

# Cultural Manual for German-Tanzanian cultural exchange



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## Introduction

This Cultural Manual was developed by the Deutsch-Tansanische Partnerschaft e.V. (German-Tanzanian-Partnership, DTP). DTP is a Non Governmental Organisation (NGO) in Germany which works in the field of renewable energy and energy saving in Tanzania since 2001. DTP's partner in Tanzania is the Tanzania Youth Coalition (TYC). The two organisations cooperate on a volunteer exchange program called "worldwards – for cultural exchange and climate protection in Tanzania" which is bringing 16 German volunteers to Tanzania every year, as well as providing opportunities for Tanzanians to volunteer in Germany and Tanzania. Since 2002 young Germans are sent to Tanzania to volunteer in environmental projects and since 2008 there is also the possibility for two young Tanzanians to go to Germany and volunteer. The DTP organises the exchange programme from Germany, TYC is its local coordinator in Tanzania.

With this volunteer programme young people have the opportunity to experience cultural exchange by working hand in hand with people of another cultural background. We aim to widen intercultural understanding and protect the environment through work in the field of Renewable Energies.

For us international understanding means to respect other cultures, to learn from each other and to work with each other. Thus, intercultural communication is of paramount importance for our project.

To ease overcoming the challenges of intercultural communication, this manual was created. It is not meant to provide easy answers in the style "Germany is like this, Tanzania is like this", but rather serve as a tool to analysing cultural differences for yourself.

It can and should be used for, but is not limited to:

- the preparation seminar for the south-north worldwards programme for Tanzanian going to Germany
- the seminar for the heads of hosting places (held by Michael Onesimo, the adviser of the DTP-TYC volunteers project)
- for the hosting places in Tanzania, where German volunteers could use it

Note: The Cultural Manual also contains a lot of additional Working Sheets. They can help you create a workshop or a seminar about intercultural aspects. Just be creative!

## What is Culture?

*“The system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, and artefacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning”<sup>1</sup>*

*“In the twentieth century, “culture” emerged as a concept central to anthropology, encompassing all human phenomena that are not purely results of human genetics.”<sup>2</sup>*

These two definitions show that culture is everywhere and everything!

- It is built through history
- It includes all values and norms, the concept of humanity, the concept of time...
- It makes us perceive, interpret and understand the world around us differently
- It is expressed in social activities, interacting with each other, language, spirituality, in the whole way of living our lives
- It is always on the move, developing itself and never static
- Although culture can be abstracted as belonging to a wider society, it is only expressed by the individual, and we must not generalise!

To conclude: ***Culture shapes the identity of a human being.***

*(See Additional Material Worksheet 1- 2)*

## Challenges in Intercultural Communication

Intercultural communication is challenging in a lot of ways. Different cultures are built on different values. That’s why we perceive and interpret the world around us in different ways.

One could say we are all wearing **“cultural glasses”**: It is the same world we see, but in different colours or in a different light. We can never swap our cultural glasses for others, because through growing up in a certain culture our identity was shaped with and attached to this special pair of glasses. But we can try to look around these glasses; we can try to understand how someone with another pair perceives the world. And with time maybe our glasses can slightly change colour... This is the meaning of intercultural understanding.

Due to our different cultures, misunderstanding with members of another culture can happen very easily. Often these happen and we don’t even recognize them as misunderstandings, because we are too fixed on our own cultural thinking and do not see that the others are thinking and feeling in another way and might have been offended or disturbed by our behaviour or by what we said.

Even basic actions are done in a different way or interpreted in different ways. Different cultures have different habits, ways of thinking, ways of meaning making, and ways of handling conflicts.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/anthropology/courses/122/module1/culture.html](http://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/anthropology/courses/122/module1/culture.html)

<sup>2</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/culture>

Similarly, the way and rules of communication differ. **The way of communicating refers to the language, habits and rules how to interact with other members of the society and general values.**

For example in Tanzania it is usual to greet an older person with “Shikamoo”, because older people are persons of respect for younger ones. In Germany older people are greeted with the formal greeting also used for persons of the same age, and there is no special greeting.

Similarly, nowadays in Germany parents are often directly criticised by their children. This is different in Tanzania, because there is another way of dealing with criticism and another relationship between children and parents.

These are only a few examples that show how the communication in countries like Germany and Tanzania differs because of our different cultural backgrounds.

But misunderstandings do not only happen through direct communication, but also through **indirect communication or nonverbal communication**. One famous phrase in this context is:

*“We can **not not** communicate”*

This means we are always communicating, even if we’re not talking. For more on this, have a look at the “Iceberg Model” which you’ll find in the last chapter of this Manual as *Worksheet 3* under “Additional Material”.

For example: In Tanzania a friend holds your hand for a long time, while you’re talking. In Germany this is not normal, you just greet with one handshake. A couple holds hands or maybe very close friends hug each other instead. Also it is normal to have a short handshake with hard grip, in Tanzania it is softer. Therefore, someone not used to the etiquette of holding hands during talking might feel uncomfortable, as well as someone who is used to it, might find it distressing not to exchange this simple gesture.

Remember that there is no right or wrong in cultural differences, just different! And although judgement is almost always unavoidable, it is our aim to not judge too quickly, but try to see the situation from a different viewpoint. We can achieve this by not judging immediately, but observing first, then interpreting, and judging at last.

And if we do not have all of this in mind, we will probably misunderstand people of another culture. For working and living together peacefully in this globalised world it is necessary not to misunderstand each other. Therefore it is very important to improve our own skills of intercultural communication. You will gain a lot of benefits by trying to see the world through different glasses, and we sincerely believe that it is the most direct and effective step you as an individual can do to further intercultural communication and, eventually, mutual understanding and respect.

*(See Additional Material Worksheet 3)*

## Concepts of Time: Linearism and Circularism

Different cultures are often based on different concepts of time. These concepts determine all social actions, working and living and so on. So for working together with a partner from a different culture, it is important to have this in mind. The Tanzanian culture refers to a circular and the German culture to a linear concept of time:

<i>Inner cultural beliefs, invisible values, reasons of behaviour</i>	<b>CIRCULARISM</b>	<b>LINEARISM</b>	<i>Inner cultural beliefs, invisible values, reasons of behaviour</i>
<i>Visible culture, actions, behaviour</i>	<p>Time is a circle</p> <p>Time returns</p> <p>After the night, it is day again</p> <p>Do several things at once, Postpone work (“labda kesho”)</p> <p>Communication and interaction with partners is more important than time plan</p> <p>You cannot lose time because it is always there</p> <p>Meetings are flexible, if someone is late, you wait. The interaction itself is important</p> <p>Interaction, greetings take a lot of time, unpunctuality, things are done late (or never)</p>	<p>Time is a line</p> <p>Time passes</p> <p>A day passes, it is over</p> <p>Do one thing after the other, “finish” tasks</p> <p>Timetable is important</p> <p>Time is money, it can be wasted</p> <p>Time brings a structure into every day life and relationships with other humans</p> <p>Punctuality, making timetables and sticking to them, do things quickly</p>	<i>Visible culture, actions, behaviour</i>
<i>Interpretations, judgments made by others</i>	<p>“unreliability”, “no respect for the work”, “no interest in things”, “bad management”</p>	<p>“hurry”, “self-righteousness”, “impoliteness”, “no respect for the person”</p>	<i>Interpretations, judgments made by others</i>

In both German and Tanzanian culture, time is obviously moving forwards. But one could say that whilst in Germany this happens in a straight line, in Tanzania it rather resembles loops and circles<sup>3</sup>!

<sup>3</sup> See Popp, Friedrich: Über die unterschiedliche Wahrnehmung der Zeit. In: Multikulturelles Nürnberg,

## Concepts of Society: Collectivism and Individualism

Just like the Tanzanian and the German culture differ in terms of time concept, they also differ in terms of society concept.

„**Collectivism** is a term used to describe any moral, political, or social outlook, that stresses human interdependence and the importance of a collective, rather than the importance of separate individuals. Collectivists focus on community and society, and seek to give priority to group goals over individual goals“<sup>4</sup>

„**Individualism** is the moral stance, political philosophy, or social outlook that stresses independence and self-reliance. Individualists promote the exercise of one's goals and desires, while opposing most external interference upon one's choices, whether by society, or any other group or institution.“<sup>5</sup>

As you can easily guess, the Tanzanian culture refers to collectivism, the German culture to individualism.

