

## Overview:

Human behavior is complex. While it may be tempting to attribute someone's actions to "human nature" or some sort of individual quirk, it's usually not so simple. Therefore, this activity aims to get participants thinking critically about three dimensions of human behavior and the nuances between them:

- Universal: the ways in which all people are the same
- Cultural: the ways in which people from a particular group are similar and also different from other groups
- Personal: the ways in which each person is different from everyone else.

## Background and Information:

This activity was created by Kris Acheson-Clair, PhD, and Lindsey Macdonald, CILMAR. It was adapted from the University of the Pacific's *What's Up With Culture?* modules (see citation below).

## Objectives:

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

1. Distinguish between three dimensions of human behavior (universal, cultural, and personal).
2. Identify the dangers of inaccurately identifying the motivations for behavior.
3. Apply this analytical skill to authentic relationships and interactions.

## Time:

20 minutes

## Group Size:

Small group

## Materials:

Universal, Cultural, or Personal Quiz Cards (see [Downloads](#)).

## Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Denial
- Polarization
- Minimization
- Acceptance

## AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:

Curiosity:

- To ask complex questions about other cultures.
- To seek out and articulate answers to these questions that reflect multiple cultural perspectives.

## 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.

## Other Skills:

Friendship, Teamwork, Diversity & Inclusion

## Activity Instructions:

1. Introduce the three categories or dimensions of human behavior (universal, cultural, and personal). Explain the meaning of each dimension and the differences between them.
  - a. At this point in the activity, the facilitator may choose to incorporate a discussion on why it's important to distinguish between the dimensions accurately and understand their nuances. They may ask participants the following:
    - i. What happens when we assume universality for something that is cultural? Or when we think something is personal when it is actually cultural?

2. Separate participants into groups of three or four and distribute four to five Quiz cards to each group. Each card will include a behavior or situation that they may encounter in everyday settings.

3. Ask each group to identify whether the behavior on each card is universal, cultural, or personal.

*Note:* Facilitators might consider where their participants fall on the Intercultural Development Continuum (IDC™) and how that might affect their responses. For example, people in minimization or denial more often assume universality when it is not there, and people in polarization tend to attribute motivations at the personal level without understanding the cultural dimension.

4. Once all groups have finished assigning their cards, ask them to reflect on what led them to select universal, cultural, or personal. Also see if there were any cards where they had trouble deciding and ask them why they had difficulty.
  - a. For personal or cultural cards, ask them to flesh out more thoroughly any nuances in cases where it might depend. For example, many participants may assign personal to hobbies; however, there are cultural factors involved in the hobbies we choose (e.g., soccer vs. football, heritage crafts, etc.).
  - b. For universal cards, ask them to add cultural or personal layers. For example, fluid intake is universal, but the when, how, what, and with whom is often cultural as well as personal.
5. If the facilitator disagrees with a group's conclusions, they can acknowledge their point and then ask the larger group if there are any alternative perspectives. At times, the facilitator may need to provide their own insights.
6. Transition into a reflective discussion with all participants. Ask the following questions:
  - Do you identify with any of these cultural behaviors? If so, how did you learn them?

- Do any of these cultural behaviors seem different to you? If so, how are they different from your own learned, cultural behaviors?
- How does reflecting on the personal, cultural, and universal dimensions of our own and others' behaviors help us in real life interactions?
- When do you think intentionally rethinking your assumptions about dimensions could help your relationships?

**Related Tools:**

*Similar tools:*

- [Universal-Cultural-Personal Quiz](#)