

Intercultural Training Exercise Pack

'Exploring Communication Approaches' handout.

1. Read each of the following pairs of descriptions.
2. Decide which descriptions is more like your country, A or B.
3. Think of another culture or country of interest to you. Does it come closer to type A or type B?
4. Choose one or two statement pairs that interest you. Can you think of any misunderstandings that might arise when people from cultures more like A, communicate with people from cultures more like B?

1	In some countries, people tend to talk quite quickly, frequently interrupting others in order to get their ideas across.	In other countries, people tend to talk in a slow and considered way, rarely interrupting other people when they are talking.
2	In some countries, people tend to talk quite loudly and are not particularly concerned if people they do not know overhear their conversations.	In other countries, people tend to be more soft-spoken, and take care to ensure that they do not talk so loudly that other people can hear their conversations.
3	In some countries, people use many physical gestures (such as smiling a lot, waving their arms or banging the table) to emphasize what they are saying and to communicate important ideas and feelings.	In other countries, people do not often use many physical gestures (such as smiling a lot, waving their arms or banging the table). Instead, they use words and their tone of voice to communicate important ideas and information.
4	In some countries, demonstrating interest in what other people have to say means maintaining good eye contact with them when they are talking.	In other countries, demonstrating respect for other people means trying to avoid too much direct or close eye contact while they are speaking.
5	In some countries, even people who do not know each other very well will hold hands, embrace, place their arms around each other's shoulders, or touch each other on the arms.	In other countries, people are taught not to touch other people they do not know, and will try to avoid physical contact with strangers wherever possible.
6	In some countries, when people talk to each other they stand or sit a considerable distance apart, sometimes as much as 50 cm.	In other countries, when people talk to each other than stand or sit very close to each other - sometimes so close that they are almost touching the other person.

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7	In some countries, people are direct and frank in the way they speak. They will give their personal opinions freely, regardless of whom they are talking to, and will often criticize other people directly if necessary.	In other countries, people are less direct in the way they speak. They will often avoid giving their personal opinions unless they know the people they are talking to well, and will try to avoid saying things that might come across as too critical of others.
8	In some countries, people write e-mails or faxes that are as short, direct and factual as possible. They pose questions directly and ask for information in an explicit and unambiguous way.	In other countries, people sometimes write e-mails or faxes in a less direct and wordier way. They often don't feel the need to spell out precisely and unambiguously the information they require.
9	In some countries, people often prefer to use e-mails, faxes, letters or other forms of written communication to pass on important information and make sure they get the response they want.	In other countries, people often prefer to use face-to-face discussions, telephone calls or other forms of spoken communication to pass on important information and make sure they get the response they want.
10	In some countries, learning foreign languages (particularly English) forms a big part of the educational curriculum. People from these countries often speak other languages very well.	In other countries, learning foreign languages is not an important part of the educational curriculum. People from these countries often do speak other languages very well.
11	In some countries, people are happy to talk about their personal and family life with their colleagues at work. They are also inclined to ask other people questions about their private and family life, even if they do not know them very well.	In other countries, people prefer to keep their private life and their work life separate. They do not tend to ask questions or talk about personal and family life at work, unless it is with close colleagues who they know well.
12	In some countries, people like to make 'small talk' (that is, talk about the weather, football, politics) before they start talking about business.	In other countries, people like to get straight into business without bothering with too much 'small talk' (that is, talk about the weather, football, politics).
13	In some countries, people are happy to talk about their accomplishments without embarrassment or shame. They think it is polite and honest to describe what they have achieved in their lives.	In other countries, people feel uncomfortable talking about what they have accomplished. They think it is polite and courteous to keep quiet about their attainments.

