



Australian Government



NEW COLOMBO PLAN

Connect to Australia's future - study in the region

CULTURAL AWARENESS



Part 1

Exploring Culture



**WHAT SHOULD I KNOW
ABOUT CULTURE?**

Photo: Christian Roth

Participants of the New Colombo Plan will gain insight into the complex and diverse cultures of the Indo-Pacific and an understanding of the contemporary challenges and opportunities that exist.

This module is designed to guide your understanding of the diversity of people from different countries and backgrounds, especially differences in attitudes and values. This will help you to build relationships and make your interactions with different cultures more effective.

At the conclusion of the module, you will have answers to the following questions.

1. What is the definition of culture?
2. What are the characteristics of culture?
3. What are the layers of culture?
4. What are cultural stereotypes?
5. What is Hofstede's Cultural Dimension model?

EXPLORING CULTURE

CULTURE DISTINGUISHES THE MEMBERS OF ONE GROUP OF PEOPLE FROM ANOTHER

Geert Hofstede, a well-known Dutch researcher of culture, has defined culture as "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group or category of people from another."

Source:

Hofstede. G, Hofstede. G.J and Minkov. M;
'Cultures and Organisations: Software of the Mind' McGraw Hill, 2011, p.6.

Sam
New Colombo Plan Scholar to Hong Kong

"I would define culture as the shared characteristics of a common group of people. I think it's shared patterns, interactions and behaviours and cognitive constructs. It's the shared understandings which are mobilised through shared socializations. Ultimately, I think it's a sense of identity that a particular group of people feel and it's unique to those kind of people."

Maria
New Colombo Plan Scholar to the Republic of Vanuatu

"I define culture as the lens through which we make meaning from. I think it is the way that we make sense of the past the present and the future. I think it's the traditions that define us and are carried on and passed for future generations. It's also the lifestyles that we choose in our present moment to live through. But it's also the values and the goals that we set for future generations. I believe that culture is something that encompasses all the ways that we behave, think and talk to other people."



WHAT ARE THE CHARACTERISTICS

OF CULTURE?

Photo: Khunham Kaung

“

My country is a majority Buddhist country so we believe in Buddhism and we have many ethnic groups. According to statistics we have 135 ethnic groups ...they all are different, they have their own languages, they have their own cultures, they even have their own beliefs.

”

Khunham Kaung, Australia Awards Scholar

"I would describe the culture of my country it's the way you talk, the way you dress, the way you communicate to people and what you believe."

Myanmar is one of the largest countries in Southeast Asia. It is made up of 135 ethnic groups and sub-groups, many with their own language and distinct traditions and cultures, including their own unique festivals, style of dress, and music.

Despite different ethnic and religious backgrounds there are values that can be attributed to most people in the country.

Culture is a way of thinking shared by individuals in a specific society. This way of thinking is based on specific attitudes, norms, and values that is reflected in the behaviour of individuals. The study of culture has led to an understanding of the key characteristics.

Although cultural groupings may change over time, notions about the world and attitudes toward other people may remain constant. Here is a list of the key characteristics of culture.

1 CULTURE IS SOCIAL

Culture is a product of social interaction. No person can acquire culture without associating with others.

2 CULTURE IS SHARED

Culture is shared by members of a group. It guides socially appropriate behaviour within the group.

3 CULTURE IS LEARNED

Culture is learned behavior by living in a group. The process of learning culture is mostly unconscious. We learn culture from families and friends. We also learn from society through education, institutions and media.



4 CULTURE IS IDEALISTIC

Culture is the collective sum of ideals, values and norms held by individuals of a society.

5 CULTURE IS TRANSMISSIVE

Culture exists as a continuous and spontaneous process. It is transmitted from one generation to another, and from one's elders, teachers, and others. Culture gradually accumulates over time. Language is the main vehicle of perpetuating culture.

6 CULTURE IS VARIABLE

Culture varies from society to society and group to group. Culture varies from group to group within the same society. There are subcultures within a culture.

7 CULTURE IS DYNAMIC

Culture is not constant. It changes as the group interacts with other cultures and adapts to changing environments.



