Challenges of Diversity in Dealing with Emergency Response

Description: Volunteers participating in emergency response activities may face a number of diversity issues. When coordinating mass care, sheltering, and food preparation, and distribution functions, volunteers must display sensitivity to the cultural, ethnic, religious, and language attributes of the affected population. Learn the importance of applying the three R’s to every response activity: Rules, Routine, and Respect.

Presentation Goals

- Increase awareness of the diversity issues volunteers participating in emergency response activities may face.
- Change perspectives about diversity issues – recognizing the deeper “hidden” aspects of cultural diversity.
- Present a new multi-cultural paradigm for working with various communities.
- Learn knowledge and skills for Multi-cultural Competence
- Grow in ability to recognize and adapt to different ways of communicating
# Culture Diversity and Emergency Responders

- It is not only a language barrier that causes problems, but also the very most fundamental assumptions that go into even the most casual conversations.
- Nature of the situation
- Assumptions about values
- Different rules for interaction
- Locus of Control (Perception) Differences

# Challenges of Diversity

- Working with diverse colleagues, co-workers, and other responders.
- Working efficiently and synergistically
- Minimizing misunderstandings
- Managing Conflict

- Working with diverse individuals representing many groups and co-cultures in our communities.
- Serving their needs and meeting expectations.
- Minimizing misunderstandings
- Managing Conflict

# Aspects of Multiculturalism

- Culture is learned (not observable characteristics)
- Culture is a set of shared interpretations and rules for the way that things should work)
- Culture involves beliefs, values, and norms.
- Culture affects behavior (and behaviors affect culture).
- Culture involves groups of people
- Communities that teach us how to think, act, and respond to others
Diversity

- Diversity includes ethnicity, gender, creed, generation, age, life-style, national origin, disability, personality, urban/rural, educational background, and income level.

Defining Culture

- Culture: shared learned behaviors, rules, norms, values, and assigned meanings that are taught from generation to generation.
- Culture is cognitive, emotional, and mental (not physicality, not race, per se).
- Culture is reflected or made manifest in physical and observable phenomena.

Statement about Culture

- Culture is shared learned behaviors and mental maps (norms, values, assumptions, etc.) that is transmitted from one generation to another for the purposes of promoting individual growth and development in the ways of a society.
Culture is a way of understanding

- Culture consists of shared learned behaviors that constitute mental maps that organize our experiences and interactions into meaningful relationships.
- Culture is what you were taught in your home, extended family, neighborhood, church-mosque-synagogue, school, region, etc.
- Culture includes accepted norms, values, assumptions, hierarchy, and order.
- Traditions, expectations, and assumptions about what and how we should behave in relationship to each other are part of our culture.

Co-Cultures

- We all live in overlapping “cultures” or communities with shared assumptions, language, values, behaviors, and rules.
- Cultural membership is never subordinate to other cultures - hence we do not use the term “sub-culture.”
- Cultures beyond the dominant culture are co-cultural phenomena, in addition to or distinct from the dominant culture characteristics

Key Concept

- We are all alike, and
- We are all different
We all share the human experience in common. In this sense, we are all alike.

Each of us lives in a number of overlapping communities where we learn rules, norms, attitudes, beliefs, and values.

We also learn our expectations and assumptions about how we should act, behave, communication, and interaction with each other.

We learn how things “ought” to be from various communities in which we identify in this sense we are all different and “Come From” different communities.

Humanity Experienced through Gender

Female

Male

Humanity Experienced through Religion
Overlapping Community (co-cultural) Memberships

- Ethnicity
- Religion
- Social Role
- Occupation
- Political Orientation
- Age
- Education Level
- World View
- Communication Style

Other (Learned) Multi-Cultural Differences

- Argumentativeness
- Verbal Aggression
- Talkativeness – Silence
- Instrumental Values
  - Politeness
  - Honesty
  - Diplomacy
  - Punctuality
  - Public Affective Displays
Learning Points

