

Directions:

Each of the following pages has two opposite cultural dimensions typed on them. The facilitator should print each page on different colored sheets of paper (for example, the collectivism/individualism could be printed on green paper, the universalism/particularism printed on blue paper, etc.). Then, the facilitator should provide one piece of paper to each participant.

Note: The facilitator does not have to use all the dimensions included in this document. They can choose which ones are most appropriate/useful for their participants.

Note: The descriptions used in this activity are from *Culture Matters: The Peace Corps Cross-Cultural Workbook*, which is publicly available online. Craig Storti was a collaborator on this workbook, so these descriptions are very similar to the ones that can be found in his book *Figuring Foreigners Out: A Practical Guide*.

COLLECTIVISM

One's identity is in large part a function of one's membership and role in a group, e.g., the family or work team. The survival and success of the group ensures the well-being of the individual, so that by considering the needs and feelings of others, one protects oneself. Harmony and the interdependence of group members are stressed and valued. Group members are relatively close psychologically and emotionally, but distant toward nongroup members.

INDIVIDUALISM

The individual identifies primarily with the self, with the needs of the individual being satisfied before those of the group. Looking after and taking care of oneself, being self-sufficient, guarantees the wellbeing of the group. Independence and self-reliance are greatly stressed and valued. In general, people tend to distance themselves psychologically and emotionally from each other. One may choose to join groups, but group membership is not essential to one's identity or success.

Cultural dimension descriptions are from the following:

Storti, C. (1999). *Figuring foreigners out: A practical guide*. Intercultural Press.

Peace Corps. (n.d.). *Culture matters: The Peace Corps cross-cultural workbook*. Peace Corps Information Collection and Exchange.

UNIVERSALISM

Certain absolutes apply across the board, regardless of circumstances or the particular situation. Wherever possible, you should try to apply the same rules to everyone in like situations. To be fair is to treat everyone alike and not make exceptions for family, friends, or members of your in-group. Where possible, you should lay your personal feelings aside and look at the situation objectively. While life isn't necessarily fair, we can make it more fair by treating people the same way.

Universalism is the rule. Personal & societal obligations are of equal importance and should be balanced. Rules should be applied equally to the in-group & society in general. What is right is always right, regardless of circumstances. Objectivity is valued & expected.

PARTICULARISM

How you behave in a given situation depends on the circumstances. You treat family, friends, and your in-group the best you can, and you let the rest of the world take care of itself. Their ingroups will protect them. There can't be absolutes because everything depends on whom you're dealing with. No one expects life to be fair. Exceptions will always be made for certain people.

Particularism prevails. It's necessary to distinguish between in-group and societal obligations; the former are important, the latter less so. Being fair is to treat the in-group well & let others fend for themselves. What is right depends on the situation. Context is crucial. Subjectivity is valued & expected.

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INDIRECT/HIGH CONTEXT

Context refers to the amount of innate and largely unconscious understanding a person can be expected to bring to a particular communication setting. In high context cultures, such as Thailand, which tend to be homogenous and collectivist, people carry within them highly developed and refined notions of how most interactions will unfold, of how they and the other person will behave in a particular situation. Because people in high context cultures already know and understand each other quite well, they have evolved a more indirect style of communication. They have less need to be explicit and rely less on words to convey meaning—and especially on the literal meaning of the spoken word—and more on nonverbal communication. People often convey meaning or send messages by manipulating the context. Because these cultures tend to be collectivist, people work closely together and know what everyone else knows. The overriding goal of the communication exchange is maintaining harmony and saving face.

People are indirect; they imply/ suggest what they mean; understatement is valued; you need to read between the lines; the truth, if it hurts, should be tempered. High context, homogenous and collectivist cultures: much is already known; the spoken word is not the primary means of communicating; much is implied but little needs to be said; nonverbal cues and the context are the key what is not said may be the message.