Photo: Christoffe Gargiulo

EXAMINING THE

LAYERS OF CULTURE

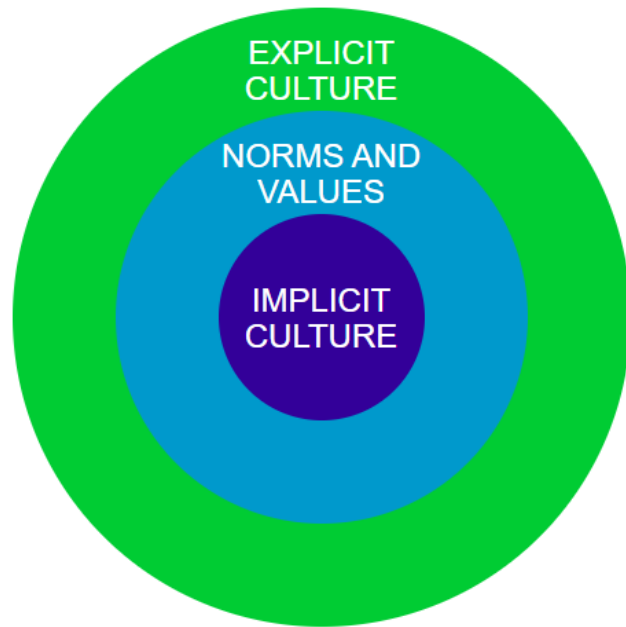
**WE ARE COLLECTIVELY PROGRAMMED
BY OUR CULTURE**

We are collectively programmed by our culture as we learn and grow up. We first learn about our culture within our family. Our parents, older siblings and our wider family teach us how to speak, how to behave, how not to behave, how to make sense of the world around us, what to value and not value.

EXAMINING THE CULTURAL ONION

Some aspects of culture are visible, but culture is often based on values, beliefs and assumptions of a society that are difficult to observe. Because of these internalised influences, culture can be compared to an onion with multiple layers.

Knowing how the layers of culture influence our consciousness, helps us understand our behaviours.



The outer layer: explicit culture

The outer layer is what most people associate with culture: the language, food, clothes, music, buildings and the communication style i.e. the use of body language and facial expressions.

The middle layer: 'norms and values'

The middle layer is the norms and values of a community. Values and norms structure the ways people behave in a particular culture. They guide what is right and wrong. They are not directly visible but influence what is observable.

The inner layer: implicit culture

The inner layer is the core of 'culture' and consists of the basic assumptions and beliefs of a society. They are very difficult to recognise, but are the key to understanding a culture.

REFLECTION

Our culture surrounds us every day. Sometimes we can struggle to identify which of our behaviours have been culturally shaped.

Using knowledge of your culture as a reference point consider the following questions:

1. What parts of your culture have become the way you do things and what you consider normal?
2. How do religious beliefs influence your life?
3. Which parts of your culture have you adapted to suit your individual personality and circumstances?



**EXAMINING THE
CULTURAL ICEBERG**

Photo: Kevin Hadfield

**SOME ASPECTS OF CULTURE ARE
VISIBLE WHILE SOME ARE DIFFICULT
TO OBSERVE**

Like an iceberg, some aspects of culture are visible, but culture is often internal and may be difficult to observe, such as the values, beliefs and assumptions.

Activity: Examining the cultural iceberg

Samoan people are known for their big smiles and friendly personalities – they will warmly welcome everyone they meet. But according to cultural research these behaviours are just the tip of a cultural iceberg.

On the cultural iceberg, what lies below the waterline drives and contributes to those elements which we see above the waterline. To understand what we see at the tip of the iceberg, we need to delve below the waterline and explore the contributing factors.

GENERALISATIONS CANNOT APPLY TO EVERY PERSON WITHIN A CULTURAL GROUP

FACTORS	ABOVE THE WATERLINE FACTOR	BELOW THE WATERLINE FACTOR
language	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
values	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
food	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
learning styles	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
family attitudes	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
hierarchy	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
dress	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
beliefs	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
music / rituals	<input checked="" type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
assumptions	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
attitudes	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>
expectations	<input type="radio"/>	<input checked="" type="radio"/>



GENERALISATIONS AND

STEREOTYPES

Photo: Maria Phuong Thi Nguyen

GENERALISATIONS CANNOT APPLY TO EVERY PERSON WITHIN A CULTURAL GROUP

Understanding the patterns or common characteristics of a culture can help us to hypothesise or guess what we may encounter when we interact with another culture. These generalisations are a necessary part of cross-cultural communication as they can help us to anticipate and make sense of the new information we experience in intercultural situations.

