

Cultural Competence for Equity and Inclusion: A Framework for Individual and Organizational Change

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Abstract

This article presents a model of Cultural Competence for Equity and Inclusion (CCEI) defined as the ability to live and work effectively in culturally diverse environments and enact a commitment to equity and inclusion. Going beyond traditional approaches to cultural competence that tend to focus solely on self-awareness, the appreciation of cultural differences and interpersonal skills, this model integrates an intersectional perspective and social justice concepts—issues of power, privilege, oppression, and systemic change. The CCEI framework identifies a range of awareness, knowledge, and skills that allow people to develop the capacities to constructively engage with people from a variety of socio-cultural identities and create equitable and inclusive relationships and institutions. I describe each of the five interrelated core competencies along with some key components of each core competency. Examples of role and context specific competencies are also discussed. I suggest a variety of ways this framework can be utilized.

Keywords: cultural competence, social justice, diversity, equity, inclusion, multicultural competence

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As the United States becomes increasingly diverse, organizations realize that developing cultural competency is a growing imperative. Many institutions have committees or initiatives focused on some aspects of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). They acknowledge that in order to be effective and successful, individuals at all levels need to develop and deepen their capacities to work across differences and create environments that are welcoming, equitable, and inclusive. Whether it is working in teams, serving clients, engaging with community members, educating students, or leading organizations, people need to cultivate the cultural competencies—the awareness, knowledge, and skills related to DEI to do their jobs effectively. Moreover, schools and universities recognize their role in preparing students to develop the ability to live and work with people from a range of backgrounds and to be thoughtful global citizens (McNair, 2016; Whitehead, 2015).

Since the language of cultural competency is widely used in DEI work, the Cultural Competence for Equity and Inclusion (CCEI) model integrates equity, inclusion, and social justice content into the paradigm of cultural competence. It is an accessible and flexible framework that can guide efforts to help people develop the capacities to become more culturally competent for equity, inclusion, and social justice across a range of contexts. In this article, I clarify what I mean by cultural competence for equity and inclusion, briefly describe each component of the CCEI model, note some of the highlights of this framework, and identify ways it can be utilized. Some models of cultural competence focus on cross-cultural understanding in a global context. This model will focus on the United States but may have applicability to other settings.

Clarifying Language

When organizations engage in DEI work, often the focus is on the “D,” diversity, sometimes on the “I,” inclusion, and least often on the “E,” equity. Often these terms are used interchangeably, but I believe there are important distinctions. *Diversity* efforts usually focus on increasing the representation of under-represented groups and understanding sociocultural differences. The emphasis is frequently on recruitment, hiring, promotion, and retention. Diversity initiatives generally seek to ensure that the organization reflects the larger community of which it is part and that people understand and value differences.

Inclusion speaks to a sense of belonging and feeling valued, respected, and empowered. People may be at an institution but not really feel part of it or as if they are fully valued members. Often gaining a sense of belonging is a one-way street—individuals from marginalized groups are expected to assimilate into the already existing organizational culture and norms.

Equity refers to fairness, ending systemic discrimination, ensuring access, and creating equivalent outcomes. It attends to differences in power and privilege and seeks to address those inequities. All three of these components are necessary to create a truly fair, multicultural environment.

I sometimes use the term *social justice* to refer to the integration of these three aspects. Social justice refers to creating a society (or community, organization, or campus) with an equitable distribution of resources and opportunities where all people are safe (psychologically and physically), can meet their needs, and can fulfill their potential (Bell, 2016, p. 4).

The concept of cultural competence has been discussed for many years in a range of fields, especially in the helping professions (Cross, Bazron, Dennis, & Isaacs, 1989; Sue, Arredondo, & McDavis, 1992). A variety of terms have been used to capture the importance of being able to understand, work with, and serve people from various backgrounds and social identities, such as *cultural competence* (Why Cultural Competence, n.d.), *cross-cultural competence* (Chiu, Lonner, Matsumoto, & Ward, 2013), *multicultural competence* (Shallcross, 2013), *intercultural competence* (Bennett, 2004), *cultural proficiency* (Lindsey, Nuri-Robins, & Terrell, 2009), and *cultural humility* (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Most cultural competency efforts have focused on developing the necessary interpersonal skills to work across cultural differences and particularly on race, ethnicity, and language. Some professional fields and organizations have shown increasing interest in developing cultural competency to work with other marginalized groups and sociocultural differences, as well as to address issues of social inequality (National Association of Social Workers, 2015; Pope, Reynolds, & Mueller, 2019; Ratts, Singh, Butler, Nasar-McMillan, & McCullough, 2016; Sue, 2001). While many descriptions of cultural competence have identified some important qualities and capacities, most are related to a particular discipline (e.g., counseling, healthcare, student affairs, social work) and do not adequately attend to concepts related to equity—power, privilege, and oppression.

