

# CRITICAL INCIDENTS FOR INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN THE WORKPLACE

## Activity Guide





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## PROJECT TEAM

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## PROJECT FUNDER

Thank you to the project sponsor, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (CIC) for their vision, financial support and encouragement.

## PROJECT CONTRIBUTORS

The Critical Incidents for Intercultural Communication in the Workplace project owes its success to the many individuals throughout the various phases, who shared their stories, expertise, and personal experiences in an effort to bring the utmost authenticity and integrity to this resource. We'd like to express our appreciation to everyone who shared their stories and experiences with our team during the initial research and information-gathering phase. We'd also like to thank the many cultural advisors who reviewed the scripts and whose reflection and honesty brought authenticity to the scenes. And finally we would like to acknowledge the hard work of our actors and film crew, whose patience and commitment to the vision was crucial in bringing the videos to fruition. Your involvement has made this resource possible and is a tribute to your commitment to making diverse communities stronger and more innovative through awareness-raising, and effective and inclusive engagement.

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## WHAT'S GOING ON? THE CONTEXT

Immigrants require a range of competencies to successfully adapt to Canadian ideas of employability. The unwritten rules of appropriate workplace language and behaviour vary across cultures; Immigrants need to be aware & navigate these unwritten rules to access and retain employment. The continued productivity of Alberta companies and the vitality of the economy require that we together address this adaptation. Demand for skilled workers is ongoing in Alberta despite the economic challenges elsewhere. Compared to the national average of 7.2%, Alberta is showing a strong employment with an unemployment rate of 4.4%.<sup>1</sup> Immigrants and interprovincial migrants, faring better in Alberta than in other provinces, still experience an unemployment rate that is double that of Canadian-born Albertans. Immigrants cite language problems and not enough Canadian job experience as the top difficulties they experience finding a job.<sup>2</sup> Current estimates indicate that Canada loses approximately 30% of its new and highly skilled immigrants because they are unable to integrate.<sup>3</sup> The divide from cultures more distant from Canadian cultural norms requires more attention to these differences for immigrants to successfully adapt to new Canadian norms for workplace communication. NorQuest College's CIE regularly receives requests for intercultural and workplace language training to address this soft skills gap for new immigrants. Also, previous feedback from language training instructors identifies intercultural resources – especially media based – as a significant gap in English Language Training programs. This project will provide a made-in-Alberta resource to support workplace related language instruction that develops relevant communication skills for immigrants.

## WHAT IS THIS RESOURCE? THE PURPOSE

This resource aims to contribute to enhancing effective communication in culturally diverse workplace contexts for Canadian-born professionals, as well as for internationally educated professionals recruited to work and live in Alberta. Intercultural relations and cross-cultural exchanges are complex, and this resource seeks to provide opportunities to reflect on this complexity while at the same time facilitating participants' ability to make distinctions and develop higher degrees of intercultural sensitivity. It looks to help users develop a shared understanding as well as the knowledge, skills and awareness required to communicate effectively in a culturally diverse workplace. The critical incidents will provide access to real experiences with minimal cultural markers and support the development of intercultural competence by developing more complex interpretations and responses to situations.

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<sup>1</sup> Edmonton Economic Development Corporation Monthly Key Indicators (June 2012)

<sup>2</sup> Government of Alberta Employment and Immigration, Occupations of Migrants (2009)

<sup>3</sup> Alliance of Sector Councils website: <http://www.councils.org/our-priorities/internationally-trained-workers/>

# HOW CAN THIS RESOURCE BE USED? OUTCOMES<sup>4</sup>

This video resource builds on work and insights gained from previous CIE projects; in particular, the following three projects and resources:

1. *Critical Incidents for Intercultural Communication Toolkit*<sup>5</sup>
2. *Critical Incidents for Intercultural Communication in Healthcare*<sup>6</sup>
3. *Inclusive Student Engagement*<sup>7</sup>

Effective use of this Activity Guide assumes you have familiarity with the comprehensive facilitator materials provided in those resources. It also assumes some experience and comfort in facilitating groups of people through activities and discussions of somewhat challenging content. With that in mind, the *Critical Incidents for Intercultural Communication in the Workplace* video resources can be used to achieve the following outcomes:

- increase awareness of culturally determined interpretations and explanations of other culturally-influenced behaviours
- identify cultural perspectives that might have contributed to particular problems, misunderstandings, or conflicts
- increase awareness of attitudes about and responses to situations such as those depicted in the critical incidents
- support participants in achieving greater intercultural sensitivity such that they are increasingly confident and effective in similar situations
- increase awareness of characteristics and behaviours necessary for intercultural competence, and motivate them to continue learning
- increase awareness of the diversity that exists among members of each culture, as well as the normative differences between cultures
- provide a supportive framework for working through misunderstandings and everyday intercultural situations

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<sup>4</sup> We recognize that participants will be in different stages of the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) developed by Milton Bennett (1986, 1993), and therefore one or more of these outcomes may be unrealistic for certain groups of participants.

