

THE LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT PARTNERSHIP

PERFORMANCE COACHING FOR BUSINESS AND EDUCATION

Identify some cultural differences that can affect your team work

'Culture' refers to a set of cognitive or perceptual filters that national groups use in order to make sense of the world. These filters manifest themselves in a set of guidelines that the group regard as 'socially acceptable' and can include rules on cleanliness, health issues, emotional expression, body language, interaction, acceptable physical distance, politeness, appropriate dress code and the use of language. It can also manifest itself in cognitive preferences such as a culture's: (i) view of time, (ii) how important the task is versus relationships, (iii) how much a culture accepts things as they are or wants to dominate it, (iv) how power structures are set up (v) how much uncertainty can be tolerated and (vi) preference for hypothetical or concrete reasoning.

Look at the list below and see if you have experienced some differences when you have worked in cross-cultural groups or organisations.

Cognitive preference	An explanation	What do you think?
Time horizon <i>The time frame within which groups set goals</i>	This shows how far ahead people set goals. <i>Present-horizon</i> groups work on short term goals while <i>future-horizon</i> groups prefer long term goals. Issues around 'safety' and 'training' would reflect a <i>future-horizon</i> frame.	Have you recognized any cultural differences in how people set goals? How about your culture and how about you personally? Do you have difficulty working with other who have a different time horizon and if so, how can you work around it?
Achievement vs relationship <i>How groups approach life and work situations</i>	Those groups that are achievement oriented, as are Westerners, are more concerned with completing their tasks, while the	Have you worked in groups where there has been some difference on this dimension? Does the kind of company you work with

	relationship oriented groups are more concerned with inter-personal activities. Achievement oriented groups often want to move forward in order to make changes happen 'efficiently' while the relationship oriented prefer to allow change to happen naturally and at its own pace in order to retain harmony.	prefer a particular style? How could you get the best out of both styles? What is your own position?
Mastery vs fatalism <i>How sure groups are of dominating their environment or how happy they are to live with what presents itself and adapt</i>	Mastery groups are those with technology and know-how who feel they have mastery over the natural world.. Those with a fatalistic viewpoint know how to accept 'what is' and adapt to it. Westerners and North Americans have a mastery view and highly respect a 'can do' attitude. Other cultures prefer to live with the natural world as it is and adapt with it.	Which world view have you grown up with? How would it be to work with someone who is different to you on this aspect?
Power distance <i>This is how groups see the working relationship between superiors and subordinates</i>	A <i>low-power -distance</i> is reflected in egalitarian work practices where information flows readily up and down the power chain. Meritocracies are example of this. A <i>high-power-distance</i> group expects leaders to be distant from subordinates and to make the decisions. This can be reflected in separate eating facilities and sometimes toilets for different ranking staff. It is not easy to challenge those of a higher rank.	What have been your experiences in working in your own country? If you have moved to a different country or company of a different culture, have you experienced a difference on this dimension? If you have been aware of it, how have you adjusted (or not)?
Tolerance for uncertainty	Cultures behave differently in the face of uncertainty, especially in their	How tolerant is your culture to uncertainty and how about you personally?

	<p>environment. Those groups with <i>low tolerance for uncertainty</i> are more stressed when things are uncertain at work and try to maintain the status quo (what they know), dislike disagreement, resist change and need to know 'where they are'. Those with <i>high tolerance for uncertainty</i> can deal with ambiguity, make changes happily, are not stressed by the unknown or disagreements.</p>	<p>How do you feel in multicultural teams in relation to this dimension? Is it an issue for you and your company or not?</p>
<p>Hypothetical vs concrete reasoning</p>	<p><i>Hypothetical thinkers</i> happily ask 'what if' questions where the original problem is grounded in reality. They are happy to extrapolate to some hypothetical scenario looking at the implications of alternative strategies. <i>Concrete thinkers</i> review past events and take current reality as a basis for new strategies; they are often procedural thinkers.</p>	<p>OK where are you? Are you a 'what if.... Let's see' person or 'where are we now' person?</p> <p>Both thinking strategies can reach the same outcome and both have positive and negative aspects. Do we know how to mix both strategies for best effect at work?</p>
<p>Attribution <i>This refers to attributing the cause of behaviour to either an individual or a system an individual is in</i></p>	<p>Attribution influences the communication style of an organisation. At one end of this dimension individuals see the skills they have as only part of themselves but not the whole of themselves. This means that positive criticism is more easily accepted as feedback as there is no or very 'little loss of face'. At the other end of this dimension the individual feels more integrated with their skills and attributes and any criticism can result in 'loss of face'.</p>	<p>Consider how you have dealt with positive criticism in the past. Do you feel very uncomfortable with it and feel embarrassed ?. How about the colleagues you have worked with? How important is feedback in your organization and is it handled in a culturally sensitive way?</p>

These are the dimensions identified by Professor Helen Klein (2004) in her 'Cultural Lens Model'.

References

1. Klein, Helen Altman(2004) Cognition in Natural Settings: The Cultural Lens Model in Michael Kaplan (Ed) *Cultural Ergonomics Advances in Human Performance and Cognitive Engineering Research*, Volume 4, pp 249-280, Elsevier Press Ltd. Available at <http://macrocognition.com/LOCKED%20PDF/KleinCulturalLens.pdf> [last accessed April 2011].
2. Ramsay, Paul, Maier, Pat, Price, Geraldine (2010) *Study Skills for Business & Management Students*, Pearsons, Essex, UK.
 - See chapter 5 'Working in Real and Diverse Teams'. This chapter works students through setting up and being effective team players taking into account some aspects of cross cultural issues, especially the work of Geert Hofstede.
 - This is also useful for academics wishing to add some team training material to group projects.
3. Mindtools website: Cross Cultural Communication at: <http://www.mindtools.com/CommSkill/Cross-Cultural-communication.htm> [last accessed April 2011 OK 17.5.11 BUT CHECK BEFORE SITE GOES LIVE].