Undergirding the Cultural Competence for Equity and Inclusion framework is the notion of cultural humility, which originated in reference to medical relationships (Tervalon & Murray-Garcia, 1998). Tervalon and Murray-Garcia describe the three main dimensions of cultural humility

as (a) committing to life-long self-education and self-critique, (b) addressing power imbalances between provider and client, and (c) creating mutually beneficial partnerships with clients and communities. When we approach developing cultural competency with cultural humility, we do not engage from a stance of arrogance or paternalism but from a place of curiosity and openness. We recognize that even if we have experienced some form of oppression, it does not mean we understand the oppression others face, nor does it eliminate the areas in which we have privilege. The willingness and ability to suspend our assumptions and judgments to respect how an individual expresses their own culture and identity is an ongoing process, not an endpoint. Similarly, developing cultural competence for equity, inclusion, and social justice is a life-long endeavor.

Cultural Competence for Equity and Inclusion Model

Cultural Competence for Equity and Inclusion (CCEI) is the ability to live and work effectively in culturally diverse environments and enact a commitment to equity and inclusion. CCEI requires developing critical consciousness, or the ability to perceive social, political, and economic inequities and to take action against the oppressive elements of society (Freire, 1970). Developing cultural competence for equity and inclusion helps move toward the vision of social justice. Cultural Competence for Equity and Inclusion requires a range of awareness, knowledge, and skills. The five core competencies in this model are: (a) self-awareness, (b) understanding and valuing others, (c) knowledge of societal inequities, (d) interpersonal skills to effectively engage across differences in different contexts, and (e) skills to foster transformation towards

equity and inclusion. These five core competencies are interconnected, and each has key components. Additionally, depending on the context and one’s role and responsibilities, there will be specific awareness, knowledge, and skills that are necessary. See Figure 1.

The CCEI framework also incorporates an intersectional perspective. An intersectional approach recognizes that different social identities and forms of oppression simultaneously intersect and interact (Collins & Blige, 2016; Crenshaw, 1993). While individuals may focus on one aspect of their own or another’s identity and the related marginalization or privilege, this dimension is always being affected by other aspects of identity and positions within other systems of oppression. To truly be culturally competent for equity and inclusion, we need to appreciate how lived realities are shaped by all aspects of identities and how different forms of social inequities are interlocking.

Self-Awareness

The first core competency of Cultural Competence for Equity and Inclusion, self-awareness, entails the ability to understand who we are and how it affects our worldviews, relationships, perspectives, experiences, and behaviors. Some of the key components of self-awareness are:

- Awareness of our social identities and their cultural influences and how they intersect.
- Awareness of our prejudices, stereotypes, and biases.
- Awareness of our internalized superiority and internalized inferiority.
- Awareness of how we may be perceived by others and the impact of our behavior.

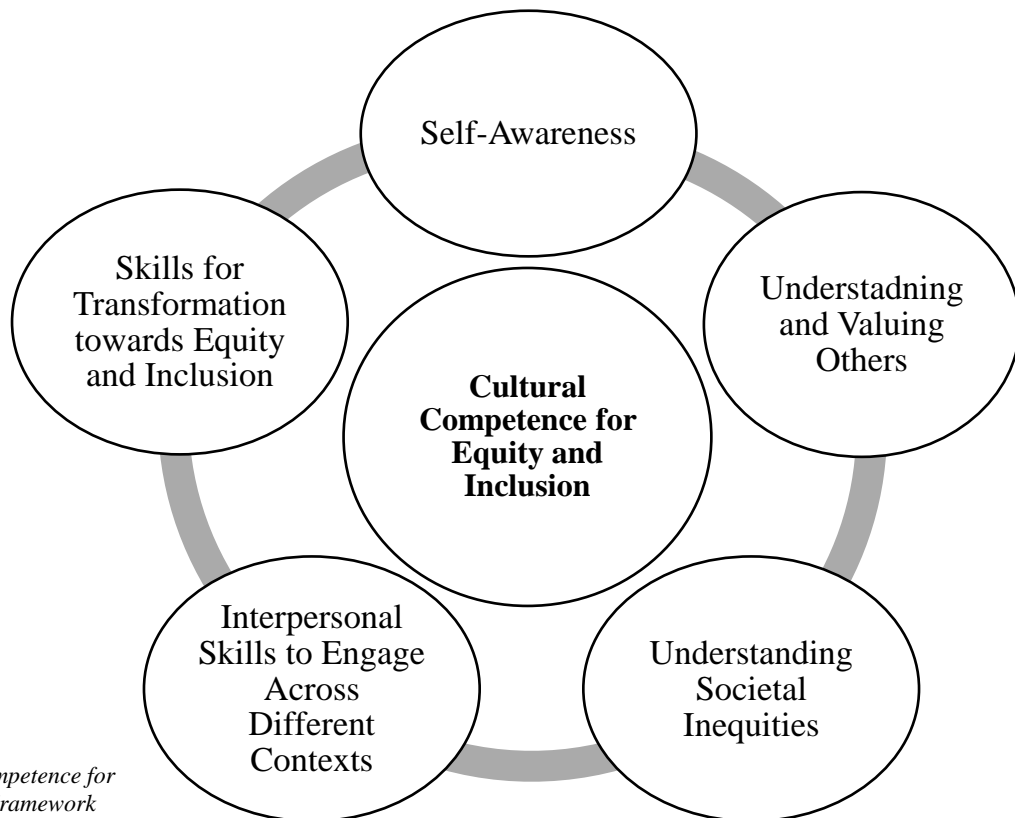


Figure 1: Cultural Competence for Equity and Inclusion Framework

Awareness of our own various social identities and their cultural influences and how they intersect

