

Cross Cultural Exercises

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Introduction

This is your **exercise book**. You should try to do as many exercises as possible.

There is a table of content at the end to help you decide which exercise you want to do when. Exercises in part III should be done after having completed at least half of the exercises in part II.

For inspiration and explanations related to those exercises you can refer to the **theory book**, which has an introduction to

1. the underlying conditions of intercultural communication;
2. the basic methodological principles of cultural awareness;
3. the fundamental cultural dimensions, disclosing institutions and revealing questions.

When you get an idea but are in a hurry, you can write keywords in your book and come back to them whenever you have time to do so. Then you can write phrases explaining what it is you meant by those keywords.

You can use another note book to continue writing about each questions whenever you need more space. Just make sure to write the reference number of the exercise your writing refers to.

PART I

Reminders for inspiration when needed

Reminder 1:

Neither prejudice nor etiquette

Five anthropological assertions

1. No one can be said to be a typical member of a given culture
2. No culture exists in an original, pristine form
3. Each member of a given culture has many relationships
4. All cultures are dynamic
5. No individual identity is given once and for all

Three epistemological assertions

1. When one analyses cultural phenomena, both cultures are usually affected - the one being analysed, and the one which is one's own frame of reference
2. When one communicates across cultures one contributes to cultural changes
3. Every description - every understanding - of a foreign culture is rooted in the cultural frame of reference from which one observes or analyses. It tells us just as much about this frame of interpretation as about the foreign culture

Reminder 2:

Six simple aims

for anyone who wishes to enter upon a fruitful dialogue with a person from another culture:

1. To realise that one's own culture is the logic through which one can see the world as an entity.
2. To understand the culture as it is spoken from, but also as it is conceived from the outside: i.e. being acutely aware of its prerequisites and assumptions; grasping the inherent and implicit premises underlying its interpretation of other cultures and the sifting of observations about that culture.
3. To aim at increased ability to reflect, to develop a more systematic criticism of one-self, so that one is aware of one's own, individual way of looking at things, of one's "approach", of being able to question one's own prejudices and determine how they find expression in description, emotion and interpretation.
4. To choose a more complex and humble approach to the foreign culture.
5. To endeavour to see things, as they appear to the other culture, on the basis of that culture's assumptions.
6. To carry on a dialogue with someone who has another point of view.

Reminder 3:

The cultural misunderstanding approach

Interaction is the nub

Irritation and surprise are priceless

1. **The principle of interaction:**

When facing a foreign culture one should remember to focus on the interaction between one's own culture and the culture being studied. A cultural analysis perforce always begins with the interaction between cultures, and a cultural analysis should always be aware of this.

2. **The principle of misunderstanding:**

To find out what has been misunderstood when two cultures meet, one can concentrate on what members of the two cultures consider surprising, tasteless, unpleasant, embarrassing, or downright irritating, when they meet representatives of the foreign culture.

3. **The “go-between” principle:**

It is easier to get a person to talk about his negative impressions of a foreign culture if oneself does not belong to the culture under discussion. This could be called **the “go-between” principle**, or the “outsider” principle.

4. **The “victim” principle:**

It is easier to register cultural misunderstandings if oneself has experienced and analysed misunderstandings in an intercultural communication one took part in. In other words, it can be advantageous to have been exposed to a culture shock, insofar as one has been able to understand it.

Reminder 4:

Ten cultural dimensions

Death

Society

The other

The animal in us

Limitations

Identity

Action

Eroticism

Nature

Time

Reminder 5:

Disclosing institutions

The giving of gifts & forms of friendship

They have been chosen because it is relatively easy to talk about them, since:

- They cannot be directly connected with racism or ethnocentrism.
- They do not necessarily directly concern anything holy.
- They are not taboo.

Quite the contrary: they are concerned with topics that can be easily connected with international trade. They are, so to speak, cultural subjects which it is natural to talk about for traders on the international market.

- It seems harmless to talk about these subjects.
- Asking about them is taken as positive curiosity.
- There is a logical connection between the subjects and what international marketers deal with every day.

These revealing institutions are:

The giving of gifts

How are gifts exchanged? Who can permit himself to give gifts? When may one, or should one, give gifts? What lies behind the giving and receiving of gifts?

