CULTURAL MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND EMPATHY – WEEK 5, SESSION 1

Aim: Foster cross-cultural understanding through raising awareness of differences between cultural norms.
To do this trainees will examine a variety of cultural traditions and values then discuss and role-play scenarios illustrating similarities and differences after completing a table in groups highlighting main points of culture/religion.
Materials: handouts and quiz Confucianism/Hinduism/Islam/Christianity, video clips cultural difference, scenarios
Time: 2 hours

Intro – video clips for US Peace corps
Examine some noteworthy cultural/religious settings, input on main areas, ss in groups complete table/quiz through asking each other and where necessary reference research
Complete three different communication styles quiz, ss in groups report back and discuss
Ss consider possible outcomes of different situations involving ways to communicate (scenarios)

Intro
Say what a society values shows what it considers important, and session will look at different values in societies, values stemming often from religion, sometimes from tradition and history. Then review scenarios of how these different values might interfere with communication between people from these different cultures. Cultural differences can be an opportunity to make a bridge not a fortress.

Homework:
Read ‘Joy Luck Club’ Amy Tan different Chinese generations in US

Conduct an ethnographic interview with a member of another culture, designing a questionnaire to find attitudes to: importance of family/importance of friends and career/status of women/food
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Key Characteristics</th>
<th>Islam</th>
<th>Christianity</th>
<th>Confucianism</th>
<th>Buddhism</th>
<th>Hinduism¹</th>
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<td>Main festivals</td>
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<td>Rites of passage</td>
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¹ Intercultural Language Activities 2010 J Corbett CUP
Confucianism (How do you think the four Confucian principles contribute to communicative behaviour?)

Difference individualism of west, collectivism of east – society is more important than individual. Components of Confucianism affect how people view and interact with each other, particularly in China, Korea, Japan.

In this context, human relationships are governed by four principles of proper conduct:
1. Jen (humanism, warm reciprocity)
2. I (faithfulness and justice, look beyond self for common good)
3. li (propriety, considerate to others)
4. chih (wisdom)

New relationships are built through:
- In-out group – principles of social relationships
- Frequent contacts over long period of time
- Personal and human relationship
- Common experiences e.g. sports/travel
- Mutual understanding of personalities
- Develop trust and positive attitude

Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism

The relationship among the three has been marked by both contention and complementation in history, with Confucianism playing a more dominant role.

Confucius (Kongzi, 551-479 B.C.), founder of Confucianism, stresses "Ren" (benevolence, love) and "Li" (rites), referring to respect for the system of social hierarchy. He attaches importance to education and was a pioneering advocate for private schools. He is particularly famous for teaching students according to their intellectual inclinations. His teachings were later recorded by his students in "The Analects."

Mencius also contributed a great part to Confucianism, lived in the Warring States Period (389-305 B.C.), advocating a policy of benign government and a philosophy that human beings are good by nature. Confucianism became the orthodox ideology in feudal China and, in the long course of history; it drew on Taoism and Buddhism. By the 12th century, Confucianism had evolved into a rigid philosophy that calls for preserving heavenly laws and repressing human desires.

Taoism was created by Lao Zi (around the sixth century B.C.), whose masterpiece is "The Classic of the Virtue of the Tao." He believes the dialectical philosophy of inaction. Chairman Mao Zedong once quoted Lao Zi: "Fortune lies in misfortune and vice versa." Zhuang Zhou, the main advocate of Taoism during the Warring States period, founded a relativism calling for the absolute freedom of the subjective mind. Taoism has greatly influenced Chinese thinkers, writers and artists.
Buddhism was created by Sakyamuni in India around the 6th century B.C., believing that human life is miserable and spiritual emancipation is the highest goal to seek. It was introduced into China through Central Asia around the time Christ was born. After a few centuries of assimilation, Buddhism evolved into many sects in the Sui and Tang Dynasties and became localized. That was also a process when the ingenuous culture of Confucianism and Taoism were blended with Buddhism.

**Linguistic codes**

Honorific linguistic systems in verbs/pronouns/nouns e.g. Japanese/Korean

Axis of address/axis of reference (Honorific address form for receiver, humble form for self-reference) More complex than e.g. French tu/vous German du/Sie

In Korean there are three verbs for ‘eat’ – plain/polite/honorific

- Nouns for rice – plain/polite/honorific

Avoid ‘you’ but say ‘professor’ ‘aunt’

These illustrate importance social relationships in Confucian societies demonstrated by lexical differentiation.

Directness could involve loss of face, as in Japanese there are at least 16 evasive ways to say no e.g.

