

Understanding Cultural Differences:  
Context, Setting and bringing Colleague and residents Interactions into Focus

Presented by



# Introduction to Cultural Differences

## Recap

## *As care workers and colleagues.....*

*Culture is an essential part of people's daily lives. It influences their views, their values, their humor, their hopes, their loyalties, and their worries and fears. If you are Hindu, Jewish or Catholic, if you are LGBT, if you are hyphenated African, Chinese or Ukrainian...If you are bi- or multi-cultural...Culture has affected you. Acknowledging this, when you are working with people and building relationships with them, it helps to have some perspective and understanding of the cultural heritages and perspectives people bring with them to our interactions.*

*Recognising the individual and cultural differences of people you are supporting is the first step in being able to tailor support, and create culturally and psychologically safe environments, both in terms of professional settings and in a care context as well. If you do not understand your "clients'" culture backgrounds you won't be able meet their needs effectively.*

# Understanding Cultural Differences

*Culture gives us a mental map that enables us to more easily understand the world around us and find solutions to common problems.*

*Geography and history shape the way people perceive the world to a far greater extent than most of us realize.*

What we will do:

- Identify key aspects of culture (surface and deep)
- Develop deeper understanding of the roots and basis of culture
- Distinguish between stereotypes and generalisations
- Differentiate between High-context and Low-context cultures
- Examine individualist and communitarian conceptions of self and others
- Develop sensitivity to communication breakdowns based on cultural assumptions and misunderstandings

# What do we mean by culture?

“Culture is the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one group from another.”

~ Geert Hofstede

“Culture is an integrated system of learned behavior patterns that are characteristic of members of a given society. Culture refers to the total way of life of a particular group of people. It includes everything that a group of people thinks, says, does and makes- it’s customs, language, material artifacts and shared systems of attitudes and feelings. Culture is learned and transmitted from generation to generation.” ~ Robert Khol

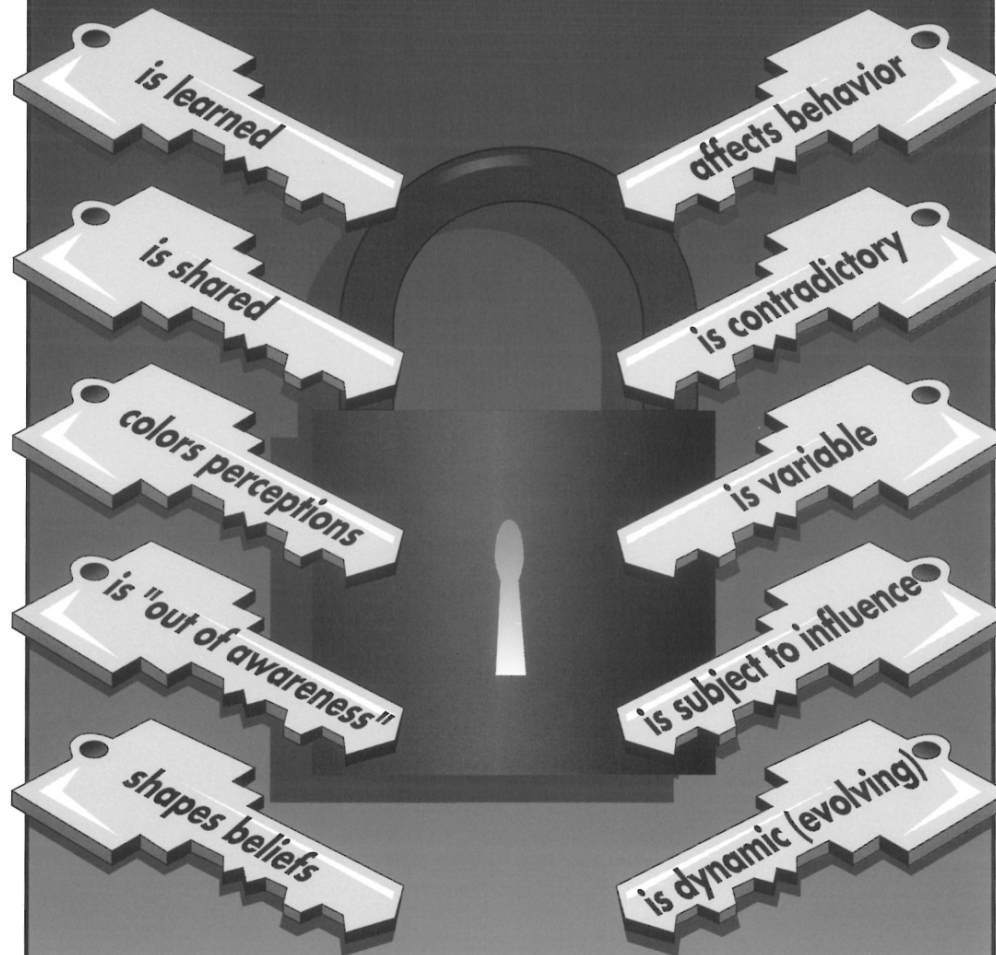
“Culture is a set of shared assumptions, values, and beliefs of a group of people by which they organize their common life.”

