

Overview:

Sometimes the best way to cope with the negative physical, mental, emotional, and social impacts of adaptation processes, sometimes called culture shock, is to gain more self-awareness of your reactions. This mindfulness allows for reflection on potential causes and solutions. A medical model of culture shock is employed in this activity to help learners think through the implications of employing short vs long-term strategies for “treating” the symptoms of transitioning into an unfamiliar cultural environment.

Objectives:

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

1. Consider cultural adaption processes within a medical model.
2. Reflect on their symptoms—or the physical, mental, emotional, and social effects of their transition.
3. Compare the pros and cons of short-term and long-term solutions for “treating” culture shock.

Time:

45 minutes

Group Size:

Small group

Materials:

Culture Shock Treatment Cards and Participant Instructions (in [Downloads](#))

Note: Participant instructions appear twice on the same page so that the facilitator can cut them apart after printing.

Intercultural Development Continuum Stages:

- Denial
- Polarization
- Minimization
- Acceptance

AAC&U Intercultural Knowledge and Competence Goals:

Openness:

- To initiate and develop interactions with culturally different others.
- To suspend judgment in valuing interactions with culturally different others.
- To seek out and articulate answers to these questions that reflect multiple cultural perspectives.

Other Skills:

Emotional Resilience

Activity Instructions:

1. Begin by asking participants how they define culture shock. Then, introduce culture shock in terms of a “medical model.” Discuss how culture shock can almost feel like being sick (the facilitator might make the connection between “homesickness”). Consider doing a list brainstorming or word cloud group activity to generate some of the many “symptoms” of culture shock that participants have experienced or witnessed others experiencing. Note that, just like with many illnesses, there are treatments for culture shock, some more effective than others.

Note: While culture shock is often associated with study abroad, it can also occur in any situation that involves experiencing a new or unfamiliar culture (e.g. moving to a different region within your home country, switching jobs, attending a new school, etc.). The facilitator should ensure that participants understand the variety of scenarios where culture shock could happen.

2. Divide participants into small groups of 3-4. Ensure that each group has a set of Culture Shock Treatment Cards. The treatments listed on each card could be applied to a variety of situations, including studying abroad, relocating, etc. Cards should start off face down.
3. Each group should turn over each card one-by-one. After turning over each card, they should identify and discuss the following:
 - First, they should identify whether the “treatment” on the card is a short-term or long-term solution. *Note:* The facilitator should emphasize that short-term vs. long-term is more of a continuum rather than a strict binary, and there may not be a clear, correct answer to any of the cards. Instead, participants should think of this exercise as a way to generate discussion and reflection about strategically coping with adjustment instead of “reacting.”
 - Then, they should discuss the pros and cons of using this particular strategy to “treat” culture shock. For example, a short-term solution may cause the individual to feel better in the moment but may delay adjustment to the new culture. And, a long-term solution may feel like drowning in the deep end of the pool: overwhelming under the current level of stress or due to lack of preparedness (e.g. language skills, etc.) or other constraints.

Related Tools:

Similar tools:

- [Culture Shock](#)
- [Culture Shock \(Hofstede\)](#)
- [Culture Shock Absorber](#)

Tools to use in conjunction with this activity:

- [Word Cloud Discussion](#)