<sup>5</sup> (Sarah Apedaile) <http://www.norquest.ca/NorquestCollege/media/pdf/centres/intercultural/CriticalIncidentsBooklet.pdf>

<sup>6</sup> (Jake Evans) <http://www.norquest.ca/norquest-centres/centre-for-intercultural-education/projects/completed-projects/critical-incident-for-intercultural-communication.aspx>

<sup>7</sup> (Kerry Louw, Cheryl Whitelaw) <http://www.norquest.ca/norquest-centres/centre-for-intercultural-education/projects/completed-projects/inclusive-student-engagement.aspx>

# ACTIVITIES

## ACTIVITY 1: THE IDENTITY WHEEL

The “Identity Wheel” is a useful tool for reflecting on identities, and personal values and beliefs.<sup>8</sup> You can use the Identity Wheel to help participants explore similarities and differences about themselves in their own group, an issue or topic that arises as a result of the critical incidents, or even to try to better understand the perspectives of the people involved in the critical incidents. This activity can be particularly useful for people in Denial, Polarization, and Minimization.

1. Have participants put their name in the center, and then use the category tabs around the center to construct their own identity wheel. They may wish to add tabs for other characteristics they feel are important (for example, use the dimensions in the 4-layers of diversity model).
2. Have them add the specific details to each of the tabs.



3. Have participants consider the values and beliefs they hold about each of the words they've used in the tabs. What has influenced these values and beliefs?
4. Have participants choose a character in one of the critical incident videos and fill out the identity wheel for them. What aspects do we know about that character? How do we know that information? What information do we assume or infer? What is unknown? If we wanted to check this, how might we ask?

<sup>8</sup> See “Roots & Connections Phase 2 – Rural ESL Enhancement”; <http://www.norquest.ca/norquest-centres/centre-for-intercultural-education/projects/completed-projects/roots-connections-phase-2-rural-esl-enhancement.aspx>

## ACTIVITY 2: WORKING WITHOUT INTERPRETATION

One of the functions of culture is to enable us to make quick interpretations about what we experience, such that we don't have to ponder or negotiate every little interaction we have with others during the day. This is one of the great strengths of cultural frames when they are shared with others, but also one of the first challenges to working across-cultures. It takes practice to be able to separate what we see from our interpretations of what it means. This activity can be particularly useful for people in Polarization and Minimization.

1. Have participants watch one of the videos (Scene A4 is particularly good for this)
2. Let them watch it one time to get a feel for the scene, and have them write down any thoughts that come into their head as they are watching the scene.
3. Open up the floor to anyone who wants to share his/her thoughts.
4. Pay particular attention to any interpretations of behaviour that arise, and ask participants what leads them to making those interpretations. (This can be difficult so help them out with examples of behaviour statements in support of their interpretations)
5. Explain the benefit of those interpretations, and the challenge they impose.
6. Have them watch the video again and ask them to simply write a description of the behaviours they see, without interpretations.
7. Ask them how regularly they do this, and how difficult it was.
8. Connect this skill back to Stage 1 "Something's Up!" of the Something's Up! Cycle and the skillset for intercultural competence.

## ACTIVITY 3: WORKING WITH EMPATHY I

Part of building intercultural competence is improving our ability to connect across cultural similarities and differences with empathy. When watching a cross-cultural interaction, it can be very useful to identify behaviours, attitudes, or responses that might be similar to the ways we enact these things ourselves. The advantage of doing this exercise while watching a video, is that we are not as emotionally involved, as spectators, as we would be if we were directly involved. This allows for a space of reflection and can be useful in understanding our own sense of "normal" and illuminating blind spots. This activity can be particularly useful for people in Polarization and Minimization.

