Career Readiness for an Interconnected World

Do you have all the skills you need to be career-ready in the new interconnected world? Today’s workplaces are exciting, intercultural spaces, and chances are that your career will have a global element to it, no matter whether you work at home, abroad, or online.

But what does it mean to be cross-culturally competent? A citizen of the world? A global worker? In short, it means that you can adapt your work behavior to new cultural contexts while remaining effective, flexible and positive.

These days, employers are looking for students who can demonstrate their employability through a core set of competencies. In addition to the conventional workplace skills, there are three core global competencies you’ll need to succeed as part of any intercultural team. Below, we’ll highlight these three skill areas, and then discuss how they directly impact every other one of your workplace competencies.

The 3 Core Global Competencies & Why They Matter

There are three key building blocks to becoming cross-culturally competent in work and life. Each of the three are practices supporting one another and, by exercising them, you’ll be setting yourself up to thrive in the modern workplace. Take note: Developing these skill sets is an eye-opening, enjoyable and ongoing adventure – but isn’t necessarily easy! Consider yourself as embarking on a lifelong journey towards building the global you.

1. Cultural Self-awareness: Know yourself first
Understanding your own culture is the essential first step to understanding others. But we’re so immersed in our cultural paradigm that it can be hard to recognize its key components. The good news is that with some formal study, you can learn how your culture impacts your approach to management, education, socialization, hierarchy, equality, communication, gender, religion and more. This knowledge will also give you a benchmark from which to understand other cultures, and allow you to confidently modify your behavior to connect more easily with friends and colleagues from other cultures. IN PRACTICE: You have a confident understanding of your culture, and can appreciate that your approach is just one of many that exist in the world.

2. Cross-cultural Awareness: Know about others
Listening and observing are the foundations of good communication across cultures. Practice being attentive to cultural cues, body language and communication styles. Aim to soak up every nuance of the cultures with which you interact. Actively seek out the clues to cultural differences and enjoy the discoveries you make. Being able to quickly analyze signals will allow you to better adapt and build relationships across cultures. You’ll also become articulate, able to confidently describe cultural differences. The most important underlying component of this competency is that you approach other cultures with deep respect and open-mindedness. You’ll recognize that there are diverse approaches to every situation, and you’ll always stay open to learning. IN PRACTICE: You’re a keen observer of cultural cues and are able to analyze those cues confidently, while always keeping an open mind.

3. Cross-cultural Adaptability: Put your knowledge into practice
Once you understand your own culture and can keenly observe the signals of others, it’s time to become a master of adaptation! Successful global workers are flexible and able to modify their behavior (communication style, project management style, social style and more) to suit the cultural environments they work in. Cultivating adaptability will also help you understand some of the key challenges that face travelers and global workers (e.g. culture shock and re-entry shock). Cross-culturally adaptable people can stay calm under pressure, have a sense of humor and are naturally diplomatic. There’s great joy – and career value – in building your cross-cultural adaptability! IN PRACTICE: You’ve learned to integrate your self-knowledge and cultural awareness, and these qualities directly inform your behavior, allowing you to confidently connect and communicate across cultural boundaries.

Defining the 3 Core Global Competencies
We’ve examined the three core global competencies and why they’re important. Now, let’s look closer at each one and define in detail how they’ll manifest in professional situations:

1. **CULTURAL SELF-AWARENESS**
   - You recognize that cultural self-awareness is a core component of being cross-culturally successful, and you strive to learn about your own culture through study and discussion.
   - You understand how your home culture affects your approach to the workplace, including views on management, teamwork, hierarchy, communication, career progression, etc.
   - You’re able to describe the dominant features of your home culture as they manifest in the workplace and can explain them to compatriots and foreign colleagues.
   - You’re able to compare North American workplace culture with other workplace cultures.
   - ATTITUDES: You are open to cultural self-analysis and reflection, and are aware of the impact your cultural norms can have on others. You nurture an understanding that other cultures are not worse or better, just different to your own.

2. **CROSS-CULTURAL AWARENESS**
   - You possess keen listening and observing skills and use them to understand cross-cultural environments.
   - You’re able to recognize nuanced cultural cues in conversation and business by observing body language, mannerisms, communication styles, social graces, etc.
   - You possess an analytical mindset and an ability to think objectively about contrasting cultures.
   - You’re able to rapidly find and apply cultural knowledge through research and discussion.
   - You aim to understand diverse cultures, races, ages, genders, sexual orientations and religions.
   - You are open to language learning, whether you target just a few simple terms to promote engagement, or aim for full fluency.
   - ATTITUDES: You value and respect differences, approaching them with openness, sensitivity, inclusiveness and a lack of judgment. You’re also willing and motivated to learn from other cultures.

