



The Guides for Equitable Practice: Chapter 1





The Guides for Equitable Practice: Intercultural Competence

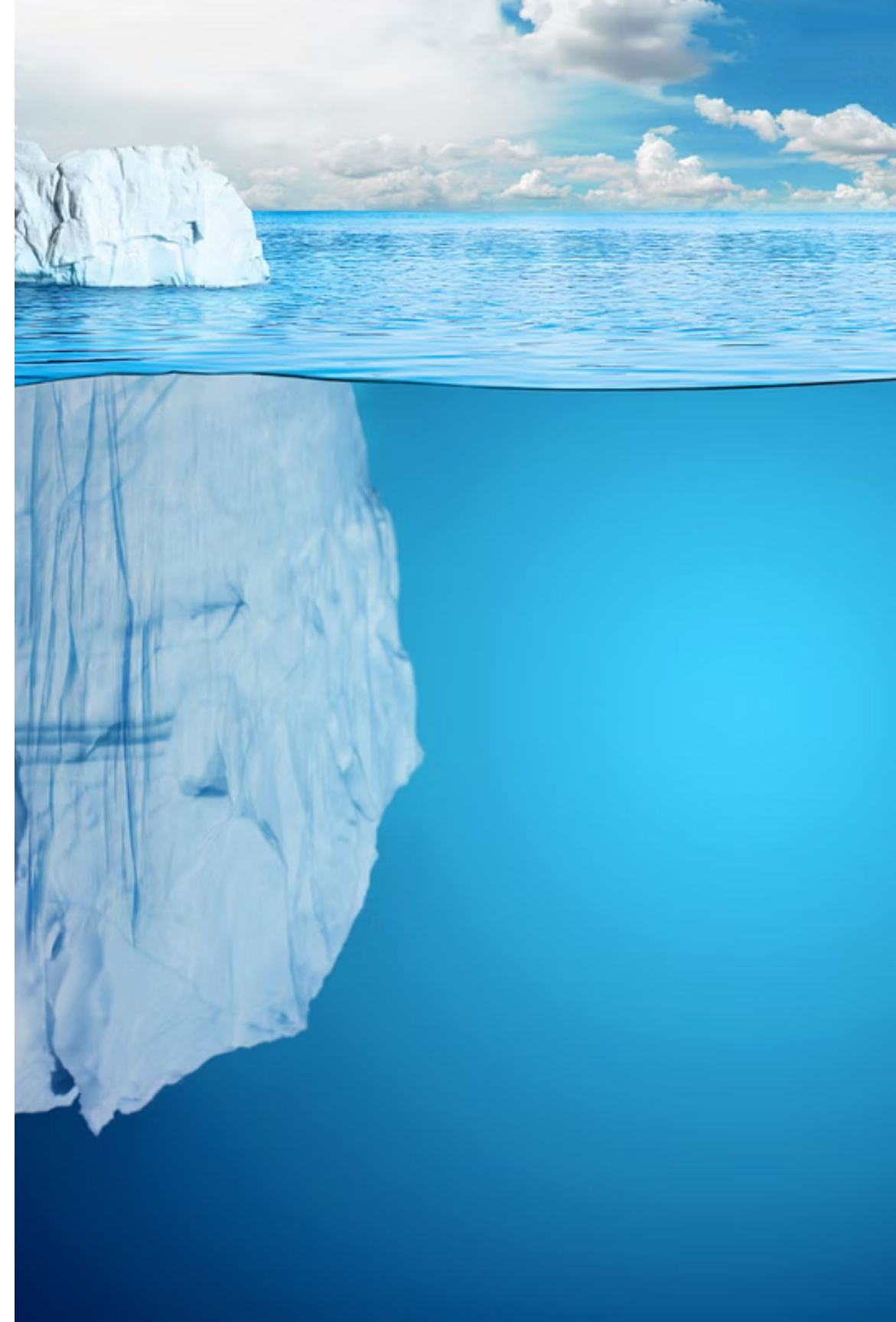
To increase the value of diversity in our profession, we must develop inclusive, equitable workplaces in which unbiased, culturally aware thoughts and actions guide our practice.