Examples:

<b>Collectivism</b>	<b>Individualism</b>
People are born into big families; the families protect their members and expect loyalty in return	Each human being grows up to look after his/her own children and spouse only
You should always be peaceful and avoid direct confrontations	To say what you think and to argue is considered courageous and truthful
If you get a job or are promoted depends on the colleagues and on how good you fit in	If you get a job or are promoted depends on your own qualifications only
Relations are more important than tasks	The task is more important than relations
The process is more important than the result	The result is more important than the process
Private life is shared with the family, groups, etc.	Everybody has got a right to have his privacy
Laws and rules depend on the group you belong to	Laws and rules are valid for everybody in the same way
Harmony and agreement in society are important aims	self-fulfilment of each individual is a very important aim

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Nr. 14, Juli 2007

<sup>4</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Collectivism>

<sup>5</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Individualism>, also see Hofstede, Geert (2001): Culture's Consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks.

## Cultural Differences Worldwide

Following is a list of examples of cultural differences worldwide, under the larger topics of power distance, male and female roles and avoidance of insecurity. It is based on Geert Hofstede's "Framework for Assessing Culture"<sup>6</sup>. The last topic of collectivism / individualism also belongs to Hofstede's concept.

### Power distance

<b>Small power distance</b>	<b>Huge power distance</b>
Inequality and social differences are considered bad and should be erased	Inequality is expected, considered normal and good
Parents treat their children like individuals and respect their opinions	Parents raise their children to make them respect and obey their parents
Teachers expect their students to actively take the initiative	The initiative is always taken by the teacher.
Workers want to be asked by their bosses when he/she is making decisions	Workers expect to be told what to do
Privileges of certain persons/ groups are considered bad	Privileges (e.g. for managers) are expected and popular
The use of power has to be authorised. People judge power not on the amount of power, but on whether it is used to do right or to do wrong	Power is more important than right and wrong; he/ she who has power is entitled to use it
The power a person has depends on the status, the knowledge and his / her possibility to reward others	The power a person has depends on family, friends and the possibility to punish others

### Male / Female

<b>Female</b>	<b>Male</b>
Important: care for others, protect the society's values	Important: material success and development
Work in order to live	Live in order to work
Social state and government	Competition

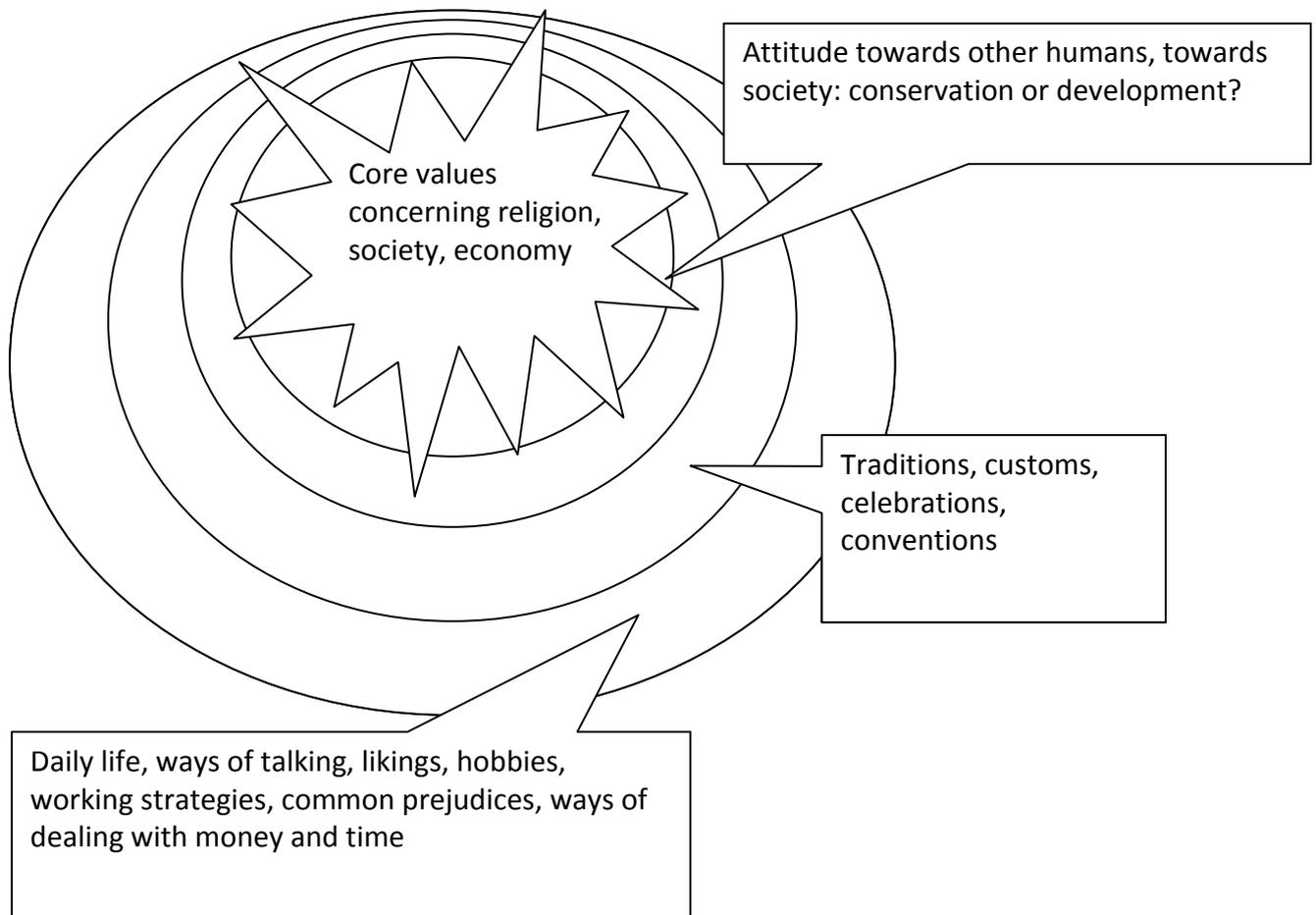
### Avoidance of uncertainty

<b>Weak avoidance of uncertainty</b>	<b>Strong avoidance of uncertainty</b>
Insecurity is normal and is accepted in daily life	Insecurity is considered a threat and people try to fight it with all their might
You must never show aggression or your emotions	Aggression and emotions can be shown in appropriate circumstances
Students like long discussions with open end	Students like simple questions and clear answers
A teacher can say: „I don't know.“	A teacher has to be able to answer everything
People like relaxing and work hard only if they really have to	People have an inner urge to be busy and work hard
There should not be more rules than necessary	People need rules, even if they never work
If we don't follow the rules, the rules have to be changed	If we don't follow the rules, we are guilty and have to change ourselves

<sup>6</sup> See Hofstede, Geert (2001): Culture's Consequences: Comparing values, behaviors, institutions, and organizations across nations. Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks.

## “The Onion of Culture”

One model to visualize how values are behind every action, is “the onion of culture”, just have a look at it, it is also a great tool for analysing<sup>7</sup>:

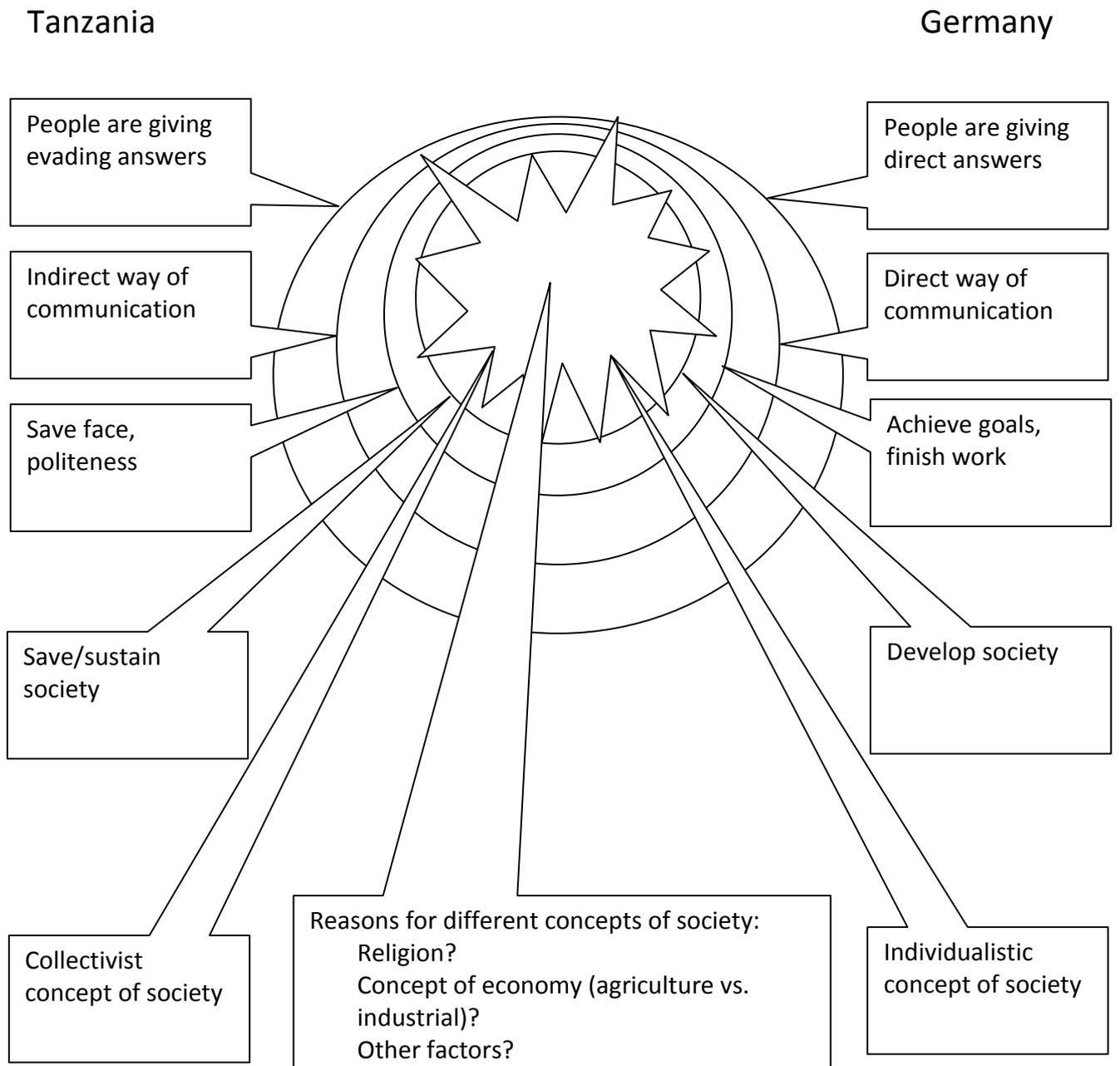


Explanation: Cultural interpretation is usually originating from a superficial and visible level, from an observation we make, a difference we notice between our culture and the host culture, and it is our goal to not remain at this superficial level but to find which value is really behind it. Therefore we “work our way inwards” to the core of the onion, which is represented by the different rings/layers in the picture. If you go from the outermost to the innermost layer, you will also go from what is visible, to what is invisible, and you will find that you will have to remove and be aware of all layers of the onion to get to the core, and see what could really be the explanation for a certain behaviour.

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<sup>7</sup> See Hofstede, Geert (1991): Culture and Organization. Software of the mind. Intercultural Cooperation and its importance for survival. McGraw Hill, New York.

The following exemplary graphic is the culture onion applied to one difference between German and Tanzanian way of communication:



## Examples: Comparing German and Tanzanian Culture

These are some few examples which show German and Tanzanian culture in different situations:

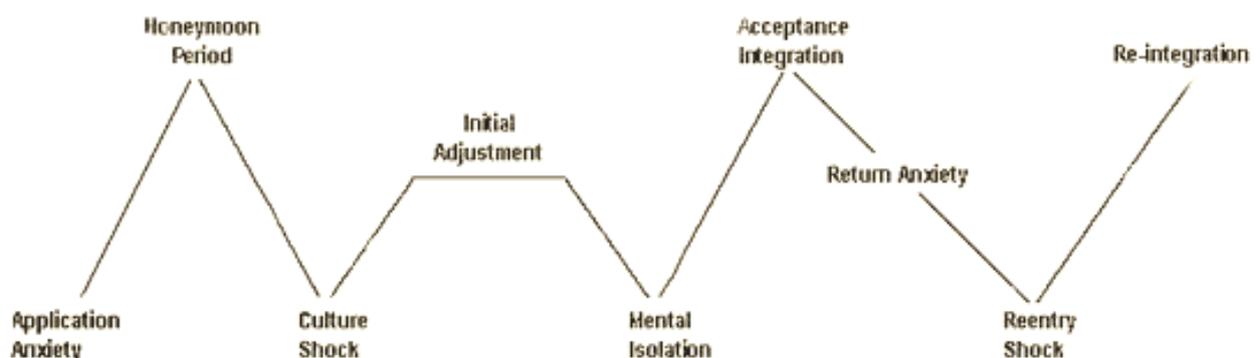
<b>Tanzania</b>	<b>Germany</b>
<u>dealing with conflicts:</u>	
<p>You should always be peaceful and avoid direct confrontations. If there is a conflict between two parties, it is of highest importance to have peace again, rather than to blame someone for his fault.</p>	<p>To say what you think and to argue is considered courageous and truthful. Direct criticism is normal. If someone has done something, which is considered as wrong, he has to take the responsibility for it.</p>
<u>dealing with time:</u>	
<p>„Pole pole“. Time is owned by the people, the people are not owned by time. „Kesho kutwa“ does not only mean tomorrow, but also an indefinite time in the future.</p>	<p>Usually, being delayed by even one minute is considered as too late. Formalities are often handed very strict. Time is always running, people are not only scheduling their work, but also their free time.</p>
<u>dealing with older persons:</u>	
<p>Older members of society are persons of respect, and are greeted with „Shikamoo“. Older persons are often considered to have a wider knowledge because of their experience. Generally, tradition is considered very important for Tanzanians.</p>	<p>You maybe greet an older person in a polite way (using the third person plural „Sie“) and formally, but otherwise for many young people nowadays they are not persons of greater respect than others. Generally, a higher importance is placed on innovations than traditions.</p>
<u>dealing with strangers:</u>	
<p>If you are new to Tanzania many people welcome you and you can easily befriend them. Even if you just walk to the duka, people ask you questions, are interested, they come up to you and want to help you. People like socialising all day.</p>	<p>If you are new to Germany, it takes a long time for you to befriend people. They are dealing with their own businesses and rarely come up to strangers. People only call others their real friends after they know each other for a very long time. At the beginning people tend to keep distance.</p>
<u>dealing with religion:</u>	
<p>Religion is a important part of life, almost all people call themselves religious. On the other hand, religion is rarely an issue or even considered something unusual; there is a long history of peaceful co-existence. Members of</p>	<p>Many Germans are not religious at all. Hence religious places like churches are often empty and not well visited, and sometimes considered as „old-fashioned“. Members of different religions sometimes perceive those of other</p>

different religions perceive each other not as obstacles but as an enrichment, and inter-religious conflicts are rare.	religions as obstacles and have hostile feelings. Inter- and intra-religious conflicts occur frequently.
<u>dealing with the roles of men and women:</u>	
In relationships and daily life there are strict roles how men and women interact with each other. Men are usually more dominant than women. Polygamy is legal.	Over time, different gender roles are disappearing more and more and women and men are becoming more equal to men, both privately and work-wise. Around 1/3 of all marriages “fail”. Gender roles are fading further as same-sex weddings are widely accepted and legalised. Polygamy is prohibited.

## Culture Shock: Adaptation and its Chances

*„Culture shock refers to the anxiety and feelings (of surprise, disorientation, uncertainty, confusion, etc.) felt when people have to operate within a different and unknown cultural or social environment, such as a foreign country. It grows out of the difficulties in assimilating the new culture, causing difficulty in knowing what is appropriate and what is not. This is often combined with a dislike for or even disgust (moral or aesthetical) with certain aspects of the new or different culture“<sup>8</sup>*

Cultural adjustment is a continuous, on-going process. It never stops, and varies from one individual to another and from one culture to another. Whilst it is at times frustrating, it is a great chance to deeply understand and appreciate the host culture’s customs and values. This usually goes along with a realisation and questioning of one’s own culture and identity, which is a further benefit you gain from cultural exchange. The end process nearly always results in a change in the individual, and sometimes, in the setting. Your own personal adjustment process may require you to examine not only differences in your new culture but also your own cultural values and practices. Each stage in the cross cultural adjustment process is characterized by “symptoms” or outward and inward signs representing certain kinds of behaviour.



