference. Someone with an Acceptance orientation may be challenged as well to make ethical or moral decisions across cultural groups. While a person within Acceptance embraces a deeper understanding of cultural differences, this can lead to the individual struggling with reconciling behavior in another cultural group that the person considers unethical or immoral from his or her own cultural viewpoint. When Acceptance is present in organizations and educational institutions, diversity feels "understood."

The intercultural competence development strategy for Acceptance is to help individuals or groups interact across cultures in ways that expand their knowledge about cultural differences, including culture-general and culture-specific frameworks, and to gain skills in adapting to these differences. They can also confront cross-cultural ethical questions within their specific workplace or living situation by fully considering what a particular practice means from their own cultural perspective and what a cultural practice represents in a different cultural community.

## Adaptation

An Adaptation orientation consists of both *Cognitive Frame-Shifting* (shifting one's cultural perspective) and *Behavioral Code-Shifting* (changing behavior in authentic and culturally appropriate ways). Adaptation enables deep cultural bridging across diverse communities using an increased repertoire of cultural frameworks and practices in navigating cultural commonalities and differences. An Adaptation mindset sees adaptation *in* performance (behavior). While people with an Adaptation mindset typically focus on learning adaptive strategies, problems can arise when people with Adaptation mindsets express little tolerance toward people who engage diversity from other developmental orientations. This can result in people with Adaptive capabilities being marginalized in their workplace. When an Adaptation mindset is present in the workplace, diversity feels "valued and involved."

The intercultural competence development strategy for Adaptation is to continue to build on one's knowledge of cultural differences and to further develop skills for adapting to these differences, including engaging in "cultural mediation" between cultural groups that are experiencing problems.

## Cultural Disengagement

Cultural Disengagement is not an orientation on the Intercultural Competence Continuum. It involves the degree of connection or disconnection an individual or group experiences toward a primary cultural community.

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