

### Why is intercultural communication important?

Culture influences people's behaviors, beliefs, and values, often unconsciously. Team members from different cultural backgrounds may have different ways of thinking or communicating, increasing the possibility of miscommunication. Intercultural communication practices can help bridge these gaps, resulting in:

- **Better ways** to manage conflict between team members
- **Improved relationships** between team members
- **Improved team effectiveness** and productivity

### What can all team members do to improve intercultural communication?

- 1 Remember that everyone has a culture that affects how they interact with others.** Be aware of – and question – your own beliefs, implicit biases, and assumptions. Think about how they might influence the way you interact with others.

**Try this:** To increase your awareness of the effect of culture on communication, reflect on your last experience communicating with someone from a different cultural background. How did you and the other person differ in basic communication practices such as using eye contact, use of personal distance, direct or indirect communication, or expressing disagreement?

- 2 Avoid assumptions.** Acknowledge differences, but don't make assumptions about people based on those differences. Stereotypes can lead to misunderstandings and impede communication.

**Try this:** Reflect on something you previously assumed about a team member. Ask yourself how accurate that assumption really was.

**Try this:** Ask a team member to say more about their idea or perspective. Confirm what you have heard in your own words to make sure you understand.

**Try this:** Talk to and learn from people who are different from you.

- 3 Be open to change.** Be open to new ways of doing things and listen to the perspectives of others. Diverse viewpoints can help you understand a problem in a new way or offer a unique solution to a problem.

**Try this:** Ask another team member how they would approach an upcoming task or how best to communicate a message.

- 4 Use respectful communication practices.** When communication lacks respect, people of all cultures tend not to share feedback with one another.

**Try this:** Use non-verbal cues such as nodding or smiling to show that you understand and to encourage the speaker to continue.

**Try this:** Refrain from interrupting – listen attentively until the other person has finished speaking.

- 5 Be careful with humor.** People from different cultural backgrounds have different views on what is funny or acceptable. What is funny to you may be offensive to someone else.

**Try this:** If you use humor, make sure it will be understood, appreciated, and not cause offense.