<sup>8</sup>

[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture\\_shock](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Culture_shock)

**Honeymoon Period**

Initially, you will probably be fascinated and excited by everything new. You may feel elated to be in a new culture.

**Culture Shock**

Culture shock sets in when you start to become immersed in the culture – experiencing the housing, transportation, food, language and people. Fatigue may result from continuously trying to comprehend and use the second language. You may also experience feelings of discontent, impatience, anger, sadness or incompetence. You may even wonder why you decided to go abroad. However, these feelings are actually a good sign! They indicate that you are not merely skimming the surface of the new culture, but actually engaging with it through close personal contact.

**Initial Adjustment**

During this period, everyday activities such as housing and going to school are no longer major problems. You feel more comfortable expressing your ideas and feelings in the local language. You may also feel a renewed sense of pleasure and humour at this stage.

**Mental Isolation**

You may experience a recurrence of culture shock after the initial adjustment period, since you have been away from your family and friends for some time and may feel lonely or homesick. You may still feel you cannot express yourself as well as you want to in the native language. Frustrations and sometimes a loss of self-confidence result, and it is during this stage that some people decide to return home.

**Acceptance and Integration**

At this stage, you will have established a routine (e.g. work, school, social life), and become accustomed to the habits, customs, food, language, people and characteristics of the country.

**Return Anxiety, Re-entry Shock, Reintegration**

Sometimes re-entry shock can be more difficult than culture shock because we may not expect it. Be prepared to experience a similar adjustment process to the one you experienced in adjusting to the host country, as you become re-acquainted to your home culture and with your family and friends.

*Image and text source: [www.isc.sdsu.edu/study\\_abroad/accepted-culture-shock.html](http://www.isc.sdsu.edu/study_abroad/accepted-culture-shock.html)*

## Reasons for Stereotypes and Prejudices

*“A **stereotype** is a simplified and/or standardized conception or image with specific meaning, often held in common by people about another group. A stereotype can be a conventional and oversimplified conception, opinion, or image, based on the assumption that there are attributes that members of the other group hold in common. Stereotypes are sometimes formed by a previous illusory correlation, a false association between two variables that are loosely if at all correlated. Stereotypes may be positive or negative in tone. They are typically generalizations based on minimal or limited knowledge about a group to which the person doing the stereotyping does not belong. Persons may be grouped based on racial group, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, age or any number of other categories.”<sup>9</sup>*

*“The word **prejudice** refers to prejudgment: making a decision before becoming aware of the relevant facts of a case or event. The word has commonly been used in certain restricted contexts, in the expression 'racial prejudice'. Initially this is referred to making a judgment about a person based on their race, religion, etc., before receiving information relevant to the particular issue on which a judgment was being made; it came, however, to be widely used to refer to any hostile attitude towards people based on their race or even by just judging someone without even knowing them. Subsequently the word has come to be widely so interpreted in this way in contexts other than those relating to race. The meaning now is frequently "any unreasonable attitude that is unusually resistant to rational influence". Race, gender, ethnic, sexual identity, age, and religion have a history of in citing prejudicial behaviour.”<sup>10</sup>*

### **The difference**

At times the terms prejudice and stereotype are confusing:

- Prejudices are abstract-general preconceptions or abstract-general attitudes towards any type of situation object or person.
- Stereotypes are generalizations of existing characteristics. These reduce complexity.

### **“Prejudice as an Intellectual Shortcut to Decision-Making”**

In its intellectual sense, prejudice is literally 'prejudgment' based customarily on the experience of an individual or of his or her society. It is an intellectual device for facilitating rapid decision-making under the pressure of sudden changes in the external environment. As such it can be particularly useful to individuals trying to cope with the pressure of modern existence. Few of us could get through the day if we had to make a fresh decision on every issue that faced us during our waking hours, as though it were the first time they had ever experienced that set of problems. Fortunately, people can save a lot of effort by referring to past experience, since humans are endowed with memory and reasoning powers that enable us to retain the memory of events and to be able to classify these and so learn from experience. Many of the opinions which we acquire, either from our own experiences or from those of our associates, or even from the collective experience of our society, are called 'prejudices.' These constitute pre-formed opinions either in favor of something or against something. When rooted in accurate observation and intelligent analysis, such pre-judgments are referred to with respect as "experience." Experience is an invaluable guide to our daily life, representing concise prejudgments which can be more or less reliably applied to new situations which are essentially parallel to past experiences. In short, the

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<sup>9</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stereotype>

<sup>10</sup> <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Prejudice>

'experienced' individual has found that people from one occupational, national, social, religious or ethnic group tend to react in similar ways in the same circumstances, and is therefore prepared for the possibility that others of the same group will possibly behave in parallel fashion. Experience inspires caution and suggests appropriate routes of action. The intelligent person with ample time at his or her disposal could theoretically decide to think out each new confrontation, but most people find themselves daily in situations without the time or the opportunity to make elaborate enquiries. So they call upon prior experiences to guide them in deciding what action to take.

Hiring job applicants requires us to rely heavily on past experience, and the sum content of past experience in this situation is nothing more or less than the much-condemned but essential 'prejudice'; favourable or otherwise. One can be prejudiced in favour of something as well as against something. This is intellectual "prejudice," a short cut to decision-making based on prior experience, without which a busy person could never get through the day."

*From: "The double nature of prejudice", Alan McGregor*

## Cultural Adaptation and its Limitations

*"Cultural adaptation means to be **flexible**, but **not to break with yourself**"*

For showing your respect to another culture, it is important **to adapt to some rules of social interaction**. This can mean to dress, talk, greet in a certain way. For example: If you are with Muslims, you should only eat and give things with the right hand, the other hand is considered as being dirty.

Therefore it is important to have some knowledge about cultural behaviour, to avoid being impolite without noticing.

**This external adaptation is easy if it does not hurt any fundamental values of your own culture.**

For example: Most of the western women would not wear a Muslim hijab because this external adaptation may stand in conflict with some of their own fundamental cultural values.

The question is: At which point does respectful cultural adaptation end and where does the own culture-belonging opinion start?

The own opinion, which is a result of your cultural background, starts at the point, when fundamental cultural values or norms are in contrast or conflict to the ones of another culture.

Everyone has to see for him- or herself, how much he can adapt to another culture and in which areas he has to stick to his culture-own opinion to not deny his own identity.

## Tools for Intercultural Communication and Cooperation

Intercultural communication can be a dynamic and creative affair but occasionally due to the inability to interpret people correctly it can be a challenge. Building an understanding of other people's cultures, their communication styles and behaviours can go a long way in improving relationships and being more successful in an intercultural environment.

**1. Be Patient:** Working in an intercultural environment can be a frustrating affair. Things may not get done when expected, communication can be tiresome and behaviour may be inappropriate. Patience with yourself and others helps move beyond such issues and address how to avoid similar incidents in the future.

**2. Establish Rules:** Sometimes if working in a truly intercultural team it may be necessary for all to take a step back and set down some ground rules. i.e. how do we approach punctuality, meetings, communication, emails, disagreements, etc? It is always a good idea to try and develop the rules as a group rather than have them imposed.

**3. Ask Questions:** When you don't understand something or want to know why someone has behaved in a certain way, simply ask. Asking questions stops you making assumptions, shows the questioned you did not understand them and helps build up your bank of intercultural knowledge.

**4. Respect:** The foundation of all intercultural communication is respect. By demonstrating respect you earn respect and help create more open and fruitful relationships.

**5. Humour:** In an intercultural environment one man's joke is another's insult. Be wary of differences in the sense of humour and also the acceptability of banter and the like in a business environment.

**6. Always Check:** The easiest way of minimizing the negative impact of intercultural communication is to check and double check. Whether agreeing something or giving instructions, a minute spent double checking all parties are 'reading from the same sheet' saves hours of work later on down the line.

**7. Be Positive:** When faced with incidents of an intercultural nature steer clear of blame and conflict. Stay positive, analyse the problem areas and work as a team to build strategies and solutions to ensure the same never occurs again.

**8. Self-Reflect:** Try to see yourself with the other's eyes and try to understand why they react to your behaviour the way they do. Take time to reflect on your own communication, management or motivation style and see where you can improve as an individual.