Working with Different Communication Styles

<p style="text-align: center;">LINEAR</p> <p>Communication is conducted in a straight line, moving in a linear way toward the main point. "Getting to the point" is very important and the point is stated explicitly. Not getting to the point quickly is seen as a time waster.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">CIRCULAR</p> <p>Communication is conducted in a circular manner around the main point. The point may be left unstated because the verbal and nonverbal information provided is sufficient for understanding. Stating the point explicitly is seen as insulting the other person.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be Brief • Preface your remarks with "the point is..." • Provide only as much explanation as the other person needs • Be explicit about the main point • Do not deviate from the main point 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Never preface a comment with, "the point is..." • Embellish your remarks with stories and anecdotes. Let the story make the point. • Let the other person infer the meaning of your comments from the story •
<p style="text-align: center;">DIRECT</p> <p>What one means is stated in a very straightforward and direct manner. There is no "beating around the bush." Directness is equated with honesty and respect for the other person.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">INDIRECT</p> <p>Meaning is conveyed by subtle means such as nonverbal behavior, parables and stories, suggestions and implication. Indirectness is equated with politeness and respect for the other person.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect the other person's time • Don't create ambiguity or uncertainty by avoiding the issue • Be straightforward 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respect the other person's feelings • Don't put the other person on the spot by being too direct
<p style="text-align: center;">FORMAL</p> <p>Communication is governed by strict rules regarding such things as: forms of address, ways to address persons of different ages and statuses, topics which can and cannot be discussed, etc. Communication in many respects is highly ritualized.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">INFORMAL</p> <p>Communication is less bound to specific conventions. Persons have more flexibility in what they say, to whom they say it, and under what circumstances. Informal communication might also be demonstrated by the use of the first name, for example.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Study the rules of communication in the target society / group and follow them. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Try to find out what is allowable in the host society / group and follow the conventions. •
<p style="text-align: center;">LOW CONTEXT</p> <p>The context of the communication is not assumed to be known. Things must be explained clearly and unambiguously. Meaning must be expressed precisely.</p>	<p style="text-align: center;">HIGH CONTEXT</p> <p>The context for communication is assumed to be known. Hence it is unnecessary, even insulting to explain things and state meaning precisely. Meaning is taken from context.</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always communicate clearly, completely, and unambiguously. • Don't leave understanding to chance. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Always respect the other person's understanding of the situation. • Leave understanding to the other person.

<p style="text-align: center;">ATTACHED (Emotive)</p> <p>Communication is carried out with feeling and emotion. Issues are discussed with a degree of passion and commitment. Communication is very expressive. Sharing one's values and feelings about the issues is highly valued.</p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State your views with passion and conviction • If you care about an idea, show it. • Bring yourself as a person into the discussion and show who you are. 	<p style="text-align: center;">DETACHED (non-Emotive)</p> <p>Communication is carried out in a calm and impersonal manner. This is equated with objectivity, which is valued. Highly expressive, emotive, and engaged communication is inappropriate because this is seen as personalizing the issues and as biased.</p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • State your views dispassionately • Avoid being overly emotional • Avoid personalizing the discussion - keep yourself out of it. •
<p style="text-align: center;">IDEA-FOCUSED</p> <p>The emphasis is on ideas which are seen as separate from the person. Thus, disagreement with another person's ideas is acceptable and even valued. It is not seen as a personal attack.</p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Listen carefully to the ideas being discussed. • If you disagree with someone's ideas, say so. • Because a person's ideas are wrong, doesn't mean there is something wrong with the person. 	<p style="text-align: center;">PERSON-FOCUSED</p> <p>The emphasis is on the person, hence great importance is attached to the feelings of the other person. Issues and ideas are not separated from the person. Thus, disagreement with someone's ideas must be handled very carefully.</p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Respond to the person. Be attentive to feelings. • In your communication, be careful not to hurt the other person's feelings. • Understand that an attack on someone's idea is an attack on that person.
<p style="text-align: center;">TASK-FOCUSED</p> <p>Communication focuses on the task at hand and getting it done. The other person's feelings are secondary. Group harmony is secondary to task completion.</p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Keep focusing on the task at hand • Don't allow too much small talk to sidetrack the task • Clarify the task • Publicly sanction slackards 	<p style="text-align: center;">RELATIONSHIP-FOCUSED</p> <p>Communication is focused on relationships. Maintaining group harmony is central. The task is secondary. Task completion must not come at the expense of the group or person.</p> <hr/> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make certain that your concern with the task doesn't come at the expense of someone's feelings and the well-being of the group. • Praise the participants for their good work. • Never publicly call down a colleague.

