

Naming the Elephants in the Room

**Reflections on working in a multicultural
dementia environment**

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Reflections on and insights into working in a multicultural
dementia care environment

A report by Alzheimer's Australia WA
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The Elephants in the Room

1. Cultural diversity is a complex subject
2. Cross-cultural conflict is a much underestimated cause of trouble
3. Cultural competence at the individual level is critical to the interaction with consumers
4. Lack of effective training programs for cultural competence at the individual level
5. Cultural competence requires change at all levels
6. Cultural competence is necessary for one and all
7. Cultural and religious beliefs about dementia cannot be isolated from the overall context of cultural and religious beliefs
8. Lack of robust evidence on the performance and effectiveness of dementia programs

Word associations

- Bread *and*
- Sugar *and*
- Black *and*
- Hot *and*
- Tea *and*
- River *and*

Mathematical calculations

7385 Add 1

5264 Add 3

24 x 17

Two systems of the mind

System 1 Characteristics

- Operates automatically and quickly, with little or no effort, and no sense of voluntary control.
- Cannot be turned off.
- Capabilities include innate skills and skills acquired through prolonged practice.
- Maintains and updates a model of one's personal world, which represents what is 'normal'.
- What you see is all there is.

Functions

- Detects that one object is more distant than another
- Orients us to the source of a sudden sound
- Completes the phrase "bread and..."
- Drives a car on an empty road
- Understands simple sentences
- Carries out social conversations
- Jumps to conclusions
- Provides only one possible interpretation of an event

Two systems of the mind

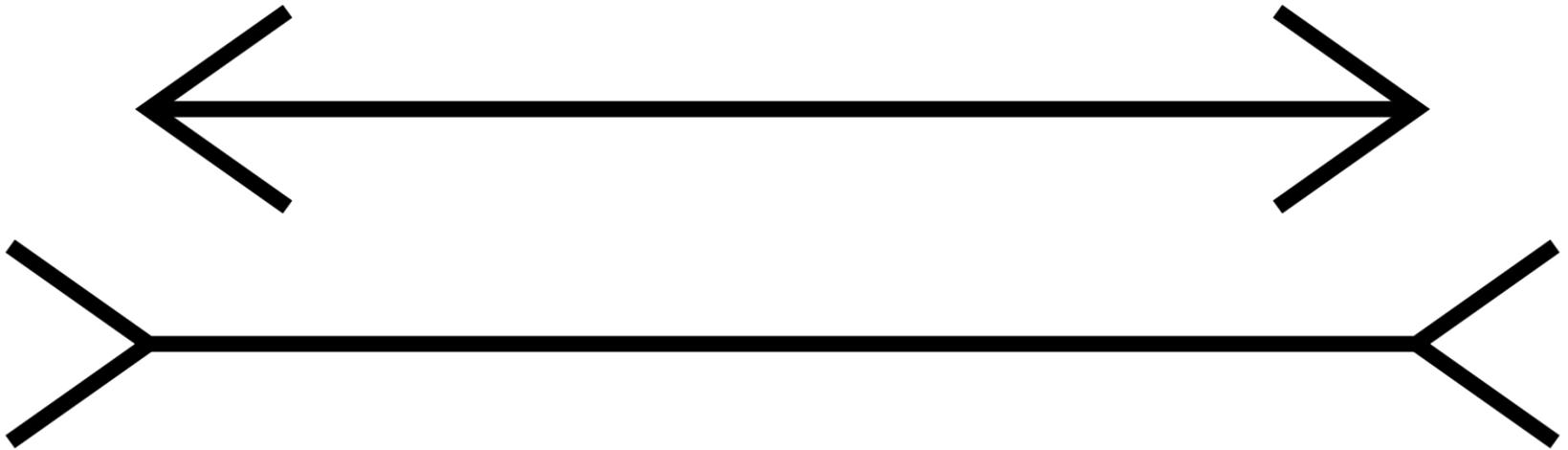
System 2 Characteristics

- Allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it, including complex computations. The operations of System 2 are often associated with the subjective experience of agency, choice and concentration.
- The operations of System 2 require attention and are disrupted when attention is drawn away.
- Is activated when an event is detected that violates the model of the world that System 1 maintains.