- English - The door is open = shut the door
- Japanese – It is somewhat cold today (no mention of door)

Or consider the Japanese wife who communicated to her husband discord with her mother-in-law through small irregularities in her flower arrangement.

**Characteristics of professional relationships in:**

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Collectivist Societies</th>
<th>Individualist Societies</th>
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<tr>
<td>Long-term relationships</td>
<td>short-term, task-focused relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td>In-group/out-group</td>
<td>little distinction</td>
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<tr>
<td>Personally known or through intermediaries</td>
<td>professional relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to conduct business</td>
<td>personal/professional separate</td>
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<tr>
<td>personal/public overlap</td>
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Hinduism

World view
Time and space are endless, levels of reality rise from providing for self (e.g. food) to life experience – mind – understanding – joy.
Reincarnation
Brahma Supreme Being, indestructible
Karma
Cause and effect

Aim of Life
Pleasure – success – righteousness – salvation
Path to Salvation
Knowledge – devotion – work – mediation
Dharma
Detailed rules for right living
Caste
Priests – rulers – traders – artisans – sweepers
Spirit of Tolerance
Different viewpoints are complementary

Islam

Four tenets:
One God
God created the world
Humans are good because God made them
Day of judgement awaits

Five Pillars:
Shahada/witness – there is no God but God
Salat/prayer – five times daily
Zakat/charity – give alms to needy
Sawm/fasting – fast at Ramadan as a minimum
Hajj – visit Mecca at least once in lifetime

Values
Importance of tradition: knowledge passed on, sometimes resistant to change.
Importance of relationships – family, social, business
Main markers – birth, marriage, death
Group is bigger than the individual
Hierarchical – God – age – gender - experience

Christianity

The key principles of Christianity (i.e. the Kingdom of Heaven where Christ is King according to Scripture) are based on:
1. Humility or faith and trust in God
2. Communication with God through prayer and self-denial
3. Observance of The Law which is written in Scripture (the Bible) and in the hearts of those who love the truth
4. The offering of sacrifice to God and partaking of the sacrificial offering (various animal and bird offerings in the Old Testament, the Lamb of God in the New Testament, the sacrifice of communion – ceremonial taking of wafer and wine as symbols of Christ’s blood and body).
Belief in Jesus Christ and following Him in a personal relationship is the central principle under which all others come.
Christians are called to obedience and faith and centrally to love as a first principle. This 'law of love' covers everything, especially the many situations in our modern age, never discussed in the New Testament.
Christianity is faith in Jesus Christ who died on the cross as a penalty for sins of humans, who were then forgiven. Christ is the son of God, whose word is the Bible, a guide for right living and a history of God’s peoples and laws.
Compare above with Grice’s Cooperative Principles, Maxims of Conversation (western)

**The Cooperative Principle**
A basic underlying assumption we make when we speak to one another is that we are trying to cooperate with one another to construct meaningful conversations. This assumption is known as the Cooperative Principle. As stated in H. P. Grice’s “Logic and Conversation” (1975):

Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. I

**Quantity**
- Make your contribution as informative as required. (Don’t say too much or too little.)
- Make the strongest statement you can.

**Quality**
- Do not say what you believe to be false.
- Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

**Relation**
- Be relevant. (Stay on topic.)

**Manner**
- Avoid obscurity of expression.
- Avoid ambiguity.
- Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity).
- Be orderly.
**Different Communication Styles**
Prepare three flip charts with labels of Detached, Attached, and Intuitive.

Using the attached outline, provide participants with descriptions of three communication styles. Stress that cultural groups teach and reinforce a “preferred” style of communication and that these three styles are on a continuum. State that while individuals may use all three styles, and that the situation or context will determine which style we use, there tends to be a preferred style—one in which we are most comfortable. Ask people to identify which style is their most comfortable style and to go to the flip chart with that label on it.

With the three groups you have created, ask people to respond to the following concepts. Provide each group with several marking pens.

- The strengths and weaknesses of our style in the workplace.
- How each of the other two styles helps us and hinders us in the workplace.

Tell the groups to select a reporter. Give them 20 minutes to complete this task.

Bring the groups back together and ask that people practise good listening skills during the reporting. Teach them TING using the overhead and the attached description. Remind them that this is a good time for them to hear how others may experience their primary communication style.

Ask each group to place its flip chart sheets where everyone can see them. Ask the reporter from each group to share the results of their discussion: first, how they see their own strengths and weaknesses and then how each of the other styles helps and hinders them at work.

After all three groups have reported out and have their sheets posted, ask for observations and begin the plenary feedback.

