



BACKPACK

CULTURAL DIVERSITY TRAINING

MODULE 2-SECTION 2

Intercultural Effective
Communication

BEFORE WE BEGIN

Now that we've established a foundation of what cultural communication is and the importance of being able to recognize our own communication patterns and habits, we will elaborate on the the Six Cultural Orientation Continua, that we previously discussed in Module 1.

We will be learning about the context of communication which can be differentiated as either High Context or Low Context. The context model can help to gain a better understanding of how people with different cultural orientations might perceive similar messages in a different way.

This section will help you critically think about your communication style and ways in which you can adapt what you have learned for effective intercultural communication when you are travelling abroad.



CULTURE & COMMUNICATION

“Culture is communication and no communication by humans can be divorced from culture” (Hall, 1992).

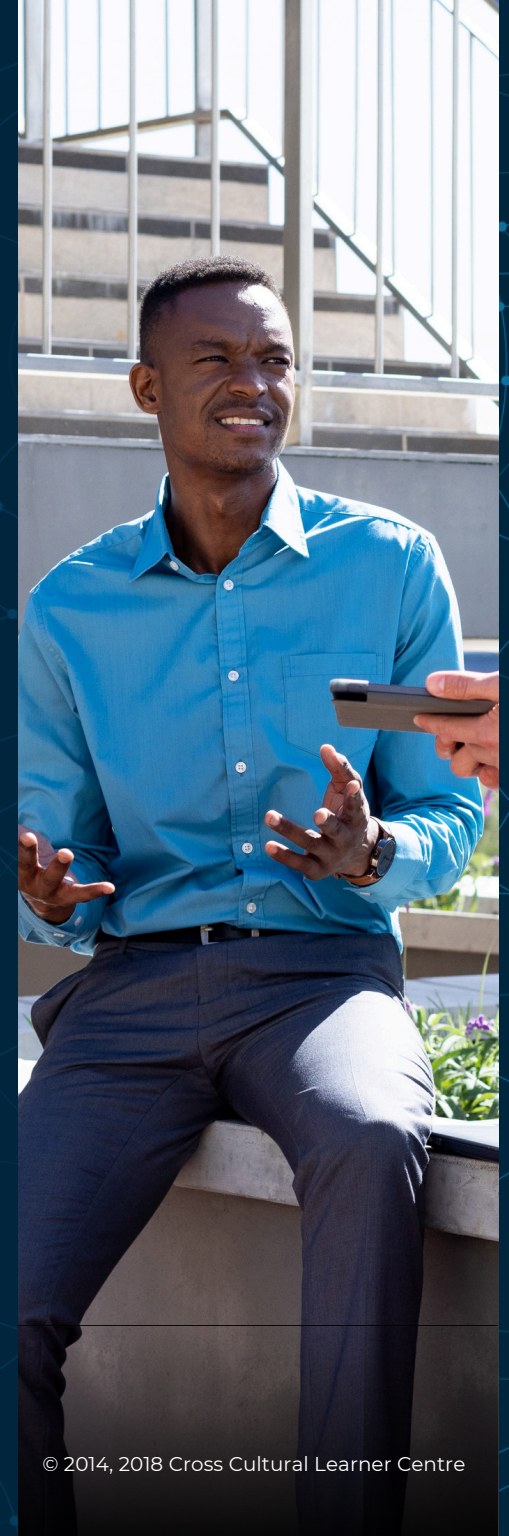
There is a reciprocal relationship between culture and communication. Cultural groups develop specific communication patterns which their members adopt. Communication within cultural groups also helps form the cohesion of the group.



COMMUNICATION CONTEXT

Communication takes place in cultural contexts and those contexts influence the communication process.

Along the Six Cultural Orientation Continua, we already talked about Direct and Indirect styles. Here we further elaborate those definitions and, additionally, we explore more dimensions related to communication styles.



COMMUNICATION CONTEXT

In very general terms, the context of communication can be differentiated as either High Context or Low Context (Hall, 1988). These two categories are able to frame the larger discussion on communication and on those characteristics that affect it. High and Low Context communication can be seen as different ways of communicating.

The context model can help to gain a better understanding of how people with different cultural orientations might perceive similar messages in a different way.



LOW CONTEXT

In low context communication, the message is made explicit in spoken or written language. People who are socialized in a low context culture do not need a lot of additional (contextual) information to engage in communication. They tend to be very open, say what they think and make direct requests. During meetings, they get to the point quickly.

Since, in a low context, it is the speaker's responsibility to convey the message clearly, these individuals give detailed directions and may over-explain the situation or problem. They are task oriented; they challenge ideas and are open to being challenged because they do not consider confrontation a personal insult. Silence and pauses during conversations can be misunderstood as signalling a lack of interest.



HIGH CONTEXT

In high context communication, it is the listener's or speaker's responsibility to hear and understand the meaning of the message. Usually in these cases the message is not directly stated. People who are socialized in a high context culture tend to rely on non-verbal behaviour to communicate and often imply the intended message instead of spelling it out. The context is full of meanings, and it assumes a crucial role in the delivering and understanding of the message. They assume the listener/reader has previous knowledge on the issue and therefore can figure out the implicit message. They are indirect.

For example, in high context communication, a person would mention that he is applying for jobs but never directly ask for reference letters. The manager/supervisor will offer to write a letter if he or she is willing to support the person. As they are relationship focused (as opposed to task focused), their disagreement would be more subtle. They avoid confrontation to maintain harmony; therefore you need to read between the lines: "yes" may mean "maybe" or even "no." In a high context culture there is more need for silence in order to understand the context and process the message.

LOW OR HIGH?

Do you consider yourself to communicate in low or high context?

There are pros and cons to both types of context. However, understanding where you fall between the 2 and how these could lead to intercultural miscommunications will help you be aware of using the proper context in the culture you are immersed in.

Being able to recognize and adapt to the proper context, based on the context used by that culture, leads to positive intercultural communication.

TAKE AWAY

Utilizing what you have learned in these modules will help you adapt and communicate with individuals in the countries you will be visiting.

Here are some best practices:

- Be open-minded to different perspectives and styles
- Be patient and understanding. Be aware that people are individuals and take time to talk to them. It's the only way you get to really know somebody. If someone is trying to communicate with you, do not rush them.
- Learn how to pronounce and spell the names of the people you are working with. Do not create short forms or nicknames for others, and respect everyone's naming preferences.
- Learn simple things in the native language of that country, for example how to say "hi" or "goodbye."
- Try to gain general knowledge about the cultures represented in the country/ team/ group members/ workplace.

"If we have knowledge with each other's different cultures, we may know where to start and stop; we can be more sensitive."

- When you face a conflict, use the "Something's Up" Cycle. (see previous description).