Forms of friendship

What is one's attitude to one's friends? Does one go out with them when they come, or keep them within the house, for example? What is usually talked about? Where is the dividing line between work and friendship and between the public and the private?

Reminder 6:

Other combination of cultural dimensions

Respect

Food

Space

Conflicts

Hierarchy

Gender

Add your own propositions:

Reminder 7:

Those are some of the most central questions worthwhile to pose in connection with cultural analyses. These questions should not be regarded as questions to be put directly, but be used as a memo for what you ought to seek information about. The questions are also to be asked by and about yourself.

- The **dividing-lines** one draws between desirable and non-desirable characteristics, superior and inferior persons:
 - What kind of person do you strongly dislike?
 - What kind of person do you respect or admire?
 - What is the most important thing for you?
 - Who are your personal heroes?
 - When do you feel superior to others?
 - When do you feel yourself inferior?
- The **differences** one notices between oneself and other people:
 - Where do you belong?
 - Where do you feel at ease?
 - What type of person do you get along with?
 - What kind of person irritates you?
 - What kind of behaviour do you find unpleasant?
- The **goals** you dream of for yourself and your loved ones.
 - What is your yardstick of success?
 - What would you like to achieve?
 - What would you like your children to achieve?
 - What do you consider desirable?
- The **limitations** one feels, fears, or imposes:
 - What kind of question or issue do you find surprising?
 - What kind of question or issue do you find irritating?
 - What kind of question do you consider stupid or unacceptable?
 - What kind of question do you often ask yourself?
 - What do you find unquestionable?
 - What do you expect others to respect?
- Relation to **nature**:
 - Where would you prefer to be ?
 - Which places do you like best?
 - What kind of food do you prefer?

- How should we relate to nature?
- Perception of **quality**:
 - What is quality for you?
 - Where have you encountered bad quality?
 - Do you think your quality perception or conception differs from others and how?
- The way one relates to **time**:
 - What do you like doing best?
 - What in your view is a waste of time?
 - Would you rather only do one thing at a time?
 - What is the best and the worst about time?
- The way one makes use of **space**:
 - Which distinctions do you make regarding space?
 - What are the boundaries between public and private?
 - How does one make use of space to express status, power, friendship?
 - How close can one come without being an intruder?
 - Which spaces do you consider as being most cosy?
 - Which are the most official spaces?
 - Which are the most public spaces?
 - Which spaces are appropriate for celebrations?

The last three themes are the most difficult to ask about. They often require a trained investigator. The last themes on time and space can best be clarified through observations on human behaviour. For instance, one can take note of how time is usually spent in the area one comes to. Are people punctual, but stay longer than expected? Are people engaged in more than one thing at a time? Do they wait out in the rain rather than turn up too early? Do people keep their guests waiting? Do they talk about their time? How? Do they correlate time with power and status, with family and the civil society, with old age?

Your proposal regarding more themes to address:

Your comments and considerations about strategies to ask that kind of questions

PART II

Exercises to be done first

Exercise 1:

Embarrassment

Embarrassment is often a key to perception of cultural differences. Briefly, this means that irritation and surprise are the key for those interested in cultural difference. The moment one registers that one is irritated about - or simply cannot grasp - the other's behaviour, one is happy at having found a pointer to there being an interesting cultural difference.

Recall as many situations as possible when you felt embarrassment. You can write a few keywords first and then come back to them to describe in details. You should not try to interpret what happened before writing the details of what you experienced. Finally, and preferably not the same day you write your notes but later, attempt an interpretation of what happened.

First account of an embarrassing or irritation situation

1. Keywords:

2. Detailed report

Your interpretation:

Second account of an embarrassing or irritating situation

1. Keywords:

2. Detailed report

3. Your interpretation.

Third account of an embarrassing or irritating situation

1. Keywords:

2. Detailed report

3. Your interpretation.

Fourth account of an embarrassing or irritating situation

1. Keywords:

2. Detailed report

3. Your interpretation

Exercise 2:

Take note of the way in which respect is shown

Respect continued

Exercise 3:

Behaviour, attitude, approach and opinion

What is it you have observed concerning behaviour, attitude, approach and opinion?