**9. Mutual learning:** What do you think is it that your colleagues can learn from you and your culture regarding work, organisation, communication, regarding certain topics and so on? Try to explain your views to them and see if they are willing to adapt your suggestions. But, even more important: Ask yourself if there are parts of the other culture's working style that could enrich you with your working strategies as well!

## Additional Material

### **Worksheet 1 :**

#### **What do we mean when we talk about „Culture“?**

*From the Roshan Institute (promoting intercultural understanding)  
(<http://www.roshan-institute.org/templates/System/details.asp?id=39783&PID=474552>)*

**Culture** is a definition highly misunderstood and misused, thus the need for an explanation:

**Culture** refers to the following Ways of Life, including but not limited to:

**Language:** the oldest human institution and the most sophisticated medium of expression.

**Arts & Sciences:** the most advanced and refined forms of human expression.

**Thought:** the ways in which people perceive, interpret, and understand the world around them.

**Spirituality:** the value system transmitted through generations for the inner well-being of human beings, expressed through language and actions.

**Social activity:** the shared pursuits within a cultural community, demonstrated in a variety of festivities and life-celebrating events.

**Interaction:** the social aspects of human contact, including the give-and-take of socialization, negotiation, protocol, and conventions.

All of the above collectively define the meaning of **Culture**.

#### **Some thoughts on culture by the American poet T.S. Eliot:**

“If we take culture seriously, we see that a people do not need merely enough to eat but a proper and particular cuisine [...] Culture may even be described simply as that which makes life worth living.”

“A people should be neither too united nor too divided, if its culture is to flourish.”

“No culture can appear or develop except in relation to a religion.”

„Neither a classless society, nor a society of strict and impenetrable social barriers is good; each class should have constant additions and defections; the classes, while remaining distinct, should be able to mix freely; and they should have a community of culture with each other which will give them something in common, more fundamental than the community which each class has with its counterpart in another society.”

”Finally, a people is judged by history according to its contribution to the culture of other peoples flourishing at the same time and according to its contribution to the cultures which arise afterwards.”

## **Worksheet 2:**

### **Culture definitions from the University of Manitoba, Canada, Section of cultural Anthropology:**

**Culture:** The system of shared beliefs, values, customs, behaviours, and artefacts that the members of society use to cope with their world and with one another, and that are transmitted from generation to generation through learning (p7).

This is a complex definition and points to four important characteristics stressed by cultural relativists:

- symbolic composition.
- systematic patterning.
- learned transmission.
- societal grounding.

#### **Emphasis 1. Symbolic Composition.**

The fundamental element or building block of culture is the **culture trait**. Traits assume many forms varying from material artefacts -- tools, house structures, art works -- to behavioural regularities -- family interrelationships, economic exchanges, and legal sanctions -- to abstract concepts and beliefs. All of these diverse and complex manifestations share one feature in common; they are symbols and as such express meaning.

A symbol is simply understood as an expression that stands for or represents something else, usually a real world condition. The use of words in a language provides the most obvious example. Words stand for perceived objective entities and states. Words as symbols, however, differ from the objects they represent and have special qualities, which is why they are so useful to us. One important characteristic is that they bear no intrinsic relation to what they represent and are thereby arbitrary. I can denote a huge animal with dramatic features such as a hoselike snout, enormous ears, and a pair of spearlike oral projections with very different sound sequences, such as pachyderm or osono. Another important symbolic characteristic is displacement, i.e., words can be used in the absence of the objects represented and thus can be reproduced in any time or place. Thus I can talk about elephants without needing to import them from Africa. This quality leads to a third major feature, creativity. Because they are freed from the material constraints of real objects, words can be manipulated to produce novel arrangements. Thus we can use the term elephant to postulate things beyond our direct experience, such as elephant species, extinct elephant ancestors, flying elephants, and elephant gods.

While words provide the simplest example, all cultural elements including material artefacts exhibit a symbolic character. Art and ceremonial objects have obvious symbolic meanings and are intentionally created to represent them. Tools and technologies are less obviously symbolic, but do involved representations. They are manufactured from a standard conceptual plan to bring about a desired objective state different from them in form. Technology also gives us a means to transform a symbolically constructed world to a real one of domesticated elephants and ivory piano keys.

#### **Emphasis 2. Systematic Patterning.**

Cultural elements as symbols assume their meanings in relationship to other symbols within a broader context of a meaning system. To interpret a symbol, therefore, anthropologists must investigate the interrelatedness of elements and the presence of unifying principles that connect symbols to form larger patterns and cultural wholes.

Let us take as an example a prevalent Dani (name of a tribe) institution that Heider identifies as "warfare". We shall be returning to Dani warfare on several occasions and will try to come to an understanding of its causes and consequences. The first assignment that an anthropologist must undertake, however, is to understand what warfare means in relation to other aspects of Dani culture in the Dani's own terms. In doing so we must suspend our own concepts and theories of warfare as a way that nation states compete over scarce resources, or as a consequence of innate human aggression, or as a delayed reaction to the repression of childhood sexuality.

## **(Worksheet 2:)**

Our first clues to Dani warfare may come from their language and a discovery that the Dani have two words for large-scale armed conflict: *wim* and *um'aim*. Heider distinguishes the two as different phases of warfare, but this understanding masks the fact that each form is linked into a separate matrix of meaning and behaviour. *Wim* is conducted between territorial and social units termed alliances. All the combatants share the same culture and language and hold common on beliefs and understandings about how and why warfare is conducted. Hostilities between alliances take the form of formal battles or sporadic ambushes or raids. They are always suspended when one of the combatants, or sometimes a bystander, is killed. If a fatality occurs, the alliance of the dead person holds a funeral, and the victorious group holds a celebration. (The bereaved group accommodatingly confirms the death and conveys the name of the deceased to the victors). The limits to violence that are inherent in this system, in which only one person is killed during a battle, result in a low fatality rate and a balance between opponents in which no territory or other resource is ceded. They also maintain warfare as a constant state that commits men to guard duty, fighting, and ceremony.

The key to understanding what might appear to you as something outside of your own cultural experience of war is that the Dani pattern combines elements that occur in Western culture into a very different complex and is related to other Dani institutions within a singular cultural matrix. The Dani provide a coherent understanding of their system by explaining warfare in relation to their belief in ghosts. When someone is killed, the ghosts of the aggrieved alliance will demand that the living avenge the death and will harass them until an enemy is killed. Ceremonies are then held to appease the ghosts of the two groups involved. The cycle is perpetuated indefinitely, because each new death calls for an additional act of vengeance. The religious rationale and the formalization and ceremonialization of hostility lead Heider to designate this form as the "ritual phase" of warfare.

We shall return to a consideration of ritual warfare and the alternate "phase" of secular warfare, or *um'aim* later in this course. For the present we can conclude that cultural traits and patterns must be initially understood in terms of the logic of the culture and the integration of cultural elements according to internally consistent themes and principles. This perspective is termed holism, a position that maintains that individual culture traits cannot be understood in isolation.

### **Emphasis 3. Learned Transmission.**

Culture traits and broader cultural patterns inclusive of language, technology, institutions, beliefs, and values are transmitted across generations and maintain continuity through learning, technically termed **enculturation**. Accordingly, learning abilities and intelligence are essential assets for all human groups and have replaced the role of biologically based genetic transmission of instincts dominant in most other animal species. However, an important relation between biology and culture must first be acknowledged.

Human biology has affected the development of culture, since symbolic and learning abilities depend upon the physical composition of the brain and other anatomical adaptations, such as vocal structures that can produce speech or manual abilities that can manufacture tools. This biological substratum supports a generalized capacity for culture among all humans and explains universal features, such as language learning abilities. However, biological factors do not determine specific cultural traits, such as the ability to speak French, English, or Dani. All children are pre-programmed by genetics to learn languages through a fixed series of stages, but will acquire a specific language only through patient instruction. Thus biology determines our general capacity for culture and is responsible for appears of some cultural universals, i.e., traits that appear in some form in every culture in the world. However, cultural variations among peoples are attributable to learned traditions and not to innate or genetic propensities.

The replacement of genetic transmission of behaviour by learning in the course of human evolution has had a clear effect on our biological heritage. We adapt to our environment through cultural strategies rather than genetic predispositions. Accordingly, human groups have spread to every part of the world and survived drastic differences in climate and diet without dramatic anatomical changes. The result has been that physical differences among peoples, which have developed over millions of years in thousands of diverse ecosystems, are remarkably superficial. Cultural differences, however, are profound and limitless and form a fascinating subject matter for anthropological enquiry.

