



The Centre for Intercultural Education

Workplace Coach Guide

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Context

In Alberta, the demand for skilled professionals is predicted to exceed the supply within 2 to 5 years. Alberta employers will therefore need to rely on Internationally Educated Professionals (IEPs) to fulfill this demand. Nationally, the Alliance of Sector Councils notes that Canada's reliance on internationally trained workers is increasing; it is predicted that 100% of net labour force growth by the end of this decade will be sourced by immigrants. For many IEPs with documented credentials and experience in their country of origin, one of the barriers to retention and promotion is their "soft skills"; i.e. their professional communication skills and their ability to work effectively with others. They are also less likely to be asked to lead teams and gain the experience in a Canadian context that supports upward mobility within a company. This gap in competence is often identified as a gap in language ability and contributes to the under-employment of skilled immigrants. In 2008, more immigrant workers (42%) aged 25 to 54 were overqualified for their work compared to 28% of Canadian born workers. Regardless of period of landing, immigrants had higher shares of over-qualification.¹

Given the cultural value differences impacting the multicultural workplace, both Canadian-born and foreign-born employees are now finding it essential to develop more multifaceted communication skills. Intercultural communicative competence has become in many ways the newest 'essential skill.' NorQuest's workplace courses and intercultural training were designed for internationally-educated workers seeking to build their knowledge and skills about the 'unwritten rules' of the Canadian workplace.

What can workplace language courses do for your organization?

The suite of NorQuest workplace courses can be used to achieve the following outcomes:

- develop skills to use language in culturally-appropriate and effective ways for success in the Canadian workplace
- identify cultural differences that might have contributed to particular problems, misunderstandings, or conflicts – or have influenced the various interpretations and explanations of the participants.

Purpose of this guide

This resource was designed as a reference and resource guide for workplace coaches. Coaches are native English speakers or settled immigrants (10 years or more working in Canada) with strong interpersonal skills usually in leadership positions in an organization. Workplace coaches support coworkers who are developing culturally informed ways of communicating more effectively in Canadian workplace culture. They are often viewed as mentors and provide insights into ways of integrating effectively into multicultural workplaces.

It is recommended that coaches and participants meet at least once a week for between 30-60 minutes to discuss challenges and successes that may be arising in the workplace environment. If one of your coworkers is taking a NorQuest Centre for Intercultural

¹ (Stats Canada, 71-606-X2009001).

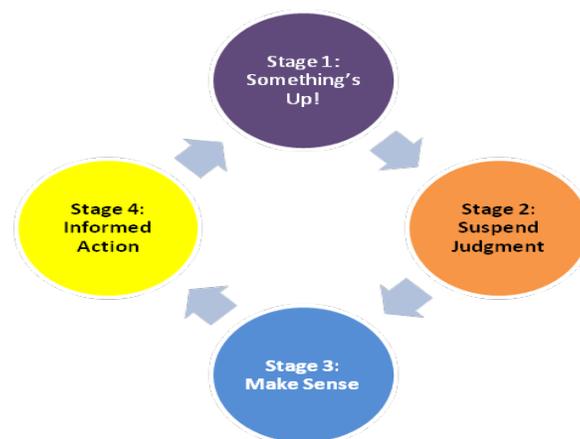
Education (CIE) course many of the assignments require participants to try a ‘Canadian way’ of communicating at work. Having a coach to practice with can increase the possibility of course learning transferring back to the workplace. Given that some of the content in our courses focus on the values that underlie behaviors in the Canadian workplace, we have put together a short resource list for coaches to reference. Thank you for taking the time to be a coach.

Intercultural Communication

Communication across cultures is always a two-way street. Both sides need to be willing to explore curiosity, surface differences and leverage similarities when necessary, engage empathy and suspend judgment. Intercultural communication is a skill in the multicultural workplace and one that is often overlooked by performance management systems. One Alberta business owner who is finding that his company is becoming more and more multicultural reported that, “intercultural is where safety was 10 years ago. It is growing, everyone is impacted by and without it, no one can really be considered leadership material.” This statement is a reflection of a new reality for many businesses. So how is intercultural communicative competence developed? NorQuest’s CIE has adapted a model called the Something’s Up! Cycle from years of exploration and research in this area.

