

Cultural awareness

SEMESTER 3



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# What is culture?

Culture refers to the shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviors, and artifacts that characterize a group or society. It encompasses everything from language and religion, to education, social norms, and material objects. Culture can also refer to the overall way of life of a particular group or society, including their way of thinking and acting.

# Which cultural aspects would you keep in mind when facing cultural differences?

When we are facing cultural differences, it's important to be aware of and respectful of a few key cultural aspects:

1. Communication styles: Different cultures have different communication styles, and it's important to be aware of these differences to avoid misunderstandings. For example, some cultures value direct and assertive communication, while others prefer indirect and polite communication.
2. Social norms and etiquette: Each culture has its own set of social norms and etiquette, and it's important to be aware of these when interacting with people from different cultures. For example, in some cultures it is considered rude to be late, while in others being late is not considered a big deal.
3. Nonverbal communication: Nonverbal communication, such as body language, facial expressions, and gestures, can vary greatly between cultures. It is important to be aware of these differences to avoid any confusion.
4. Religions and beliefs: Understanding and respecting different religious beliefs and practices is important to build a positive and effective interaction with people from different cultures.
5. History and context: Understanding the history and context of a culture can help you understand their perspective and behaviors. It is important to consider that culture evolves through time.

It is important to keep in mind that every person is unique, and he/she may have different perspectives and experience. We should always show respect and open-mindedness when interacting with people from different cultures.

# What is my culture?

My culture is a combination of Bulgarian and Armenian cultural elements. Bulgaria is a country in Southeast Europe with rich history and unique blend of Slavic, Turkic, and Greek influences. Armenian culture, on the other hand has its roots in the ancient civilization of the Armenian people, which has been shaped by a mix of influences from the Middle East, Asia, and Europe over the centuries.

Bulgarians are warm, emotional, and impulsive people characters of the multi-active cultural type based on the cultural types expressed in the Lewis model.

# Current situation

For this semester we have an Individual project/assignment and a group one as well. For the individual assignment we worked mostly alone but still during classes between other students we shared our knowledge or discoveries during our self-study, while the group project was working as a team where communication was important, either for team tasks or single tasks issues.

Once again, I found myself in a group with people from different cultures. Including:

* One Ukrainian student
* One Fellow Bulgarian student
* One Israelian student
* One Romanian student
* Two Dutch students

Some impression I had from this and previous year from the group projects are that Ukrainian people are quiet. Also, I noticed that Dutch people love to add bread and dough products in their daily meals, another thing that made an impression is that they are very strict on working hours for example if University ends at 16 o’clock they are leaving while Bulgarians are accustomed to work even after working hours if there is more work to be done. Dutch people appreciate sarcasm which we Bulgarians are commonly using some different jokes as well with dark humor or political jokes. For the Romanian student he is from the Balkan, and we share a lot of viewpoints, inside Balkan jokes and we are a lot similar at all. My impression of the Israelian student is that he is hard worker, likes jokes but he is quiet most of the times while doing his work, but I can’t form a cultural impression from him.

# Describe a situation where your interaction with people from cultures other than yours, went different from how you had initially expected it to be?

Once in previous semester during the group project I was left with the impression that Dutch people don’t stay after university hours to finish the work that was started, but they are eager to leave as fast as possible. (Of course, they are some exclusions among Dutch students).

After coming in the Netherlands I was surprised of the lack of night life, clubs and bars most of the week are closed and they don’t work too late except if there is a holiday at that time, as well as shops closing early and that there are few shops that are working until late and almost zero that are 24 hours, while in Bulgaria the night life is more alive and developed you can go at every day of the week in a bar or a club that is working until morning (5-6 a.m.), and there are many non-stop markets (24 hours working shops).

# How would you act in the future when you know that you need to communicate or collaborate with a person from another culture?

I will approach the situation with a respectful and open-minded attitude. I will be aware of and respectful to our cultural difference, I’m going to keep an effective and clear communication as well as researching and understanding our cultural differences so that I won’t disrespect it unintentionally.

# In your project group, what did you do to improve the group communications with respect to cultural differences?

When you have e fellow student from the same country or know the same language, it’s inevitable to communicate between each other either for better communication or we just don’t realize that we switched to it mid-sentence. That’s why whenever someone else is next to us I always talk in language that is understandable for everyone around so that we don’t cut him off the conversation. I am careful with the sarcasm and jokes so that I don’t upset someone or disrespect someone’s culture in a way they don’t like.