



## **Intercultural Group Dynamics**

### **Activity 2 Understanding Intercultural Incidents**

#### **Activity Description**

##### **Purpose**

Activity 2 includes a short lecture, a case study and two variations for this activity. The purpose of this activity is to focus on understanding the differences that might arise during group work from an intercultural perspective. This involves (i) discussing a framework for understanding cultural variation and difference: the high–low context continuum (Hall & Reed Hall, 1989) and (ii) analysing the impact of cultural difference on interaction in the international classroom using the high–low context continuum.

First, the facilitator briefly discusses a framework for understanding cultural variation and difference: the high–low context continuum (Hall & Reed Hall, 1989). Next, participants analyse the impact of cultural difference on interaction in the international classroom using the high– low context continuum. Finally, participants explore opportunities for facilitating multicultural group dynamics.

The activity addresses the following learning outcomes:

- Incorporate classroom opportunities brought by the cohort in terms of diversity in order to develop intercultural engagement.
- Identify and use intercultural incidents as opportunities for learning.

##### **Procedure**

- First introduce the high-low context framework for analysing cultural difference (Hall & Reed Hall, 1989). Explain that this is one of the possible theoretical frameworks to understand and analyse communication incidents that may come up in intercultural groups. Depending on the familiarity of the participants with intercultural theory this may take up to 10 minutes.
- The next 10 minutes of the activity focusses on the influence of intercultural difference on group work. This helps participants to further familiarise themselves with this framework and connect it to their own experiences. Start the activity with a discussion on the impact of the high–low context mode of communication on the interaction between students in a project group which may lead to misunderstandings, conflicts and failed group projects. Ask participants to provide concrete examples when possible. As a facilitator, capture the discussion on a flipchart.



- Summarise the discussion and mention that high-low context communication modes might influence group work but that a conflict in a diverse group might not always be a cultural one.
- Participants sit within the group formation produced in the snowball activity of activity 1. If the groups are unequal in size, move some participants to make the numbers equal and explain that the activity functions better with groups of equal size.
- Introduce and distribute the case study to the participants. To understand this intercultural incident, the high-low context framework can help. First, explain the instructions of this case study. Then, distribute the individual worksheets (in A4 format) to every participant and an A3 version (or flip chart) to every group as well. Finally share the case study. This may take up to 5 minutes.
- Ask the participants to first individually read the case and complete the individual worksheet as far as possible (10 minutes).
- When everyone is done with completing their own worksheet, ask the participants to discuss their findings with each other in their groups. Instruct the participants to create a shared framework on the A3 handout or the flip chart (10 minutes).
- The facilitator asks each group in turn to share their comments / learning from the A3 sheet and writes any outcomes on the flipchart (10 minutes).
- Final reflections/learning are summed up by the facilitator using slides 11-12 in the PowerPoint relating to key insights from this activity (Top 10 challenges as detailed by Turner, 2009). Furthermore, the facilitator can comment on the fact that if the participants found it easy or difficult to fill in some of the boxes within the tool, which could give them an indication of where their learning gaps related to intercultural interactions may reside. (5 minutes).

### Resources needed

1. Activity 2 case study: 1 per participant
2. Activity 2 case study worksheet for every participant
  - 1) In A3 format handout for every group (1x group)
  - 2) In A4 format handout for every participant (1x participant)
3. Activity 2 PowerPoint presentation
4. 1 flipchart stand and sheets or whiteboard for use by the facilitator

### Room / space needed

Room needs to allow for workstations with wall space or movable divider walls.



## Timeframe

60 minutes; minimal 2 Groups of 3; max 5 Groups of 5

## Possible variations

### Variation 1

If the group of participants consists of EDs who have an advanced theoretical understanding of cultural differences, you may consider leaving out the input on the high-low context framework and using the 360° view worksheet as a handout instead.

- Start the activity by a discussion on the impact of cultural differences on the interaction between students in a project group which may lead to misunderstandings, conflicts and failed group projects. Ask participants to provide concrete examples when possible. As a facilitator, capture the discussion on flipchart. This plenary discussion may take 15 minutes
- Connect the examples of the participants to the salient theories on value and communication style differences between cultures, for instance the high-low context framework of Hall & Reed Hall (1989), Hofstede, Hofstede & Minkov (2010) or Gesteland (2002)(5 minutes).
- Conclude the discussion and mention that value differences and differences in communication styles might influence group work but that a conflict in a diverse group might not always be a cultural one.
- Participants sit within the group formation produced in the snowball activity in activity 1. If the groups are unequal in size, move some participants to make the numbers equal and explain that the activity functions better with groups of equal size.
- Introduce and distribute the case study to the participants. Refer to the previous discussion on value and communication style differences. First, explain the instructions of this case study. Then, distribute the individual 360° view worksheets (in A4 format) to every participant and an A3 version (or flip chart) to every group as well. Explain the 360° framework or method for exploring some of the potential causes of differences in students' approaches to (intercultural) group work. Finally, share the case study. This may take up to 5 minutes.
- Ask the participants to first individually read the case and complete the individual worksheet as far as possible (10 minutes).
- When everyone is done with completing their own worksheet, ask the participants to discuss their findings with each other in their groups. Instruct the participants to create a shared framework on the A3 handout of on the flip chart (10 minutes).



- The facilitator asks each group in turn to share their comments / learning from the A3 sheet and writes on the flipchart any outcomes (10 minutes).
- Final reflections/learning are summed up by the facilitator using slides 11-12 in the PowerPoint relating to key insights from this activity (Top 10 challenges as detailed by Turner, 2009). Furthermore, the facilitator can comment on the fact that if the participants found it easy or difficult to fill in some of the boxes within the tool, this could give them an indication of where their learning gaps related to intercultural interactions may reside. (5 minutes).
- Explain to the participants that the 360° framework (slide 13) might be particularly valuable in analysing one's own case but that some parts might also help them in understanding the differences in the case study.
- Discuss the value of the 360° view worksheet, particularly commenting on the fact that the idea is that participants take this 360° tool away with them and use it as a resource for similar situations.

## Resources needed

Activity 2 worksheet 360° view

- 1) In A3 format handout for every group (1x group)
- 2) In A4 format handout for every participant (1x participant)

## Variation 2

If the group of participants consists of EDs who are highly experienced, consider leaving out the case study. Instead, ask the EDs to share cases from their own experience and choose one case per group to analyse. Be aware that the plenary discussion could take up more time since the groups will all work with a different case.

If a lot of time is available for this activity (more than the indicated time above) and you choose to work with case studies (instead of asking the EDs to share their own cases), distributing different cases to each group could also be an option. Again, the plenary discussion will probably take up more time since the groups will each work with a different case.

## References

The 360° table is adapted from Berardo, K., & Deardorff, D. K. (2012). *Building cultural competence: Innovative activities and models*. Stylus Publishing.

Hall, E.T. and Reed Hall, M. (1989). *Understanding Cultural Differences*. Yarmouth, ME, USA: Intercultural Press.





Turner, Y. (2009). "Knowing Me, Knowing You," Is There Nothing We Can Do? Pedagogic Challenges in Using Group Work to Create an Intercultural Learning Space. *Journal of Studies in International Education*, 13(2).

### Further references for variation 1

Hofstede, G., Hofstede, G. J., & Minkov, M. (2010). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. McGraw-Hill USA.

Gesteland, R.R. (2002). *Cross-Cultural Business Behavior*. Copenhagen, Denmark: Copenhagen Business School Press.

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