Generalisations will change as we gain new knowledge or have new experiences. They must remain flexible. Generalisations cannot apply to every person within a cultural group.

WHAT ARE CULTURAL STEREOTYPES?

Stereotypes categorise all members of a group as having the same characteristics and ignores individual differences. They are unlikely to change when exposed to new information about the group or when meeting an individual who does not match the stereotype.

Stereotypes are retained in our subconscious mind. They are a reflection of bias and may interfere with our efforts to understand other cultures.

Maria

New Colombo Plan Scholar to the Republic of Vanuatu

“I most definitely think you can stereotype a culture, especially when there are so many cultures that make up that national culture as well. I surprised some people when I went to Vanuatu, because I'm not that blue eyed blonde girl that people stereotypically expect.

For example, when I was in Pentecost Island, I was constantly referred to as Miss Sissy. So, they called me Miss Sissy and what that meant was 'white woman'. And that was the only word that they had to call a foreigner and naturally with my Asian ethnicity, overtime I gradually got tanner over the weeks. And that was when the students and the children at the school that I was teaching in would start asking their parents, why is the Miss Sissy brown?

So, in that aspect I was breaking the stereotypes that they expected of me. But I think it's very common for Australians or any visitors coming to Vanuatu to hold onto stereotypes as well.”

Laura

New Colombo Plan Scholar to Japan

“I think the culture in Japan, it's very structured. In some ways, it's rigid, but in some ways it's very hard to understand and induct to. Even just talking to people, there's multiple different levels of language you can use to indicate respect or closeness. I did have some challenging experiences because I do speak Japanese and I was taking my university courses in Japanese, so there wasn't really a language barrier. I assumed I could assimilate into the culture and I think over time I came to realise that that was not the case.

So, as an example, I would call up and reserve at a restaurant and I would turn up with my friends, we'd speak to the server in Japanese, sit down and then they would come out and bring Japanese menus for all of my friends, and then hand me a special English menu. Yes, I was definitely a Gaijin in my host country, which is a shortened term for foreign person.”



INTERCULTURAL

RESEARCH

Photo: Kevin Evans

**GENERALISATIONS CANNOT APPLY TO
EVERY PERSON WITHIN A CULTURAL
GROUP**

WHAT IS HOFSTEDE'S CULTURAL DIMENSION MODEL?

Hofstede's Cultural Dimension model is a framework for cross-cultural communication. It helps you understand your personal assumption about what is normal by differentiating culture into six independent dimensions. In Hofstede's model each country is scored on the scale from low to high. However, the scores are relative, in that we are all human and simultaneously we are all unique. In other words, culture can only be used meaningfully by comparison.



The analysis of Geert Hofstede led him to develop the first empirical model of the dimensions of national culture. The cultural dimensions represent independent preferences for one state of affairs over another that distinguish countries (rather than individuals) from each other.

HOFSTEDE'S CULTURAL DIMENSION MODEL

1 POWER DISTANCE

This dimension expresses the degree to which a society handles inequalities among people.

2 INDIVIDUALIST VERSUS COLLECTIVE ORIENTATION

This dimension expresses the degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups.

3 MASCULINITY VERSUS FEMININITY

In this dimension, masculinity is defined as a preference in society for achievement, heroism, assertiveness and material rewards for success. Its counterpart represents a preference for cooperation, modesty, caring for the weak and quality of life.

4 UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE

This dimension expresses the degree to which the members of a society feel uncomfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity.

5 SHORT-TERM VERSUS LONG-TERM ORIENTATION

This dimension expresses the connection of the past with the current and future actions/challenges.

6 INDULGENCE VERSUS RESTRAINT

This dimension expresses the degree of freedom that societal norms give to people in fulfilling their human aspirations.

THE VALUES OF A SOCIETY'S CULTURE WILL AFFECT BEHAVIOUR



EXPLORING THE KEY

CULTURAL DIMENSIONS

Photo: Josh Estey

Hofstede's cultural dimensions shows the effects of a society's culture on the values of its members and how these values relate to behaviour. The following are three key dimensions of Hofstede's framework that will help your cross-cultural communication.

Power Distance

This dimension expresses the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. The fundamental issue here is how a society handles inequalities among people.

- People in societies exhibiting a large degree of Power Distance accept a hierarchical order in which everybody has a place and which needs no further justification.
- In societies with low Power Distance, people strive to equalise the distribution of power and demand justification for inequalities of power.