## **(Worksheet 2:)**

### **Emphasis 4. Societal Grounding**

Culture is observable only in the form of personal behaviour but can be abstracted from individuals' actions and attributed to the social groups to which they belong. Accordingly, anthropologists underemphasize the importance of individual responsibility and creativity and focus on the common denominator of collective identity and symbols. This position counters some modern understandings of the importance of individual rights and actions. However, a few reflections show that society defines and constrains our behaviour in many unperceived ways. We can best understand the social aspect of culture by realizing that the central function of human symbolization is communication and requires adherence to understood conventions.

We most consciously experience social forces in the form of legal sanctions, which are themselves culturally based, but group norms constrain our behaviour in a wider array of circumstances. There is no law that says that I must communicate with you in English, but I am impelled to do so by the fact that we are engaged in a social relationship that requires mutual understanding. Under special circumstances, you or I might use another language and expect that the other learns it or engages a translator. However, I would never be allowed to use my individual creative powers to invent my own personal language.

A second example involves the selection of clothing. Here in the virtual classroom I am not subject to a dress code, but I do teach this class to a live audience as well and must face each day with the problem of what to wear for my lectures. Of course there are some legal constraints to my selection, since I cannot appear naked, but there are less obvious social restrictions as well. Past generations imposed fairly well defined limits to professorial dress. We had to wear academic gowns symbolic of our status. At a later period professionally identifying clothing was no longer in fashion, and we donned the more mundane adornments of generic business attire, although gowns were and still are required for academic processions.

In the 1960s, anti-authoritarian values dictated a new standard: jeans and work-shirts. Now we have apparently achieved a wide freedom to select whatever dress styles we want, but there are still strict cultural limits. I could not come to class in a bathing suit, even on a hot humid day when doing so would contribute to my comfort. As a male, I could not wear high heels and a miniskirt, at least not without creating undesired attention that would detract from my teaching effectiveness.

Such conventional meanings and limitations attached to dress are arbitrary and assume quite different forms in other cultures. Highland Mayan men and women in the Guatemalan community of San Antonio must invariably both follow a strict dress code in which everyone in the village wears the same dress. Judging from Western fashion, we might describe both male and female outfit as consisting of a blouse and wrap-around skirt, which might cause us to question the masculinity of Mayan men.

However, a close appraisal of the above picture will illustrate that San Antonian men and women dress in ways that clearly mark sexual differences. The clearest contrast is in the colour patterns of the tops: the male style is marked by a red and white striped vest and solid red sleeves; the women's style is the exact inverse of the men's. Besides marking sexual roles, highland Mayan dress forms also mark community membership, since each village has adopted a distinct outfit which unambiguously identifies its residents.

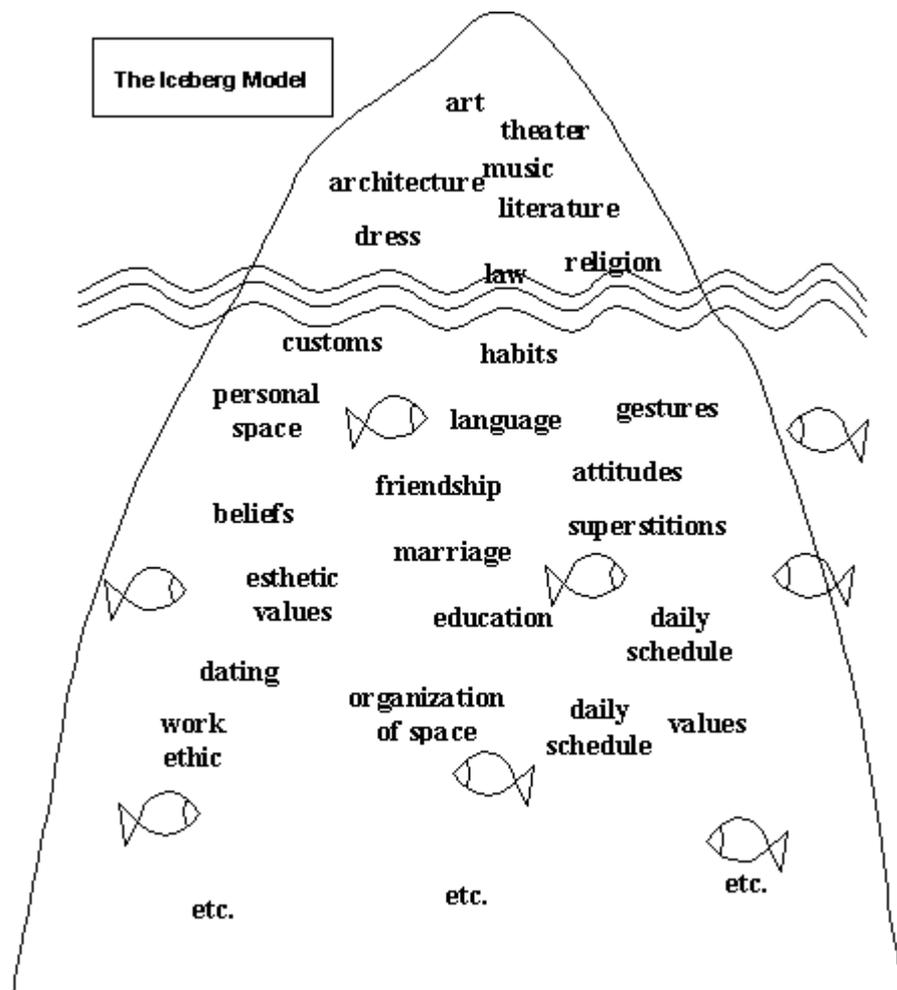
While the emphasis on the social determinants of personal behaviour is basic to the culture concept, anthropologists have tended to exaggerate their influence to the point of overlooking individual behaviour completely. As such, people are often viewed as actors in a play written and directed by an extra-natural author labelled "culture" or "society". (This tendency is called reification, the process of assigning a material reality to an abstract concept.) Cultural and social forces are manifest only in the behaviour of individuals, who are subject to influences of a different nature, such as psychological drives, personal ambitions, and creative imaginings. The anthropological focus on the culture concept gives us only a partial view of the human reality and we must borrow from or cooperate with other disciplines to achieve a total understanding of the human experience.

*Source: [www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/anthropology/courses/122/module1/culture.html](http://www.umanitoba.ca/faculties/arts/anthropology/courses/122/module1/culture.html)*

### Worksheet 3: The Iceberg model

Culture can be explained with the Iceberg model. There is a small part of external culture which everyone can see. This is illustrated by the visible top of the iceberg. But most of the iceberg is under water, invisible. Just like culture! More is hidden behind the obvious; the external is built on something deeper.

This model can also explain culture clashes: Imagine two icebergs in the sea. Even though their visible parts do not touch, their invisible underwater parts already collide with each other. So before us even communicating and being active, cultures can clash!



## **Worksheet 4:**

### **The culture of Albatros – simulation**

#### ***Utamaduni wa Albatros***

##### **Roleplay**

The participants of the game wait outside whilst the two actors, the “people of Albatros” arrange the room. There are two chairs and a bowl of peanuts. Then, one participant is called inside.

The people of Albatros wait inside. They don't wear shoes.

When the guest enters, the Albatros people show him/ her with hissing noises to pull off the shoes. If the guests don't understand, the Albatros people take off their shoes (man only touches man, woman only woman).

They walk around the room once, the man taking the lead. Then, a guest man is seated on one of the chairs, a guest woman is shown to kneel down. When all participants have come in, taken off their shoes and sat/ knelt down, the Albatros man sits down on the other chair and the Albatros woman fetches the peanuts. First, she puts some peanuts into the Albatros man's mouth, then she eats herself. Then she puts peanuts into the guest man's mouth, then she holds out the peanuts to the guest woman who has to take peanuts herself.

Afterwards, the Albatros woman kneels down. The Albatros man puts a hand on her shoulder and she bends towards the earth. Then, the Albatros people show the guest pair to do the same. Finally, the Albatros people walk around the room once more, man in front, and leave.

##### **Description and Interpretation of the Simulation**

1st Step: Describe what happened, what you saw. (flipchart)

2nd Step: How did you feel, what did all this mean? Interpretation. (Flipchart)

##### **Background**

The culture of Albatros is a matriarch community (maana: wanawake ni mabossi), and the people of Albatros believe the earth is a (female) god. Big feet are considered beautiful because they enable you to be in close contact with mother earth, and at all times you have to hold this contact. Shoes stop the flow of power from the goddess earth into your body, so Albatros people give their guests the special honour to take off their shoes.

