The Interchange Institute

Intercultural Concepts in a Nutshell

On the following pages you will find very brief descriptions of some core cultural dimensions along with the websites that originated these summaries. A basic familiarity with these concepts will enhance your experience at our Crossing Cultures with Competence workshop, as we will be focusing on how to train and apply the concepts.

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Individualism

Highly individualist cultures believe individual is most important unit

- People taking care of themselves (including immediately family only)
- Self-orientation
- Identity based on individual
- Guilt culture
- Making decisions based on individual needs
- "I" mentality
- Emphasis on individual initiative and achievement
- Everyone has a right to a private life
- The country is more economic development developed / wealthy modern industry, urbanization, greater social mobility/larger middle class, has nuclear family
- Children take care of self as soon as possible
- Disability is a handicap to overcome
- Security through insurance

Collectivism

Highly collectivistic cultures believe group is most important unit.

- Expect absolute loyalty to group (nuclear family, extended family, caste, organization)
- Group orientation
- Decisions based on what is best for the group.
- Identity based on social system
- Shame culture
- Dependence on organization and institutions (Expects organization / institution / group to take care of individual)
- "We" mentality
- Emphasis on belonging
- Private life "invaded" by institution and organizations to which one belongs
- The country is less economic development underdeveloped / poor more traditional agriculture; less social mobility / smaller middle class; has extended family/tribe
- In politics, political power is by interest groups; law/rights depend on group
- At work, relatives preferred in hiring; hiring and promotion take in-group status into account; fewer working hours
- At school, teachers deal with groups; students expected to listen and learn how to do
- Disability is a shame
- Children maintain lifelong contacts with family
- Security through social network

Retrieved from

http://www2.andrews.edu/~tidwell/HofstedeIndividualism.html

High Power Distance

- In the workplace, a supervisor is expected to display his/her authority Employees are generally accepting of the "glass ceiling."
- It's considered a sign of weak character for a boss to ask the opinions of his/her employees
- Parents are treated with respect
- Teachers are authority figures
- Those in authority openly demonstrate their rank.
- Subordinates are not given important work and expect clear guidance from above.
- Subordinates are expected to take the blame for things going wrong.
- The relationship between boss and subordinate is rarely close/personal.
- Politics is prone to totalitarianism.
- Class divisions within society are accepted

Low Power Distance

- A "down-to-earth" supervisor is ideal
- Employees can easily imagine themselves as being future managers
- The boss expects feed back and suggestions from his/her employees
- Children treat parents as equals (which a person from a high power distance culture may consider disrespectful)
- Teachers are regular employees and are expected to treat students respectfully
- Superiors treat subordinates with respect and do not pull rank.
- Subordinates are entrusted with important assignments.
- Blame is either shared or very often accepted by the superior due to it being their responsibility to manage.
- Managers may often socialize with subordinates.
- Liberal democracies are the norm.
- Societies lean more towards egalitarianism.

Retrieved from

http://www.wordiq.com/definition/Power_distance

http://wiki.answers.com/Q/What_is_definition_and_description_about_low_power_distance

Universalism

The universalist, or *rule-based*, approach is roughly: "What is good and right can be defined and ALWAYS applies." Focus is more on rules than relationships.

- Legal contracts are readily drawn up
- A trustworthy person is the one who honors his or her word or contract
- There is only one truth or reality which has been agreed to
- A deal is a deal

When working with Universalists:

- Be prepared for "rational", "professional" arguments and presentations that push for your acquiescence
- Do not take impersonal, "get down to business" attitudes as rude

Particularism

In particularist cultures, far greater attention is given to the obligations of relationships and unique circumstances.

- Focus is more on relationships than on rules
- Legal contracts are readily modified
- A trustworthy person is the one who honors changing mutualities
- There are several perspectives on reality relative to each participant
- Relationships evolve

When working with Particularists:

- Be prepared for personal "meandering" or "irrelevancies" that do not seem to be going anywhere
- Do not take personal, "get to know you" attitudes as small talk

Retrieved from
http://www.stanford.edu/group/scie/Career/Wisdom/univ_par.htm

Monochronic People

- Do one thing at a time
- Concentrate on the job
- Take time commitments (deadlines, schedules) seriously
- Are low-context and need information
- Are committed to the job
- Adhere religiously to plans
- Are concerned about not disturbing others; follow rules of privacy and consideration
- Show great respect for private property; seldom borrow or lend
- Emphasize promptness
- Are accustomed to short-term relationships
- Interpersonal relations are subordinate to present schedule
- Schedule co-ordinates activity
- Breaks and personal time are sacrosanct regardless of personal ties
- Time is inflexible, time is tangible
- Work time is clearly separable from personal time
- Activities are isolated from organization as a whole
- Tasks are measured by output in time