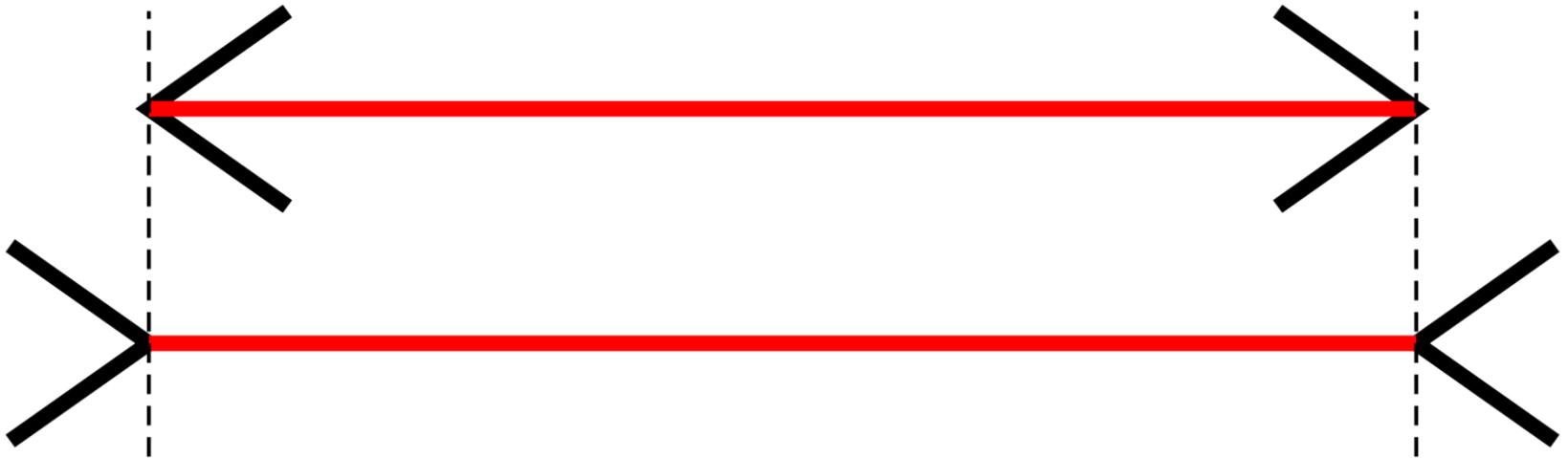
Functions

- Focuses on the voice of a particular person in a crowded and noisy room
- Counts the occurrences of letter *a* in a page of text
- Tells someone your phone number
- Parks in a narrow space (for most people except parking attendants)
- Compares options (eg. two washing machines for overall value)
- Checks the validity of a complex logical argument
- Can program memory to obey an instruction that overrides habitual responses
- Controls thoughts and behaviours “suggested” by System 1
- Deals with uncertainty and doubt and maintains incompatible interpretations in mind at the same time

