

Self-Awareness Activity 2.9 Cultures You've Known

Purpose: To recognize the hidden aspects of your own and other cultural groups.

Instructions: Perhaps reviewing some obvious rites, rituals, heroes, and symbols of the cultures you've belonged to will help you recognize more subtle rites, rituals, etc., in the cultures you encounter. Remember, rites and rituals relate to the need for belonging. A rite is any formal practice, custom, or procedure. A ritual is any detailed method of procedure that is regularly followed. Be aware that in every organization, the stronger the rites, rituals, symbols, and heroes, the stronger the effect and influence the organization has on its members' lives. For each category that is relevant to your life, such as your nation, school, religious community, family, workplace, identify examples of cultural practices, as exemplified in the National Symbols category below.

Step 1: National Symbols

Rites and Rituals: (What rites and rituals gave you a feeling of national unity—an emotional community with common purpose? For example, the national anthem.)

Heroes: (What heroes personified key national values?)

Symbols: (What symbols served to unify, to express values? For example, the flag.)

Values: (What values are expressed by the above?)

Step 2: Your life.

Pick at least one other area of your life—such as your workplace, school, family, religious community, or social organization—and give examples of important rites, rituals, heroes, symbols, and values.

Guidelines for Completing Case Studies

Case studies are great opportunities to apply to workplace situations what you learn about managing diversity. They give you chances to build your interactive skills—along with your problem-solving and management skills. The problem-solving process involves recognizing and identifying the surface problems in a situation, uncovering the root problem(s) by asking why-why, which usually means gathering more information, generating possible solutions, and selecting the best solution.

The surface problems are the easiest ones to identify—they are the ones always mentioned in the written case. In a work situation, they are the communications and actions that are obvious as you talk with people, walk around, look at written materials, etc.—things that you can observe. The difficulty comes in getting beneath the surface problems and figuring out why they are occurring, what is really going on—the root problem(s). Sometimes the root problem could be called “the key issue,” and it often is some form of stereotyping, prejudice, or discrimination. For each case, follow these four steps:

Step 1: Identify surface problems: What problems do I see (listed in written case or observed in actual situation)?

Step 2: Ask Why-Why to get root problem: Why are these problems occurring? What is going on beneath the surface or in the background that is causing them? Do I need to again ask *why* these underlying reasons are occurring (why-why)?

Step 3: Generate Solutions: What are some possible solutions to these problems?

Step 4: Take action or make recommendations: As a manager or consultant, what would I recommend as the best viewpoints and actions to take?

Case Study 2.1 is a true story (as are all the cases in this text). It demonstrates some cultural diversity problems and issues. See if you can ferret out the root problem(s) by asking Why? And perhaps asking Why? again (the Why-Why technique).