Do you recall embarrassing, strange or irritating situations?

Did you experience problems concerning the expression of respect?

Behaviour, attitude, approach and opinion continued

More observations concerning behaviour, attitude, approach and opinion

Keywords:

Respect, irritation, time, space, hierarchy, delegation, democracy, authority, gender, age, nationality

...

More about behaviour, attitude, approach and opinion

How is behaviour, attitude, approach and opinion from your own country perceived in this country?
Do you know how the second man in command sees the behaviour, attitude, approach and opinion of your own country?

How?

How do you know?

Some concepts to study behaviour, attitude, approach and opinion

You should first do what is asked of you on the preceding pages before reading the following.

Now that you have worked out the prior exercises you should try to categorise the different kind of behaviour, attitude, approach and opinion and problems you have encountered in connection with these experiences.

Here are my kinds of behaviour, attitude, approach and opinion:

I can see different kind of problems. I categorise each one with a name:

Some concepts to study kinds of behaviour, attitude, approach and opinion

- Communication
 - Communication style
 - Communication channels
 - Communication context
- Problem solving
 - Who is responsible?
 - Goals
 - What is the most important to achieve?
 - Degree of commitment
 - Underlying criteria of evaluation
- Decision making
 - Who decides?
 - Basis for decision
 - Decision process
 - How fast?
 - How firm?
 - Information about decisions
- Organisation
 - Flexibility
 - Compatibility
 - Colourfulness
 - Hierarchy
 - Pattern
 - Permeability
 - Tolerance
 - Control
 - Tradition
- Innovation
 - Is innovation valued?
 - Where does it come from?
 - Does it come easy?
- Reward
 - Expectations
 - Ritualisation
 - Evidence
 - Importance

Which other categories would you add to the above list, or which alternative way of categorising would yo prefer?

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More about behaviour, attitude, approach and opinion

Associations

Go back to the former page and write keywords about your associations next to each category.

Entitle each of the following pages with one of those keywords and expand. What did you experience in the country you are working concerning those issues?

Keyword 1:

More about behaviour, attitude, approach and opinion

Keyword 2:

More about behaviour, attitude, approach and opinion

Keyword 3:

More about behaviour, attitude, approach and opinion

Keyword 4:

More about behaviour, attitude, approach and opinion

Keyword 5:

More about behaviour, attitude, approach and opinion

Keyword 6:

More about behaviour, attitude, approach and opinion

Keyword 7:

More about behaviour, attitude, approach and opinion

Keyword 8:

Exercise 4:

Novels or films

Read novels, see films (or theater plays of course) by the country's authors and producers. Write which novels and films you are referring to.

Write here your comments regarding, what you found **strange**, surprising, unpleasant in them:

Novels or films continued

Write here your comments regarding what you believe was typical in novels or films by the country's authors and producers:

More novels or films

What was strange?

More novels or films

What was typical?

Exercise 5:

Gifts

Note what sort of gifts (in the widest sense) are exchanged.

Comments on gift practice

Gifts continued

What did you receive, what was your reaction?

Gifts again

Ask someone you know about gift giving traditions and write here what you learned.

Exercise 6:

Excuses

Note what sort of excuses (in the widest sense) are used and accepted.

Comments on the practice of excuses

Exercise 7:

Public transportation

Observations made in public transportation

Though it may seem difficult to see anything new here, these are in fact excellent for training ones skills.

What did you observe that could be dealing with cultural differences?

Come on!

You must have observed more in those boring public transportations.

Exercise 8:

Market places

Observations on market places

It is excellent practice to try and recall what one has experienced, with a view to describing the differences one can now see:

- What are people doing?
- How effective is the organisation?
- What products are being traded?
- How are people treated when they arrive and when they depart?
- How do people communicate with one another?
(Remember body language: Do they smile?)
- What can one do at a market? (Remember all the activities not directly connected with buying and selling).
- What peculiarities can we find - things we find unusual? (Is there anything that has to do with death, religion, sexuality ...?)
- How much room is there for people to move about in?
- How are products displayed?
- How are the products grouped?

Observations on marketplaces 1

Observations on marketplaces 2

Observations on marketplaces 3

Exercise 9:

Newsstands

- What is on display?
- How rapid is the selling process?
- Do people “hang about”?
- Do people talk to each other?
-

Observation on newsstand continued

Any other observation on local newsstands?

