

Cultural Awareness Document



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Due to the global nature of software engineering, cultural awareness becomes a critical point. The possibility of a software engineer interacting with people from other cultural backgrounds is very high. The most valuable skill is understanding and accepting the differences, because this change can impact the work quality and productivity significantly.

Culture refers not only to traditions, values and beliefs but also to behavior and way of communicating, which are the main aspects when working in a group with different people. In our group we have many representatives of different cultures - Canadian, Dutch, Bulgarian and Romanian. Even though we come from different countries, we have similarities based on different aspects such as:

- *Geographical regions*: most of the group members come from the Balkan region in Europe where they share historical backgrounds and communication style which is more indirect. Eastern Europe is characterized with being more forceful and supportive of co-workers, Germanic Europe - result-oriented and value competition.
- *Religious similarities*: We are all Christians.
- *Language similarities*: English and Dutch come from the Germanic language family.
- *Goal*: We share the same goal of contributing to the project and getting the work done.

However, as a multicultural group we face difficulties sometimes maintaining clear communication, which can harm the workflow. Even though we come from all around the world, the main thing we focus on is respecting each other no matter the obstacles we find along the way.

According to the Lewis Model for cultural types Bulgaria and Romania are in between the multi-active and reactive variations meaning they are people-oriented, have a flexible scheduling and engage in expressive and emotional communication. Canada is right between the reactive and linear-active variations making Canadians task-oriented as well as people-oriented, punctual and respectful listeners. The Netherlands however is leaning very close to the linear-active side because they are punctual, direct, like privacy and have limited body language.

One difference that we encounter sometimes is that we all have different holidays. Dutch people and Canadians are often Catholic Christians, meanwhile Bulgarians and Romanians-Orthodox. That means that not only do we have different holidays, we also sometimes have the same holiday at a different date such as Easter. National holidays are also by no surprise different.

The way we come from countries far from each other, we as individuals receive and give feedback in different manners. Dutch people are known for their directness towards others, while a Bulgarian person could feel criticized and unmotivated, mistaking the words for rudeness.

The last main difference we have is punctuality. In Canadian and Dutch culture, being on time is really important while being late is really frowned upon. That is not as strict in Romania and Bulgaria. By no means does that indicate that every Balkan person is always late, but rather that being a few minutes late is not a big deal.

Some challenging moments we have come across when working in the group is due to the language barrier. We communicate in English which is not the first language for most of us, making it sometimes difficult to keep the flow going in English for too long.

As mentioned earlier, the main focus when working together is respecting each other which means honoring each of our differences. During the beginning we had a lot of talks outside of group work in order to get to know each other and get used to each other. We have learned a lot about how each member expresses themselves and using that knowledge we have great respect for each other and our cultures. Most importantly, we have made our way of working easier and more pleasant.