LOW POWER DISTANCE (EGALITARIAN)	HIGH POWER DISTANCE (HIERARCHICAL)
➤ There should be a minimum of inequality since it can exploit others	➤ Inequality is unavoidable and everyone has the place they deserved
➤ If there is a hierarchy in an organisation it is only for the sake of convenience	➤ Hierarchy in an organisation reflects natural differences
➤ People who are superiors or subordinates are all the same	➤ Superiors or subordinates are different kinds of people
➤ Everyone should enjoy the same privileges; there should be no status symbols	➤ Power-holders are entitled to privileges and status symbols
➤ Subordinates should be consulted	➤ Subordinates should be told what to do
➤ Individuality is to be respected	➤ Authority is to be respected
➤ The manager should be a resourceful democrat	➤ The manager should be a benevolent autocrat

Individualist versus group orientation

The one side of this dimension, called 'Individualism', can be defined as a preference for a loosely-knit social framework in which individuals are expected to take care of only themselves and their immediate families.

Its opposite, 'Collectivism', represents a preference for a tightly-knit framework in society in which individuals can expect their relatives or members of a particular group to look after them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty. A society's position on this dimension is reflected in whether people's self-image is defined in terms of "I" or "we."

COLLECTIVIST	INDIVIDUALIST
<ul style="list-style-type: none">> 'We' mentality	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> 'I' mentality
<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Identity is based on one's social group	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Identity is based on the individual
<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Decisions are primarily made according to what is best for the group	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Decisions are based primarily on individual needs
<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Relationships prevail over the task	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Tasks prevail over relationships
<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Focus is on belonging to an organisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Focus is on individual initiative and achievement
<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Values differ according to the group (particularism)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">> Value standards apply to all (universalism)

Short-term versus long-term orientation

Every society has to maintain some links with its own past while dealing with the challenges of the present and the future. Societies prioritise these two goals differently. Societies which score low on this dimension, for example, prefer to maintain time-honoured traditions and norms while viewing societal change with suspicion. Those with a culture which scores high, take a more pragmatic approach: they encourage thrift and efforts in modern education as a way to prepare for the future.

SHORT-TERM ORIENTATION (NORMATIVE)	LONG-TERM ORIENTATION (PRAGMATIC)
> Need for achievement, self-determination	> Need for accountability, self-discipline
> Loyalty towards others can vary according to the needs of business	> Develop and maintain lifelong personal networks
> People shall be rewarded according to their abilities	> Large social and economic differences should not be tolerated
> Stress is on short-term profits	> Stress is on future market position
> Managers and employees are in different camps	> Owner-managers and workers share the same aspirations

Sources:

Hofstede.G, Hofstede.G.J and Minkov. M; 'Cultures and Organisations: Software of the Mind' McGraw Hill, 2011

Browaeys. M and Price. R; 'Understanding cross-cultural management, Pearson, 2019

REFLECT ON YOUR PERSONAL ASSUMPTION ABOUT WHAT IS CULTURAL NORMAL



Hofstede's Cultural Dimension model helps you to reflect on your personal assumption about what is normal. Let's examine the observed behaviours in two dimensions:

Power distance:

This dimension expresses the degree to which a society handles inequalities among people.

Individualist versus collective orientation:

This dimension expresses the degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups.

POWER DISTANCE

BEHAVIOUR	EGALITARIAN	HIERARCHICAL
If there is a hierarchy in an organisation it is only for the sake of convenience	<input type="radio"/> ✓	<input type="radio"/>
Hierarchy in an organisation reflects natural differences	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> ✓
Authority is to be respected	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> ✓
Inequality is unavoidable and everyone has the place they deserved	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> ✓
Individuality is to be respected	<input type="radio"/> ✓	<input type="radio"/>

INDIVIDUALIST VERSUS COLLECTIVE

BEHAVIOUR	COLLECTIVIST	INDIVIDUALIST
Tasks prevail over relationships	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> ✓
Focus is on belonging to an organisation	<input type="radio"/> ✓	<input type="radio"/>
Identity is based on one's social group	<input type="radio"/> ✓	<input type="radio"/>
Focus is on individual initiative and achievement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> ✓
Decisions are primarily made according to what is best for the group	<input type="radio"/> ✓	<input type="radio"/>
Decisions are based primarily on individual needs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/> ✓

Always remember this!
 Hofstede's framework will help your cross-cultural communication because it helps you to predict the effects of a society's culture on the values of its members and how these values relate to behaviour.

