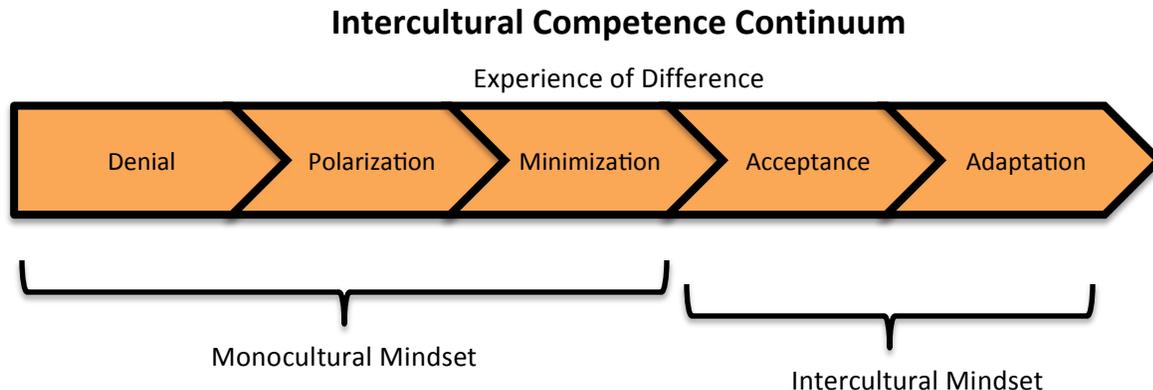


There are basically two worldview orientations: **Monocultural** and **Intercultural**. In a monocultural frame, one's own culture is central to reality; in an intercultural frame one sees the world relative to other cultures where one's own cultural patterns are not any more central to reality than any other culture. Within the two broad frames, there are five different developmental orientations as shown below.



Many people have a minimization orientation; a transitional stage between monocultural and intercultural worldviews. I believe in our (U.S.) quest towards fairness and equality, we have been taught to focus only on our similarities. In so doing we have, inadvertently perhaps, not attended to differences that make a difference. The learning opportunity for those in minimization is to enhance their understanding of the complexities and realities of differences that can make a difference in experiences. Below is more information about each of the Intercultural Competence Continuum Stages.

## Intercultural Competence Continuum Stages

### **DENIAL**

A Denial mindset reflects a more limited capability for understanding and appropriately responding to cultural differences in values, beliefs, perceptions, emotional responses, and behaviors. Denial consists of a Disinterest in other cultures and a more active Avoidance of cultural difference. Individuals with a Denial orientation often do not see differences in perceptions and behavior as “cultural.” A Denial orientation is characteristic of individuals who have limited experience with other cultural groups and therefore tend to operate with broad stereotypes and generalizations about the cultural “other.” Those at Denial may also maintain a distance from other cultural groups and express little interest in learning about the cultural values and practices of diverse communities. This orientation tends to be associated more with members of a dominant culture as well as members of non-dominant groups who are relatively isolated from mainstream society because both may have more opportunity to remain relatively isolated from cultural diversity. By contrast, members of non-dominant groups who are more actively engaged within the larger, mainstream society are less likely to maintain a Denial orientation, because they more often need to engage cultural differences. When Denial is present in the workplace, cultural diversity oftentimes feels “ignored.”

## **POLARIZATION**

Polarization is an evaluative mindset that views cultural differences from an “us versus them” perspective. Polarization can take the form of Defense (“My cultural practices are superior to other cultural practices”) or Reversal (“Other cultures are better than mine”). Within Defense, cultural differences are often seen as divisive and threatening to one’s own “way of doing things.” Reversal is a mindset that values and may idealize other cultural practices while denigrating one’s own culture group. Reversal may also support the “cause” of an oppressed group, but this is done with little knowledge of what the “cause” means to people from the oppressed community. When Polarization is present in an organization, diversity typically feels “uncomfortable.”