~ Gary Wederspahan

"Culture" refers to a group or community which shares common experiences that shape the way its members understand the world. It includes groups that we are born into, such as race, national origin, gender, class, or religion. It can also include a group we join or become part of. For example, it is possible to acquire a new culture by moving to a new country or region, by a change in our economic status, or by becoming disabled. When we think of culture this broadly we realize we all belong to many cultures at once. ~ Marya Axner

THE KEYS TO UNDERSTANDING CULTURE

Culture



CULTURAL CHARACTERISTICS: CULTURE IS LIKE AN ICEBERG

**"Culture hides more  
than it reveals,  
and strangely  
enough, what it  
hides it hides  
most effectively  
from its own  
participants."**

Edward T. Hall



*Doing*

*Surface Culture 10%*

*Thinking*

*Deep Culture 90%*

*Feeling*





***Surface Culture 10%***

***Doing***

Behaviours

Traditions

Customs

Core values

***Thinking***

Beliefs

Priorities

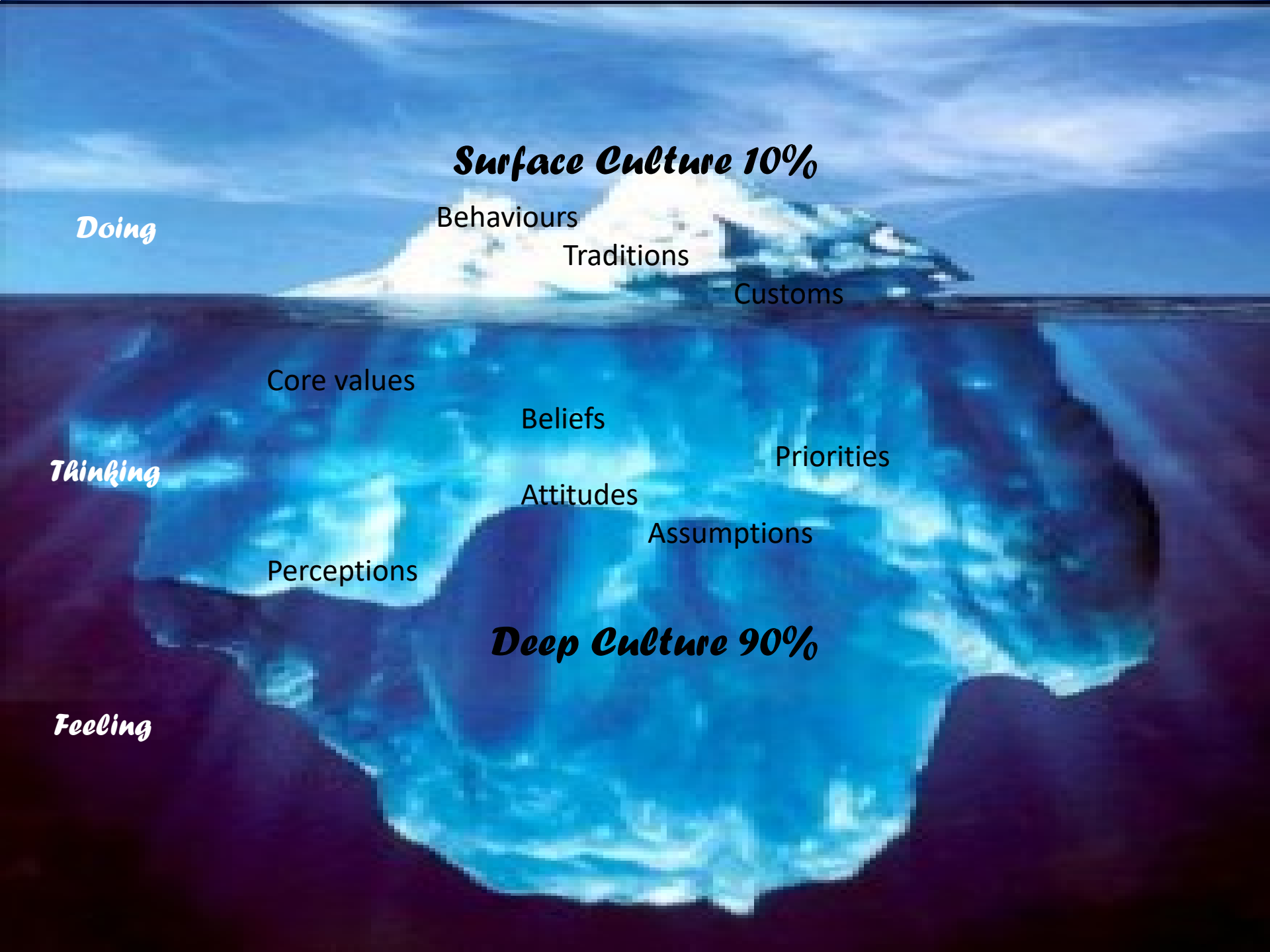
Attitudes

Assumptions

Perceptions

***Deep Culture 90%***

***Feeling***



# Surface Culture 10%

Easy to observe with vision, touch, taste, smell, sound,

Ways of life  
Laws and customs  
Institutions  
Methods and  
Techniques  
Rituals  
Language

**Doing**

Food      Art      Dance  
Greetings      Dress/clothing      Language  
Music

**Thinking**

World view      Religious beliefs      Authority      Decision-making models  
Gender roles      Ideas about leadership      Concepts of justice  
Concepts of time      Power      Personal space      Body language  
Communication      Ideas about modesty      Definition of sin  
Friendship      Designation of status based on positions (e.g., age, gender, job)  
Pace of work      Dating and courtship practices  
Cooperation /competitiveness      Notions of child-rearing

Norms  
Roles  
Ideologies  
Beliefs  
Philosophy

**Feeling**

# Deep Culture 90%

Difficult to observe

Values  
Tastes  
Attitudes  
Desires  
Assumptions  
Expectations  
Myths

## GENERALISATIONS AND STEREOTYPES

Cultural understanding is based on generalisations--a useful tool no doubt-- but it is the application of this tool that is critical to fostering acceptance and communication.

Often people consider **stereotypes** and **generalisations** to be the same; however, there are some key differences that we need to keep in mind if we are to foster understanding and tolerance.

### **What do generalizations do?**

They help outsiders identify topics or ideas that may be sensitive and which should be handled with care. Generalisations are often used to develop an understanding of the core values held by the majority of the group or culture.