EXPLORING THE DIFFERENCE:

INDIVIDUALIST VERSUS GROUP ORIENTATION

Individualist versus group orientation examines the loyalty towards oneself and towards the group.

- Individualism can be defined as a preference for a loosely-knit social framework in which individuals are expected to primarily take care of themselves and their immediate families.
- Collectivism represents a preference for a tightly-knit framework in society in which individuals can expect their relatives or members of a particular group to look after them in exchange for loyalty.

**INDIVIDUALIST VERSUS GROUP
EXAMINES LOYALTY TOWARDS
ONESELF AND TOWARDS THE GROUP**

HOW DOES CULTURE INFLUENCE OUR BEHAVIOUR?

Gilan

Australia Awards Scholar from the Republic of Indonesia

“So, I've lived in Jakarta for over ten years, and I think Jakarta is a capital city whereby modernisation and urbanisation has taken place. And I think Australians, particularly if they go to Jakarta, they would feel like it's home, because we share a lot of similarities with Australian culture. Sometimes we mix Bahasa and English as well, so it's not going to be a barrier. It's going to be fun for you to go to Jakarta.”

The culture of my country, Indonesia, is I would say collectivist. We have a very deep sense of community, a very deep sense of 'we-ness' instead of individualism. And I think we put very high-power distance, meaning there is a tendency where we have to pay respect to most people, but most importantly, people who are older than us. The religious beliefs are very integral, if it's not central to the culture of Indonesia, because the majority of Indonesians are Muslims. Therefore, Islam has been very influencing our national culture in general. We do tend to take values from the Quran to be the values that determine what's right and what's wrong in our daily lives.”

Gilan described the importance of religion, respect and family in Indonesia's culture.

Indonesia consists of over 17,500 islands and is the largest Islamic country in the world. The dispersion of the islands means there are also over 300 ethnic groups spread across the Indonesia archipelago. For example, the Javanese population that mostly occupies the island of Java reflect characteristics of Islamic society. While the Balinese population, occupying the Island of Bali, are mostly Hindu.

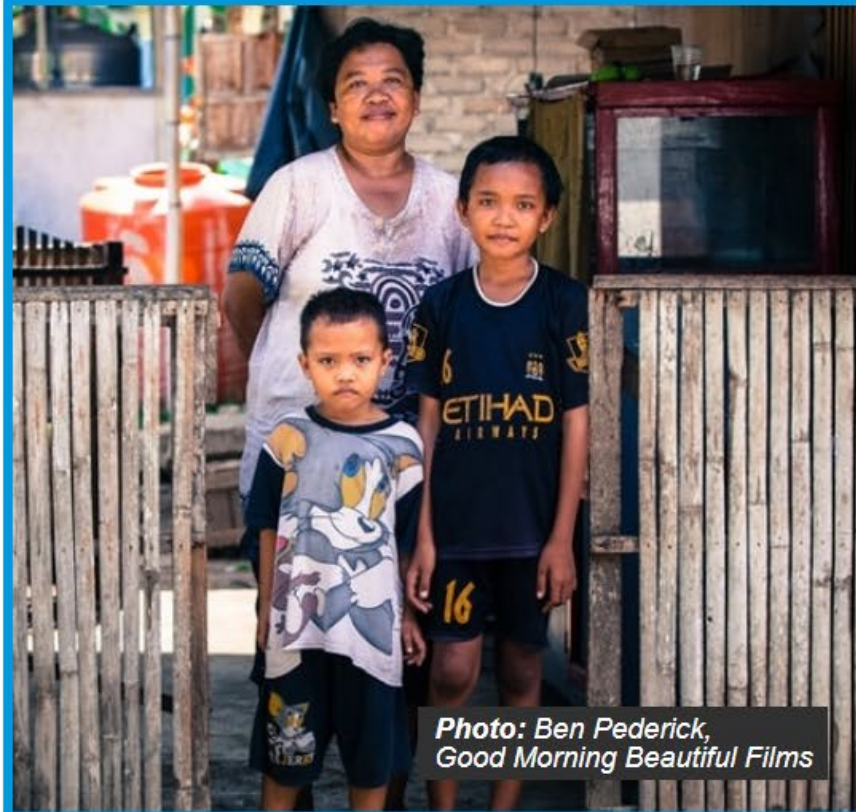
Gilan states that his country has a collective-oriented culture while he agrees that Australia is an example of an individualist culture. A collective-oriented culture is one in which people grow up as members of cohesive groups while an individualist culture is one where people are primarily expected to look after themselves and their immediate family.