How do our race, ethnicity, religion/spirituality, socioeconomic class, sexual orientation, gender, ability, national origin, age, and other social identities affect our worldview, values, beliefs, and behavior? We are socialized and culturally conditioned into particular roles and ways of being. Consider the messages you received (overtly or implied) growing up about how to express your feelings; how to deal with conflict; expectations about school, work, career, and lifestyle; and appropriate gender roles. Were you encouraged to address conflict openly, or were you encouraged to avoid conflict? Were you expected to conform to rigid gender roles or supported to express yourself in gender-nonconforming ways? Were you raised to be highly individually competitive or to be more collaborative and community-oriented? These messages are tied to our social and cultural identities (as well as our particular individual personalities and histories). It is not sufficient to understand each dimension of our identity in isolation without appreciating how these various aspects intersect to shape our particular behaviors, perspectives, and realities. The messages we receive may align or contradict. As a middle-class girl in a New York area Jewish family, I was taught both to “act like a lady” (be polite and well-mannered) as well as to speak up for what I believed in, even if it meant challenging authority.

Awareness of our prejudices, stereotypes, and biases

We all are exposed to misinformation and a lack of information about various social identity groups. The growing research

on implicit or unconscious bias demonstrates that everyone has biases that affect their behavior and decisions, whether we realize it or not (Banaji & Greenwald, 2013; Staats, Capatosto, Wright, & Jackson, 2016). These unconscious biases may not even be consistent with our conscious beliefs. Biases may affect whom we see as most trustworthy or as having the most potential, or with whom we feel most comfortable. The more we are aware of our stereotypes and assumptions and are vigilant about how our unconscious biases may be manifesting, the more we are able to act in equitable and inclusive ways.

Awareness of the impact of our positionality and internalized superiority and inferiority

Not only are we all cultural beings, but we are also positioned differently within systems of inequality. We may be part of dominant (or privileged) groups—male, heterosexual, cisgender (people whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth), middle/upper class, Christian, able-bodied/without disabilities, born in the United States, as well as part of marginalized groups—female; lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans*, queer (LBGTQ); low-income; born outside the United States; have a disability; be an elder; or from a religious minority. Most of us are part of both privileged and marginalized groups.

When we are part of privileged groups, that identity is aligned with norms of the dominant culture. Therefore, we are often less aware of that identity or of the realities of others from marginalized groups. As a result, we may not be as sensitive to or empathic about the inequities others may face. This can affect how we respond to concerns, form opinions on issues, make decisions, and set policy. People without

disabilities may not be attuned to the range of challenges people with disabilities face and thus may not sufficiently attend to how to make the organization more equitable and accessible. Or individuals who come from predominantly dominant groups may not understand why other people feel so strongly about the need to address microaggressions (subtle insults and slights, often unconscious, towards marginalized groups).

Moreover, in mainstream society, dominant groups are seen as superior to other groups and set the norms and standards against which others are judged. When we are part of dominant groups, we may internalize this sense of superiority and the normality of our group—internalized superiority. We may see ourselves and people like us as “just normal” (with the implication that others are not) and as smarter, more capable, more valuable, and more deserving of positions of power than people from the corresponding nondominant group. We may not be aware of our internalized superiority; we may not consciously believe that we are better than others. Yet, these attitudes and beliefs may manifest when we negatively judge others who are from marginalized groups who are “different,” feel that we know what is best for those individuals and communities, want to make others “more like us,” or feel entitled to take up more space, attention, and resources. Despite good intentions, behavior that is seen as patronizing or condescending such as the “White savior complex” (when White people assume they can “fix” the problems of people of Color) or “mansplaining” (when a man explains things to a woman in a way that is arrogant and condescending, assuming that he automatically knows more than she does) are examples of internalized superiority. When we are part of privileged groups, we may also find it difficult to hear challenges

to the current social, political, and economic systems, learn about our group’s role in perpetuating oppression, or get feedback on our behavior (DiAngelo, 2011; Goodman, 2011; Watt, 2015). Self-awareness, in this regard, requires being able to notice and address our reactions, feelings, and defensiveness so we can continue to learn and grow.

The flip side of internalized superiority is internalized inferiority (or internalized oppression). In mainstream culture, nondominant groups are seen as inferior, deficient, and “less than.” When we are part of marginalized groups and internalize these negative messages we may believe, sometimes unconsciously, that we or others like us are not as smart, competent, attractive, or deserving of power and resources as people from dominant groups. The research on stereotype threat (Inzlicht & Schmader, 2012; Steele & Aronson, 1995) illustrates how these negative beliefs can adversely impact test performance. Due to internalized oppression, we may try to overcompensate, limit ourselves, or engage in self-destructive behavior. We may also distance ourselves from others from our social identity group or view them negatively (Bivens, 2005; David, 2014). Expressions of internalized oppression may be when an administrative assistant assumes she has nothing valuable to contribute to a department meeting that involves higher-level staff and administrators, or when a gay person is uncomfortable being around other gay people whom he sees as “too gay.” Internalized oppression contributes to our collusion with oppression, which supports its continuation.