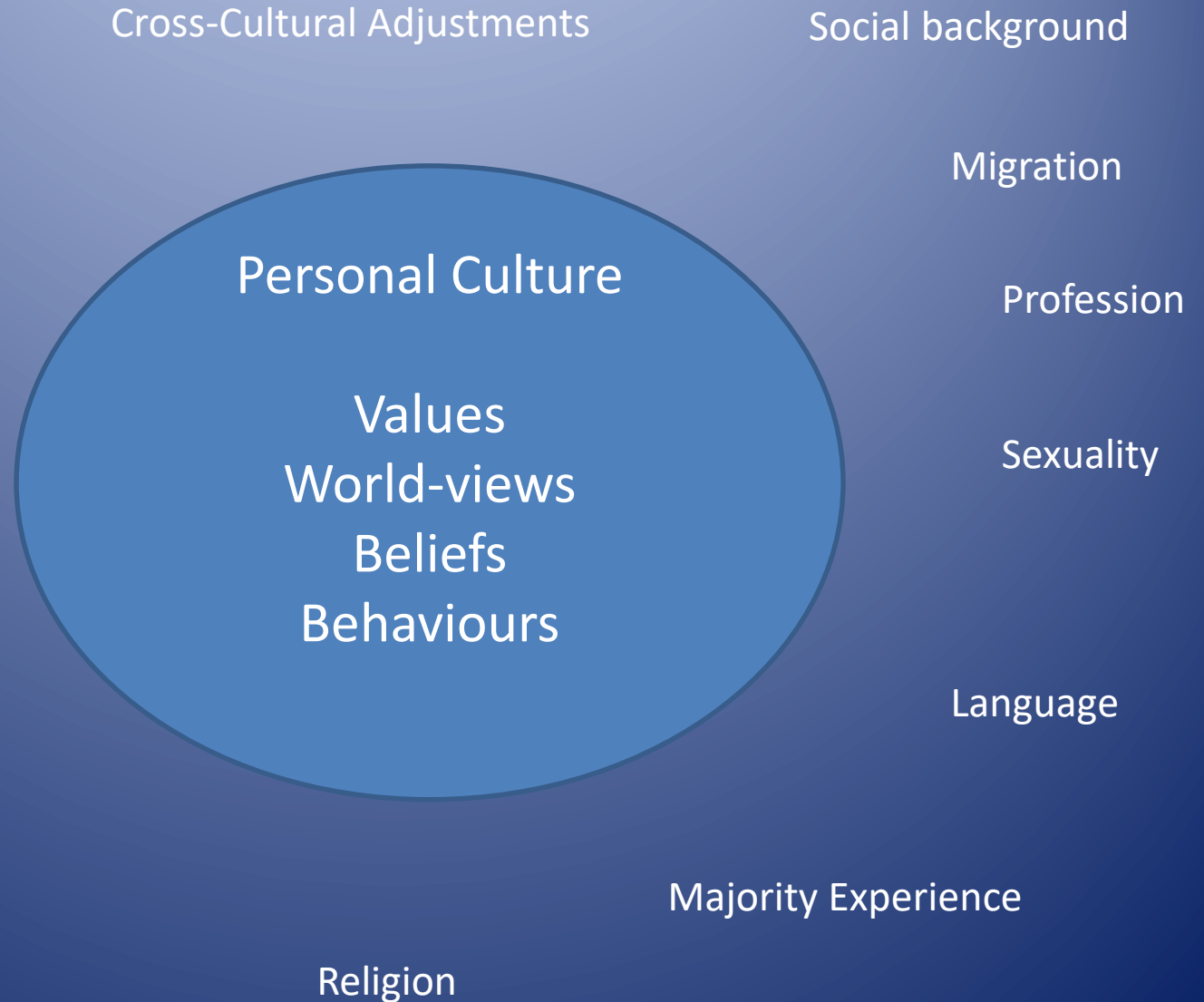
### **What do stereotypes do?**

They make over simplifications of groups and communities and are often widely shared perceptions of the “other.” Stereotypes are often used to assign characteristics , both positive and negative, to groups of people related to their race, nationality and sexual orientation, social affiliations, physical or intellectual prowess.

***Though all stereotypes are generalisations, not all generalisations are stereotypes.***

Stereotypes	Generalisations
<p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All Chinese are good at science</li> <li>- All black people are good at basketball and singing</li> <li>- All French people love wine</li> <li>- All Muslims are terrorists</li> <li>- Jews are money hungry</li> <li>- Hindus worship cows</li> <li>- Blondes are dumb</li> <li>- Catholics worship Mary</li> <li>- Gay men are indiscriminate</li> <li>- Immigrants are taking our jobs</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">- *****</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Present a fixed and inflexible image of a group</li> <li>• Ignore exceptions and focus on behaviors that support the image they present</li> <li>• Are ethnocentric and/or racial</li> </ul>	<p><b>Examples:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Because education has been an important avenue for Chinese to excel, they place high value on scientific knowledge</li> <li>- Wine is an important aspect of French Culture</li> <li>- The history of exclusion of the Jews in Europe left two prominent avenues for success- education and business.</li> </ul> <p style="text-align: center;">- *****</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Are based on a large sample of the group and are flexible and evolving</li> <li>• Provide general characteristics based on cultural and social factors</li> <li>• Assume that individuals within groups vary in their adherences</li> <li>• Inform rather than prescribe</li> </ul>