The best way to see this difference is to compare the two extremes of these cultural preferences.



Lempuyang Temple, Indonesia. dmf87 / Getty Images

Presented next are six opposing examples of how a specific cultural background will engender explicit behaviours. For each situation most people fit somewhere in between the two extremes.



*Photo: Ben Pederick,
Good Morning Beautiful Films*

Family

INDIVIDUALIST CULTURE

People tend to live in small family units. The concept of 'immediate family' is vertical, comprising parents, children and grandparents, with parents being directly responsible for the upbringing of their children. The 'nuclear family' is limited to parents and children.

COLLECTIVE-ORIENTED CULTURE

The entire group has responsibility for family members. The concept of family is horizontal, with aunts and uncles holding similar status to parents, and cousins considered to be, and often named as, brothers and sisters. Children may be raised by aunts or grandparents, and parents may be located in another city.



Photo: Jim Holmes

Guilt vs. shame

INDIVIDUALIST CULTURE

Individualist cultures are guilt-based. When a person breaks a rule, their private knowledge of their transgression usually results in a feeling of guilt, even if no-one else knows about it. To avoid this, people abide by the law. If caught, they reverse their wrongdoing through corrective behaviour (fines, prison) or through confessing their guilt. People view problems and situations in terms of right and wrong behaviour.

COLLECTIVE-ORIENTED CULTURE

Group-oriented cultures are shame based. When a person breaks a rule, if their behaviour becomes publicly known, it brings shame on their family. Conformity, hospitality, flattery and gift-giving are behaviours which will bring honour to self and family, and avoid shame. Hiding the shame is considered acceptable. People view situations in terms of what would be the honourable thing to do, rather than the right thing to do.



Photo: Jim Holmes

Education

INDIVIDUALIST CULTURE

Individual opinions matter. Students are asked 'What do you think?' and encouraged to express their opinions, whether they agree or disagree, supported with evidence. The conflict which may arise from disagreement is seen as an opportunity to consider divergent views, rather than a risk to be avoided.

COLLECTIVE-ORIENTED CULTURE

Respecting group harmony matters. Individual opinions can create conflict and threaten the cohesion of the group. It is more important for a group to reach consensus and express a collective opinion, or stand behind the opinion of the most senior person within the group: 'We have agreed ...'



Photo: Jim Holmes

Hospitality

INDIVIDUALIST CULTURE

When hosting family or friends, people are given the space to 'help themselves' and 'make themselves feel at home'.

COLLECTIVE-ORIENTED CULTURE

When hosting family or friends, people are looked after, and no-one is left alone. All meals are prepared, transport, excursions and entertainment arranged, and the hosts pay for everything. All activities are shared and guests are accompanied at all times. Guests are highly valued, and the failure to provide and accept hospitality brings shame on the family.



Independence vs. autonomy

INDIVIDUALIST CULTURE

People fear losing their independence and autonomy. This is most evident in elderly people, who resist being looked after by their children or being admitted to retirement villages and nursing homes.

COLLECTIVE-ORIENTED CULTURE

People fear being lonely and isolated. This is most evident in elderly people who want to be looked after by their children and play an active role in raising their grandchildren. This drives the behaviour to maintain harmony, avoid conflict, be loyal, obedient and look after each other.



*Photo: DFAT Save the Children
Elissa Bogos Mirzaei, 2012*

Parenting

INDIVIDUALIST CULTURE

Discipline is based on the individual. A child hears, 'Don't do that or you will be in trouble' and learns there are consequences, but only to him or herself as an individual. Children grow up knowing that they are responsible for their own individual behaviour and its consequences.

COLLECTIVE-ORIENTED CULTURE

Discipline is based on the group. A child hears, 'Don't do that, you will embarrass our family' and learns there are consequences for the whole family. Children grow up knowing that they are responsible for how their behaviour impacts their family and broader in-group, including their school and later on, their place of employment.

