



Introduction:

This activity introduces a case study of international development and humanitarian aid to you to consider the ways in which intensity factors impact cross-cultural interactions and collaboration. You will be introduced to the background of the case study step-by-step, with each step introducing additional insight and nuance into the complexities of the situation.

Participant Instructions:

1. Read the following information and make note of the words and phrases that stick out to you or that you are curious about by underlining or making a mental note. Pause and answer the questions posed along the way.

Background

Long ago, in a land far, far away, a project was funded by an international aid organization to conduct applied research and outreach to:

- Reduce storage degradation and loss
- Improve the storage and preservation of beans
- Inventory and evaluate local bean varieties
- Determine variables making the beans hard to cook
- Test insect resistance
- Possibly develop a new and better bean

PAUSE and share:

- What comes to mind when you read the words “international aid organization?”
- What are your current thoughts about the beans referenced?
- What else stuck out to you from this excerpt? What questions do you have at this point?

The Location

Wangoa is a (fictitious) tropical country with a complicated colonial history, prolonged intergroup conflict, located in a densely populated mountainous region, where the vast majority of the people live as subsistence agriculturalists. One of the world’s poorer countries, the area struggles with deforestation and soil erosion.

There are significant cultural issues at play in Wangoa. They distrust foreigners, as well as each other across ethnic lines. Their values tend to emphasize:

- Social formality
- Honoring hierarchies
- Avoiding uncertainty and risk
- Collectivism along ethnic lines
- Circular and indirect communication patterns

PAUSE and share:

- Why do you think the Wangoans might distrust foreigners?

- How do you feel about the way the Wangoans are depicted in this description?
- What is your personal experience with the value emphases listed (if any)? Do you personally identify with any Wangoans values?
- What are your current thoughts about the beans? Have your thoughts changed at all? How so?
- What else stuck out to you from this excerpt? What questions do you have at this point?

The Contractor

The agriculture faculty of Mid West University (MWU) was selected as the sole contractor for this program. A few of the faculty members had short experiences of less than one year with projects overseas. They had limited knowledge of the local culture, although they were open to learning the history, politics, art, music, and food. Since they didn't realize cultural differences existed, they were less aware of value contrasts, communication styles, thinking patterns, and social interaction patterns. They were internationally known experts on beans, and therefore perceived themselves as going to have a bean experience, not a cultural experience.

PAUSE and share:

- What are your current sentiments toward the Wangoans? Toward the faculty members?
- How do you feel about the way the faculty members are depicted in the description?
- How do you think the faculty members envision "a bean experience" to be? What about a "cultural experience?" What do YOU think a "cultural experience" is?
- What are your current thoughts about the beans? Have your thoughts changed at all? How so?
- What else stuck out to you from this excerpt? What questions do you have at this point?

The Case: Putting the "Culture" in Agriculture

One of the professors conducting the training made a pre-visit to Wangoa to prepare a culture map of the variables that might impact the project. She discovered that not only did the Wangoans have culture, but also that the culture of growing, cooking, tasting, storing, and eating beans was a powerful force to be reckoned with.

The faculty had a three-month preparation for their four-year project in Wangoa, studying intercultural relations, the colonial language, and technology transfer. They met for four hours once a week before their planned departure overseas.

PAUSE and share:

- What are your current sentiments toward the Wangoans? Toward the faculty members?
- What do you think is meant by "a powerful force to be reckoned with?"
- What are your current thoughts about the beans? Have your thoughts changed at all? How so?

- What else stuck out to you from this excerpt? What questions do you have at this point?

Toward the end of the training portion of the program, the Minister of the Interior from Wangoa and his entourage arrived for a project meeting and ceremony. The faculty members were eager to meet the visitors and felt the meeting had gone quite well.

Much to their surprise, the result of the meeting was that the Minister threatened to withdraw the contract. The meeting was videotaped for later review and revealed that the faculty had "humiliated" the Minister in subtle but powerful ways. This visit, and the video, became a turning point in the project, when the experts realized that culture matters.

PAUSE and share:

- What are your current sentiments toward the Wangoans? Toward the faculty members?
- Why do you think the discrepancy in evaluation of the meeting between the faculty members and the Minister might have occurred?
- What do you think is meant by "culture matters?"
- What are your current thoughts about the beans? Have your thoughts changed at all? How so?
- What else stuck out to you from this excerpt? What questions do you have at this point?

While they now were alert to possible social and cultural barriers to the success of their project, they remained confident of their knowledge of beans, which was, after all, definitively their area of expertise. Only when they arrived in Wangoa did they fully comprehend that beans did indeed have culture, and that there was a great deal they had to learn about beans before they could proceed.

PAUSE and share:

- What are your current sentiments toward the Wangoans? Toward the faculty members?
- What do you think is meant by, "area of expertise?" How might this definition shift across historical, socioeconomic, cultural, etc. contexts and different groups?
- What are your current thoughts about the beans? Have your thoughts changed at all? How so?
- What else stuck out to you from this excerpt? What questions do you have at this point?