The Something’s Up! Cycle

The Something’s Up! Cycle² is a four-step process for examining misunderstandings that are culture based, and a template for working through the complexities of the video resources. As a tool that moves beyond the videos themselves, it can be used to reflect on situations, or it can even lay the framework for discussing issues with another person or as a team—exactly the kind of ongoing reflection that can lead to increased intercultural competence, enhanced team cohesion, and more effective team performance. The Something’s Up! Cycle has four stages.



² This strategy is inspired by the “Personal Leadership” methodology described in *Making a World of Difference: Personal Leadership: A methodology of two principles and six practices* by Schetti, Watanabe, and Gordon (2008).

Stage 1: Something's Up!	
<p>What Happened? The goal of the first stage of the Something's Up! Cycle is to notice emotions (e.g., frustration, anger, confusion) because of the actions of another person. In this stage, we want to talk only about facts and feelings.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe what happened and how each person felt. • Don't try to make sense or solve the misunderstanding; that step comes later. 	<p>Signs that "something is up" include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling confused, angry, or frustrated • A desire to avoid further interaction with or a general disinterest in the other person <p>For examining a personal experience, the questions are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What happened? • How did I feel? • How did (might) others involved feel?
Stage 2: Suspend judgment.	
<p>What are the judgments/conclusions of each person? The two goals of the second stage of the cycle:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a list of the judgments and/or conclusions both people have arrived at regarding each other. • Suspend judgment about the other person. Don't react emotionally and make the situation worse. <p>Making a list helps us understand ourselves and how other people might see us. This step helps us notice that when we judge we might also make incorrect assumptions about others. Identifying and then suspending judgment opens the way to learning and understanding.</p>	<p>Judgment involves all the ways of coming to conclusions about what has been perceived. Judging something as right or wrong or good or bad is a normal, often automatic, response to many situations. In many ways, this reaction is a natural display reflecting cultural values and beliefs. Our culture gives structure and meaning to our experiences and enables us to make sense of the vast amounts of information we receive every day.</p> <p>In cultural interactions, however, judgments can get in the way of mutual understanding.</p> <p>When we identify judgment, we can gain valuable insights into what is happening and increase our cultural self-awareness.</p> <p>When you try to identify a judgment, consider the following categories of conclusions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Credibility: I am not convinced that he can do his job. • Leadership: That person is not a good leader. • Professionalism: That person is unprofessional. • Competence: That person just doesn't seem to know how to do his job. • Trust: I'm not sure I can trust this person. <p>At this stage of the cycle, the questions to be asked of the group are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the judgments of the people involved? • What are each person's conclusions or perceptions of the other? <p>Or if this is being used to examine a personal experience, the questions are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are my judgments? • What are my conclusions or perceptions of the other?
Stage 3: Make sense.	
<p>What is this about? The goal of the third stage is to try to understand the Something's Up!</p>	<p>It is at this stage where we start to use some of the cultural orientations and also examine some of the topics discussed in the</p>

<p>using intercultural tools. Examples of this are differences in the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Language use (ways of asking questions, greeting, making requests) • Body language (levels of eye contact, speaking volume) • Time (what is early? on time? late? in both people’s cultures) 	<p>Workplace Values section.</p> <p>These categories can help us make sense of “the way things are done.” If expectations are not met, misunderstandings can arise and influence the way people interact and perceive one another in terms of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rapport • Trust • Responsibility • Accountability • Credibility <p>At this stage of the Something’s Up!, participants observe and reflect on general patterns of behaviour to make sense of a situation.</p> <p>Questions to be asked are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is this situation/ misunderstanding about? • What did each person expect? (What is each person’s “normal”?) <p>This approach to breaking down culture acknowledges, rather than ignores or minimizes, differences.</p>
<p>Stage 4: Informed Action</p>	
<p>What is the shared goal? In this part of the Something’s Up! Cycle, we look for a shared goal. Then we use the information we have learned from the “make sense” step to take action.</p> <p>Examples:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Check perceptions. 2. Clarify goals. 3. Adapt behaviour. 	<p>In the fourth and final stage, participants are prepared to respond to the situation. Acting for Success implies that different perspectives have been considered and the best response possible has emerged.</p> <p>At this stage of the, the questions to be asked are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can be done to move forward? • What are the short-term actions? • What are the long-term considerations? <p>Or if this is being used to examine a personal experience, the questions are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What can I/we do to move forward? • What are the short-term actions? • What are the long-term considerations? <p>Some possible actions that may be decided upon include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use the cultural orientations and workplace values categories to have a meaningful conversation about cultural differences to seek mutual understanding.