DIRECT/LOW CONTEXT

Context refers to the amount of innate and largely unconscious understanding a person can be expected to bring to a particular communication setting. Low context cultures, like the United States, tend to be more heterogeneous and individualist and accordingly have evolved a more direct communication style. Less can be assumed about the other person in a heterogeneous society, and less is known about others in a culture where people prefer independence, self-reliance, and a greater emotional distance from each other. They cannot depend merely on manipulating context—not doing or not saying something that is always done or said in that situation—or communicating nonverbally to make themselves understood; they must rely more on words, and on those words being interpreted literally. Getting or giving information is the goal of most communication exchanges.

People say what they mean and mean what they say; you don't need to read between the lines; it's important to tell it like it is; honesty is the best policy; the truth is more important than sparing someone's feelings. Low context, heterogenous and individualist cultures: little is already known; the message must be explicit and spelled out; words are the primary means of communication; nonverbal cues are not the key to understanding.

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THE IMPORTANCE OF FACE: FACE LESS IMPORTANT

Face has moderate importance; the facts and expediency are more important than being careful about what you say; getting/ giving information is the overriding goal of the communication exchange; criticism is straightforward; it's okay to say no, to confront people.

THE IMPORTANCE OF FACE: FACE IS KEY

Face is paramount; saving face/ not losing face takes precedence over the "truth"; maintaining harmony is the overriding goal of the communication exchange; confrontation is avoided; saying no is difficult; criticism is handled very delicately; what one says and what one feels often are not the same.

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THE TASK

The task is separated from the person; do business first and then have small talk; establishing rapport/a good personal relationship is not essential to getting the job done. The goal is accomplishing the task.

THE PERSON

The task and the person can't be separated; begin with small talk and then move to business; a personal relationship is a prerequisite to getting the job done. The goal is building the relationship.

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MONOCHRONIC

Time is the given and people are the variable. The needs of people are adjusted to suit the demands of time—schedules, deadlines, etc. Time is quantifiable, and a limited amount of it is available. People do one thing at a time and finish it before starting something else, regardless of circumstances.

People's attitude towards time is monochronic. People must adjust to the demands of time; time is limited. Sometimes people are too busy to see you. People live by the external clock.

POLYCHRONIC

Time is the servant and tool of people. Time is adjusted to suit the needs of people. More time is always available, and you are never too busy. People often have to do several things simultaneously, as required by circumstances. It's not necessary to finish one thing before starting another, nor to finish your business with one person before starting in with another.

A polychronic attitude towards time is the norm. Time is bent to meet the needs of people. They're never too busy; there's always more time. People live by an internal clock.

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HIGH POWER DISTANCE

People in these cultures accept that inequalities in power and status are natural or existential. In the same way they accept that some people are smarter than others, people accept that some will have more power and influence than others. Those with power tend to emphasize it, to hold it close and not delegate or share it, and to distinguish themselves as much as possible from those who do not have power. They are, however, expected to accept the responsibilities that go with power, to look after those beneath them. Subordinates are not expected to take initiative and are closely supervised.

Greater distance exists between the boss and subordinates. Power is centralized and generally not shared. The boss does not delegate responsibility or reward initiative. The worker does not disagree with or question the boss. The boss sees himself/herself as on one level, workers on another. The boss is more autocratic and paternalistic.

LOW POWER DISTANCE

People in these cultures see inequalities in power and status as largely artificial; it is not natural, though it may be convenient, that some people have power over others. Those with power, therefore, tend to deemphasize it, to minimize the differences between themselves and subordinates, and to delegate and share power to the extent possible. Subordinates are rewarded for taking initiative and do not like close supervision.

Less distance, more interaction exists between the boss and subordinates. The boss is more democratic, delegates responsibility. Taking initiative is okay. It's also okay to disagree with or question the boss. The boss sees himself/herself as one of the group. Power is decentralized.