Unless we are aware of how we have absorbed and enacted internalized superiority and inferiority, we are likely to

continue to enact inequitable dynamics. Becoming aware of internalized superiority/inferiority is essential though challenging work because these beliefs are often unconscious. Personal awareness of internalized superiority and inferiority is linked to understanding societal inequities and will be explored further in the third component of the model.

Awareness of how we may be perceived by others and the impact of our behavior

Another component of self-awareness is understanding how we may be seen or “read” by other people and how our behaviors are interpreted and experienced. These perceptions are influenced by our social identities and dominant and subordinated statuses. An African American with a more passionate style of communication may be incorrectly interpreted as being angry. As a woman, my self-deprecation may be read as a lack of confidence or competence, whereas that is less likely to be the case for a man. A man who interrupts women or talks at length may be seen as enacting his male privilege. Our various intersecting social identities affect how we are experienced. While White female instructors are likely to be challenged more than White male ones, women of Color faculty are even more likely to have their authority and credentials questioned (Gutierrez y Muhs, Niemann, Gonzalez, & Harris, 2012; Pittman, 2010). Add in other marginalized identities, such as being younger or being an immigrant, and this undermining of authority will likely increase. Being aware of how we may be seen by people with different identities and backgrounds allows us to not internalize inaccurate projections, adjust as necessary, or decide how we want to express our authentic selves within the mainstream norms.

Understanding and Valuing Others

The corollary to self-awareness is knowledge of and appreciation for others’ social identities, cultures, and perspectives, and understanding their biases and internalized inferiority and superiority. Some key components of this core competency include:

- Knowledge of the social identities of other people, their cultural influences, and how they intersect.
- Ability to value and appreciate ways of being, doing, and thinking other than our own.
- Ability to recognize how other people express internalized superiority and internalized inferiority.

Knowledge of the social identities of other people, their cultural influences, and how they intersect

Like self-awareness, knowledge of others’ cultures and social identity groups and how they intersect is also essential. We need to explore how others’ socialization, life experiences, and cultural backgrounds shape who they are, their worldviews, beliefs and values, and ways of being. Unless we understand other individuals, we are likely to misinterpret their behavior, unintentionally offend, or be ineffective at meeting their needs. Much diversity work is focused on understanding cultural differences and people’s experiences as part of different social identity groups.

Furthermore, we cannot assume that just because we share a particular social identity with another, our perspectives and experiences are alike or that two people will be similar just because they come from the same social identity group. For example,

although women in an organization may share some similarities related to being female and dealing with sexism, a Chinese American, middle-class manager, and a White, working-class custodian are likely to have different experiences as women. Additionally, simply because two people are Latinx immigrants, we cannot assume similarities and would need to understand not only personal differences but countries of origin, conditions of immigration, status, and experiences in their home country, years in the United States, as well as the significance of their other social identities. The more we can appreciate the many dimensions of an individual and how they interact, the greater the understanding and ability we will have to work with them. There is less likelihood we will misinterpret their behavior or rely on stereotypes.

Ability to value and appreciate ways of being, doing, and thinking other than our own

It is not enough to just seek to know and understand different social and cultural identities. We need the capacity to value and appreciate other ways of being, doing, and thinking. CCEI entails a shift from believing that our way is the right or only way. Different worldviews, cultural backgrounds, socialization, and experiences influence how people approach situations, tasks, and relationships. Dominant U.S. society tends to value individualism, competition, expediency, and objectivity (Okun, n.d.). Yet, people may have other cultural styles and orientations. Some people may be oriented towards more collaborative approaches to working together, less linear thinking, artistic ways of conceptualizing and expressing ideas, recognizing the wisdom of the body, the use of ritual, less rigid time norms, and prioritizing relationship and process over task. People

with different abilities/disabilities, religious practices, or other needs outside the mainstream norms may require structures and processes that allow for their full participation and inclusion. Cultural competence for equity and inclusion requires not only understanding different social identities and cultural styles but developing the flexibility to interact and work in ways that value and accommodate these differences.

Ability to recognize the impact of others' positionality and how they express internalized superiority and internalized inferiority

Social location and experiences of privilege and oppression affect others' sense of identity, perspectives, behavior, and experiences. This lens of positionality provides ways to understand how individuals may be interpreting, understanding, and dealing with situations. This, in turn, can enable us to make sense of their behavior, develop ways to challenge their biases, support their growth, and have greater compassion.

We can consider positionality and internalized superiority and inferiority when we work with and mentor different individuals. For example, in a university context, how might internalized dominance be at play when a straight, cisgender resident assistant at a college is being accused by queer students in a residence hall of being insensitive to their needs and planning programs that are not inclusive of people with a variety of genders and sexualities? How could the resistant assistant be helped to see how this behavior may reflect his lack of awareness or sense of normalcy as a heterosexual, cisgender person and is impeding his ability to be successful in his position? Or, when a female student

studying engineering is quick to assume she can't succeed in this field when she receives some negative feedback. How could we challenge her internalized inferiority and support her to explore the roots of her self-doubt and achieve her academic and professional goals? Dominant and subordinated statuses may also affect how people respond to diversity and social justice issues. While any individual can experience a range of emotions at different times, as noted previously, people from privileged groups may express defensiveness as well as guilt and shame. People from marginalized groups may feel anger and hopelessness. By understanding these common reactions, we can better support people in working through their responses, finding appropriate outlets, and developing greater openness to learning and change.

