

Cultural Awareness Report



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Introduction

The purpose of this document is to provide an overview of my personal experience with intercultural communication. Living in the modern world provides wonderful opportunities to meet people from all over the Globe but often people are fascinated by the glorious façade and don't pay enough attention to the disastrous consequences that mistreating other people's culture may lead to. Cultural awareness has a vital importance in our everyday lives but when it comes to professional communication the bar of caution should be set even higher. Disrespecting other people's culture can be easily caused due to lack of knowledge about the specific culture's bases which can imperceptibly lead to the formation of an aggravating environment resulting in lower quality of work, badly influenced productivity and generally degraded working process. That is the reason why cultural differences should not be taken frivolously and this topic should be a life-long learning journey as its impact on the overall everyday life in the modern world can be both beneficial and fruitful but also it may take a bad turn.

What is a culture?

If you search in the Internet what is the definition of culture you will most certainly encounter something like this: culture is the characteristics and knowledge of a particular group of people, encompassing language, religion, cuisine, music and arts. But what is often overlooked is that it also encapsulates the social habits, the traditions and people's general perception of the world. Another definition of culture might even state that it describes the identity growth of a specific group intertwined with shared patterns of interactions that form the social behaviour of the nation. To sum up, culture has a vast complexity which sometimes is the reason why people don't pay enough attention to its specifics. It is no accident that nowadays there are thousands of study programs which track multi-cultural specifications and try to simplify intercultural communication. After all, when it comes to culture often there is not a right or wrong side – there are just different perceptions influenced by hundreds of years fostering society growth.

Experience with different cultures

In this semester I have the wonderful opportunity to work in a team with people from the Netherlands, Algeria and Columbia. Working with them is a great experience to say the least but inevitably we faced some differences in our cultures along the way. In my opinion we managed to find a good balance in our interactions and during our working process there was always a friendly atmosphere and amity. However, in the beginning we were walking on egg shells as we were not at all familiar with social habits of the rest of the team mates and for example the way they are used to receive feedback or criticism. I can vividly recall a situation from a previous semester where I was not happy with the work done by one of my teammates but I did not know how she may cope with some constructive feedback so I decided to keep my opinion for myself. The results of course were not good as I did not share my ideas and at the end, at our group evaluation we received negative remarks exactly regarding the aspect that I wanted to discuss with the group. That experience taught me that my knowledge and ideas are valuable and even if there is a chance for the other person to perceive my words in a wrong way it's still worth it for me to get to know a little bit the person's culture and find a suitable way to present my feedback and express my opinion.

Another differences that I spotted while working in a multi-cultural team is that some of my team mates of a particular culture really value their free time – needless to say there is nothing wrong with that but it can get in the way of our working process because in a situation where there is an urgent task to be fulfilled during the weekend or late at night it is very unlikely for these people to come to the rescue which would cost some of their spare time. That is understandable, but in my culture, we are used to sacrificing some of our past-time activities in order to achieve good results for the team.

Furthermore, as an abroad studying student I face everyday cultural differences between me and my teachers. A challenge which I had in the beginning of the past couple of semesters is that in my culture there is a very different strictly professional relationship between the teachers and the students. I observed these differences in all kinds of cases starting from small almost insignificant habits like the fact that back we are absolutely forbidden of calling our teacher by their first name to more impactful situations like asking for feedback – of course in my country we can ask for questions after lessons but the teachers are not willing to help that much students especially outside the time-range of their lecture. With that said it may be easier to understand why in the beginning I was wont to ask for feedback only in explicitly rare occasions. Nevertheless, I slowly managed to get used to the local guidelines for communication and I feel comfortable with requesting feedback and having useful long discussions with my teachers about my progress and my growth.

Inferences for future situations

I feel like so far I learnt a lot about multi-cultural communication but I know that definitely I will have a various experience with it my whole life and this learning process will be a life-long journey. What I can without a doubt classify as the biggest lesson that I learnt is that intercultural relations require effort – people can not expect to be aware of every aspect of a foreign culture. A valuable objective which people nowadays should adopt is having an open-minded attitude towards the world. According to a very descriptive and detailed presentation which gives an overview of multi-cultural differences such as social perceptions and cultural mindsets, the key to intercultural communication is not about changing cultures it's about expanding your culture and merge all the positive aspect of each culture. This is called a Global Mindset. *(TEDx Talks, 2014)*

Of course, such fundamental change is easier said than done, and struggles comes along with it, but eventually that's how you grow as a part of the society and that's how the world goes around.

Conclusion

In conclusion I would like to mention that every culture has its own beautiful and remarkable characteristics which makes intercultural communication even easier as long as you have curiosity to learn about other people and of course patience because such level understanding takes time. A good rule which I established in my mindset after dealing with a diversity of multi-cultural situations is that I don't need to overstep myself in order to please or not to affect negatively a person from another culture – it is enough to have an open mindset and respect for the unknown. I am looking forward to my future encounters with different cultures and I am happy that my current experience helped me to get acquainted with the importance of proper behaviour in such situations.

References

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