



MULTICULTURAL COMMUNICATION

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*“Every human is like all other humans,
some other humans and no other human.”*

-Clyde Kluckhohn

1. INTRODUCTION

In this document, you will find exercises aimed at learning about multicultural communication created as DISCOM Project Study Materials. The study materials consist of individual tasks for students as well as anyone interested in the subject matter. The exercises were designed to help learners develop knowledge and skills to communicate cross-culturally in a more effective way. Along with the description of theoretical concepts regarding the topic, in this document there are included materials that will be helpful in acquiring hands-on experience and learning cross cultural communication via exercises as well as the debrief afterwards.

1.1. Social and practical relevance of the specific topic addressed

Regardless whether you are negotiating with your clients, working in a team at work, travelling or visiting a wedding abroad - it should be stressed that almost every conversation, discussion and other form of human interaction happens in some kind of a cultural overlap. Multicultural communication is a skill which can be learnt, acquired and mastered.

Multicultural communication can be defined in many ways, typically it is said to be: a verbal and written interaction involving two or more participants who have different cultural values and beliefs. In other words, it is an interaction individuals coming from significantly different backgrounds (regardless of whether it is due to their geographical origin, gender, system of beliefs, social status etc.).

1.2. Need of assessment:

Multicultural communication skills are crucial. As the world is becoming a smaller and smaller place, differences that occur on both our professional and personal paths are increasingly bigger and more noticeable. While working and living across nations and cultures, the comprehension and awareness of the intercultural competency is the survival issue. Very much needed to thrive. The importance of cultural competency is becoming more recognized and materials helping to develop such are required.

On many occasions, the cultural communication skill is enumerated as one of most needed to become a global leader, successful professional or grow as a person in general.

Every individual should learn how to effectively communicate in a multicultural context with an emphasis on globalization and professional relevance.

1.3. Main goals and learning outcomes:

The ultimate goal of learning multicultural communication skills is to obtain Intercultural communication competency (ICC). The ICC is simply the ability to navigate a communication process in order to minimize the [negative] influence of culture on [the effectiveness of] communication. In pursuance of mastering the intercultural communication competency people need to become aware, to transform their attitudes, develop their flexibility and adaptability as well as transform knowledge into competence – with a set of skills helpful in reaching full potential of intercultural interaction.



Intercultural Communication Competency does not require simply learning about each and every culture in the world. Moreover, it cannot be measured by the number of cultures one learnt about. Simply put, when Leslie studied 7 cultures, it does not mean they are have higher cross cultural competency than Alex who learnt 3.

Intercultural Communication Competency is adequate when cultural differences between interacting people do not hinder the outcome of the communication process. In other words, when you understand and are understood to the same extend by people of ‘your culture’ as you are understood by representatives of the ‘other culture’.

The main **goals** of the following materials are to help you understand:

1. basic concepts e.g.: communication, culture, biases, preferences as per communication styles, multicultural influence on communication;
2. factors playing important roles in the way one communicates;
3. role of importance of effective communication;
4. role of culture in communication;

In order **for you to be able to**:

1. observe and analyze your personal and other people communication styles;
2. recognize differences in communication;
3. discuss differences in communication;
4. overcome obstacles in communication;
5. adjust communication style and methods to maximize communication effectiveness.

One important perspective in studying multicultural communication is to emphasize the importance of the individual efforts put into an intercultural conversation or other interaction – in other words, you need to take the burden of communication on your shoulders. With that perspective, your self-knowledge (knowing and managing yourself in a multicultural scenario) is crucial. As well as the ability to identify which communication happens in a multicultural context – in order for you to be able to entail appropriate measures and use proper communication methods. Hence, there are two main concepts that should be studied: CULTURE and COMMUNICATION.

Remember, while learning about multicultural communication:

- Be careful to not reinforce stereotypes,
- Do not equate:
 - a country with a culture;
 - a citizen of a country with an ideal representative of a particular ‘culture of a country’;
 - a person with a stereotype;
- Do not generalize and regionalize – as in an era of communication geographical boundaries are becoming less *solid*.