Because women can give birth to life, just as the goddess earth, they have privileges. Men have to protect them by walking in front of them and defending them. They also have to try all the food before it is eaten by women, so the women cannot be poisoned. But because all food comes from mother earth, it is sacred, so only women may touch it with their hands. Furthermore, only women are allowed to sit on the floor to get good contact to mother earth, while men have to sit on chairs, far away from god. In a ritual ceremony, however, men are allowed to put their hands on the woman's back. The woman then bends towards the earth to absorb the energy coming from goddess earth, and through her body she transfers it to the man so he can get a small part of the earth's power indirectly.

**Discussion:** Where did the interpretation go wrong? Why?

Codes can have a totally different meaning in another culture.

How to avoid misunderstandings?

1. Observe, 2. Feel, 3. Interpret, 4. Judge

## **Worksheet 5:** **Culture and Conflict**

### **How Cultures Work**

Though largely below the surface, cultures are a shifting, dynamic set of starting points that orient us in particular ways and away from other directions. Each of us belongs to multiple cultures that give us messages about what is normal, appropriate, and expected. When others do not meet our expectations, it is often a cue that our cultural expectations are different. We may mistake differences between others and us for evidence of bad faith or lack of common sense on the part of others, not realizing that common sense is also cultural. What is common to one group may seem strange, counterintuitive, or wrong to another.

Cultural messages shape our understandings of relationships and of how to deal with the conflict and harmony that are always present whenever two or more people come together. Writing about or working across cultures is complicated, but not impossible. Here are some complications in working with cultural dimensions of conflict, and the implications that flow from them:

Culture is multi-layered -- what you see on the surface may mask differences below the surface.

*Therefore, cultural generalizations are not the whole story, and there is no substitute for building relationships and sharing experiences, coming to know others more deeply over time.*

Culture is constantly in flux -- as conditions change, cultural groups adapt in dynamic and sometimes unpredictable ways.

*Therefore, no comprehensive description can ever be formulated about a particular group. Any attempt to understand a group must take the dimensions of time, context, and individual differences into account.*

Culture is elastic -- knowing the cultural norms of a given group does not predict the behaviour of a member of that group, who may not conform to norms for individual or contextual reasons.

*Therefore, taxonomies (e.g. "Italians think this way," or "Buddhists prefer that") have limited use, and can lead to error if not checked with experience.*

Culture is largely below the surface, influencing identities and meaning-making, or who we believe ourselves to be and what we care about -- it is not easy to access these symbolic levels since they are largely outside our awareness.

*Therefore, it is important to use many ways of learning about the cultural dimensions of those involved in a conflict, especially indirect ways, including stories, metaphors, and rituals.*

Cultural influences and identities become important depending on context. When an aspect of cultural identity is threatened or misunderstood, it may become relatively more important than other cultural identities and this fixed, narrow identity may become the focus of stereotyping, negative projection, and conflict. This is a very common situation in intractable conflicts.

*Therefore, it is useful for people in conflict to have interactive experiences that help them see each other as broadly as possible, experiences that foster the recognition of shared identities as well as those that are different.*

Since culture is so closely related to our identities (who we think we are), and the ways we make meaning (what is important to us and how), it is always a factor in conflict. Cultural awareness leads us to apply the Platinum Rule in place of the Golden Rule. Rather than the maxim "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you," the Platinum Rule advises: "Do unto others as they would have you do unto them."

## **(Worksheet 5:)**

### **Culture and Conflict: Connections**

Cultures are embedded in every conflict because conflicts arise in human relationships. Cultures affect the ways we name, frame, blame, and attempt to tame conflicts. Whether a conflict exists at all is a cultural question. In an interview conducted in Canada, an elderly Chinese man indicated he had experienced no conflict at all for the previous 40 years. Among the possible reasons for his denial was a cultural preference to see the world through lenses of harmony rather than conflict, as encouraged by his Confucian upbringing. Labelling some of our interactions as conflicts and analyzing them into smaller component parts is a distinctly Western approach that may obscure other aspects of relationships.

Culture is always a factor in conflict, whether it plays a central role or influences it subtly and gently. For any conflict that touches us where it matters, where we make meaning and hold our identities, there is always a cultural component. Intractable conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or the India-Pakistan conflict over Kashmir are not just about territorial, boundary, and sovereignty issues -- they are also about acknowledgement, representation, and legitimization of different identities and ways of living, being, and making meaning.

Conflicts between teenagers and parents are shaped by generational culture, and conflicts between spouses or partners are influenced by gender culture. In organizations, conflicts arising from different disciplinary cultures escalate tensions between co-workers, creating strained or inaccurate communication and stressed relationships. Culture permeates conflict no matter what -- sometimes pushing forth with intensity, other times quietly snaking along, hardly announcing its presence until surprised people nearly stumble on it.

Culture is inextricable from conflict, though it does not cause it. When differences surface in families, organizations, or communities, culture is always present, shaping perceptions, attitudes, behaviours, and outcomes.

When the cultural groups we belong to are a large majority in our community or nation, we are less likely to be aware of the content of the messages they send us. Cultures shared by dominant groups often seem to be "natural," "normal" - "the way things are done." We only notice the effect of cultures that are different from our own, attending to behaviours that we label exotic or strange.

Though culture is intertwined with conflict, some approaches to conflict resolution minimize cultural issues and influences. Since culture is like an iceberg -- largely submerged -- it is important to include it in our analyses and interventions. Icebergs unacknowledged can be dangerous, and it is impossible to make choices about them if we don't know their size or place. Acknowledging culture and bringing cultural fluency to conflicts can help all kinds of people make more intentional, adaptive choices.

### **Culture and Conflict: How to Respond**

Given culture's important role in conflicts, what should be done to keep it in mind and include it in response plans? Cultures may act like temperamental children: complicated, elusive, and difficult to predict. Unless we develop comfort with culture as an integral part of conflict, we may find ourselves tangled in its net of complexity, limited by our own cultural lenses. Cultural fluency is a key tool for disentangling and managing multilayered, cultural conflicts.

*Cultural fluency* means familiarity with cultures: their natures, how they work, and ways they intertwine with our relationships in times of conflict and harmony. Cultural fluency means awareness of several dimensions of culture, including

- Communication,
- Ways of naming, framing, and taming conflict,
- Approaches to meaning making,
- Identities and roles.

Each of these is described in more detail below.

## **(Worksheet 5:)**

Communication refers to different starting points about how to relate to and with others. There are many variations on these starting points. Some of the major variations relate to the division between high- and low-context communications, a classification devised by Edward T. Hall.

In high-context communication, most of a message is conveyed by the context surrounding it, rather than being named explicitly in words. The physical setting, the way things are said, and shared understandings are relied upon to give communication meaning. Interactions feature formalized and stylized rituals, telegraphing ideas without spelling them out. Nonverbal cues and signals are essential to comprehension of the message. The context is trusted to communicate in the absence of verbal expressions, or sometimes in addition to them. High-context communication may help save face because it is less direct than low-context communication, but it may increase the possibilities of miscommunication because much of the intended message is unstated.

Low-context communication emphasizes directness rather than relying on the context to communicate. From this starting point, verbal communication is specific and literal, and less is conveyed in implied, indirect signals. Low-context communicators tend to "say what they mean and mean what they say." Low-context communication may help prevent misunderstandings, but it can also escalate conflict because it is more confrontational than high-context communication.

As people communicate, they move along a continuum between high- and low-context. Depending on the kind of relationship, the context, and the purpose of communication, they may be more or less explicit and direct. In close relationships, communication shorthand is often used, which makes communication opaque to outsiders but perfectly clear to the parties. With strangers, the same people may choose low-context communication.

Low- and high-context communication refers not only to individual communication strategies, but may be used to understand cultural groups. Generally, Western cultures tend to gravitate toward low-context starting points, while Eastern and Southern cultures tend to high-context communication. Within these huge categories, there are important differences and many variations. Where high-context communication tends to be featured, it is useful to pay specific attention to nonverbal cues and the behaviour of others who may know more of the unstated rules governing the communication. Where low-context communication is the norm, directness is likely to be expected in return.

There are many other ways that communication varies across cultures. High- and low-context communication and several other dimensions are explored in *Communication, Culture, and Conflict*.