Communicating with Coworkers Whose First Language is not English

Often times, accent can get in the way of good communication. People will often judge others by their accents and not give them a chance at work. In addition, speakers of other language don’t always have the same cultural ways of showing and checking understanding, giving opinions and feedback and speaking up in meetings just to name a few. The following tips can be used as general guidelines and shared with your coworkers who may have difficulty communicating with coworkers whose first language is not English:

1. Make an effort to include your coworker in small talk or group discussions.
2. Listen carefully, and check your understanding of what your coworker says.
3. Encourage your coworker to ask/clarify when s/he doesn't understand something.
4. Give only a few instructions at a time, checking understanding as you go.
5. Make sure your coworker can see your face when you're speaking.
6. Have patience and work together for mutual understanding.
7. Speak clearly, avoid slang.
8. Slow down a little
9. Put yourself in their shoes (empathy)
10. Learn a few words/greetings in your coworker's first language and use them regularly.

Empathy

It takes approximately 10 years to integrate into a new culture. If the distance between cultures is greater, the length of time could be longer. Part of this integration process involves finding fulfilling work in your field, building a strong professional network and making friends that you can relate to. All of these must be accomplished in a second or additional language from the one you grew up speaking. Conversely, those who work with these newcomers also face many challenges. We've already talked about accent, soft skills and culture. Things don't always get done the same way as they used to when, for the most part, personality and working style were the biggest obstacles to workplace communication. Now, with the influx of newcomers from all over the world our teams have become more diverse. So who really helps those folks integrate into the workplace? Sometimes HR, sometimes senior leadership but most often, it is coworkers or middle managers taking on this extra work. The problem is, we don't always get paid as culture shock absorbers but we take on the roles of orientation volunteers, trainers and safety consultants. Both sides have obstacles and challenges to overcome, this is certain. The other certainty is that judgments will be made from both sides, conflicts will occur, new ideas and insights will arise, success stories will emerge and, without a doubt, culture will always play a role. The similarities will connect you; the differences will set you apart.

Resources on Culture and Language

The following list of resources is meant to help coaches not only learn about other cultures but also reflect on their own. Using video as a way into discussing some of the similarities and differences about culture in the workplace is one of the most effective ways to start engaging discussions. The characters in the videos developed at the NorQuest Centre for Intercultural Education are fictional and meant only to reflect some of the case studies we have gathered in our 10 years of workplace research and training. Below, you will find a description of each of the resources available on the Centre's webpage: <http://www.norquest.ca/norquest-centres.aspx> has useful resources on culture and language. To access, select the Center for Intercultural Education/Projects/Completed Project/Online Workplace Integration Language Resources and scroll down to the following links:

1. Full Videos

2. Language Study Tables
3. Something's Up! Examples

Full Videos

The videos serve as the main content for the majority of our workplace course offerings and intercultural training. The objective of the videos is to raise awareness of both pragmatics (soft skills or appropriate language use) and culture. The videos page has two tabs which represent two different workplace contexts: Office and Industry. There are 5 videos for each workplace context. The first video in each context is a meeting of a multicultural team. This meeting provides the thematic content for the other four videos which are essentially break-out scenes of the initial meeting. You might find it useful to watch assigned videos with your coachee and give your perspective on assignments they may have or to discuss cultural similarities and differences.

The Language Study Tables

The Language Study Tables were developed as a tool to help learners build their language skills in the Canadian workplace. The tables provide a breakdown of language use (called speech acts) unique to Canadian workplace values. We realize of course that not all of the Canadian content in these tables can be generalized to every workplace across the country. We intend for this content to be used as a starting point for making sense of how people use language in the workplace and for identifying levels of appropriateness that may differ from worker to worker, depending on cultural background.

The Something's Up! Examples

Ten intercultural miscommunications or disconnects between characters in the videos have been broken down into the various stages of the Something's up! Cycle. The *Something's Up! Cycle* is a 4-step process for examining misunderstandings that are culture-based and a template for working through the complexities of the video resources. Learners are guided through the Something's Up! Cycle by answering multiple-choice or true/false questions. In many of the Conversation Management modules, participants will be asked to watch these videos and comment on the cultural miscommunications.

Contacts

If you have any questions or comments, please feel free to contact the Centre for Intercultural Education at: icinfo@norquest.ca or 780-644-6771

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