Intercultural communication competency is not only about learning about other cultures; it is about developing mindset and instruments universal and applicable in multicultural scenarios.



EXERCISE 1

HOW MANY CULTURES? Worksheet 1

Introduction:

This exercise explores what is culture, how to understand culture and clarifies its visible and less visible elements.

Exercise

A. Please come up with up with and list five things that, **to you** represent a culture of a person from a different culture than yours:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

B. Now, please come up with and list five things that, **to you**, represent **your own** culture.

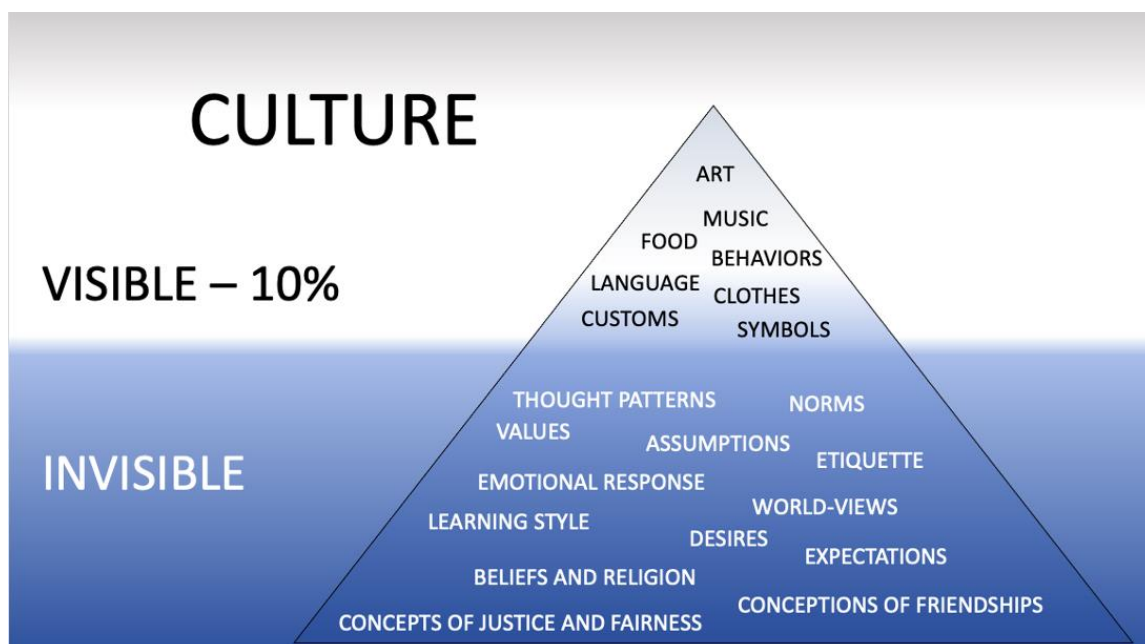
1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____



C. Next, come up with and list five more things that, to you, represent your culture. However, no outsider should be able to easily learn about/ guess those.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

D. Having completed the three elements of this exercise, please take a look at the following graphic portraying culture as an iceberg.



Observations and evaluation:

1. Which of your indicated elements – above or below *the water* – you chose to describe another culture?

2. Which elements - visible or invisible – you indicated when referring to your own culture? Are any of them assumptions or stereotypes?

3. Who did you choose to describe as a representative of a different culture? Was it someone from a different country, language, ethnicity?



Key takeaway points:**Remember, a *culture*:**

- Can be defined as something accepted and familiar,
- Is learnt – not inborn;
- Describes the characteristics of particular group;
- Culture influences perceptions, interpretations, communication style, behaviours, manners etc.

Seeing the Culture as an iceberg graphic, we tend to go more in-depth when describing our own culture as we know it best. At the same time it is more difficult to touch the core of another cultures. We are not born with any culture, we rather grow into many cultures and they have profound influence on our behaviour and the way we communicate.