This guide outlines the importance of increasing intercultural competence and actively reducing bias in the U.S. architecture workplace against people with nondominant identities—and recommends actions for doing so.



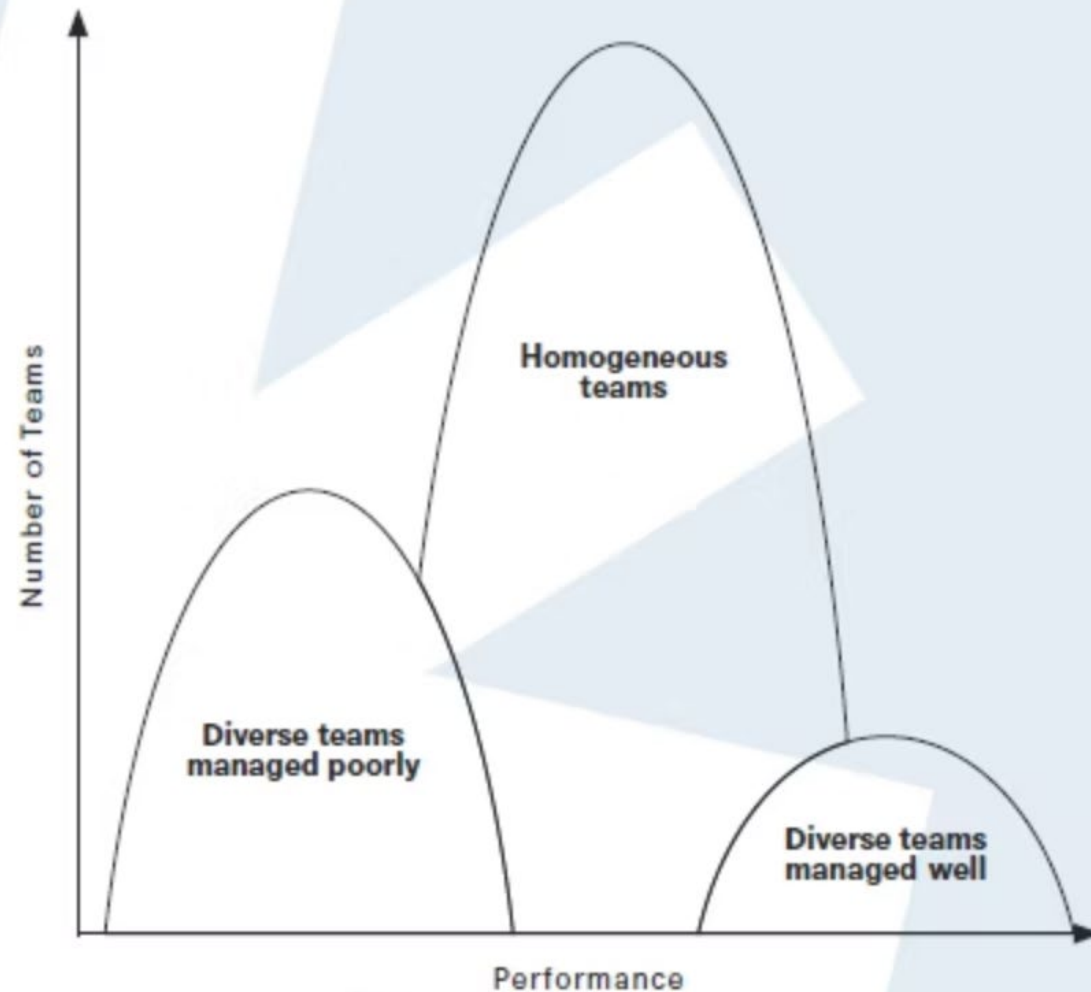
What is intercultural competence?

- The ability of individuals and groups to deeply understand and value cultural differences and to shift or adapt thinking and behaviors to achieve shared goals.
- To value and work across cultures you have to understand intercultural competence.
- What parts of a culture are visible? What is under the surface?



Why intercultural competence matters

- Mixed groups are more productive, creative, and innovative *if* they can leverage everyone's contributions.
- Diverse teams only outperform if well managed.
- Intercultural competence consists of both knowledge and skill that can be learned and practiced.