Muller-Lyer experiment



Muller-Lyer illusion

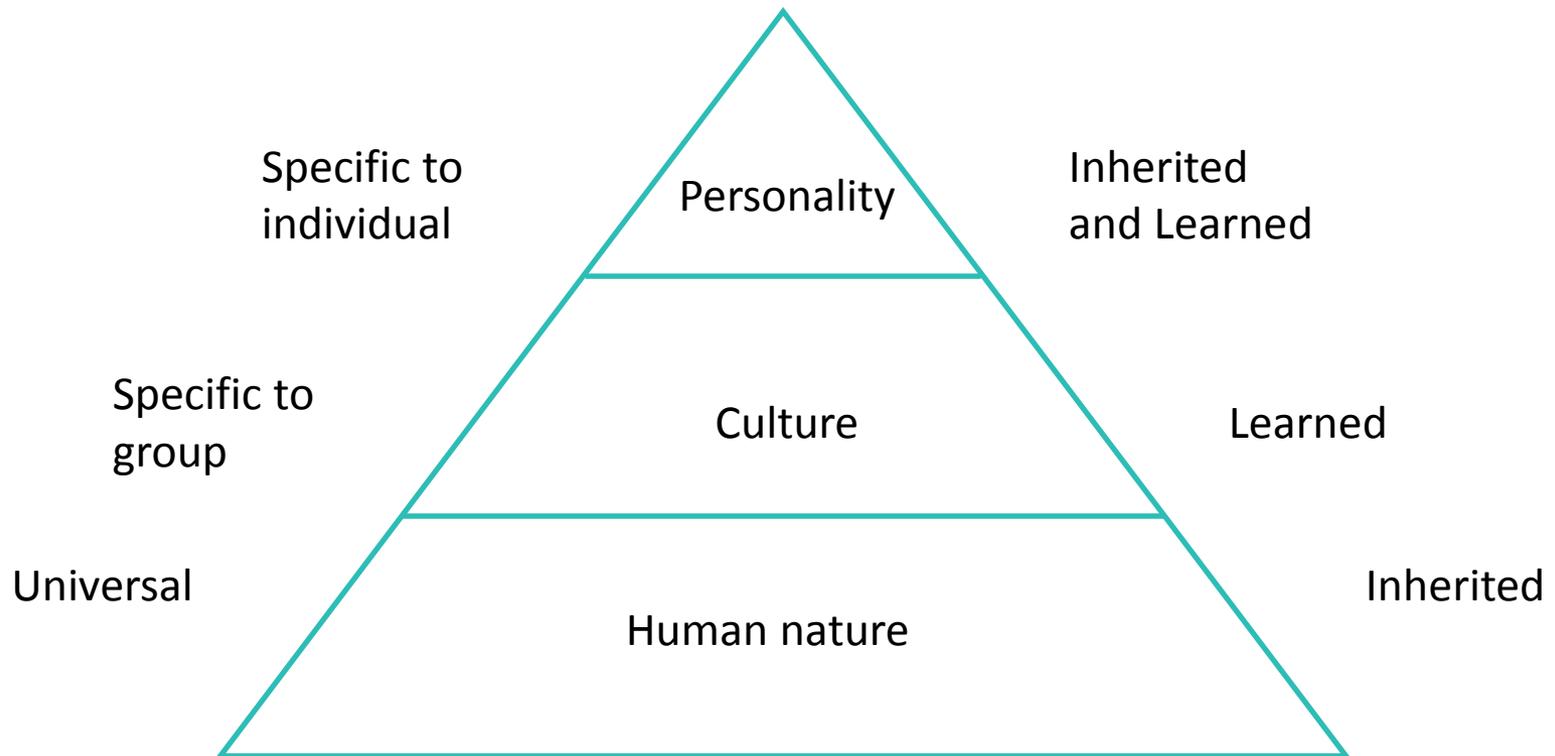