*Adapted from J. Bennett, 1993 by Michael Paige, 1996
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Critical Incident Cards

School

1. A student was not satisfied with her new class. She wanted to move to a higher class. First, she consulted the student advisor who said that she could not move up at this time. The student, still unsatisfied with this answer, asked the other student advisor. The second student advisor gave her the same answer. Next, she made an appointment to see the coordinator of the Language Training Program. The coordinator consulted the student's teacher and the student's test scores and explained to the student that, according to the guidelines, she was unable to move to the next level at that time. The student was still not satisfied and made an appointment to see the dean and then intended to talk to the president of the college. Meanwhile, the teacher couldn't understand why the student did not just accept her decision. She also could not understand why the student could not see that there were policies in place so that no matter how high up she went in the college hierarchy, it would not change the outcome for her.
2. Jane entered her classroom after the morning coffee break and saw a group of students looking at photos. A young woman in her twenties was showing the photos. The photos were of a three-month-old infant. The teacher commented that the baby was very cute. Then the teacher noticed that the baby was in a coffin and, after a pause, commented that the baby had died. The woman said yes, and then the teacher asked her a few more questions about the child. The teacher was surprised. This group of students had been together for only two weeks. Later, the word "undertaker" came up as a vocabulary word in the same class. When the teacher explained the meaning, the student went on to describe in detail the process of preparing her baby's body for burial. The teacher wondered if she should talk to the student privately to explain that some people might be uncomfortable with this topic. The teacher certainly was!
3. Sandra gave her students a grammar test. During the test, a student was looking at another student's answers and writing them on his paper. The teacher asked him to do the test on his own. The student continued to look at the other student's answers. The teacher took his paper away and threw it into the garbage in full view of all the other students to make the point that the student's answers were not an indication of his understanding of the grammar and that it was pointless to write the test if he was just going to cheat. The student was very upset and went to the office to complain.

4. My friend liked her class, but she felt that the teacher was very cold. She said the teacher just taught grammar and never asked about the students' families or talked about her own.

5. Mark entered his LINC (Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada) class on the first day and introduced himself to the class. The first lesson was designed to work on all four skills and to give students the chance to get to know their teacher. Mark began by telling the students that he, too, was an immigrant to Canada and that he was going to share his biography with the class. Their first assignment was to ask him questions and take notes about what they heard. Next, they had to write several paragraphs about him and hand it in later that week. On the day that it was due, all the students had done the work except for one. Mark asked her why she had not done her homework, and she answered that she did not need to know about him. Mark explained that the assignment was designed to work on a variety of specific English skills that she needed to improve her ability to communicate in English. After that, she did not really participate in class. She did her own work and paid attention only when there was something that interested her.

6. Sandra is a fun-loving teacher teaching in the LINC program. At the beginning of every course, she explains the classroom and school guidelines, including the rule about being late. After about a week and a half, one of her students started to arrive late for class every morning. Sandra likes to treat things in a lighthearted manner, and so when the student walked in late one morning, Sandra said "good evening" to her and everyone laughed. Sandra had done this before with other students. The student ignored Sandra and went and sat down. Sandra felt a little annoyed and so she asked the student about being late. The student then yelled at Sandra and said, "You don't talk to me like that!" Sandra told her that she should apologize for being late. Later, Sandra approached her privately and apologized to her even though she felt that the student should apologize first. The student also apologized but later stopped coming to class altogether.