- Each individual has been acculturated by many different culture communities.
- These communities range from the schools, religious congregations, neighborhoods, sports, teams, clubs, ethnic traditions, to national institutions.
- These Overlapping cultural influences, all work together to form who we are as individuals.
- Multicultural Diversity is not just differences in appearance.
- We are all (each of us) multicultural

Key points

- To understand the individual we must understand all of the communities in which they have learned to organize the world and make sense of it.
- We must understand their assumptions about the rules, norms, values, and expectations for others.
- We must understand how they understand.
- This is the opposite mind-set from STEREOTYPING
Sources of Misunderstanding & Conflict

- Iceberg model

### Communication

- Physical differences, clothing, ethnicity
- Assumptions, values, cultural orientations

### Cultural Orientation ICEBERG

- **Surface Factors**
  - "Racial" categories, clothing, appearance, observable behaviors, nationality, etc.
- **Intermediate Factors**
  - Customs, traditions, norms, rules, ways of doing social activities, etc.
- **Deep Structure Factors**
  - Philosophies, assumptions about ontology, values, ethics, morality, etc.

### Typical Problems: Ignorance

- One of the basic problems with intercultural conflict is ignorance of the real sources of our conflict.
- The ICEBERG reminds us that conflict will occur at the "under the water" level of basic assumptions and orientations before the "visible" or surface differences ever clash or scrape.
- **KEY:** You must learn to search out these "invisible" differences and recognize them before conflict occurs.
Typical Problems: Wrong Assumptions

- Prejudice and (stereotypical) assumptions guide our behaviors/interpretations rather than seeking to understand contextual factors and how multi-culture influences may affect an individual.
- The basic rule is to also seek to understand others in the context of their varied learned cultures first, and only then seek to be understood in ways that would be meaningful to another multi-cultural individual.

Typical Problems: Assumed Similarities

- The natural tendency to seek out and interact with those who we perceive to think like ourselves.
- This means that we tend to avoid those who we perceive as being “different” from ourselves.
- This also leads to the problem that we too often assume that merely because someone “looks” like, talks like, or dresses like us that they must also think like us.
- The tendency leads to misunderstandings.

Typical Problems: Uncertainty-Anxiety

- When interacting with those whom we perceive as “different” people tend to have raised levels of uncertainty and anxiety.
- This tendency makes us uncomfortable and fearful about discussing such differences, and itself can lead to exaggerated or awkward interaction.
- It also heightens attention to specific word choices and sustained discomfort tends to lead to even more misunderstandings (humor can easily be interpreted as thinly veiled prejudice or negative stereotyping).
Multicultural Competence Skills

- Know yourself and your assumptions
- Learn about others and the communities that have shaped their orientations and patterns of behavior.
- Consider the Contexts and Setting before Interpreting
- Seek to understand diverse ways of thinking, doing, interacting
- Suspend Judgment
- Develop Empathy for the other
- Encourage Feedback
- Develop Flexibility and Adaptability

Keys to Effective Intercultural Communication

- Know yourself.
- Understand your own culture.
- Learn about other cultures.
- Avoid assumptions.
- Suspend Judgement
- Develop empathy.
- Capitalize on individual strengths.
- Recognize the validity of differences.
- Respect differences.
- Encourage feedback.
- Be open and flexible.
- Take responsibility.

Multicultural Communication Competence

- Learn the importance of applying the three R’s to every response activity: Rules, Routine, and Respect
Central Paradox

- **PEOPLE ARE ALIKE and**
- **PEOPLE ARE DIFFERENT**

A Prime Directive

- **Seek first to Understand**
- **Then...**
- **Seek to be Understood**

- This approach fosters the synergy which is created when the work environment values the differences in individuals and practices inclusiveness and open communication.

Improving Multi-cultural Interaction

- Recognize how cultural world views impact perceptions of values and behaviors
- Recognize and appropriately integrate indigenous world view paradigms
- Recognize various cultural systems and remain sensitive to these belief systems (acceptance and tolerance is essential)
- Adapt to be understood and effective.
We are all alike, we are all different.

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