TEAM PERFORMANCE AND DIVERSITY
Research has shown that well-managed homogeneous teams outperform poorly managed diverse teams, while well-managed diverse teams outstrip all others.¹

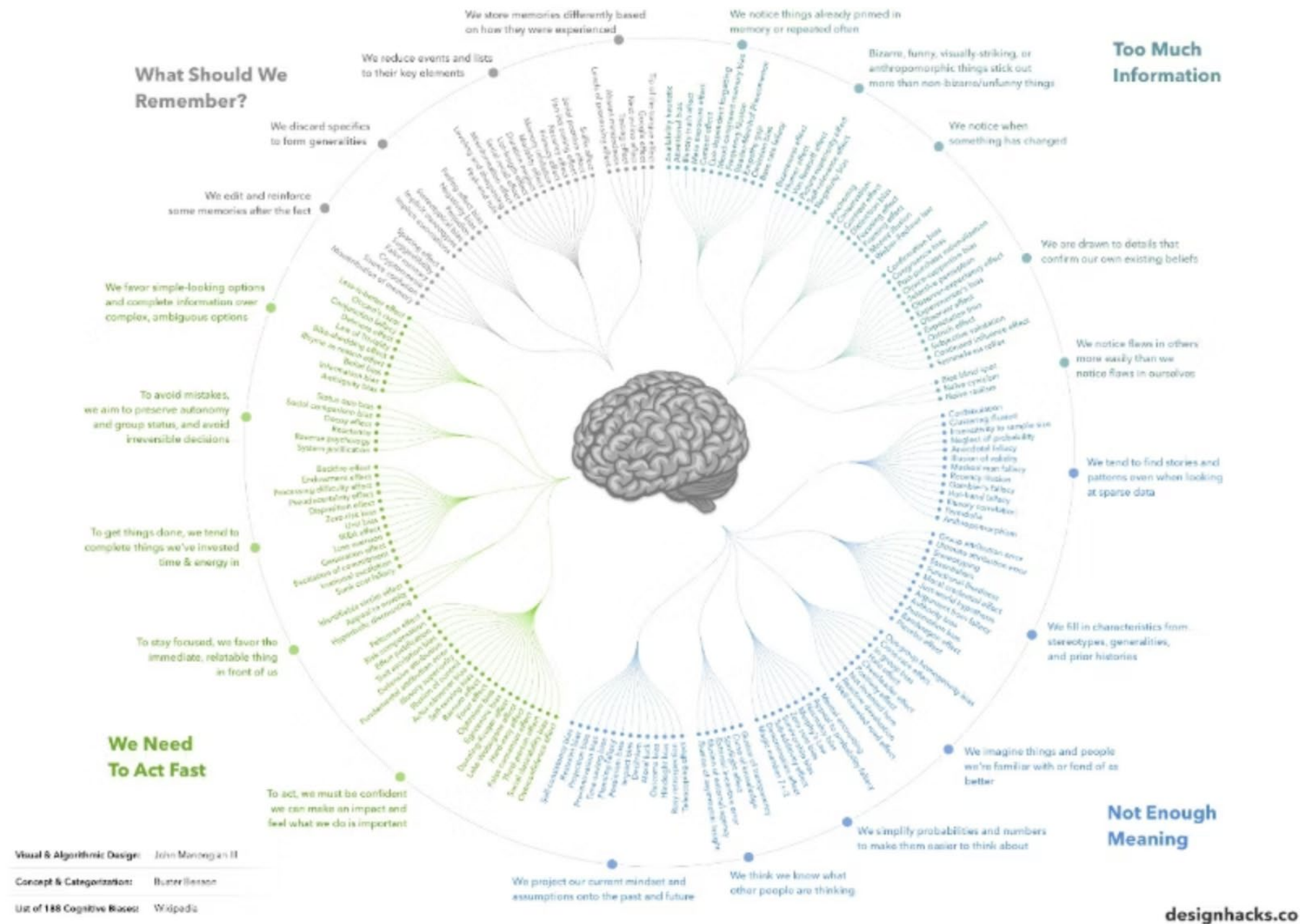


Identity and bias

- Identity: Social categories like gender, race, religion, ability, etc. Everyone has multiple identities.
- Context and situation determine some aspects of identity[[]. Dominant identities are the ones considered to be the “norm.” Nondominant are those considered “minority” or “different.”
- [[]Bias: Unfair preference or prejudice, conscious or unconscious.
- Bias can affect how we perceive all facets of identity both favorably and negatively and can lead to inequities.