Knowledge of Societal Inequities

We cannot understand ourselves or other people or create greater equity without considering the larger sociopolitical and historical context of which we are part. We need to have a grasp of different forms of privilege and oppression and how these affect people's experiences and access to social power, resources, and opportunities. Additionally, we need an awareness of the strategies for resistance and resilience different individuals and communities have utilized. It is also critical to appreciate the interlocking nature of different types of inequality. Some key components include:

- Knowledge of the history and ideology of different forms of oppression and how they impact current manifestations of systemic inequities.
- Understanding how different forms of oppression operate on individual, interpersonal, cultural, institutional,

and structural levels.

- Understanding the impact of systemic inequities on individuals' opportunities and lived realities and strategies for surviving, resisting, and thriving.

Knowledge of history and ideology of oppressions and their current impact

Our current inequities did not occur overnight, nor are they disconnected from what has previously occurred. Oppression is a system of accumulated advantages and disadvantages. Without a historical perspective, we cannot appreciate how the past is shaping the present. For example, in order to understand the challenges for Indigenous people in gaining access to education and well-paying jobs, it is necessary to recognize the long history of oppression Native people have endured, including the stealing of their lands, displacement and isolation, boarding schools that forcibly removed children from their homes and brutally tried to erase their cultural knowledge and language, the breaking of treaties, negative and distorted history and media images, and the banning of their cultural and religious practices. Every marginalized group has a particular history of exclusion, discrimination, violence, and distortion. This history provides a context and lens for interpreting the behaviors and inequities we currently see. Knowledge of how different groups have survived and thrived despite or because of these barriers and mistreatment is also important to challenge notions of victimhood and provide models of resilience and change.

Coupled with a historical perspective is the need to understand the dominant ideology that justifies and normalizes oppression. What are the commonly

accepted narratives and stereotypes about different marginalized groups? How do these biases and beliefs perpetuate systemic inequality? Returning to the example of Native Americans, the dominant ideology in the United States portrays Indigenous people as poor, lazy alcoholics, who mistreat their children, while also being exoticized as spiritual and in tune with nature. More generally, the dominant narrative in the United States is that we are a meritocracy where anyone can pull themselves up by their own bootstraps. This allows people who are poor to be viewed as deserving of their situation rather than seeing the systemic forces that create and maintain poverty. The commonly accepted beliefs about different marginalized groups allow the oppression to continue as if it is natural or deserved. Similarly, the dominant ideology also allows the elevated positions of people from privileged groups to seem natural and go unchallenged. For example, many people have accepted the disproportion of men in positions of power since their dominance historically has led to assumptions that this is normal and that they are stronger, more decisive leaders than women.

Oppression on different levels

All forms of oppression occur on multiple levels: individual, interpersonal, institutional, cultural, and structural. Oppression needs to be understood and addressed on all dimensions if we want to dismantle inequities and foster social justice. The individual and interpersonal levels entail the ways individuals internalize the messages from the dominant culture that maintain oppression, such as the internalized superiority and inferiority discussed earlier. Offensive jokes, individual acts of meanness or bias (e.g., writing a hateful word on someone's door), and microaggressions are

examples of interpersonal oppression. Members of organizations often relate numerous ways they experience interpersonal bias on a daily basis, eroding their sense of belonging and ability to thrive. Institutional policies, practices, and norms also create barriers to diversity, equity, and inclusion. Examples include a criminal justice system that has unfairly targeted and incarcerated Black and Brown people, a lack of legal protection against job or housing discrimination for LGBTQ people, an underrepresentation of women in high-level positions in government, business, and corporate boards, and the reluctance to hire older employees. Institutional manifestations may include biases in hiring, mentoring, and promotion; the lack of adequate accommodations for people with disabilities; a curriculum that ignores the history, contributions, and realities of various marginalized groups; pay inequities; or financial barriers for low-income students. Cultural manifestations include norms around communication, dress, and language; the holidays that are recognized and observed; the food that is served; gender role expectations; and physical esthetics (decorations, pictures, etc.). Often people from marginalized groups feel that they cannot express their authentic selves since they would not fit in or feel that the environment does not reflect their cultural identities or needs. Structural oppression refers to how ideology, along with these different levels of oppression, and interlocking institutions, create a broader, interconnected system that disadvantages people from marginalized groups.

Impact on opportunities and lived realities

History, ideology, and manifestations of oppression on multiple levels all affect people's experiences and access to resources. Being culturally competent for

equity and inclusion requires that we understand and support people in navigating and overcoming these barriers. Someone in a queer family may face different obstacles and have different concerns finding housing in a welcoming and safe community with accepting schools for their children than someone who is heterosexual. Socio-economic status affects people's ability to pursue educational or professional development opportunities—conferences, internships, study abroad, or simply to being able to afford to stay in school. Immigration status may affect someone's opportunities to get jobs or internships and their risks in complaining about unfair treatment for fear of losing their position, which could jeopardize their visa status. Ability/disability may impact how easily and quickly someone can move around campus or a city or what jobs are available. When we are part of privileged groups, relative to the marginalized group, we are generally seen as smarter and more capable, given the benefit of the doubt in situations, and thus are more likely to be given mentoring and opportunities to try something new. The particular mix of dominant and marginalized identities will affect the ways and the degrees to which people experience both advantages and disadvantages.