Don't forget that:

- There are more cultures than nationalities - The term 'culture' includes not only culture related to nationality, race, ethnicity, but e.g. beliefs, experiences and ways of being in the world shared by people with common characteristics- people with disabilities, people who are members of faith and spiritual communities, people of various socio-economic status etc.
- There are more cultural differences 'near you' and you interact cross-culturally more often than you think!

Beware of:

- the assumptions that you hold about people of cultures different from your own. The same goes to stereotypes. Did you refer to any stereotypes in describing the other culture? Are you aware of your stereotypes as they arise?
- ambiguity and assessment of the limits of our knowledge - Do you recognize that your knowledge of certain cultural groups is limited? How much are you committed to create opportunities to learn more?

E. BONUS Task!

Make an effort to get to know better someone representing a culture different than yours. Choose to learn more about their culture. Pick three elements from "under-water" culture iceberg which you would like to inquire about and note down what you learnt.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

EXERCISE 2

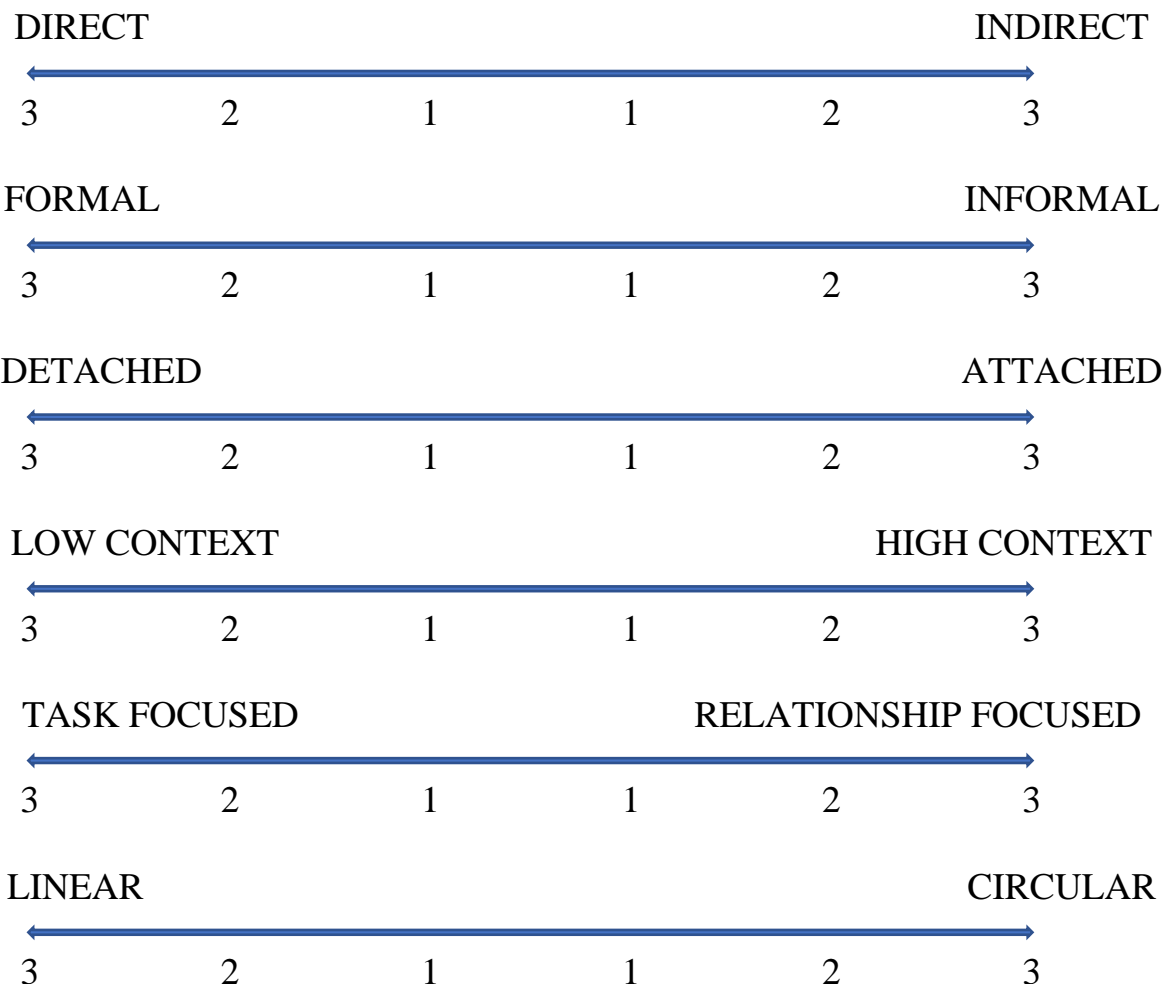
WHAT IS YOUR PERSONAL COMMUNICATION STYLE?

