

Values Spectrum Activity

Purpose: Highlighting the ways that values and cultural norms intersect, this activity helps people to think about where they fall on a continuum of different values. (This activity works well on its own, but also follows nicely after the activity *Would You Rather?*)

To Do

Introduce the general concept of a spectrum or continuum, as kind of a line within the room. You are going to be inviting participants to place themselves somewhere along a continuum that stretches from one end of the room to the other. At this point it's helpful if the group is standing already in a grouping in the middle, ready to move to different places along the spectrum.



Say:

One of the things cultures build themselves around are values. Different groups place value on different ends of a spectrum within a topic. One such topic or value that cultures orient around is related to **time**.

Some groups have a fixed notion of time. (There is only a fixed amount of time, and therefore, the concept of running out of time). The other extreme is a fluid orientation of time –(What matters most is what you are doing with your time--). Where do you fall or where would you place yourself on the Time Continuum? What is your preference in the way you deal with time? Ask participants to place themselves on a spectrum that stretches across the room, with “Fixed” at one end and “Fluid” at the other. Acknowledge that there is not a right or a wrong end of the spectrum to be on, but that each of us has a comfort zone around where they are on the spectrum.

Now think about your organization. Where would you place your organization in terms of its values about time? Invite participants to move from where they were individually to where they feel their organization lies. Ask people if they had to move a lot.... Invite them to share their observations about how their personal styles might be different from the organizational styles.... You might even ask them to share their perceptions of those who are at a different end of the spectrum from where they are.... As you do this, help participants to remember that there is not one right way or wrong way—just different perspectives. How can they help each other to understand the perspective that is not their own?



Another value to consider is **tolerance for ambiguity**. Invite people to place themselves along this spectrum as well. How much chaos can we really accept? On one end is rule-based and particularistic. On that end, it is very important to follow the rules. On the other end there is a universalistic approach that says “Yes, there are rules. But rules are useful only when they are useful. They are also there to be broken. Rules are guidelines, rather than something that must be specifically to be followed.”

Where do you as an individual fall or where would you place yourself on the tolerance for ambiguity scale? Are you more rule follower or rule breaker? Again, invite participants to place themselves on the physical timeline...

A third value is **power distance**. You can ask people to place themselves on this values spectrum as well. On one end are people/cultures who have a high equality orientation. That doesn't mean everyone has power, but everyone feels there is access to power. There is not a high power distance. On the other end of the spectrum are very hierarchical cultures where people who are out of power don't expect, don't see, don't have channels to access power. Not that they are happy not to have power, but they have an acceptance of the way things are; this is the way they believe the world works.



There are some tendencies around being more on one side than on the other. If you are higher on the particularistic end of things, you might be more hierarchical. However, this is not always necessarily true. Sometimes the values are independent of one another; sometimes inter-related. It's also important to remember that we are all part of multiple cultural groups at the same time. We might be navigating across these in our different roles at our organizations. Remember, cultural competency is not about a right way and a wrong way of doing things, but about understanding the ways that people are moving along different spectra of values. In the workplace, it may be that people are being pushed to move from one end to the other on a particular value when they have to match their personal style with the organizational style.

How might an understanding of these differences help you to be more culturally competent in the workplace?