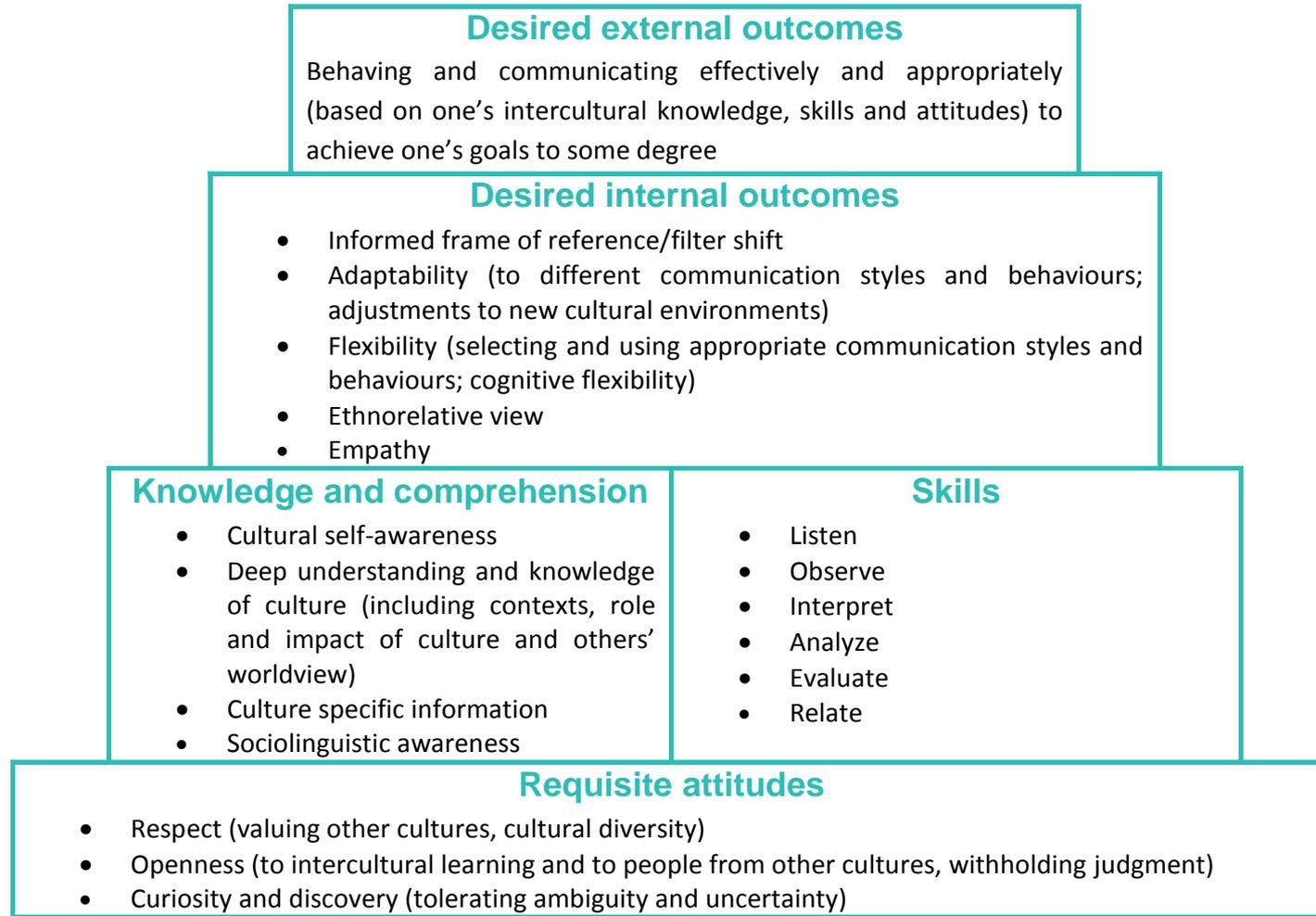
Cultural axioms based on work of Edward T. Hall

