

The Situation

You are a professional working for an educational institution in Fredonia (a fictitious place). You are part of a workgroup that is involved in teaching, training and administration. The campus has a diverse student population with people from a wide variety of both domestic and international cultures and Fredonia is itself a multicultural community.

A new staff member has just been hired to join the work team, and your group is about to tell her what it is like to work in your academic environment. She is European American, age 34. She will be working in student services, and as part of her responsibilities, she will have daily contact with dozens of different cultures. This is her first assignment in such a diverse context, and she is curious about what to expect. You may assume she is professionally competent for her task; the focus here is on orienting her to the cultural challenges in her work.

1. Read the Mindset of your group. You can assume that all members of your workgroup share the same perspective.
2. Perhaps you have met others who have this mindset during your teaching and training experiences. Feel free to imitate their thoughts on these matters!
3. How would you approach the task of preparing her for intercultural interactions on your campus in Fredonia?
4. What would you tell her to expect about the students from different cultures?
5. Would it be different than her life at her former job where most of her colleagues and the students were from her own culture? How?

Shift your mindset to your own (real) point of view and consider:

1. What advantages can you see to approaching this situation from the mindset of your assigned group?
2. What are the limitations/ disadvantages of approaching it from this mindset?
3. What would be an appropriate name or label for this mindset? (What would you call it?)

Your Mindset

Group C

You are comfortable with the familiar and are not anxious to complicate life with 'cultural difference.' You may simply not notice much cultural difference around you. Since you have many things on your mind, culture may not seem like a very important issue to you.

When you think about "culture," you may be most interested in familiar categories of food, clothing, and the arts instead of exploring the less-familiar idea of cultural differences.

You also may maintain separation from others who are different. Perhaps you avoid contact because of the discomfort of dealing with strange people and situations. Or you might seek out meeting places, groups, or religious organizations with people who are as culturally similar to yourself as possible.

Essentially, you don't see how cultural differences affect your life or work, and sometimes you may wonder why people make such a big deal about it. You suspect that this is an issue that will eventually go away, or certainly won't impact you. One of your clear strengths is your adherence to traditional values and support for the community of like-minded people.

Your Mindset Group F

You have a strong commitment to your own worldview and some distrust of cultural behavior or ideas that differ from your own. You are aware of other cultures around you, but you may have a relatively incomplete understanding of them and you probably have some fairly strong negative stereotypes about some of them.

For instance, you might routinely attribute negative characteristics to many women, many Moslems, many tribal cultures, many gays, etc. You may find yourself complaining about the failings of people from other culture groups. You probably do not seek out the company of people from other cultures because you object to one or more of their unpleasant traits.

If you do have a good relationship with a co-worker, neighbor, or friend from another culture, you may consider that person an exception to the rule about the group to which he or she belongs. You believe your own culture has a lot to offer these people. One of your clear strengths is in dealing head-on with difficult international and multicultural issues. You resist the temptation to return to blissful ignorance and give in because of "political correctness."

Your Mindset

Group B

You have gotten beyond feeling that people from other cultures pose a threat to your own. Your experience is that people from other cultures are pretty much like you, under the surface. You are quite aware that other cultures exist all around you, and you may be fairly knowledgeable about cultural differences in custom and everyday behavior.

You do not denigrate other cultures and you seek to avoid stereotypes by treating every person as an individual or by treating other people as you would like to be treated. You believe in the Golden Rule, because, deeply, we all share a common humanity. You enjoy sharing aspects of American culture with people from other places.

In many ways, you like it that people from other cultures speak and act in ways different from yourself, but you probably believe that there are some universal values that apply to all people, regardless of culture. It's a small world, after all, and we should all get along based on our similarities. One of your clear strengths is recognizing the essential humanity of every person and trying to behave in tolerant ways towards others.

Your Mindset

Group A

You both acknowledge and respect cultural difference. You are aware of your own culture(s), and you see that your own culture is just one of many ways of experiencing the world. When you think of people from other cultures, you imagine them as every bit as complex as yourself. Their ideas, feelings, and behavior may seem unusual to you, but you realize that their experience is just as 'rich' as your own.

You may not like everything about other cultures (or everything about your own, for that matter), but that fact does not make you think that the members of those cultures as a group are any less civilized than your own cultural group. You are curious about other cultures and seek opportunities to learn more about them, even if you do not have as many opportunities as you would like to interact with members of those cultures.

When you are around people who are culturally different, you may not act any differently than you do with members of your own culture, but you are aware that your behavior might be interpreted in unusual ways. You in turn are careful to withhold quick judgments of members of other cultures and to consider how their behavior might mean something different than it would in your own culture. One of your clear strengths is in recognizing cultural differences between your own and other groups and seeing how these differences are valuable to society and to yourself.

Your Mindset Group E

You recognize the added value of having more than one cultural perspective available to you. You have deep knowledge of your own and at least one other culture, and you are able to shift your cultural perspective to look at the world through different eyes. When you shift perspective into another culture, you find that your behavior changes in a natural way to express that different view of the world.

You have a broad repertoire of behavior that allows you to act in culturally appropriate ways outside of your own culture. In fact, you are able to intentionally change your behavior to match that of other cultures, even if you are not around people from that culture.

You are often in situations where you use this ability to facilitate intercultural discussions, conduct negotiations across cultures, manage teams, or direct projects. It is likely that you are bicultural in a least one other culture, although you can shift your behavior in more limited ways towards others cultures as well. You may routinely use this ability to act as a bridge across cultures.

Your clear strengths include the ability to communicate effectively across cultures, your flexible perspective and your deep understanding of at least one.