Polychronic People

- Do many things at once
- Are highly distractible and subject to interruptions
- Consider time commitments an objective to be achieved, if possible
- Are high-context and already have information
- Are committed to people and human relationships
- Change plans often and easily
- Are more concerned with those who are closely related (family, friends, close business associates) than with privacy
- Borrow and lend things often and easily
- Base promptness on the relationship
- Have strong tendency to build lifetime relationships
- Present schedule is subordinate to interpersonal relations
- Interpersonal relations co-ordinate activity
- Breaks and personal time are subordinate to personal ties
- Time is flexible, time is fluid
- Work time is not clearly separable from personal time
- Activities are integrated into organization as a whole
- Tasks are measured as part of overall organizational goal

Retrieved from
http://www.ci.uri.edu/ciip/CIIPLeadership/Docs_2007/Monochronic%20and%20Polychronic%20Cultures.pdf

http://hackvan.com/etext/monochronic-vs-polychronic-time.html

High Context

- Groups that have high context communication styles combine verbal and nonverbal messages to convey the entire meaning. A listener must read between the lines and add nonverbal nuances to fully understand the message. It is important to have excellent listening and observational skills when interacting with individuals from a high context culture.
- Less verbally explicit communication, less written/formal information
- More internalized understandings of what is communicated
- Multiple cross-cutting ties and intersections with others
- Long term relationships
- Strong boundaries- who is accepted as belonging vs who is considered an "outsider"
- Knowledge is situational, relational.
- Decisions and activities focus around personal face-to-face relationships, often around a central person who has authority.
- Communication tends to be efficient because the context already says much;
- Roles tend to be clear
- Group projects and team efforts tend to be practicable and effective.
- It tends to promote a shared and coherent moral vision.
- Power and authority are backed by the institutional structures and the traditions, and this can facilitate efficient decision-making and institutional focus.
- Relational and Collectivist
- Intuitive
- Contemplative
- Language valued less

Low Context

- Low context culture relies on the literal and precise meaning of the words they use. They prefer explicit conversations where words convey the bulk of if not the entire message. Groups with this preference prefer written communication as they do not need to include the subtleness of nonverbal communication. Examples of countries with low context cultures are: the United States; Germany; Switzerland; and the Scandinavian countries.
- Rule oriented, people play by external rules
- More knowledge is codified, public, external, and accessible.
- Sequencing, separation--of time, of space, of activities, of relationships
- More interpersonal connections of shorter duration
- Knowledge is more often transferable
- Task-centered. Decisions and activities focus around what needs to be done, division of responsibilities.
- It allows for great flexibility, adaptability and originality
- It can thus release an enormous amount of creative energy and initiative
- Change is much more easily promoted
- The opportunities for the individual to develop and express his or her individuality can be significantly enhanced.
- Linear and Individualistic
- Action-oriented
- Lives are compartmentalized
- Language is often precise

Retrieved from

http://www.culture-at-work.com/highlow.html
http://www.catalyst-for-renewal.com.au/high_and_low_context.htm
http://www.slideshare.net/uncstaff/high-and-low-context-cultures-93-97
http://www.guptaconsulting.com/docs/CrossCulturalSamplePage.pdf

Geert Hofstede's Work

Hofstede developed a model of culture with five dimensions: power distance, individualism vs. collectivism, masculinity, uncertainty avoidance and long term orientation

http://www.geert-hofstede.com/
http://www.clearlycultural.com/geert-hofstede-cultural-dimensions/
http://www.growing-global.com/detail.asp?ID=23

Fons Trompenaars' Work

Trompenaars developed a model of culture with seven dimensions: universalism vs. particularism, individualism vs. collectivism, neutral vs. emotional, specific vs. diffuse, achievement vs. ascription, different attitudes toward time, different attitudes toward the environment

http://www.globalprojectmanagement.org/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=23&Itemid=32

Culture Shock

Culture shock is the trauma one experiences when he/she moves into a culture different from the home culture.

http://www.worldwide.edu/travel_planner/culture_shock.html