Interpersonal Skills to Engage Across Differences in Different Contexts

In addition to understanding self, others, and society, we need the ability to adapt to and work collaboratively with a diversity of people in a range of situations. People's social identities affect their interpersonal, communication, and work styles, as well as their views of conflict, notions of leadership, and sense of time (among many other things). Our positionality affects power dynamics in interpersonal relationships and groups. Some key components of this core

competency include the ability to:

- Embrace, integrate, and adapt to different cultural styles.
- Engage in dialogue about diversity, equity, and inclusion issues.
- Deal with conflict due to cultural differences and the dynamics of inequality.

Embrace and adapt to different cultural styles

Given these myriad differences, we need to develop the skills to work together across our various social identities and cultural orientations and recognize and value alternative styles of engagement. When people act in ways different from our own or different from organizational norms, it can be easy to label their behavior as wrong or inferior. Cultural competence for equity and inclusion asks us to reconsider our assumptions and find ways to embrace a wider range of interpersonal and work styles. People who favor personal connection might prefer face-to-face meetings rather than email exchanges. Others may want the expression of emotions to be an acceptable part of interactions and not seen as irrational, unstable, or dangerous. Degrees of formality vary, and those who seem too informal may be viewed as disrespectful or unserious. We need the skills to recognize and then adjust to and integrate these different cultural orientations, so people do not feel excluded, silenced, or misinterpreted. We need the flexibility to engage in ways that stretch our own and our institution's cultural norms in order to truly be more inclusive.

Engage in dialogue about diversity, equity, and inclusion issues

If we are to live and work together

effectively, we need to be able to acknowledge and discuss the impact of social identities, power dynamics, and systemic inequities. Often these topics are taboo, or people are too uncomfortable to talk about them. Some individuals believe that merely talking about differences creates division and that if we ignore injustices, they will simply go away. Yet, we know that cultural differences and inequities exist and affect us whether we name them or not. It is often easier to adopt a colorblind (or power evasive) stance or avoid issues that may be controversial. Cultural competence for equity and inclusion requires that we talk about how social identities shape perspectives and experiences and validate the realities of different groups of people. For example, instead of dismissing the concerns of people of color as being overly sensitive, we can explore how institutional racism and unconscious racial bias may be affecting decisions and climate. There are a variety of skills that help us do so. Active listening is critical since these skills help us pay attention and really listen to what someone is saying and reflect that understanding. We also must be able to give and receive feedback. Individuals need the ability to discuss how we are experiencing different situations and the impact of others' behavior. We need to let people know what we expect from them in order to have constructive and authentic personal and working relationships. The ability to hear and utilize feedback requires managing our defensiveness and other reactions. Knowing the appropriate language or terminology to discuss issues helps conversations be more productive.

Deal with conflict

Inevitably, conflicts arise in our relationships with others. Differences in social identities, positionality, and cultural

styles can increase the potential for conflict and the complexity in resolving it. CCEI requires that we not only have the awareness and knowledge to recognize how conflicts may be fueled by our differences in identities, cultures, and positionalities, but also have the skills to work through these challenges. Often people have different ways to approach conflict and its management. Some people may prefer a direct approach that clearly lays out the concerns and actively seeks to explore the issues; others may prefer a more indirect approach that addresses disagreements in a more subtle way. Avoiding conflicts that arise as we work together reduces our ability to enact change and often results in people disengaging. We need to be able to work effectively through differences and disagreements in culturally sensitive and respectful ways. Successfully resolving interpersonal issues allows for the development of trust and deeper and more authentic relationships.

Skills for Transformation Towards Equity and Inclusion

Cultural competence for equity and inclusion entails more than just interpersonal skills and an understanding of the impact of structural inequities. It requires being able to identify and address inequities and choose appropriate interventions to create environments, policies, and practices that foster diversity and social justice. We need to be able to transform the barriers to equity and inclusion. Key components for creating change are needed at various levels, such as skills for:

- Continual self-development and allyship.
- Addressing interpersonal and group issues.
- Transforming institutions.

- Creating societal change.

Continue self-development and allyship

Skills for self-development include ongoing self-reflection, self-education, and personal growth. Since developing cultural competence for equity and inclusion is a life-long process, we need to know how to continually learn and grow. These skills include being able to self-monitor our thoughts and behavior, hear and respond appropriately to feedback, access resources for on-going learning around different social identities and forms of oppression, work on overcoming our biases and prejudice, and examine and transform our internalized superiority/inferiority.