3. **CROSS-CULTURAL ADAPTABILITY**
   - You’re able to vary your behavior in cross-cultural environments.
   - You’re able to deal with change and ambiguity and comfortably integrate into foreign and cross-cultural teams.
   - You take a diplomatic approach to cross-cultural communications.
   - You ask pertinent questions and pinpoint areas for personal improvement in cross-cultural communication.
   - You’re able to interact respectfully with people from different cultures.
   - ATTITUDES: You’re curious about other cultures and fascinated about behavioral patterns around the world. You’re eager and motivated to improve your cross-cultural abilities, and you enjoy the process of adapting your behavior to be more effective in new environments.

**The 7 Core Competencies & How to Apply Them Globally**

There’s a basic set of core competencies that is widely used by hiring managers across North America. At first glance, these skill areas may not appear global in nature, but by looking closely, we can see that each competency is directly impacted and enriched by considering a global view.

1. **Critical Thinking & Problem Solving**
   You’re able to apply sound reasoning to analyze issues, make decisions and overcome problems. You can obtain and interpret knowledge, facts and data, while possibly demonstrating originality and inventiveness in the process.

   **What does this look like in a global context?**
   - You analyze the needs of cross-cultural managers and teams – and adapt your processes to deliver results accordingly.
• You analyze and solve problems within the framework of the host culture, while balancing the needs of the multicultural team.
• You are always thinking about cross-cultural communication and relationships and adapting your behavior to achieve goals.
• ATTITUDES: You have a positive, problem-solving attitude and you stay observant. You enjoy the process of seeking to understand what the cross-cultural team needs from you so that you deliver the best solutions.

2. Oral & Written Communications
You can articulate ideas clearly and effectively to people inside and outside the organization, in both written and oral formats. You have public speaking skills, and are able to write and edit memos, letters and complex technical reports.

What does this look like in a global context?
• You quickly pick up on nuances of oral and written communication when working in intercultural teams.
• You’re perceptive, and you know how to adapt your oral and written communication style to suit various cross-cultural situations.
• You’re confident in video and phone meetings with colleagues and managers from other cultures.
• Depending on who you speak with, and the issues on the table, you know when to make a video call to promote interpersonal relationships and when to rely on the written word to communicate.
• You’re quickly able change your approach to socialization and humor depending on the norms of the culture you’re working with.
• When working with intercultural teams, language fluency may vary throughout the team. You know how to write and speak clearly and precisely in language that everyone from your team understands.
• You’re willing to use foreign terms and speak in your host country’s language whenever possible.
• ATTITUDES: You nurture curiosity when it comes to learning about foreign communication styles. You’re motivated and eager to adapt in order to improve your communication abilities, and are willing to learn foreign terms and languages to improve rapport and interaction.

3. Teamwork & Collaboration
You can build collaborative relationships with colleagues and customers representing diverse populations. You’re able to work within a team structure and can negotiate and manage conflict.

What does this look like in a global context?
• When working as part of an international or intercultural team, you quickly recognize and understand the various management styles and modify your behavior accordingly.
• You take steps to recognize ways in which your home culture might promote or inhibit others from fully participating, and modify your behavior accordingly.
• You objectively recognize your own cultural baggage and how it might impact your approach to teamwork. You also recognize the cultural context of others and understand how that will impact their work styles.
• You’re comfortable collaborating in diverse teams.
• You easily adapt your approach to workplace hierarchy, goal-setting and project management to suit foreign and intercultural contexts. In cultures where junior workers are expected to take initiative, you become proactive. In cultures with stricter hierarchical structures, you comfortably let the manager take the lead.
• ATTITUDES: You’re open-minded and able to negotiate, share ideas and encourage others to share theirs. You enjoy hearing and sharing insights about cultural differences and are willing to recognize the impact of your own cultural norms on your approach to collaboration.

4. Digital Technology
You’re able to use technology ethically and efficiently to solve problems, complete tasks and accomplish goals. You learn and adapt to new technologies quickly.

**What does this look like in a global context?**
- You understand that international business relationships rely heavily on technology, and you know the ins and outs of every relevant platform and program.
- You harness the power of technology to successfully manage work relationships across time zones.
- You’re a quick learner, able to dive in and learn new programs and systems quickly. You’re comfortable adapting your workflow according to your manager’s style.
- **ATTITUDES:** You have a positive approach to learning about new tools and platforms. You are willing to modify your use of technology in accordance with the standards of your host company, which could include reverting to older or simpler technologies to suit the technical constraints of your colleagues.