Ways of naming, framing, and taming conflict vary across cultural boundaries. As the example of the elderly Chinese interviewee illustrates, not everyone agrees on what constitutes a conflict. For those accustomed to subdued, calm discussion, an emotional exchange among family members may seem a threatening conflict. The family members themselves may look at their exchange as a normal and desirable airing of differing views. Intractable conflicts are also subject to different interpretations. Is an event a skirmish, a provocation, an escalation, or a mere trifle, hardly worth noticing? The answer depends on perspective, context, and how identity relates to the situation.

Just as there is no consensus across cultures or situations on what constitutes a conflict or how events in the interaction should be framed, so there are many different ways of thinking about how to tame it. Should those involved meet face to face, sharing their perspectives and stories with or without the help of an outside mediator? Or should a trusted friend talk with each of those involved and try to help smooth the waters? Should a third party be known to the parties or a stranger to those involved?

John Paul Lederach, in his book *Preparing for Peace: Conflict Transformation Across Cultures*, identifies two third-party roles that exist in U.S. and Somali settings, respectively -- the formal mediator and the traditional elder. The formal mediator is generally not known to those involved, and he or she tries to act without favouritism or investment in any particular outcome. Traditional elders are revered for their local knowledge and relationships, and are relied upon for direction and advice, as well as for their skills in helping parties communicate with each other. The roles of insider partial (someone known to the parties who is familiar with the history of the situation and the webs of relationships) and outsider neutral (someone unknown to the parties who has no stake in the outcome or continuing relationship with the parties) appear in a range of cultural contexts. Generally, insider partials tend to be preferred in traditional, high-context settings, while outside neutrals are more common in low-context settings.

## **(Worksheet 5:)**

These are just some of the ways that taming conflict varies across cultures. Third parties may use different strategies with quite different goals, depending on their cultural sense of what is needed. In multicultural contexts, parties' expectations of how conflict should be addressed may vary, further escalating an existing conflict.

Approaches to meaning-making also vary across cultures. Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars suggest that people have a range of starting points for making sense of their lives, including:

- universalist (favouring rules, laws, and generalizations) and particularist (favouring exceptions, relations, and contextual evaluation)
- specificity (preferring explicit definitions, breaking down wholes into component parts, and measurable results) and diffuseness (focusing on patterns, the big picture, and process over outcome)
- inner direction (sees virtue in individuals who strive to realize their conscious purpose) and outer direction (where virtue is outside each of us in natural rhythms, nature, beauty, and relationships)
- synchronous time (cyclical and spiraling) and sequential time (linear and unidirectional).

When we don't understand that others may have quite different starting points, conflict is more likely to occur and to escalate. Even though the starting points themselves are neutral, negative motives are easily attributed to someone who begins from a different end of the continuum.

For example, when First Nations people sit down with government representatives to negotiate land claims in Canada or Australia, different ideas of time may make it difficult to establish rapport and make progress. First Nations people tend to see time as stretching forward and back, binding them in relationship with seven generations in both directions. Their actions and choices in the present are thus relevant to history and to their progeny. Government negotiators acculturated to Western European ideas of time may find the telling of historical tales and the consideration of projections generations into the future tedious and irrelevant unless they understand the variations in the way time is understood by First Nations people.

Of course, this example draws on generalizations that may or may not apply in a particular situation. There are many different Aboriginal peoples in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, the United States, and elsewhere. Each has a distinct culture, and these cultures have different relationships to time, different ideas about negotiation, and unique identities. Government negotiators may also have a range of ethno cultural identities, and may not fit the stereotype of the woman or man in a hurry, with a measured, pressured orientation toward time.

Examples can also be drawn from the other three dimensions identified by Hampden-Turner and Trompenaars. When an intractable conflict has been ongoing for years or even generations, should there be recourse to international standards and interveners, or local rules and practices? Those favouring a universalist starting point are more likely to prefer international intervention and the setting of international standards. Particularists will be more comfortable with a tailor-made, home-grown approach than with the imposition of general rules that may or may not fit their needs and context.

Specificity and diffuseness also lead to conflict and conflict escalation in many instances. People, who speak in specifics, looking for practical solutions to challenges that can be implemented and measured, may find those who focus on process, feelings, and the big picture obstructionist and frustrating. On the other hand, those whose starting points are diffuse are more apt to catch the flaw in the sum that is not easy to detect by looking at the component parts, and to see the context into which specific ideas must fit.

Inner-directed people tend to feel confident that they can affect change, believing that they are "the masters of their fate, the captains of their souls." They focus more on product than process. Imagine their frustration when faced with outer-directed people, whose attention goes to nurturing relationships, living in harmony with nature, going with the flow, and paying attention to processes rather than products. As with each of the above sets of starting points, neither is right or wrong; they are simply different. A focus on process is helpful, but not if it completely fails to ignore outcomes. A focus on outcomes is useful, but it is also important to monitor the tone and direction of the process. Cultural fluency means being aware of different sets of starting points, and having a way to speak in both dialects, helping translate between them when they are making conflict worse.

## **(Worksheet 5:)**

These continua are not absolute, nor do they explain human relations broadly. They are clues to what might be happening when people are in conflict over long periods of time. We are meaning-making creatures, telling stories and creating understandings that preserve our sense of self and relate to our purpose. As we come to realize this, we can look into the process of meaning making for those in a conflict and find ways to help them make their meaning-making processes and conclusions more apparent to each other.

This can be done by storytelling and by the creation of shared stories, stories that are co-constructed to make room for multiple points of view within them. Often, people in conflict tell stories that sound as though both cannot be true. Narrative conflict-resolution approaches help them leave their concern with truth and being right on the sideline for a time, turning their attention instead to stories in which they can both see themselves.

Another way to explore meaning making is through metaphors. Metaphors are compact, tightly packaged word pictures that convey a great deal of information in shorthand form. For example, in exploring how a conflict began, one side may talk about its origins being buried in the mists of time before there were boundaries and roads and written laws. The other may see it as the offspring of a vexatious lawsuit begun in 1946. Neither is wrong -- the issue may well have deep roots, and the lawsuit was surely a part of the evolution of the conflict. As the two sides talk about their metaphors, the more diffuse starting point wrapped up in the mists of time meets the more specific one, attached to a particular legal action. As the two talk, they deepen their understanding of each other in context, and learn more about their respective roles and identities.

Identities and roles refer to conceptions of the self. Am I an individual unit, autonomous, a free agent, ultimately responsible for myself? Or am I first and foremost a member of a group, weighing choices and actions by how the group will perceive them and be affected by them? Those who see themselves as separate individuals likely come from societies anthropologists call individualist. Those for whom group allegiance is primary usually come from settings anthropologists call collectivist, or communitarian.

In collectivist settings, the following values tend to be privileged:

- cooperation
- filial piety (respect for and deference toward elders)
- participation in shared progress
- reputation of the group
- interdependence

In individualist settings, the following values tend to be privileged:

1. competition
2. independence
3. individual achievement
4. personal growth and fulfillment
5. self-reliance

When individualist and communitarian starting points influence those on either side of a conflict, escalation may result. Individualists may see no problem with "no holds barred" confrontation, while communitarian counterparts shrink from bringing dishonor or face-loss to their group by behaving in unseemly ways. Individualists may expect to make agreements with communitarians, and may feel betrayed when the latter indicate that they have to take their understandings back to a larger public or group before they can come to closure. In the end, one should remember that, as with other patterns described, most people are not purely individualist or communitarian. Rather, people tend to have individualist or communitarian starting points, depending on one's upbringing, experience, and the context of the situation.

### **Conclusion**

There is no one-size-fits-all approach to conflict resolution, since culture is always a factor. Cultural fluency is therefore a core competency for those who intervene in conflicts or simply want to function more effectively in their own lives and situations. Cultural fluency involves recognizing and acting respectfully from the knowledge that communication, ways of naming, framing, and taming conflict, approaches to meaning-making, and identities and roles vary across cultures.

*Source: <http://www.beyondintractability.org/action/essay.jsp?id=26234&nid=1186>*

## Credentials

1<sup>st</sup> Edition: June 2009 by Anna Hoppenau and Johannes Hahn

2<sup>nd</sup> Edition: May 2010 by Office of German-Tanzanian Partnership

This Cultural Manual is supposed to grow and be developed further. Therefore feel free to send recommendations or additions you might have to make to [info@dtpev.de](mailto:info@dtpev.de). Asante.

## Sources

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