# FORCES THAT SHAPE INDIVIDUAL CULTURE



# Importance of Context

Communication can be:



**Low Context** - focuses on literal meanings of words, independent of setting

**High Context** - uses implied meanings which arise from the setting



- \* **Note:** this distinction does not describe a dichotomy, but rather poles on a continuum.
- ✓ Everyone engages in both, depending on:
- ✓ The relationships involved
- ✓ The situation
- ✓ The purpose of communication

# Context Differences

## High-context communication patterns:

- ❖ Nonverbal messages/gestures are important
- ❖ Status and identity may be communicated nonverbally
- ❖ Face-saving and tact are important
- ❖ Building a good relationship may be essential
- ❖ Indirect routes and creative thinking may be important



## Low-context communication patterns:

- ❖ Statements may be taken at face value
- ❖ Roles and functions may be decoupled from status
- ❖ A sustained focus on tasks may be necessary
- ❖ Direct questions are not meant to offend
- ❖ Indirect cues may be ineffectual

# Community/Autonomy

Cultures differ as to the degree of emphasis placed on community versus individual autonomy



## In Communitarian Settings

- People see themselves as part of a circle of relationships
- Identity is as a member of a group
- In conflict, response is chosen jointly

## In Individualistic Settings

- People see themselves as independent and autonomous
- Identity is individual
- In conflict, response is individual





# Community/Autonomy II

## In Communitarian Settings

- ❖ Maintaining group harmony and cohesion is important
- ❖ Choices are made in consultation
- ❖ People are part of a hierarchy
- ❖ People are accountable to the group



## In Individualistic Settings

- ❖ Achievement involves individual goal-setting and action
- ❖ Everyone is capable of making their own choices
- ❖ People are autonomous
- ❖ People are accountable to themselves

# Intersections

## Context/Community intersections:

- ❑ High-Context cultures are usually communitarian
- ❑ Low-Context cultures are usually individualistic

### **NOTE:**

**These are broad generalisations. Individual people and situations will vary widely.**

What can we tell about the men?



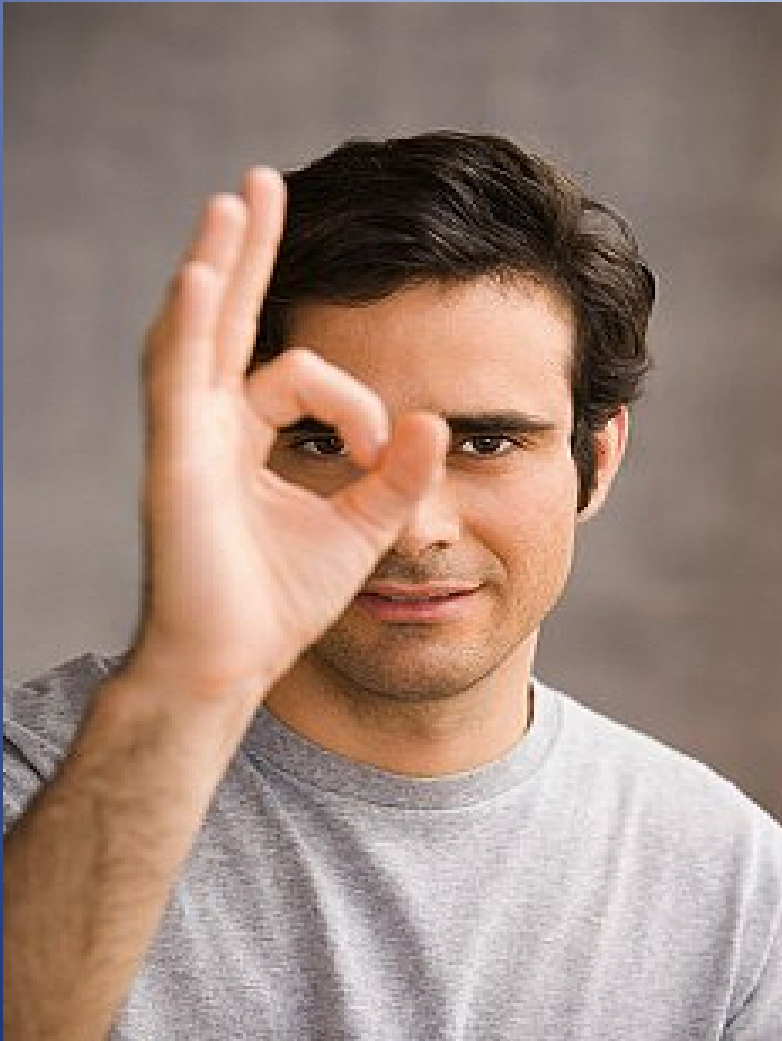
Think overt/deep culture, high/low context , community orientation.....