Introduction:

This exercise explores communication styles and their importance in the communication process. As well as provides for self-assessment of individual preferences as to communication styles.

Exercise

There are multiple communication styles. Some possible style-pairs are listed below. It is important to note, that there are no two separate boxes for each communication style pair. It is rather a spectrum –a continuum. Please, mark on the graph in each of the six pairs as you feel is your communication style. There is one important rule – no mark can be put in the middle!



Before filling in this graphs, you can take a look at the definitions of each style:

COMMUNICATION STYLES:

<p>DIRECT A straightforward way of expressing thoughts and feelings; Directness is equated with honesty and respect for the other person and their time; Do not create ambiguity or uncertainty by avoiding discussion on the issue (even trivial ones) – state specifics; Values time, so every communication is simple and clear to be quick.</p>	<p>INDIRECT Meaning is conveyed in a subtle way using non-verbal cues, parables and stories; High respect for other person’s emotions and feelings; Indirectness is equated with politeness and respect for the other person; Do not put the other person on a spot by being blatantly direct. Citing a mistake or voicing disapproval is deemed impolite, subtle implication allows for ‘face-saving’.</p>
<p>FORMAL Status of each person is important and acknowledged (age, topics, rituals), Strict communication rules apply. They regard i.a.: forms of address, ways to address persons of different age and status, topics that can and cannot be discussed; Formal communication supports the values of status and hierarchy; Communication is highly ritualized.</p>	<p>INFORMAL Communication is less limited by conventions, a person has more flexibility in what, to whom and under what circumstances they say (e.g. the use of first name is welcome); Indirectness supports the value of fairness and equity; Communication has few rules -find out what is allowable in that particular group and follow the conventions.</p>
<p>DETTACHED Unemotional, calm, objective, impersonal communication; Dispassionate statements are considered professional and equated with objectivism, which is valued; Focus is on objective information/data; Disagreement is with the idea, not the person – it is not seen as personal attack; Highly expressive communication is inappropriate as it is deemed biased.</p>	<p>ATTACHED Emotional, expressive way of speaking; Strong feelings are shown and vocalized; Issues are discussed with passion and commitment, Ideas, issues and a person are not separate; There is strong personal stake in the outcome – if one cares about the idea, they show it; Sharing ones values and feelings about the issue is highly valued.</p>
<p>LOW-CONTEXT The communication context is not assumed to be shared and known; Things and meanings are explained clearly and precisely.</p>	<p>HIGH-CONTEXT The context of communication is assumed to be known; It is unnecessary or even insulting to overexplain and state meaning precisely, as meaning is understood from context.</p>
<p>TASK FOCUSED Accomplishing the goals is a priority; Feelings of other people are secondary;</p>	<p>RELATIONSHIP FOCUSED Group harmony, relations are priority; The need to make everyone feel heard;</p>