Exercise 10:

Local restaurants

- What do people eat?
- Do they eat alone?
- What type of furniture is there?
- What about lighting?
- Is it noisy?
- Customer behaviour
- Service

Local restaurants continued

More observations in local restaurants

More observations in restaurants

Consequences of your observations for the notion of service in this country?

Exercise 11:

Food

Your observations about food tastes and traditions

More about food

How do you personally react to local food culture?

How do/would the local react to your own food culture?

Exercise 12:

Photographs and videos

Take photographs or videos of things other than traditional tourist objects, and try to get meaning from them when you get a chance. It is a good idea to start by categorising the pictures you have taken, choose one from each category, sequence them and then narrate.

Insert the pictures you have chosen to comment upon. Give them numbers and write your comments.

Photographs and videos continued

Photographs and videos continued

Photographs and videos continued

Exercise 13:

Observations concerning what is considered private and public

Did you encounter a difference between what you yourself consider as being private or public and what you feel is private or public in this country?

Private and public continued

Exercise 14:

Observations of death rituals

What have you notice concerning the relationship to death in this country? Is it different from your own country?

Exercise 15:

Observations of sacred places

What is sacred here?

Is it different from your own culture?

Exercise 16:

Observations concerning limits perceived

What do you think is an improper behaviour in this country?

What is it that will not be accepted?

Which subjects are not appropriate?

Exercise 17:

Observations concerning humour

What kind of humour is appropriate here?

What are the limits?

Exercise 18:

Observations concerning the heroes

What kind of heroes do people have in this country?

Exercise 19:

Observations concerning nature

How would you characterise the way this culture relates to nature?

Exercise 20:

Observations concerning time

Which observations did you make concerning the use of time in this country?

Keywords:

Past and future orientation.

Polychrome and monochrome time. Work and leisure time.

Importance and types of watches, clocks.

Walking speed, transaction times.....

Time observations continued

Exercise 21:

Personel relations

What kind of persons do you best get along with here?

How would you explain that it is those persons you get along best with?

Personal relations continued

Exercise 22:

Problems in working relations

What kind of problems in working relations did you experience?

Problems in working relations continued

Exercise 23:

Conflict

How are aggressiveness and conflicts viewed and regulated?

Conflict continued

Exercise 24:

Gender

How does the relationship between genders differ from what is usual in your own country?

Exercise 25:

Age

How does the relationship between age groups differ from what is usual in your own country?

What else?

Write here any other relevant observation

PART III

Exercises to be done last

Exercise 26:

Question your own way of behaviour

Is there anything you have done that might have been misunderstood?

You do not need to be sure about this. You can also write about situations you are not sure about.

Exercise 27:

Consequences of your observations of behaviour, attitude, approach and opinion

Go back to the different observations you have made and draw the consequences you see for t behaviour, attitude, approach and opinion that should be adopted in the culture you are operating.

It is recommended to make a reference to the pages and/or remarks that inspire your comments.

Consequences for behaviour, attitude, approach and opinion continued.

More consequences for behaviour, attitude, approach and opinion.

More about behaviour, attitude, approach and opinion

Did you consider such issues such as:

- delegation of responsibilities,
- bottom up or?
- cooperation
- risk avoidance,
- risk taking
- reward

Behaviour, attitude, approach and opinion (last page)

Exercise 28:

Your organisation's strength

What are the strengths and weaknesses of foreign cultures' image of your native culture?

What are the positive and negative aspects of your own culture in relation to work together with other cultures?

Your company's strength continued

Exercise 29:

Appropriate managers

What are the consequences of all this for the choice of the appropriate person to be working in your organisation?

Appropriate employees continued

Your legacy

What is the most important information you wish to give to new colleagues in this organisation?

Your legacy continued

YOUR ADDITIONAL COMMENTS

MORE COMMENTS

MORE COMMENTS

PART IV

Your own ideas regarding when and how to do observations

Your own ideas about when and how to do observations

More ideas about when and how you intend to observe

More ideas about when and how you intend to observe

More ideas about when and how you intend to observe

More ideas about when and how you intend to observe