## **MINIMIZATION**

Minimization is a transitional mindset between the more Monocultural orientations of Denial and Polarization and the more Intercultural/Global worldviews of Acceptance and Adaptation. Minimization highlights commonalities in both human Similarity (basic needs) and Universalism (universal values and principles) that can mask a deeper understanding of cultural differences. Minimization can take one of two forms: (a) the highlighting of commonalities due to limited cultural self-understanding, which is more commonly experienced by dominant group members within a cultural community; or (b) the highlighting of commonalities as a strategy for navigating the values and practices largely determined by the dominant culture group, which is more often experienced by non-dominant group members within a larger cultural community. This latter strategy can have survival value for non-dominant culture members and often takes the form of “go along to get along.” When Minimization exists in organizations, diversity often feels “not heard.”

## **ACCEPTANCE**

Acceptance and Adaptation are intercultural/global mindsets. With an Acceptance orientation, individuals recognize and appreciate patterns of cultural difference and commonality in their own and other cultures. An Acceptance orientation is curious to learn how a cultural pattern of behavior makes sense within different cultural communities. This involves contrastive self-reflection between one’s own culturally learned perceptions and behaviors and perceptions and practices of different cultural groups. While curious, individuals with an Acceptance mindset are not fully able to appropriately adapt to cultural difference. Someone with an Acceptance orientation may be challenged as well to make ethical or moral decisions across cultural groups. While a person within Acceptance embraces a deeper understanding of cultural differences, this can lead to the individual struggling with reconciling behavior in another cultural group that the person considers unethical or immoral from his or her own cultural viewpoint. When Acceptance is present in organizations and educational institutions, diversity feels “understood.”

## **ADAPTION**

An Adaptation orientation consists of both Cognitive Frame-Shifting (shifting one’s cultural perspective) and Behavioral Code-Shifting (changing behavior in authentic and culturally appropriate ways). Adaptation enables deep cultural bridging across diverse communities using an increased repertoire of cultural frameworks and practices in navigating cultural commonalities and differences. An Adaptation mindset sees adaptation in performance (behavior). While people with an Adaptation mindset typically focus on learning adaptive strategies, problems can arise when people with Adaptation mindsets express little tolerance toward people who engage diversity from other developmental orientations. This can result in people with Adaptive capabilities being marginalized in their workplace. When an Adaptation mindset is present in the workplace, diversity feels “valued and involved.”

Orientation	<i>High-level description</i>	<i>What people at this orientation might believe</i>
<b>Denial</b>	An orientation that likely recognizes more observable cultural differences (e.g., food) but, may not have an interest in understanding deeper cultural differences (e.g., conflict resolution styles), and may avoid or withdraw from cultural differences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Live and let live, that's what I say."</li> <li>• "I am not really interested in learning about another religion. Why would I?"</li> <li>• "All big cities are the same – lots of buildings, and too many cars and people. I avoid them."</li> </ul>
<b>Polarization</b>	<p>A judgmental orientation that views cultural differences in terms of "us" and "them". This can take the form of:</p> <p><b>Defense:</b> An uncritical view toward one's own cultural values and practices and an overly critical view toward other cultural values and practices.</p> <p><b>Reversal:</b> An overly critical orientation toward one's own cultural values and practices and an uncritical view toward other cultural values and practices.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "Why do they drive on the wrong side of the road?!"</li> <li>• "I wish these people would just talk the way we do."</li> <li>• "These people don't value life the way we do."</li> <li>• "These people are so sophisticated, not like the superficial people back home."</li> </ul>
<b>Minimization</b>	An orientation that highlights cultural commonality and universal values and principles that may also mask deeper recognition and appreciation of cultural differences.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "The only race that matters is the human race."</li> <li>• "The color of a person's skin doesn't matter to me. I'm color-blind."</li> <li>• "When you really get to know people, they're all pretty much the same."</li> </ul>
<b>Acceptance</b>	An orientation that recognizes and appreciates patterns of cultural difference and commonality in one's own and other cultures.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "I always try to study about a new culture before I go there."</li> <li>• "The more cultures you know about, the better comparisons you can make."</li> <li>• "Where can I learn more about Mexican culture to be effective in my communication?"</li> </ul>
<b>Adaptation</b>	An orientation that is capable of shifting cultural perspective and changing behavior in culturally appropriate and authentic way while preserving one's own cultural values and norms.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• "To solve this dispute, I'm going to have to change my approach."</li> <li>• "I can maintain my values and also behave in culturally appropriate ways."</li> <li>• "Let's talk about our different life experiences to understand how we might be able to come to a mutual resolution."</li> </ul>