If a Saudi man holds another man's hand in public it's a sign of mutual respect. In many places throughout Asia, holding hands amongst men is considered a common demonstration of hetero friendship. While crossing chaotic streets or sauntering down the sidewalk, South Asian and Chinese men show no shame in interlocking fingers and pressing palms. But don't do it in Australia, Texas or England, UK!

1. **Care worker/ colleague avoids eye contact.**
2. **The care worker/colleague tends to smile when disagreeing with what is being said or when being reprimanded.**
3. **The care worker/colleague does not participate actively in group work or collaborate with peers on cooperative assignments.**
4. **The care worker/colleague displays uneasiness, expresses disapproval, or even misbehaves in informal learning situations involving open-ended learning processes. (For example, exploration).**
5. **The care worker/colleague seems inattentive or does not display active listening behaviors.**
6. **Performance following instruction reveals that the care worker/colleague does not understand the instruction, even though he or she refrained from asking for help or further explanation.**
7. **The care worker/colleague exhibits discomfort or embarrassment at being singled out for special attention or praise.**
8. **The care worker/colleague appears reluctant to engage in debate, speculation, argument, or other processes that involve directly challenging the views and ideas of others.**

1. **Possible Cultural Explanation:** Keeping eyes downcast may be a way of showing respect. In some cultures, direct eye contact with a manager is considered disrespectful and a challenge to a manager's authority.
2. **Possible Cultural Explanation:** A smile may be a gesture of respect that some cultures are taught to employ to avoid giving offense in difficult situations.
3. **Possible Cultural Explanation:** Cooperative group work is never used by certain sexes in some cultures. Care worker/ colleagues may thus view sharing as "giving away knowledge" and may see no distinction between legitimate collaboration and cheating.
4. **Possible Cultural Explanation:** Caring in some cultures involves strict formality. For care worker/ colleagues who are used to this, an informal atmosphere may seem chaotic and undemanding, while managers with an informal approach may seem unprofessional. Such care worker/ colleagues may also be uncomfortable with process-oriented activities and prefer activities that yield more tangible and evident results.
5. **Possible Cultural Explanation:** In some cultures, the process may involve observing and doing rather than note-taking or other forms of active listening
6. **Possible Cultural Explanation:** In some cultures, expressing a lack of understanding or asking for help from the manager is interpreted as a suggestion that the person has not been doing a good enough job, and is considered impolite.
7. **Possible Cultural Explanation:** To put oneself in the limelight for individual praise is not considered appropriate in some cultures, where the group is considered more important than the individual.
8. **Possible Cultural Explanation:** In some cultures, it is considered inappropriate to openly challenge another's point of view, especially the manager's. In other cases, there may be a high value attached to being prepared, knowledgeable, and correct whenever one speaks.

What is he saying?



- 'OK' to a Westerner
- 'money' to a Japanese
- 'zero' to the French and
- insulting to the Turks and Brazilians

Thanks to globalisation, we must interact and live with multiple groups with very different cultures. It is important to recognise that people from different cultures have different ways of interacting with the world around them. These differences can cause problems interpreting what the other person is doing or saying. Thus, developing a sensitivity to cultural differences can make a difference in promoting positive interactions and lead to the attenuation of negative perceptions.



Cultural Differences  
EXERCISE FOR AFTERNOON  
WORKSHOP



