

Introduction:

The ability to adapt in new or unfamiliar situations is a crucial life skill. However, in cross-cultural interactions, it can be difficult to decide when we should adapt to a different culture's expectations, or when it might be more appropriate to refrain from enacting unfamiliar customs and norms. Therefore, the goal of this activity is to guide participants through this decision-making process and allow them to understand and reflect on their ability to adapt.

Background and Information:

This activity was created by Kris Acheson-Clair and Lindsey Macdonald, CILMAR, based on a chapter in Stella Ting-Toomey's *Communicating Across Cultures* (see citation below).

Facilitator notes:

Tailor examples for target culture. Be mindful of the cultural situations and behaviors presented and delete/add based on safety factors for participants (i.e., do not include the behaviors related religion, gender, etc. if answering this could place a participant in an unsafe situation legally, socially, etc.).

Objectives:

As a result of this activity, participants will be able to:

1. Articulate what is important to them when deciding to adapt (or not) across cultures and contexts.
2. Describe the ways in which others make adaptation decisions.

Time:

60 minutes.

Group Size:

Small group.

Materials:

Participant Instructions; Adapt or Be Yourself slides (both in [Downloads](#)).

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Minimization
- Acceptance
- Adaptation

AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:

Cultural Self-Awareness

- To articulate insights into own cultural rules and biases (e.g., seeking complexity; aware of how their experiences have shaped these rules, and how to recognize and respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self-description).

Knowledge of Cultural Worldview Frameworks:

- To demonstrate sophisticated understanding of the complexity of elements important to members of another culture in relation to its history, values, politics, communication styles, economy, or beliefs & practices.

Activity Instructions:

Note: This activity is based on Stella Ting-Toomey's (1999) model of Transcultural Communication Competence. Therefore, before leading this activity, facilitators should become familiar with the model (see citation below).

1. Create a Menti word cloud or Jamboard (or similar) for participants to answer the question "What is adaptation?"
2. Create a Kahoot (or similar polling platform – i.e., Poll Everywhere) for participants according to the situational and behavioral scenarios presented later in the lesson plan.
3. Introduce the lesson plan with the Adaptation slides (in [Downloads](#)).
4. Using a Menti word cloud or Jamboard and sharing a collaboration link with participants, ask them to indicate words, images, or memories that come to mind when considering what "adaptation" means. From the word cloud or Jamboard sticky notes, create a co-constructed definition of adaptation as a group.
5. Present Ting-Toomey's definitions of adaptation and cross-cultural adaptation skills.
6. Ask:
 - What has been your experience like with adaptation in the U.S.?
 - What are the consequences of adaptation? For you? For whom you are adapting (or not) to?
7. Show the following video: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RofpAjqwMa8&t=34s> (A trailer from *The Farewell*) and ask:
 - What does this clip have to do with adaptation?
 - Who adapts to whom?
 - What influences the characters' decisions to adapt (or not)?
8. Explain the premise of the activity: all participants should imagine their first few weeks after moving to the U.S. They will then be presented with a list of cultural behaviors or situations (see Participant Instructions in [Downloads](#)) that they may have encountered. For each of these behaviors or situations, the participants must choose whether you adapt or not to the cultural expectations.
9. To make their decisions, participants should first ask themselves the following questions:
 - Do I have the skills and knowledge I would need to adapt, i.e., can I adapt **effectively**?
 - Do others want or expect me to adapt, i.e., is it **appropriate** to adapt in this situation?
 - Would adapting violate or conflict with my deep-seated morality or ethics, i.e., would adapting be **satisfactory**?
10. Let participants know that for each scenario, they can choose one of the following answers:

- Adapt to the “local culture”
- “Be yourself” (do what comes naturally to you)
- “Being myself works in the local culture”
- “I blend cultural practices”

11. Begin the Kahoot game, moving through each scenario.
12. After you have gone through all scenarios and participants have made their decisions, the facilitator should invite participants to brainstorm scenarios they would add to the list in small groups.
13. After small group discussion, instructors should debrief with their own questions or the questions provided below.
14. Alternate instructions: In lieu of a handout, these behaviors and situations can be printed on cards and distributed so that each individual receives a card to respond to or facilitators can use the slides themselves with the scenarios on each slide.