1. Choose one of the videos you feel will resonate with your audience.
2. Have them watch the video and ask them to choose the character in the video they most identify with.
3. Once they are finished, break them up into groups of 3-4 and have them share their responses.
4. Tell them that in their groups, they are not allowed to argue, challenge or debate the views of their fellow group members. They are only allowed to empathize and ask questions to clarify.
5. Once everyone has shared, bring them back together as a large group and debrief the conversations they had in their groups.
6. Did they learn anything new? What did they find easy about that? Challenging?

## ACTIVITY 4: WORKING WITH EMPATHY II

Part of building intercultural competence is improving our ability to connect across cultural similarities and differences with empathy. When watching a cross-cultural interaction, it can be very useful to identify behaviours, attitudes, or responses that might be different to the ways we enact these things ourselves. The advantage of doing this exercise while watching a video, is that we are not as emotionally involved, as spectators, as we would be if we were directly involved. This allows for a space of reflection and can be useful in understanding our own sense of “normal” and illuminating blind spots. This activity can be particularly useful for people in Polarization and Minimization.

1. Choose one of the videos you feel will resonate with your audience.
2. Have them watch the video and ask them to choose the character in the video they least identify with.
3. Once they are finished, break them up into groups of 3-4 and have them share their responses.
4. Tell them that in their groups, they are not allowed to argue, challenge or debate the views of their fellow group members. They are only allowed to empathize and ask questions to clarify.
5. Once everyone has shared, bring them back together as a large group and debrief the conversations they had in their groups.
6. Did they learn anything new? What did they find easy about that? Challenging?

## ACTIVITY 5: WORKING WITH EMPATHY III

Part of building intercultural competence is improving our ability to connect across cultural similarities and differences with empathy. When watching a cross-cultural interaction, it can be very useful to try to step into behaviours, attitudes, or responses that might be different to the ways we enact these things ourselves. The advantage of doing this exercise while watching a video, is that we are not as emotionally involved, as spectators, as we would be if we were directly involved. It also gives us an opportunity to try on different perspectives to see how they feel. This allows for a space of reflection and can be useful in understanding our own and others’ senses of “normal” and illuminating blind spots. This activity can be particularly useful for people in late Minimization and Acceptance.

1. Choose one of the videos you feel will resonate with your audience.
2. Have them watch the video and ask them to choose the character in the video they least identify with.
3. Once they are finished, give them some space to try to identify the operating values and logic for the character they’ve chosen. This can often be easier in groups, so you may want to assign a “character” (ex. everyone who chose “George” come to this table) to one or more tables, and have them split up this way.
4. Have each group record their thoughts as they are discussing. See if they can come up with statements of logic for the character (similar to what is in the Expectations & “Normal” for each character in the Scene-by-Scene Breakdowns)
5. When finished, have them watch the video again and look for behaviours that support their understanding of the character.
6. Give them more time to discuss and modify their statements.
7. Once everyone has finished, bring them back together as a large group and debrief the logic statements they came up with in their groups.
8. Reveal the information for each character in the Scene-by-Scene Breakdown, either in handouts or a powerpoint.
9. Were they correct? Did they learn anything new? What did they find easy about that? Challenging?
10. Connect this skill back to Stage 3 “Make Sense” of the Something’s Up! Cycle and the skillset for intercultural competence.

## ACTIVITY 6: ATTENDING TO JUDGMENT

One of the functions of culture is to enable us to make quick interpretations about what we experience, such that we don't have to ponder or negotiate every little interaction we have with others during the day. These interpretations lead us to judgment calls and ultimately to the "what, when, why, and how" of our choices every day. Judgments therefore are normal and natural, but they can get in the way of our understanding in cross-cultural situations. This activity can be particularly useful for people in Polarization and Minimization.

1. Have participants watch one of the videos.
2. Let them watch it one time to get a feel for the scene, and have them write down any thoughts that come into their head as they are watching the scene.
3. Open up the floor to anyone who wants to share his/her thoughts.
4. Pay particular attention to any judgments that arise about the characters and their choices in the scene.
5. See if participants can identify the values that underlie their judgments. Ex: "I value.... and therefore what X did was..."
6. If they are able to do that, see if they can identify where those values came from. Ex: experiences, parents, education, etc.
7. Ask them how regularly they do this, and how difficult it was. What is the advantage of being able to do so?
8. Connect this skill back to Stage 2 "Suspend Judgment" of the Something's Up! Cycle and the skillset for intercultural competence.



