**Cross Cultural Sensitivity – Reading Material**

**Overview:**

Intercultural understanding is important for in many different contexts. The course will encourage participants to explore their own assumptions and preconceptions about other cultures, as well as creating awareness of their own cultural heritage and how it affects their world views, values and assumptions. The course will also explore aspects of cultural values and cultural differences which may affect interactions with international clients and colleagues

**Objectives:**

This reading material is designed to help you:

* Define the key terms relating to 'culture' and apply this knowledge to discuss cultural difference in a positive way
* Identify the cultural values that cause cultural differences
* Understand how awareness about other cultures and cultural differences can improve your interaction in a multicultural environment
* Use the knowledge you have acquired to further develop your cultural sensitivity.

**GEERT HOFSTEDE AND CULTURAL-DIMENSIONS THEORY—AN OVERVIEW**

# Geert Hofstede is a Dutch social psychologist and anthropologist who has studied the interactions between cultures. He has received numerous awards for his intercultural research all over the world. One of his most notable accomplishments is the establishment of the cultural dimensions theory, which provides a systematic framework for assessing the differences between nations and cultures.

# The theory is based on the idea that value can be placed upon six cultural dimensions. These are power (equality versus inequality), collectivism (versus individualism), uncertainty avoidance (versus uncertainty tolerance), masculinity (versus femininity), temporal orientation, and indulgence (versus restraint). Hofstede gathered most of his data on world cultural values through surveys conducted by IBM, a US-based technology and consulting firm. He then proposed a scoring system using a scale from 1 to 120.

# Power-Distance index: According to Hofstede, “power distance is the extent to which the less powerful members of organizations and institutions (like the family) accept and expect that power is distributed unequally.” This dimension does not measure the level of power distribution in a given culture, but rather analyzes the way people feel about it. Low power-distance scores mean that a culture expects and accepts that power relations are democratic and members are viewed as equals. High power-distance scores mean that less powerful members of the society accept their place and realize the existence of formal hierarchical positions.

# Individualism vs. Collectivism: “The degree to which individuals are integrated into groups.” This dimension has no political connotation and refers to the group rather than the individual. Cultures that are individualistic place importance on attaining personal goals. In collectivist societies, the goals of the group and its wellbeing are valued over those of the individual.

# Uncertainty-Avoidance index: “A society’s tolerance for uncertainty and ambiguity.” This is a dimension that measures the way a society deals with unknown situations, unexpected events, and the stress of change. Cultures that score high on this index are less tolerant of change and tend to minimize the anxiety of the unknown by implementing rigid rules, regulations, and/or laws. Societies that score low on this index are more open to change and have fewer rules and laws and more loose guidelines.

# Masculinity vs. Femininity: “The distribution of emotional roles between the genders.” This dimension measures the level of importance a culture places on stereotypically masculine values such as assertiveness, ambition, power, and materialism as well as stereotypically feminine values such as an emphasis on human relationships. Cultures that are high on the masculinity scale generally have more prominent differences between genders and tend to be more competitive and ambitious. Those that score low on this dimension have fewer differences between genders and place a higher value on relationship building.

# Long-term Orientation vs. Short-term Orientation: This dimension describes a society’s time horizon. Short-term oriented cultures value traditional methods, take a considerable amount of time to build relationships, and in general view time as circular. This means the past and the present are interconnected and that which cannot be done today can be done tomorrow. The opposite of this is long-term orientation, which sees time as linear and looks to the future rather than the present or the past. It is goal-oriented and values rewards.

# Indulgence vs. Restraint: This dimension measures a culture’s ability to satisfy the immediate needs and personal desires of its members. Those that value restraint have strict social rules and norms under which satisfaction of drives is regulated and discouraged.

Hofstede stresses that the cultural dimensions are only a framework to help assess a given culture and thus better guide decision making. There are other factors to take into consideration such as personality, family history, and personal wealth. The proposed dimensions cannot predict individual behaviors and do not take into account individual personalities.

# How to Communicate Well With People from Other Cultures

# To build good relationships with people from other cultures, it is essential to learn how to communicate with them verbally and non-verbally. You can make things easier by also learning about their culture and practicing tolerance. Armed with the knowledge of how to communicate effectively, you can learn from people from other cultures and share yours with them.

# Learn about the culture beforehand.

# A little knowledge can go a long way. If you have time before embarking on a trip or meeting with someone from another culture, try to take time to learn the basic “do’s and dont’s” of that culture.

# Communicate Well With People from Other Cultures

# Expect differences. Different cultures will speak at different volumes, be more or less direct in showing emotion, may or may not expect to engage in “small talk,” and exhibit other dissimilarities in communication

# Understand hierarchies.

# When communicating with a different culture, there may be unwritten rules about social hierarchy that you are not used to.For instance, you may come from a culture where men and women are expected to communicate equally with each other, but may have to interact with someone from a culture where men may do more talking in mixed company. Similarly, you may be communicating with someone who expects that a younger person should let an older person do most of the talking, while you expect people across age groups to communicate equally.

# Be upfront about difficulties in communication.

# If you could not understand someone, or think that he or she did not understand you, say something about it. Avoid being rude or offensive, but patiently explain the problem. It’s usually better to be upfront than to let a problem in communication go undressed, since there may otherwise be bigger problems later.If you think you did not understand what someone meant, try saying something like: “I’m not sure I understood you. Could we go over that again?”If you think that someone did not understand you, try saying something like: “Let’s review things to make sure we’re all on the same page.” You can also make sure to let the person know to ask questions.

# Be respectful and tolerant.

# Each culture has its own set of dominant values, beliefs, and prejudices. Signs of these may emerge when communicating with people from other cultures. Basic communication, however, it is not the time to judge people based on these differences. Instead, respect them for what they are, and tolerate them.You may even learn something new.Even if cultural differences come up explicitly in conversation, be tolerant and open-minded instead of argumentative. For instance, if you are American and someone comments on Americans’ tendency to be work-focused, say something like: “Yes, it’s true that many Americans take work seriously, and there are a lot of reasons for that. Why don’t you tell me some more about how your culture thinks about work?”

# Be patient.

Communicating with people from other cultures can be enlightening and rewarding, but also have its difficulties. Expect that not everything will come out quite right or be fully understood. Be patient with others, and ask them to be patient with you.