<p>Little or no small-talk; If there is disagreement or discontent with the work of other people, it is polite and expected to be discussed publicly.</p>	<p>Any concern for the task, does not hurt or exploit someone, their feelings and well-being; Frequent appraisals to participants for their good work; No individual criticism on a forum.</p>
<p>LINEAR Communication is like a straight line – moving in a linear way toward the main point; ‘The point’ is stated as quick as possible; Brief and explicit communication, Lengthy deviations from the main point are considered time wasters.</p>	<p>CIRCULAR Communication takes circular manner – ‘around the main point’; It is not necessary to state main point clearly, as verbal and non-verbal messages provides for sufficient understanding; Elegant and flowing communication full of stories and anecdotes where stories make a point; Meaning is inferred from stories and parables; Supports the values of relationships, history and group meaning..</p>

Observations and evaluation:

1. *There is no one right or universal communication style*, as each of them have their strengths and possible challenges. Please, think of examples when extreme communication style can pose challenges in effective communication and how can you overcome them?

STYLE:

CHALLENGE:

SOLUTION:

STYLE:

CHALLENGE:

SOLUTION:



Key takeaway points:

- *Communication style influences **HOW** one speaks, not **WHAT** one says.* Hence, differences in communication styles can have an impact on whether the intent of our message and the impact it has on the receiver of that message. Differences in communication styles may in some cases hinder communication and lead to misunderstandings.
- Understanding your own communication preference, while discovering the preferences of others can be a very useful mechanism to enhance the effectiveness of communication. Communication styles can be used as a profiling and analysing tool in a multicultural communication situation.
- Use of multiple styles is common, even though, individuals tend to have personal preference, some kind of a *default mode* they lean towards while under pressure.
- It is crucial to remember that, each of the above-mentioned pairs is independent from other pairs. In other words ‘the left column’ does not always go together as well ‘the right column’ does not always go together either. Therefore, an individual always needs to stay alert to the other person’s styles, rather than assume *formal=indirect*, etc.
- Communication styles are not separate boxes- rather a continuum, a scale. While every individual uses multiple styles, they also move on the spectrum (more towards right or left as per the graph presented in the Worksheet) dependent on the person they communicate with (e.g. in a conversation with a principal a student is more indirect, whereas at home while conversing with their siblings they may be more direct).



EXERCISE 3

E-MAIL TIME!

Introduction:

This exercise explores the impact of style and the need for adjustment of communication tools used in each individual communication situation in order to understand and be understood by the other person.

Exercise

For the purposes of this exercise use your completed Exercise 2 – What is your personal communication style worksheet graph. Also, feel free to refer to Communication Styles definition list.

Using the Exercise 2 graph, in each of the six categories, please highlights your own prevailing (automatically assumed) style in each of the six categories:

1.	DIRECT	INDIRECT
2.	FORMAL	INFORMAL
3.	DETACHED	ATTACHED
4.	LOW CONTEXT	HIGH CONTEXT
5.	TASK FOCUSED	RELATIONSHIP FOCUSED
6,	LINEAR	CIRCULAR

Now, list the opposite styles:

A. _____

B. _____

C. _____

D. _____

E. _____

F. _____



YOUR TASK:

Imagine you are a representative of a team working with a group of internationals and your task is to write an email to Jesse - the representative of the other group with an invitation to a work meeting at your headquarters. Important fact is that Jesse represents completely opposite styles to you (as A-F listed above). Note at least three elements in your email that you intentionally changed - compared to when you would draft an email to someone like you.

Three adjustments:

- 1). _____
- 2). _____
- 3). _____

Observations and suggestions for discussions

- *How did it felt to switch to a different style?* Often it is not automatic, unintuitive and even hard. Adapting to a different style requires analysis and awareness of oneself and others.
- *What did you learn from this activity?* Conscious adjustments to style of the other person may help in better understanding one another.
- *Which elements did you change?* Consider the elements that you altered/adapted. Brainstorm other elements/tools in written and spoken communication which may need adjustments when interacting with a person who has a different style compared to yours.



REFERENCES & FURTHER READINGS

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