COGNITIVE BIAS CODEX



Unpacking bias: Implicit & explicit

Explicit bias: conscious prejudice or attitudes.

Implicit bias: unconscious attitudes/stereotypes that influence decisions.

Examples of bias (some of many)

- Affinity bias
- Confirmation bias
- Halo effect

The cost of unchecked bias

- Individual: stifled creativity, stress, reduced performance.
- Firm: high turnover, reduced talent pools.
- Profession: limited innovation, missed opportunities, systemic injustices.



Individual, Firm, and Profession



What Good Looks Like

- Make a check mark next to practices that you can find in your firm or organization
- A question mark for those that you are not sure
- A minus for those that are missing.

GUIDE 1 * INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCE

WHAT DOES GOOD LOOK LIKE?

Our workplace improves intercultural competence when...

AWARENESS

firm leaders model responsibility for recognizing and improving their attitudes and biases

individuals actively listen to each other

firm leaders and managers embrace individual differences, perspectives, and communication styles

people know and honor preferred names and pronouns

identity groups openly communicate how they are misunderstood or made to feel they do not belong

statements on social inequities are specifically tied to actions and practices

DEVELOPMENT

firm leaders set the standards and expectations for noticing, addressing, and mitigating biases

the firm supports inclusive and balanced dialogue

diverse teams and their leaders receive support for holding complex conversations

employees set goals for increasing their capacity to navigate cross-culturally

the firm offers intercultural learning opportunities

marginalized employees and groups are appropriately reconnected to the organization

COMPLIANCE

unlawful discrimination of any kind is not tolerated

business practices are analyzed for discrimination

firm leaders and members realize what constitutes microaggressions or subtle acts of exclusion, understand their damage, and commit to eliminating them

INFLUENCE

communication patterns and discussions reflect multiple cultural perspectives

challenges are resolved using a variety of approaches

cultural differences are bridged by adapting strategies

individuals with different levels of intercultural competence cross-mentor

allies deeply understand the views of the people with identities different than their own

groups form to discuss and advocate for specific equity, diversity, and inclusion strategies



Actions to build personal competence



Increase cultural self-awareness



Learn and interrupt bias (IAT, IDI)



Build relationships across difference



Understand your organization's cultural patterns



D.I.V.E. Method: Describe, Interpret, Verify, Evaluate



Actions to build firm competence



Audit systems for bias



Review decision making inclusion



Cultivate shared mission and values



Develop leaders' capacity to listen and lead



Consider

I SAW IT OVER AND OVER

I worked at a number of firms of varying sizes, primarily larger (40–500). At larger firms in my experience, there is very, very little diversity. The people of color who were hired were generally hired for clerical, receptionist, mailroom positions—that kind of stuff. I was only one of two black people working at any given time at any firm that I worked at. There were very few Latino/Chicano folks, if any, and very few Asian architects.

So my experience in those situations was always: You feel like an outsider. You are not generally the first person picked for promotion and for opportunities. You're usually bypassed for somebody who is white and male, with a certain look. Even though that person may not know anything or do much work, that person is generally given credit for a lot of work that the team comes up with and lands on an upward track.

That sends a message to people who don't look like that particular white male young employee that that's the hierarchy. Even though you may be doing the work or be smarter or have better ideas, it doesn't matter. There's an understanding that this is the type of person who's going to advance in the profession and that you're supposed to be a cog in the wheel and let this person take the credit for whatever ideas and productivity come out of the teams. I saw that over and over again.

It was obvious to everybody this is how things work in this industry. I knew I was going to have to start my own practice if I was going to live up to my fullest potential, that I wasn't going to get the opportunity to really demonstrate my ability at the level that I was capable of.

— Managing Partner and Firm Owner, Black, Male, 46

Consider scenarios & reflections

Read, discuss in small groups, and share insights



Now what?

Review your thoughts and observations thus far

Develop a SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) goal that will increase your intercultural competence