



# Developing Cultural Competence: The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS)

Developed by Dr. Milton Bennett



# What is the DMIS?

The Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS):

- Explains how people or groups tend to think and feel about cultural difference.
- Is the basis for effective coaching and development to work more effectively with people from other cultural backgrounds.
- The DMIS was created by Dr. Milton Bennett. It is based on years of direct observation and research. **DMIS provides a structure for understanding how people experience cultural difference.** Six stages of perspectives describe how a person sees, thinks about, and interprets events happening around them from an intercultural-difference perspective.
- Since DMIS indicates what a person sees and thinks, it also suggests what they do not see or think. DMIS, therefore, **highlights how a person's cultural patterns both guide and limit their experience of cultural difference.**
- The six stages of DMIS, on the next slide, represent a set of perspectives with successively greater ability to understand and have a more complete experience of cultural difference.

# DMIS Stages

I don't want to deal with foreigners.

There is nothing to learn from them.

People are all the same anyway.

**Denial**

**Defense**

**Minimization**

They should also learn about our culture.

We make a great team!

**Acceptance**

**Adaptation**

**Integration**

Ok. There are differences. So what?

How much do I/we need to change?

# Stages 1-3: Ethnocentric

- **Denial.** Being comfortable with the familiar. Not anxious to complicate life with “cultural differences”. Not noticing much cultural difference around you. Maintaining separation from others who are different.
- **Defense.** A strong commitment to one’s own thoughts and feelings about culture and cultural difference. Some distrust of cultural behavior or ideas that differ from one’s own. Aware of other cultures around you, but with a relatively incomplete understanding of them and probably fairly strong negative feelings or stereotypes about some of them.

**Reversal** is the opposite of Defense. The person feels that some other culture is better and tends to exhibit distrust of their own culture.

- **Minimization.** People from other cultures are pretty much like you, under the surface. Awareness that other cultures exist all around you, with some knowledge about differences in customs and celebrations. Not putting down other cultures. Treating other people as you would like to be treated.

# Stages 4-6: Ethnorelative

- **Acceptance.** Aware of your own culture(s). See your own culture as just one of many ways of experiencing the world. Understanding that people from other cultures are as complex as yourself. Their ideas, feelings, and behavior may seem unusual, but you realize that their experience is just as rich as your own. Being curious about other cultures. Seeking opportunities to learn more about them.
- **Adaptation.** Recognizing the value of having more than one cultural perspective available to you. Able to “take the perspective” of another culture to understand or evaluate situations in either your own or another culture. Able to intentionally change your culturally based behavior to act in culturally appropriate ways outside your own culture.
- **Integration.** To varying extents, have integrated more than one cultural perspective, mindset, and behavior into one’s identity and worldview. Able to move easily among cultures.

- The first three stages are considered “ethnocentric” in that one’s own culture is seen as the only culture or to varying extents the “better” culture. The last three stages are considered “ethnorelative” in that one’s own culture is seen as equal among many other cultures.
- ***The ethnorelative stages are characterized by a positive mindset about cultural difference. These stages are indicative of a person who will tend to make more inclusive decisions and actively seek to build a diverse workforce and an inclusive work environment.***
- This highlights the central importance of developing leaders and managers to the point where they have an ethnorelative experience of cultural difference.
- *This information comes from Dr. Bennett’s website*  
[http://www.mdbgroupinc.com/dmis\\_background.htm](http://www.mdbgroupinc.com/dmis_background.htm)