Discussion

The identities of the country, the contractor, and the agency have been changed to maintain confidentiality, but this is a true case study of an actual international development project.

Therefore, as you review the following questions, you may approach them from the perspective of any culture with which you are familiar. We are not looking for the "right" solution, but rather to explore the range of possible perspectives that can be brought to bear on this complicated work of international development and humanitarian aid.



2. Answer the following questions in a whole or small group discussion:
 - What actions on the part of the American MWU faculty might have caused the Minister of the Interior and his entourage to feel "humiliated?" How else do you think the Minister and or the Wangoans felt throughout this project?
 - What did the MWU faculty need to know about the culture of beans? Try to imagine all the questions the local population might have about the new beans being introduced.
 - How would you illustrate, either verbally or via images, the progression of the faculty's changes in perception/cultural adjustment?
 - Consider how intensity factors impact the faculty members as they implement their program in the Wangoans culture by completing the Intensity Factor Index on the following page.

Intensity Factor Index:

The Intensity Factors Index is a tool for evaluating the psychological intensity of intercultural environments based on these ten cross-cultural stress factors.

Factors	Least Intense ← → Most Intense									
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Cultural Differences	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
2. Ethnocentrism	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
3. Cultural Immersion	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
4. Cultural Isolation	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
5. Language	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
6. Prior Intercultural Experience	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
7. Expectations	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
8. Visibility/Invisibility	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
9. Power and Control	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
10. Status	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Overall Intensity	Score:									

Ten Cross-Cultural Stress Factors:

These are some of the factors that determine how much stress someone will experience while in a new cultural context (Paige et al., 2006, p. 57).

1. Cultural differences

Psychological stress increases as the degree of cultural difference increases between the person's own culture and the host culture. Moreover, the more negatively the individual evaluates those cultural differences, the more stressful the intercultural experience will be.

2. Ethnocentrism

Ethnocentrism is a stress factor that expresses itself in two ways. First, people with ethnocentric orientations, particularly those in denial and defense, find intercultural experiences more threatening. Second, some cultural communities themselves are less accepting of outsiders. Learners in those more ethnocentric cultures will find the experience to be more stressful.

3. Cultural Immersion

The more immersed the person is in another culture, the greater the amount of stress. "Culture fatigue" is a common problem for people who are deeply immersed in another culture – living and working with host culture people and speaking a language other than their own.

4. Cultural Isolation

The stress of cultural immersion can be reduced by time spent with one's own cultural group members. This allows for cultural reaffirmation and renewal; however, some people can be isolated by geography and other circumstances from their own cultural group.



5. *Language*

People unable to speak the language of the host culture will find the experience more stressful. Further, the more essential language ability is to functioning in the target culture, the greater the stress will be. The ability to speak the target language is not always essential nor does it assure effective communication or intercultural adjustment. Lack of language skills, however, can lead to social isolation and frustration.

6. *Prior Intercultural Experience*

Stress is affected by the amount and nature of one's prior intercultural experience. In general, people with a limited intercultural background will experience more stress in a cross-cultural situation. Those with a great deal of previous intercultural experience will generally adapt more effectively because they have already developed effective learning and coping strategies, have realistic expectations, and possess strong intercultural communication skills.

7. *Expectations*

There are two major issues regarding expectations in intercultural work. First, people who have positive but unrealistic expectations about the new culture will feel a psychological letdown after a time. The culture just can't live up to those expectations. Second, people who have high expectations of themselves in term of their ability to work effectively right away in the new culture will experience stress when they encounter normal cultural adjustment problems.

8. *Visibility/Invisibility*

People who are physically different from members of the host (or dominant) culture are highly visible and may become the object of curiosity, unwanted attention, or even discrimination. This can lead to considerable stress. Stresses can also occur when an important aspect of one's identity is invisible to members of the host culture (e.g., one's religion or political philosophy) or is concealed because it is not accepted in the host culture (e.g., sexual orientation). Concealing something about oneself for fear it could harm one's standing in the community or reduce one's effectiveness can cause considerable psychological stress.

9. *Power and Control*

One of the most consistent research findings is that people in cultures other than their own feel a loss of power and control over events and people compared to what they possess at home. And the more power one is used to exercising, the more disturbing the loss. Their personal efficacy is diminished, and they can feel that things are "out of control." The less the power and control the person has in the intercultural situation, the more psychologically stressful the experience will be.

10. *Status*

People who feel they are not getting the respect they deserve or, conversely, feel they are receiving unearned recognition will find the experience more psychologically intense. Qualities that are valuable in the home culture may not be important in the new one and can result in a loss of status. Alternatively, being granted status on the basis of inherited characteristics (e.g.,

age, ethnicity, religion, nationality, family background, and occupation) rather than personal achievements can result in discomfort.

BEANS DON'T HAVE CULTURE

HANDOUT