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HIGH UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE

Cultures characterized by high uncertainty avoidance feel especially anxious about the uncertainty in life and try to limit and control it as much as possible. They have more laws, regulations, policies, and procedures and a greater emphasis on obeying them. They also have a strong tendency toward conformity, hence predictability. People take comfort in structure, systems, and expertise—anything that can blunt or even neutralize the impact of the unexpected. The unknown is frightening.

The unknown must be controlled. More laws exist and greater emphasis is on obeying laws and conforming. It's never good to break laws or bypass the chain of command, whatever the reason. Conflict must be avoided; risks are not attractive. Interactions are more formal. Different is dangerous.

LOW UNCERTAINTY AVOIDANCE

People in these cultures do not feel quite so threatened nor anxious about uncertainty, and therefore do not have such a strong need to limit or control it. They seek to legislate fewer areas of human interaction and tolerate differences better. They feel boxed in by too much structure or too many systems. They are curious rather than frightened by the unknown and are not uncomfortable leaving things to chance. Life is interesting but not especially daunting.

The unknown need not be scary. Fewer laws exist and less emphasis is on conformity. It's okay to break laws for pragmatic reasons; it's okay to bypass the chain of command if necessary. Conflict can't always be avoided. Taking risks is acceptable. Interactions are more informal. Different is interesting.

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ACHIEVED STATUS

In these *doing* cultures, people are looked up to and respected because of their personal, and especially their professional, accomplishments. You get ahead into positions of power and influence by virtue of your achievements and performance. Your status is earned and not merely a function of birth, age, or seniority. You are hired based on your record of success, not on the basis of family background, connections, or the school you attended. People aren't particularly impressed with titles. Education is important, but not the mere fact of it; you have to have done something with your knowledge. Status is not automatic and can be forfeited if you stop achieving.

Meritocracy exists. Status is earned by your achievements, by what you've accomplished in life. You get ahead based on merit. Status must be won, not automatically accorded, and it can be lost.

ASCRIBED STATUS

In these *being* cultures, a certain amount of status is built into the person; it is automatic and therefore difficult to lose. You are looked up to because of the family and social class you are born into, because of your affiliations and membership in certain important groups, and, later, because of your age and seniority. The school you went to and the amount of education you received also confer status, whether or not you did well in school or have done anything with your education. Titles are important and should always be used. You are pressured to justify the power, respect and deference that you automatically enjoy. While you cannot lose your status completely, you can lose respect by not realizing your potential.

An autocracy exists. A certain amount of status comes with the family name and the groups you are affiliated with, and can't easily be lost. Achievements are important, but you can have status even without them. Your station in life is in part an accident of birth.

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WORK AS PART OF IDENTITY

Work has value in and of itself. Your job is an important part of your identity. People live to work, in the sense that getting things done is inherently satisfying.

WORK AS FUNCTIONAL NECESSITY

Work is the means to paying bills and meeting financial obligations. It may be satisfying but doesn't have to be. Life is too short to revolve around one's work. Work is what I do, not who I am.

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PERSONAL/PROFESSIONAL SEPARATED

Personal matters should not be brought to work. Personal/family obligations should be scheduled around work. The personal and professional lives should and can be kept separate. The human factor is real but can't be indulged in the workplace. People won't understand if you plead a family emergency.

PERSONAL/PROFESSIONAL INTERTWINED

It is impossible to separate personal and family matters from work. You may have to interrupt work to take care of personal business. The personal and professional lives inevitably overlap. People will understand if you plead a family emergency.

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MOTIVATION: PROFESSIONAL OPPORTUNITY

Professional opportunity and success are important motivating factors. People want to learn, get ahead, move up in their professions or organizations and have greater power, authority and responsibility. Job security is not so important as the chance to make more money and advance in one's career.

MOTIVATION: COMFORTABLE WORK ENVIRONMENT

People are motivated by the desire to have a pleasant work setting and good relationships with coworkers. Job security is important, as is an organization that takes care of its employees. Having more time off to spend with family is also very motivating. More power and responsibility are not of themselves attractive, even if they mean more money.