### 5. Leadership

You’re able to leverage the strengths of others to achieve common goals and use interpersonal skills to coach and develop others. You know how to assess and manage your emotions and those of others. You use empathy to guide and motivate team members. You’re able to organize, prioritize and delegate work.

**What does this look like in a global context?**
- You’re able to coach your home team and host country team to understand each other’s perspective and working style. You can adapt your leadership style to meet your teams’ various expectations.
- You have the skills to guide others and can easily recognize cultural cues and adapt your behavior to be an effective leader in cross-cultural environments.
- You understand the sensitivities and motivations that drive workers in different cultures. As such, you take steps to avoid conflict and know how to manage it when it arises.
- You can manage your emotions and help others to manage theirs.
- You communicate often and clearly to keep your team on track to reach stated goals. You know when and how to reward workers for their successes, according to the cultural environment.
- **ATTITUDES:** You don’t shy away from the challenges involved in cross-cultural work teams. You nurture a positive, can-do attitude when managing expectations across diverse teams, and you value the unique approaches of individual team members.

### 6. Professionalism, Work Ethic & Productivity

You demonstrate personal accountability and effective work habits, such punctuality working productively with others and workload management. You’re able to understand the impact of non-verbal communications on professional work image. You demonstrate integrity and ethical behavior, act responsibly in the interest of the larger community and are able to learn from mistakes.

**What does this look like in a global context?**
- In the event of challenges in working across time zone or cultural boundaries, you quickly take responsibility for issues and actively seek out solutions.
- You are able to apply transferable international skills in order to quickly integrate into teams and become productive.
- You are dedicated to calmly and creatively overcoming the challenges inherent in intercultural work.
- **Low acceptance**
- You have in-depth self-knowledge, which gives you a benchmark from which to understand and modify your behavior in multicultural environments, while still remaining true to your own identity.
- You have a clear understanding of your own values and how they impact your behavior, even when working unsupervised and far from home.
- **If required, you’re able to change your primary focus from the task at hand to focusing on relationship-building, knowing that in some cultures this approach is considered key to achieving long-term organizational goals.**
ATTITUDES: You’re open-minded and comfortable adapting your professional dress, communication style and project flow to match the expectations of your intercultural team and managers. You maintain an awareness of how your home culture impacts your expectations in the workplace. You’re respectful and non-judgmental, willing to take on board any input that managers or colleagues might have about your work style.

7. Career Management

You can identify and articulate your skills, strengths, knowledge and experiences with respect to a given position, and can clearly describe career goals while identifying areas necessary for professional growth. You’re able to navigate and explore job options, pursue opportunities and self-advocate in the workplace.

What does this look like in a global context?

- You’re recognize that developing your international skills is an important component of your total skill set.
- You cultivate and seek out mentors and fellow practitioners who operate in the international realms of your industry.
- You continually study professional cross-cultural techniques and learnings by attending international conferences, courses and doing your own research and reading.
- You’re able to speak professionally about your international skills and have a set of career stories to help you communicate your experience to employers.
- ATTITUDES: You’re motivated to continue your global career development, and you value the cross-cultural workplace experiences you’ve had. You’re willing and eager to constantly pursue cross-cultural learning environments and incorporate those experiences into your professional global profile.

Build Your Professional Profile with Global Competencies

As a young professional, you need to develop the practice of growing your global competencies. No matter where you work, you’ll likely be called upon to navigate intercultural relationships and environments. Now is the time to start recognizing and developing these crucial skill areas. Use the detailed descriptions above to guide your learning objectives on-campus, off-campus and online. Focus on building the muscles you need to grow your global competencies, and your professional profile will start to shine!

Further Reading

The three global competencies represent the basic building blocks of a professional international profile. To dive deeper into what makes an ideal international worker, check out these important articles: [NOTE: Students at our client schools can access these links by registering and/or logging in.]

- Your International IQ
- Skills for Succeeding Abroad
- The Ideal International Profile
- The NA Identity in the International Workplace

When you’re ready to start applying for jobs, you’ll need to focus on how to describe your skill sets and key traits. At this stage, you’ll want to expand your vocabulary beyond the competencies above. Check out these articles for ideas:

- Showcasing International Skills on Your Resume
- An Inventory of Cross-cultural Skills
- The International Elevator Pitch
- Marketing Your International Experience to Employers
EDITOR’S NOTE: The organization NACE developed a set of eight core competencies for career readiness. The seven competencies listed above are drawn from their collection, while the three global competencies represent our suggested expansion of NACE’s original eighth competency, global fluency.]