Cultural competency evolves over time through the process of attaining cultural knowledge, becoming aware of when cultural mores, values, beliefs and practices are being demonstrated, sensitivity to these behaviors is consciously occurring, and one purposely utilizes culturally based techniques in dealing with the workplace and with service delivery.

**Cultural Knowledge**: Familiarization with selected cultural characteristics, history, values, belief systems, and behaviors of the members of another ethnic group (Adams, 1995).

**Cultural Awareness**: Developing sensitivity and understanding of another ethnic group. This usually involves internal changes in terms of attitudes and values. Awareness and sensitivity also refer to the qualities of openness and flexibility that people develop in relation to others. Cultural awareness must be supplemented with cultural knowledge (Adams, 1995).

**Cultural Sensitivity**: Knowing that cultural differences as well as similarities exist, without assigning values, i.e., better or worse, right or wrong, to those cultural differences (National Maternal and Child Health Center on Cultural Competency, 1997).

Definitions used here can be found in:

**Levels of cultural competency**

1. **Destructiveness**: Attitudes, policies and practices destructive to other cultures; purposeful destruction and dehumanization of other cultures; assumption of cultural superiority; eradication of other cultures; or exploitation by dominant groups. The complete erosion of one’s culture by contact with another is rare in today’s society.

2. **Incapacity**: Unintentional cultural destructiveness; a biased system, with a paternal attitude toward other groups; ignorance, fear of other groups and cultures; or discriminatory practices, lowering expectations and devaluing of groups.

3. **Blindness**: The philosophy of being unbiased; the belief that culture, class or color makes no difference, and that traditionally used approaches are universally applicable; a well-intentioned philosophy, but still an ethnocentric approach.

4. **Pre-Competence**: The realization of weaknesses in working with other cultures; implementation of training, assessment of needs, and use of diversity criteria when hired; desire for inclusion, commitment to civil rights; includes the danger of a false sense of accomplishment and tokenism.

5. **Competence**: Acceptance and respect for differences; continual assessment of sensitivity to other cultures; expansion of knowledge; and hiring a diverse and unbiased staff.

6. **Proficiency**: Cultures are held in high esteem; constant development of new approaches; seeking to add to knowledge base; advocates for cultural competency with all systems and organizations.