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THE KEY TO PRODUCTIVITY: RESULTS

Focusing on the task ensures success. People won't always get along, but you have to move forward anyway. Harmony is nice but results are what count. If you get results, people will be more harmonious. Getting results is ultimately more important than how you get them.

THE KEY TO PRODUCTIVITY: HARMONY

Working well with other people is the key to success in any enterprise. Harmony in the workplace will ensure eventual success. Getting things done hinges on people getting along well. Results bought at the expense of harmony are too costly. How you get results is just as important as the results themselves.

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THE IDEAL WORKER: TECHNICAL SKILLS

What matters most in a worker is their technical qualifications: education, work experience, and specific skills. "People" skills are important, but they don't contribute as much to the bottom line. Hiring a relative would be sheer coincidence and only if they had the skills you needed. Demonstrated competence is the key to getting promoted.

THE IDEAL WORKER: PEOPLE SKILLS

What matters most in a worker is their ability to work well with others and not rock the boat. Experience and technical skills are important, but they don't contribute as much to the bottom line. Hiring a relative is always a good bet. Age and seniority are important for getting promoted.

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THE LOCUS OF CONTROL: INTERNAL

The locus of control is largely internal, within the individual. There are very few givens in life, few circumstances that have to be accepted as they are, that cannot be changed. There are no limits on what I can do or become, so long as I set my mind to it and make the necessary effort. Life is what I do.

THE LOCUS OF CONTROL: EXTERNAL

The locus of control is largely external to the individual. Some aspects of life are predetermined, built into the nature of things. There are limits beyond which we cannot go and certain givens that cannot be changed and must be accepted. Life is in large part what happens to me.

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SELF IDENTIFICATION

Primary identification is with one's self. The self is the smallest unit of survival. Self-reliance, personal freedom, emotional distance from others are important. Protecting one's self guarantees well-being of others. Identity is a function of one's own achievements.

GROUP IDENTIFICATION

Identity is the function of group membership. The smallest unit of survival is the primary group. Interdependence, looking after the group insures well-being of the individual. People need close affiliation with others. Too much freedom is scary.

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EGALITARIAN MENTALITY

Egalitarian mentality is the norm. Group membership is casual & voluntary. No strong sense of in/ outgroup exists. Most people are treated the same. People are informal with friends and strangers alike. It's easy to change groups and make friends.

INGROUP MENTALITY

An ingroup mentality prevails. People are close, intimate with their ingroup & compete with their outgroup. They're formal with all but their ingroup. People have little trust of their outgroup. Groups hardly change. It's harder to make friends.

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ONE THING AT A TIME

People do things one at a time. They stand in line; they expect undivided attention. Interruptions are bad; schedules, deadlines are important. Late is bad; adherence to schedule is the goal. Plans are not easily changed.

MANY THINGS AT ONCE

People do many things at one time. People stand in line less. Divided attention is okay. Interruptions are life. Schedules & deadlines are considered a loose guide. Late is late. Completing the transaction is the goal. Plans can be easily changed.

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LIFE IS WHAT I DO

There are few givens in life, few things I can't change and must accept. I can be/do whatever I want, if I make the effort. My happiness is up to me. Unhappiness is not normal. Human beings are the locus of control.

LIFE IS WHAT HAPPENS TO ME

There are some things I have to live with; there may be limits to what I can do/be; happiness & unhappiness are normal parts of life. Human beings are only sometimes the locus of control.

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PROGRESS IS INEVITABLE

Change is usually for the better. Tradition is not always right. Optimism is best. Technology is often the answer. Every problem has a solution. New is usually better.

PROGRESS IS NOT AUTOMATIC

Change can be for the worse. Realism is best. Tradition is a good guide. Some problems can't be solved. Technology does not have all the answers. New is new, not necessarily better.

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