**Plenary Questions:**
1. What did you notice as you listened to each group’s report?
   Listen for:
   a. What one group sees as its strengths, other groups often see as a weakness and vice versa.
   b. Groups tended to describe both themselves and others in much the same way.
   c. Every group brings something powerful to a team

**Plenary Conclusions:**
1. All three styles bring value to the workplace.
2. We all tend to agree about both the strengths and weaknesses of each style. We know them all.
3. While others may see the same strengths and weaknesses in
our style that we do, the tendency is for us to downplay the weakness while others may highlight it in evaluating us.
4. The greatest strength for a team is when all three styles are available to call on.
5. All three styles are effective in coming to solutions and decisions although they may come to them in different times and in different ways.
6. Most workplace cultures recognize and reward one style and ignore or actively eliminate the other styles. This leaves people for whom the least rewarded styles are their preference with two primary options: either adapt at work in order to fit in, or retain one’s preferred style and be perceived and treated like an outsider. This can result in enormous loss of resources for the workplace.
Communication Styles:

• Describe the three communication styles using the following descriptions.
• Ask people how those who use each style might perceive people using the other styles.

Detached Communication Style: Communication “should” be calm and impersonal. Objectivity is valued. Emotionally expressive communication is seen as immature or biased.

Attached Communication Style: Expression of feelings is an important and necessary part of communication. Subjectivity is valued. Objectivity can be seen as “not caring.”

Intuitive Communication Style: Communication of global concepts or ideas is valued. There is frequent use of metaphor and expression of abstract ideas. May appear to others to deviate from the topic but intuitive communicators see the connection.

TING – MIND EYE HEART EAR

TING is the Chinese word for “To Listen.” In order to listen effectively, you need to use:

• Your ear to literally hear the words
• Your mind to understand the words
• Your eye to observe nonverbal messages
• Your heart to understand the feelings of the speaker

Explain that in order to genuinely communicate with another person; it is important to listen with all four senses.
Bridging the Gap

Objectives:
To help participants:
Identify:
1. barriers to cross-cultural communication.
2. Recognize cultural differences to the same barriers.
3. Discuss effect of barriers on relationships/productivity.
4. Develop strategies to decrease barriers.

Materials:
Cultural scenarios on index cards (1 for each group)
Intercultural Communication Handout for each participant

Process:
1. Introduce the objectives for this activity.
2. Distribute the Intercultural Communication Handout and briefly review.
3. Divide the group into teams of 4–6.
4. Have one member of each team draw a cultural scenario card.
5. Ask each team to read the scenario and identify barriers to communication
6. Have each team select one member to share the scenario and another team member to share the group thoughts/suggestions.
7. Plenary feedback to compare/contrast cultural scenarios.

Questions for Scenario Review:
• What communication barriers are evident in this scenario?
• What cultural factors may be related to the barrier(s)?
• How might the barrier(s) impact relationships? Team functioning? Workplace productivity?
• What specific behaviours could help decrease or remove the barrier(s)?

Plenary Questions:
1. How did you feel during the team activity?
2. Which communication barriers were identified in these scenarios? Which barriers might be more salient? Less evident?
3. Have you observed or experienced something similar to one of these situations? Describe.
5. Did you have any insights into cross-cultural communication during your team activity? As you listened to the other scenarios?
6. How might this activity be helpful to you in the future?

Debriefing Conclusions:
1. Cultural preferences can impede effective cross-cultural communication.
2. Awareness of the cultural aspects of communication enhances understanding.
3. Many communication “rules” are taken for granted by the people within the culture.
4. Being observant and asking appropriate questions can enhance cross-cultural understanding.
Intercultural Communication Handout

Communication style preferences are learned and rooted within culture. We learn our culture from the “inside,” so we tend to assume that everyone else views the world the same way we see the world. Even the mastery of a foreign language cannot guarantee an individual will meet with success in an intercultural setting. Awareness of these three aspects in cross-cultural communication can be used to enhance understanding:

External and Internal Culture
Whether a culture is national or organizational, it is important to be aware of the meaning that lies beneath observable behaviour.
- External culture can be studied in history, geography, political science, and the arts. Understanding external, objective aspects of a culture can foster greater understanding.
- Internal culture is culture implicitly learned. Internal culture includes subjective knowledge that is unconsciously held, including shared values, beliefs, assumptions, and behaviours. Internal aspects of culture cause the greatest misunderstandings in cross-cultural encounters.