EXPLORING THE DIFFERENCE: POWER DISTANCE

The power distance dimension expresses the degree to which the less powerful members of a society accept and expect that power is distributed unequally. The fundamental issue here is how a society handles inequalities among people.

While a defining feature of Australian culture is the egalitarian nature of society, Hofstede's Cultural Dimension model demonstrates how your personal assumption about what is normal will differ across cultures. The best way to see this difference is to compare two extremes of these cultural preferences.

“

In my classroom I noticed that one Australian student used to like put his feet up to the other chair beside him and didn't pay too much attention to the professor and in my country you would be expelled for doing that.

”

Fitri Deliana, Australia Awards Scholar



Photo: Fitri Deliana

Next, let's look at opposing examples of how a specific cultural background will engender explicit behaviours. For each situation most people fit somewhere in between the two extremes.



Education

EGALITARIAN

Questioning and independent thought are valued. Students are encouraged to ask 'Why?' and to have inquiring minds. Individual research, expanding one's knowledge and questioning existing frameworks are seen as positive methods of learning.

HIERARCHICAL

Students are taught it is very important to demonstrate respect for teachers. 'Rigorous debate' with a teacher is considered inappropriate. To challenge their knowledge is considered deeply disrespectful. The wisdom of experts is revered and knowing who they are and being able to quote them is highly prized. Rote learning is widely applied in schools.



*Photo: Ben Pederick,
Good Morning Beautiful Films*

Parenting

EGALITARIAN

Parents and children are more like friends. Children participate in family decision-making.

HIERARCHICAL

Parents are respected and should not be questioned. In some cultures, children are punished for asking 'Why?'



Photo: Rob Maccoll

Workplace status

EGALITARIAN

Status is often ascribed due to talent and ability. It is considered important to recognise and award achievement and promote according to talent. It may be considered discriminatory to even address other issues.

HIERARCHICAL

Status is often ascribed due to wealth, age, education, family background, profession and position. Titles and other status indicators are considered very important. Power is held over people and it is assumed that managers 'have all of the answers'.



Photo: Conor Ashleigh

Decision making

EGALITARIAN

Consultation and consensus are preferred. Everybody will openly express their opinion and all ideas will be considered.

HIERARCHICAL

Clear direction is preferred. People more senior in the hierarchy will advise juniors.



Photo: Conor Ashleigh

Questioning

EGALITARIAN

It is considered appropriate to take responsibility for yourself and question something you don't understand.

HIERARCHICAL

It is considered impolite to question or talk back to someone more senior. To do so would be seen as insulting and result in a loss of face.



Photo: Ness Kerton

Respect

EGALITARIAN

Respect is demonstrated by treating everyone equally.

Language seeks to combat hierarchy. People are called by their first name regardless of status or relationship to the speaker.

HIERARCHICAL

Respect is demonstrated by treating people according to their position and status in relationship to you.

Hierarchy is embedded in language. People are named according to age, position and relationship to the speaker. The use of titles is very important.

HOW DOES CULTURE INFLUENCE OUR BEHAVIOUR?

Sophie
New Colombo Plan Scholar to the Republic of Indonesia

“One of the main things I can remember is that I was visiting a Muslim friend's family in a small town in Java and she was having a family reunion where some of her elderly uncles arrived.

As I was going around the room to greet her family members as is custom in Indonesia, I noticed these uncles were shaking the hands of the younger female cousins and that involved taking their hand and then the younger female cousins putting that to their heart or their head as a sign of respect, and so I was also willing to do that as well as a sign of respect.”



“So I walked up to the Uncle to shake his hand, but then the Uncle just stepped away from me and just bowed. So I was quite embarrassed so I just bowed as well, but my friend then came to me afterwards and explained that it was because I wasn't a related female that's why he wasn't able to shake my hand.

But because I was genuine and I was trying to understand their culture, and I was trying to be respectful, no one was embarrassed, and no one had any ill feelings towards me. So I think the lesson I took for myself from that is that as long as I'm trying to be genuine, and as long as I'm really trying to learn and engage with people from Indonesia, I will always be forgiven for whatever cultural mistake I make.”