We also need to be developing our skills for allyship (Brown, 2015; Goodman, 2011). While allyship can occur within and across different marginalized groups, I am particularly referring to when people from privileged groups work against a form of oppression from which they benefit. Certainly, personal awareness and knowledge of the issues are key components. Additionally, being able to work in solidarity with people from marginalized groups for equity and inclusion involves numerous skills such as learning when to listen and when to speak up, how to contribute one's expertise without taking over, and not looking for and expecting the marginalized group to provide emotional support and praise.

Skills to address interpersonal and group issues may involve a host of capacities depending on one's role, including the ability to respond to biased comments and microaggressions, to identify and remedy oppressive group dynamics, and to create equitable and culturally inclusive workplaces and classroom/learning

environments. This may mean being able to speak up at a meeting when one notices that a person of Color's idea is being ignored or attributed to a White person, ensuring that students with disabilities are appropriately included in-class activities and group assignments, or constructively leading a discussion on controversial social issues. Supervisors/managers, in particular, may need skills at helping to resolve interpersonal conflicts related to culture and social identities and providing unbiased performance evaluations.

Skills for institutional transformation involve being able to create and critically analyze organizational policies and practices for differential impact and outcomes (Diversity Collegium, 2016; Sturm, Eatman, Saltmarsh, & Bush, 2011). This competency requires that one can advocate on behalf of self or others to address policies, practices, or organizational cultural norms that are inequitable or culturally exclusive or insensitive. Institutional policies and practices that affect admissions, graduation, hiring, promotion, retention, discipline, curriculum, services, and programming are some areas that need to be considered. People need to be able to use a social justice lens to develop new policies and practices that are equitable and inclusive and be able to remedy and enact changes to existing ones once inequities or disparities are identified.

Skills for societal change include the ability to work collaboratively with others to create changes in society that may include efforts to change laws, governmental policies, or cultural norms. These efforts might be collective action to support rights for the LGBTQ community, to increase educational access for low-income and immigrant students, or to enhance worker rights. To be effective, we need the capacity

to utilize various social change strategies as appropriate, such as community organizing, media campaigns, petitions, rallies, and teach-ins and the ability to choose appropriate action for a given situation.

Competencies

Context and Role Specific Competencies

Thus far, I have focused on the five core competencies and key components that are likely to be relevant for anyone seeking to become more culturally competent for equity and inclusion: self-awareness, understanding and valuing others, knowledge of societal inequities, interpersonal skills engaging across differences, and skills for transformation towards equity and inclusion. Depending on one's particular context, role, and responsibilities, the specific awareness, knowledge, and skills within these core competencies will need to be tailored to the situation. For example, in terms of considering the context, the make-up of the members of the organization and the surrounding community will affect what people need to know to be culturally competent for equity and inclusion. If an institution has numbers of individuals from particular ethnic groups, obviously greater knowledge of those cultures and lived realities is necessary. Similarly, if an organization serves people from specific populations, such as individuals who were formerly incarcerated or immigrants, people need a deeper understanding of the experiences and related government policies for those groups.

People within the same organization with different roles will need different specific competencies. For example, in a university, faculty have many varied responsibilities. They need the self-

awareness to understand how their social identities and positionality will affect how and what they teach, an awareness of how their biases might affect how they treat students in the classroom, as well as how they advise, mentor, or grade them. Faculty also need knowledge of how the social identities and positionality of their students may affect their participation and experience in the class (e.g., feeling isolated, invisible, confident), and their life circumstances (e.g., being able to afford books, food, housing; working other jobs). They need skills to manage classroom dynamics (e.g., address microaggressions, handle conflict constructively) and create an inclusive curriculum and classroom environment where everyone feels valued and is able to learn. In addition, faculty need skills to create and advocate for equitable departmental and university policies.

Others in the college community may need other specific awareness, knowledge, and skills. Health service providers need to be particularly aware of gender and sexuality issues in order to provide appropriate and sensitive medical and mental health care to people who identify as gender non-conforming or queer. Important for career counselors is an awareness of their biases as they advise students on career options and an understanding of how internalized inferiority, cultural background, and societal oppression may influence career choices, whether in limiting one's aspirations, dealing with the pressure from family to pursue a particular vocation, or concerns about the bias and discrimination a student is likely to encounter in a particular field (e.g., women in technology). Administrators and those with management responsibilities may need particular work regarding biases that arise in hiring, promotion, evaluation, and supervision skills to effectively manage diverse staff, and the

ability to create and review policies and procedures for equity and inclusion.

Developing Competencies

The development of a particular competency rarely occurs in isolation from other competencies. The core competencies are interrelated, and thus their development is often interconnected. For example, when we learn about others' cultures and experiences, it often sheds light on our own. As we learn more about systemic inequities, it can help us develop ways to create more equity in our environments and to raise our awareness of the privileges we receive. The point is not to try to isolate the different core or key competencies, but to ensure that all of them are being addressed in appropriate ways. Additionally, individuals likely have uneven awareness, knowledge, and skills depending on the social identity, form of oppression, or issue. Someone might have high levels of competency around LGBTQ issues but not about class issues, or be skilled at institutional advocacy but limited in self-awareness.