Debriefing Questions:

- Which scenarios did you add?
- How did it feel to go through these scenarios?
- In what situations did you choose to adapt (or not) and what criteria did you use to make that decision?
- What is important about effective adaptation? What is important about appropriate adaptation? What is important about satisfactory adaptation? Would you add or subtract any criteria (outside of effective, appropriate, and satisfactory)?
- Were there any situations where it was particularly easy or difficult to make a choice to adapt or not? If so, why?
- Were there any instances where you felt the choice to adapt would be dependent on the specific scenario? If so, can you provide the group with an example (i.e., who was involved? where did this scenario take place? when did this scenario happen?, etc.)?
- Would you add any behaviors or situations to the list?
- Where do you feel the most pressure to adapt? Where have you adapted that you wish you hadn’t and/or didn’t “have to?”
- Whose responsibility is it to adapt?
- What does it mean to “be yourself?”
- What is the “local culture?”
- Have you experienced anyone adapting to you here in the U.S.? What happened? How did you feel?
- What if we were talking about adapting in your home country context? How would this change your decisions?
- Based on your experiences, what advice would you give someone struggling to adapt to life in the U.S.?
- What did you learn about adapting to different cultures?

Behaviors or Situations:

1. How you dress.
 - Examples: Dressing more modestly or less modestly, dressing according to gender norms, wearing traditional garments, etc.
2. How you style your hair.
 - Examples: Pulling your hair back, wearing your hair down in its natural state, covering your hair, straightening, or curling your hair, etc.
3. Participating in a religious ceremony (for a religion you do not practice).
 - Examples: Praying, taking communion, going on a pilgrimage, meditating, etc.
4. How you interact with someone of a different gender identity.
 - Examples: Making/not making eye contact, taking on either a subservient or dominant role, using an intermediary or making sure you have a chaperone, etc.
5. How you interact with authority figures.
 - Examples: Challenging or not challenging an authority figure, calling them a formal title, or referring to them in more casual terms, etc.
6. The level of affection you show your friend or romantic partner in public.
 - Examples: Kissing or not kissing, holding hands or not holding hands, etc.
7. Undergoing or hiding body modification.
 - Examples: Piercings, tattoos, cosmetic surgery, etc.
8. How you speak.
 - Examples: Language used, vocabulary used, etc.
9. How you use nonverbals in social settings.
 - Examples: Eye contact, distance between you and others, gesturing, etc.
10. How you get to know someone.
 - Examples: Asking or refraining from asking questions and types of questions (i.e., about family, about personal identity, about interests and preferences, about friends, about age), observing, gathering (in groups or one-on-one and setting/purpose of gathering, i.e., more task-focused or more conversational), etc.
11. How you organize, participate in, and show up to social gatherings.
 - Examples: Setting or not setting an end time, guest arrival time, expectations around entering and leaving a host's home, how long in advance you plan/communicate about an event, guest list, food preparation.
12. Accepting food or drink offered to you when it goes against your dietary restrictions or preferences.

- Examples: Accepting meat when you're a vegetarian, accepting food or drink that is normally off limits due to religious beliefs (pork, shellfish, etc.), accepting alcohol when you normally refrain from drinking, etc.
13. How you interact with people in the service industry (restaurant servers, taxi drivers, etc.)
- Examples: Tipping or not tipping, calling them by their name or the title of their position, snapping your fingers or yelling to get their attention, etc.
14. How you eat.
- Examples: Eating with utensils and type of utensils, eating with hands, slurping, etc.
15. How you introduce yourself and how you refer to others.
- Examples: Which name you use, how you respond to people shortening/lengthening your name, how you shorten/lengthen others' name(s).
16. How you communicate on social media and messaging platforms.
- Examples: Calling only, video chat, texting only, etc.
17. What time you eat.
- Examples: Breakfast, lunch, dinner, eating a late dinner, snacks, etc.
18. How you share information about yourself.
- Examples: Sharing personality characteristics, interests, family, and friend details, etc.
19. How you indicate where you are from.
- Examples: Country name, city name, region name, qualifying language, etc.
20. How you seek help.
- Examples: Asking directly vs indirectly, asking peers or authority figures, etc.