REFLECTION

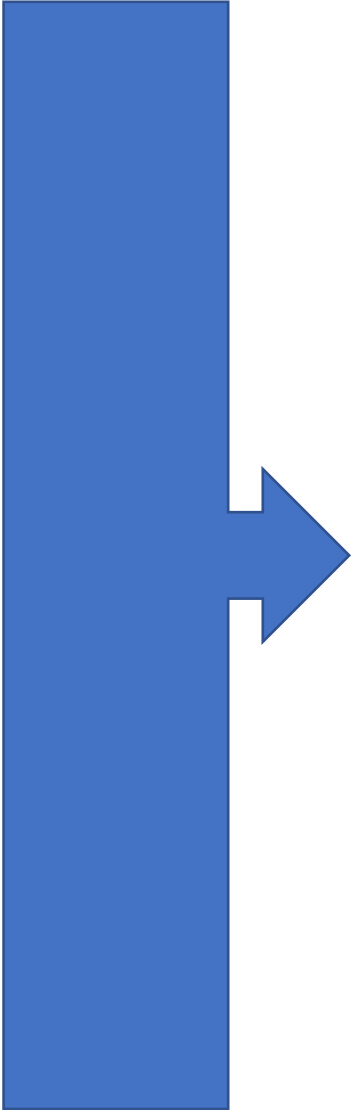
In this example, Sophie recommends 'cultural faux pas' as a good way of learning. If our behaviour is the result of our cultural assumptions, beliefs, values and norms, and if people from another culture share a different set of assumptions, beliefs, values and norms, then we can expect them to behave differently from us.

Before departing on your NCP assignment, learn as much as you can about your host country's culture – this will help reduce the 'cultural faux pas' experience.

Using knowledge of your culture as a reference point, consider the following questions:

- 1. What has your culture taught you as to the appropriate expression of respect?**
- 2. What parts of your culture have become part of the way you do things and what you consider normal?**
- 3. Which parts have you adapted to suit your individual personality and circumstances?**

Let's review



Culture is a way of thinking shared by individuals in a specific society. This way of thinking is based on specific attitudes, norms, and values that is reflected in the behaviour of individuals. Although cultural groupings may change over time, notions about the world and attitudes toward other people may remain constant.

The study of culture has led to an understanding of the key characteristics.

- Culture is a product of social interaction. No person can acquire culture without associating with others.
- Culture is shared by members of a group. It guides socially appropriate behaviour within the group.
- Culture is learned behavior by living in a group. The process of learning culture is mostly unconscious. We learn culture from families and friends. We also learn from society through education, institutions and media.
- Culture is the collective sum of ideals, values and norms held by individuals of a society.
- Culture exists as a continuous and spontaneous process. It is transmitted from one generation to another, and from one's elders, teachers, and others. Culture gradually accumulates over time. Language is the main vehicle of perpetuating culture.
- Culture varies from society to society and group to group. Culture varies from group to group within the same society. There are subcultures within a culture.
- Culture is not constant. It changes as the group interacts with other cultures and adapts to changing environments.

We are collectively programmed by our culture as we learn and grow up. We first learn about our culture within our family. Our parents, older siblings and our wider family teach us how to speak, how to behave, how not to behave, how to make sense of the world around us, what to value and not value.

Some aspects of culture are visible, but culture is often based on values, beliefs and assumptions of a society that are difficult to observe. Because of these internalised influences, culture can be compared to an onion with multiple layers.

Knowing how the layers of culture influence our consciousness, helps us understand our behaviours.

- The outer layer is what most people associate with culture: the language, food, clothes, music, buildings and the communication style i.e. the use of body language and facial expressions.
- The middle layer is the norms and values of a community. Values and norms structure the ways people behave in a particular culture. They guide what is right and wrong. They are not directly visible, but influence what is observable.
- The inner layer is the core of 'culture' and consists of the basic assumptions and beliefs of a society. They are very difficult to recognise but are the key to understand a culture.

Understanding the patterns or common characteristics of a culture can help us to hypothesise, or guess, what we may encounter when we interact with another culture. These generalisations are a necessary part of cross-cultural communication as they can help us to anticipate and make sense of the new information we experience in intercultural situations. Generalisations will change as we gain new knowledge or have new experiences. They must remain flexible. Generalisations cannot apply to every person within a cultural group.

Stereotypes categorise all members of a group as having the same characteristics and ignores individual differences. They are unlikely to change when exposed to new information about the group or when meeting an individual who does not match the stereotype. Stereotypes are retained in our subconscious mind. They are a reflection of bias and may interfere with our efforts to understand other cultures.

Congratulations you have completed
Part 1 – Exploring Culture