- Culture hides much more than it reveals and what it hides, it hides most effectively from its own participants
- There is no way to teach culture in the same way that language is taught
- Culture controls behaviour in deep and persistent ways many of which are outside of awareness and therefore beyond conscious control of the individual
- Every culture has its own hidden, unique form of unconscious culture
- The real job is not to understand foreign culture but to understand our own. All one ever gets from studying foreign culture is a token understanding
- Any behaviour is rational and logical from the perspective of the person behaving

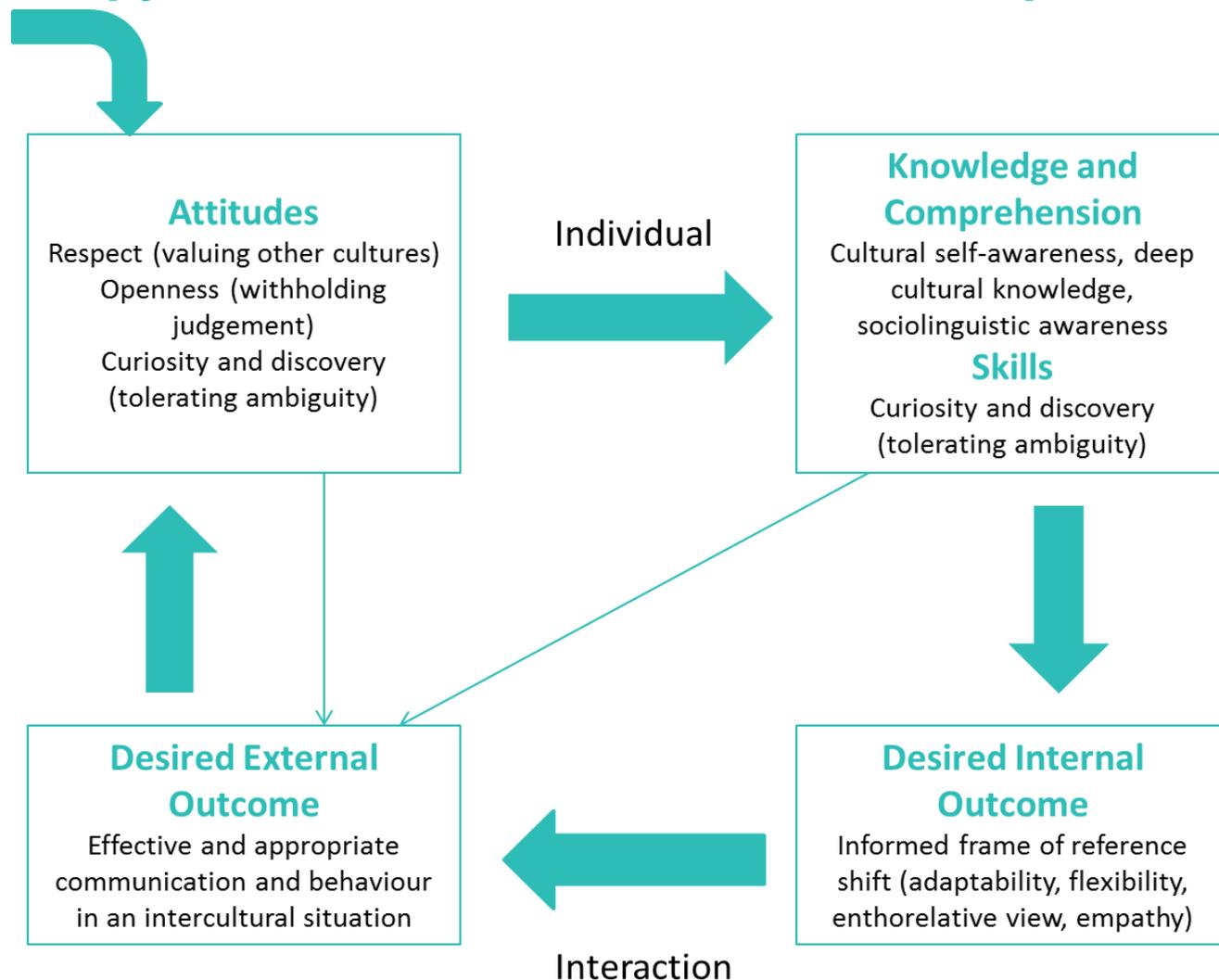
Hofstede's three levels of uniqueness



Deardorff process model of intercultural competence



Deardorff pyramid model of intercultural competence



Elements of cultural competence

1. Understand other's worldview
2. Culture self-awareness and capacity for self-assessment
3. Adaptability and adjustment to new cultural environment
4. Skills to listen and observe before interpreting and evaluating
5. General openness toward intercultural learning and the people from other cultures
6. Ability to adapt to varying intercultural communication and learning styles
7. Behavioral flexibility
8. Skills to analyze, interpret and relate
9. Tolerating and engaging ambiguity
10. Deep knowledge and understanding of culture (one's own and others')
11. Respect for other cultures

Elements of cultural competence

12. Cross-cultural empathy
13. Understanding the value of culture diversity
14. Understanding of the role and impact of culture and the impact of situational, social and historical contexts involved
15. Cognitive flexibility
16. Sociolinguistic competence (awareness of relation between language and meaning in societal context)
17. Mindfulness
18. Withholding judgment
19. Curiosity and discovery
20. Learning through interaction
21. Ethnorelative view
22. Culture specific knowledge and understanding host culture's tradition

Stereotyping distorts perception and judgement

- Individuals tend to seek out information confirming stereotypes at a greater rate than information contradicting them;
- Especially when under time pressure, individuals notice and remember information which confirms stereotypes more than information contradicting them;
- When information is ambiguous, individuals fit it to confirm stereotypical expectations;
- When recalling objective facts about an individual, memory errors tend to confirm stereotypes;
- When information contradicts a stereotype, the stereotype tends to be maintained by attributing the inconsistency to temporary circumstances or by creating subcategories with their own stereotypes;
- Even when individuals are explicitly informed about the invalidity of stereotypes, their propensity to rely on the stereotype is not eliminated, and their reliance on actual information is not increased;
- Individuals may bolster their stereotype-based judgments by assuming that factual information went into the judgment, even when it did not. The illusion of having received factual information tends to make individuals more confident in their judgments and the judgments themselves more extreme;
- Individuals' judgments are particularly prone to distortion by stereotypes in complex, ambiguous situations calling for subjective decisions **such as intercultural encounters.**

Illness belief systems

- Germ theory
 - Tumours, abnormal cells and chemicals are the causes of illness and disease
- Equilibrium
 - Theory based on balance and holds that illness results when things are unbalanced (humoral pathology and harmony)
- God and spirit caused illnesses
 - Theory attributes illness to divine causes. For example, dead ancestors are punishing or testing descendants for not honouring the family
- Sorcery and witchcraft
 - Hexes or evil eyes may cause illness

The belief system is a truth within the patient's frame of reference.

Cultural barriers between patient and providers

- The patient's level of comfort with the practitioner and fear of what he or she may find upon examination;
- A different understanding, on the part of the patient, regarding the role and function of the health care system and health care providers, which may vary greatly based on cultural context;
- A fear of rejection of personal health beliefs. Patients may face providers who do not respect their beliefs and who may even challenge those beliefs;
- Differing expectations regarding the patient's ability to choose treatments. For example, the provider may feel that he or she has to lay out choices for the patient. If the patient sees the provider as an authority, having choices presented may be strange or unsettling for him or her.

Intercultural competence is a lifelong process



The greater the difference between cultural backgrounds,
the greater the effort needed for connection / engagement