CHECKLIST 9

Communicating Across Cultures

PURPOSE: *Prepare for and improve written, verbal, meeting and feedback communication with people from different cultural backgrounds.*

Working with: *Team member, partner or stakeholder*	**Context:** *Project, meeting or relationship*	**Date:** *MM/DD/YYYY*

WHEN TO USE

Use this when working with team members, partners, or stakeholders from different cultural backgrounds. Cultural competence is a journey, not a destination; use the checklist to prepare, and the notes to record what you learn.

BEFORE COMMUNICATING

- ☐ Learn about relevant cultural communication norms
- ☐ Understand high-context vs. low-context culture differences
- ☐ Research hierarchical vs. egalitarian preferences
- ☐ Consider direct vs. indirect communication styles
- ☐ Be aware of your own cultural biases
- ☐ Ask questions rather than assume

WHAT I HAVE LEARNED ABOUT THEIR PREFERENCES

Their communication preferences (asked, not assumed):

How they prefer to receive feedback:

Time zone, working hours, holidays and schedules to respect:

WRITTEN COMMUNICATION

- ☐ Use clear, simple language (avoid idioms)
- ☐ Be more explicit than usual
- ☐ Provide context liberally
- ☐ Avoid culture-specific references
- ☐ Use bulleted lists for clarity
- ☐ Consider time zone differences for urgency
- ☐ Proofread for potential misunderstandings

VERBAL COMMUNICATION

- ☐ Speak clearly and at moderate pace
- ☐ Pause frequently for processing
- ☐ Check for understanding regularly
- ☐ Avoid slang and colloquialisms
- ☐ Be patient with language differences
- ☐ Watch for non-verbal cues
- ☐ Allow silence for thinking time
- ☐ Repeat key points multiple ways

MEETINGS

- ☐ Share agenda and materials in advance
- ☐ State purpose and goals clearly
- ☐ Create space for all voices
- ☐ Allow time for processing before decisions
- ☐ Be aware of holiday/prayer schedules
- ☐ Consider recording for language processing
- ☐ Follow up in writing to confirm understanding

DECISION-MAKING

- ☐ Be explicit about decision-making process
- ☐ Clarify who has authority
- ☐ Understand consensus expectations vary
- ☐ Allow appropriate time for input
- ☐ Respect hierarchical norms where they exist
- ☐ Document decisions clearly

FEEDBACK

- ☐ Understand direct vs. indirect feedback norms
- ☐ Ask how they prefer to receive feedback
- ☐ Be aware that “yes” might mean different things
- ☐ Provide written summary after verbal feedback
- ☐ Give more context than usual
- ☐ Be extra careful with constructive feedback

RESPECT AND INCLUSION

- ☐ Learn and use names correctly
- ☐ Respect titles and forms of address
- ☐ Be aware of personal space preferences

- ☐ Understand eye contact norms vary
- ☐ Respect different approaches to time
- ☐ Acknowledge different holidays
- ☐ Create inclusive team norms together

BUILDING UNDERSTANDING

- ☐ Ask: “What are your communication preferences?”
- ☐ Acknowledge differences as strengths
- ☐ Learn from mistakes without defensiveness
- ☐ Seek feedback on your communication
- ☐ Invest in relationship building
- ☐ Show genuine curiosity and respect

AVOIDING MISTAKES

- ☐ Don’t assume your way is the “right” way
- ☐ Don’t speak louder when not understood
- ☐ Don’t rush to fill silence
- ☐ Don’t take different styles personally
- ☐ Don’t make culture-based jokes
- ☐ Don’t tokenize or stereotype

AVOIDING MISTAKES — NOTES

Pro Tip: Cultural competence is a journey, not a destination. Approach differences with humility, curiosity, and respect. When you make mistakes (you will), apologize and learn. Your authentic desire to understand and connect matters more than perfection.