## ACTIVITY 8: IDENTIFYING BEHAVIOURS USING THE DMIS

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS) can be a useful tool, not only for understanding our own responses to cultural similarities and differences, but also for understanding others' responses as well. Following the theory, everyone you work with in your organization is at some point along the developmental continuum. The Intercultural Development Inventory (IDI) can help determine where we are all at, but even without using the inventory, we can make educated guesses about our own and others' stages by paying attention to our behaviours and the way we speak about similarities and differences. This activity would need to follow a discussion about the DMIS itself and its five stages. This activity can particularly useful for people in Minimization, Acceptance, and Adaptation.

1. Have participants watch one of the videos; preferably one with only two characters in it.
2. Let them watch it one time to get a feel for the scene, and have them write down any thoughts that come into their head as they are watching the scene.
3. Open up the floor to anyone who wants to share his/her thoughts.
4. Pay particular attention to any comments that point to the DMIS stages for the characters involved in the scene. (See the Scene-by-Scene Breakdowns)
5. Bring this to their attention and see if you can get them to reach consensus on where along the DMIS the two characters are.
6. Watch the video again and ask participants to watch the characters for behaviours that are consistent with the stages they've identified for each.
7. Debrief connecting the behaviours to descriptions of the DMIS stages.

## ACTIVITY 9: IDENTIFYING GOALS

The employees in the videos are coming together in each scene to reach certain goals and objectives. Some of these are shared goals; some of them are not. In intercultural spaces it can be useful to articulate the goal upfront, and from the start. This can help people speak to how they see the goal being met, and also serve as an anchor point for realigning conversations, meetings, or actions if they get off track, and once again create shared meaning and movement forward. This activity can particularly useful for people in all stages of the DMIS.

1. Choose one of the videos you feel will resonate with your audience; preferably one with only two characters in it.
2. Let them watch it one time to get a feel for the scene, and have them write down any thoughts that come into their head as they are watching the scene.
3. Open up the floor to anyone who wants to share his/her thoughts.
4. Pay particular attention to any comments that point to the goals for each of the characters involved in the scene. Bring these to their attention.
5. Speak to how goals are not always articulated and not always shared in cross-cultural interactions.
6. Watch the video again and ask participants to identify the common goal between the two characters as well as the individual goals each is striving for.
7. Generate a discussion about what in the scene has led them to identify these goals. See if they can identify points in the scene where referring to either the common goal or the individual goals may have changed the conversation for the better.
8. Connect this skill back to the "Identify Goals" Stage of the Something's Up! Cycle and the skillset for intercultural competence.

## ACTIVITY 10: MOVING TO INFORMED ACTION

Intercultural competence is made up of a mindset, a heartset, and a skillset.<sup>9</sup> The former two are very important pieces to help build the foundation for increased confidence in the latter. In other words, having knowledge and building empathy are important in and of themselves, but ultimately we're moving to a space where we can actually make difference choices about what we're *going to do* in intercultural interactions before they occur, in the moment they're happening, and after they've passed. This activity can particularly useful for people in all stages of the DMIS; informed actions will then vary depending on the stage and the identified stretch goal.

1. Choose one of the videos you feel will resonate with your audience; preferably one with only two characters in it. Print off a copy of the transcript for each participant.
2. Let them watch the video once to get a feel for the scene, and have them write down any thoughts that come into their head as they are watching the scene.
3. Open up the floor to anyone who wants to share his/her thoughts.
4. Pay particular attention to any comments that point to different choices that could be made, or different things that could be said that might have improved the outcome of the situation. Bring these to their attention.
5. Speak to the concepts of both choice points and perspective points and how having skill in these areas can help us make more informed choices in cross-cultural interactions.
6. Hand out copies of the transcript. Watch the video again and ask participants to identify one choice point where they feel the conversation or interaction could've been steered in a more constructive direction.
7. Have them rewrite the dialogue at that point using language and a strategy they feel would better steer the interaction towards the goal.
8. If time allows and there is enough trust in the group, break them into pairs to share their rewritten dialogues. Have them explore the possible new outcomes together.
9. Invite participants to share their ideas with the group.
10. Connect this skill back to Stage 4 "Informed Action" of the Something's Up! Cycle and the skillset for intercultural competence.

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<sup>9</sup> Fritz, W., Möllenberg, A. & Chen, G.M. (2000); Bennett J. (2009).

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