High Context and Low Context Cultures
Cultural communication falls along a continuum from high context cultures to low context cultures.
- High context cultures have a long tradition of commonly shared values and understandings. Communication is more implicit and internalized; it is transmitted in subtle ways. Nonverbal cues are very important. The environmental setting, gestures, and mood are part of the message being communicated.
- Low context cultures have a preference for explicit and direct information. Specific and in-depth explanations are the expected norm. In low context cultures, individuals are usually more competitive. They tend to be more analytic rather than holistic in their problem solving.

Monochronic and Polychronic Time
Differences in basic time systems are also a source of frustration and misunderstanding in cross-cultural communication. These are two different ways to perceive time. Each approach has advantages and disadvantages.
- Monochronic time usually is found in industrialized societies. Time is blocked into allotments and one task at a time takes precedence. When the scheduled time is “up” the person is expected to move on.
- Polychronic time means being involved with many different things at one time. There is no sense of “wasting time” or “running out of time.” There is more of a focus on people and relationships. Time is experienced very differently.
Cultural Scenarios
You are German, working on a multicultural team in Belgium. You begin your work day at 08:00 and leave each day at 17:00. Several members of your team (from Spain and France) “wander in” well after 08:00, heading directly for coffee. These team members regularly arrive late and rarely offer a morning greeting. You do not respect their lack of punctuality and wonder how you will be able to work with them on the new assignment.

You are working as a purchasing agent for a boat repair company in the Seattle area. You are Taiwanese. You have been able to negotiate “best price” deals for your employer on parts from a Taiwan manufacturer. Today your U.S. employer has received some bad news and he is very angry about a family matter. He begins to yell at you, showing you no respect.

You are a thirty-year-old German female. Your company has recently purchased a Russian business and you are assigned to manage an office in a small Russian village. The current office supervisor is a fifty-five-year-old Russian male. He will remain in the office and report directly to you. All of the employees are Russian and they have been reporting directly to him.

You are a U.S. computer technology specialist working for a Chinese employer. You believe it is best to be very specific when working with a customer. Your employer takes a different approach. The company sales and service policy is not clear to you. You are wondering how you will define your area of responsibility.

You are a college student from Italy, enrolled in a U.S. university. Your roommate in the international dorm is from England. You like to invite classmates to visit you in your room. Your roommate does not approve of the visitors and does not seem interested in forming a friendship. You are wondering how you will last through the year.

You create a scenario that applies specifically to your organization.
**How Would I Say That?**

**Time Required:**
60 minutes: 5 minute introduction, 25–30 minute activity, 25–30 minutes to debrief

**Objectives:**
To help participants:
1. Recognize the influence context has on communication style.
2. Explore how the goal or purpose of the communication influences style.
3. Observe ways cultural values and/or gender roles influence a communicator’s style.
4. Observe how status/power roles influence communication style.

**Materials:**
- Index cards with a “Speech Act” on the card
- A Speech Act Handout for each participant
- Pen/pencil and paper or index cards for participants

**Process:**
1. Introduce activity and give brief (5 minute) overview of “speech acts” listed on handout.
2. Divide participants into small groups (6–8). Each group draws three cards with different speech acts (e.g., “give a compliment to a co-worker” etc.).
3. Ask individuals to jot down how they would personally communicate the speech act. Participants then share their response with the group.
4. Remind group members to pay special attention to diversity in responses.

Have participants in small groups discuss differences and commonalities, paying special attention to differences by gender, culture, age.

**Plenary discussion to include interesting and/or surprising observations.**

**Possible Questions:**
1. Which speech acts were easy? What might make the same act more difficult?
2. What differences within the group surprised you? Were you able to discuss the differences?
3. How might culture affect individual responses/expectations? Were there any generational differences in response/expectations?
4. How might gender affect some speech acts? Male/female? Female/male?
5. How did the communication change when family members were involved? Was it easier or more difficult to deal with the family members? Why or why not?
6. How did you feel when you communicated a need to a supervisor or family elder?
Conclusions:
How do cultural values and/or gender roles influence the way we send and receive messages?
How do status/power roles influence communication styles?
3. Generational expectations often differ in style and expectation, especially related to age, status, and direct vs. indirect communication.
4. Although we may have preferred styles, other style choices are available.
5. “Receiver’s” style is an important factor to consider.
6. Context (where/when the message is sent) influences communication style.
7. It is important to be clear about your goal or purpose for the communication.
Optional ways to conduct exercise:
Ask for volunteers to role-play the activity for the large or small groups and then debrief the “style” used to meet the communication goal.
Bibliography

L Samovar/R Porter  Understanding Intercultural Communication 2000  Wadsworth Press

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Corbett J 2010  Intercultural Language Activities CUP

The above session and materials have been compiled by Ruth Keene, July 2012