There are numerous ways to develop competencies and increase capacity for equity and inclusion. One way is through various educational experiences such as classes, workshops, webinars, and lectures that provide information, discussions, and activities to increase awareness, knowledge, and skills. Another avenue is through relationships and experiences with different individuals, groups, and communities. This may include meeting with people from local organizations, doing internships, volunteering, joining groups, or developing more meaningful relationships with individuals with a diversity of social identities and backgrounds. As we have actual contact and connections with different people, we have the potential to gain

invaluable firsthand knowledge, empathy, and insight. Additionally, we can engage in our own self-education by accessing information through reading, media, and cultural events. There is no shortage of opportunities to be developing cultural competence for equity and inclusion if one is intentional about doing so.

Assessing Competencies

There are also many ways to assess the development of competencies. While at the moment there is no validated instrument for the CCEI model, there are a variety of other methods that can be helpful. Individuals and departments can receive feedback from relevant others: colleagues, supervisors, students, clients, community members. This can be done through surveys, questionnaires, feedback forms, and/or focus groups. Campus climate surveys can help identify areas for attention. People can be asked to discuss or write self-assessments, self-reflections, or case analyses and take tests that assess knowledge. Individuals can demonstrate skills through facilitating a group, planning and conducting a class or workshop, or being observed working with a client. There are also instruments that measure attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors related to diversity and inclusion (e.g., <https://idiinventory.com/Intercultural-development-inventory>; Pope & Mueller, 2005).

Implementation and Application

The Cultural Competence for Equity and Inclusion model can be used for a variety of diagnostic and planning purposes. It can help people reflect on the questions:

- What do we want people to be able to do?
- What areas are we already

addressing and which need more attention and depth?

- How can we measure where we are towards this goal?

This model can offer a roadmap for implementing diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts and for identifying the capacities that need to be deepened. Instead of just randomly offering particular workshops or implementing new programs, the CCEI can help individuals and groups charged with advancing DEI at their institutions create a more systematic and intentional way to plan their interventions. The following are a few examples of how the model could be used.

Organizational mission and strategic planning

At its broadest level, this model can be used for setting institutional goals. These core competencies can provide the overall framework for what the institution wants to cultivate in all its members. It can then consider how these capacities can be developed.

Professional development

The CCEI framework can be used to identify and develop the competencies needed by members of the organization, generally, as well as the specific needs of different departments/groups within an institution. The model can be a reference to ascertain which competencies are being developed and which need further attention. For example, I worked with one organization to offer a two-day general CCEI training open to all members of the organization to create some shared foundational knowledge and skills. This was followed by some sessions, particularly for people in different roles.

Educational programming

To go beyond just general diversity events, planners can be intentional about offering a range of programming that would help people develop the awareness, knowledge, and skills for CCEI. They can consider the particular speakers who are invited, include sessions that allow people to have meaningful dialogue across differences, and provide workshops on specific topics.

Student leadership development

Student leadership development programs can be designed to prepare students to be culturally competent for equity, inclusion, and social justice. At one university, I developed and trained trainers to lead a one-day basic workshop for student leaders on CCEI. The staff is subsequently developing additional training for students who remain student leaders over several years to build on and increase their competencies.

Curriculum development and creating student learning outcomes

Instructors can develop courses that intentionally develop these various competencies or create programs or sequences of courses to do so. These competencies can be the basis for student learning outcomes. Some instructors have intentionally integrated these competencies into their syllabi. One university has adopted the CCEI framework as the core competencies for all their students. Each school and department is working to identify the specific competencies needed for their students and how students through courses and other experiences (across the university) would develop these competencies and how they will be assessed. I provided initial

training on the CCEI model to a steering committee so they could help oversee this process.

An overall flow to consider for implementing the CCEI is identifying:

Core competencies → Key components → Specific competencies for that role/context → Ways to develop the competencies → Ways to assess the competencies.

As more people have become familiar with the model, they are finding different ways of utilizing it.

Highlights of This Model

There are several characteristics of this framework that make it different from most cultural competency models, and that may make it a useful tool for a range of organizations.

Encompasses all social identities and forms of oppression. This framework addresses various sociocultural groups, not just those related to race and ethnicity. People can use this model to explore and develop cultural competency around sex, gender, sexual orientation, religion, socioeconomic class, ability/disability, age, and national origin, among others, along with the corresponding systemic inequities.

Incorporates an intersectional perspective. Not only does this model address a variety of sociocultural groups, it considers how these various social identities and forms of oppression interact and intersect within particular contexts and how this affects people's senses of self and experiences.

Integrates equity, inclusion, and social

justice issues. Examinations of power, privilege, and oppression, as well as cultural differences, are infused throughout all components of the model.

Includes skills for action and advocacy. In addition to interpersonal skills, this framework addresses the skills needed to ensure equity and inclusion on organizational, institutional, and societal levels. It recognizes the importance of both personal and institutional/social change.

Provides a flexible, broad framework. This model can be applied across a variety of contexts and purposes. These basic components can be tailored to meet the needs of particular fields or organizations.

The Cultural Competence for Equity and Inclusion model offers one way to integrate social justice content with cultural competency to achieve diversity, equity, and inclusion goals. Making competencies explicit increases the likelihood they will be addressed. The ability to live and interact effectively with a diversity of people in diverse contexts and foster equity, inclusion, and social justice is needed throughout all of our institutions. This framework can be a tool towards this end.

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