

Intercultural Group Dynamics

Activity 2 Understanding Intercultural Incidents

Case Study Identifying and Analysing Intercultural Misunderstandings

Background

It is nearing the end of term in June 2017 for a Master’s (Post Graduate) class. You have been asked, at short notice, to cover for a lecturer who has gone off sick. This includes teaching tutorials as well as engaging with students towards the end of the class in order to ensure that their group assessment is progressing. Although you have not taught on this module before, you did take it as a student five years ago when you completed your Master’s degree, so you have some familiarity with the subject matter. The number of students taking the module is 36 – comprising six groups of six students from a range of countries and disciplines. The final assessment of the module is a combination of a written exam (60% of the final grade) and a group report (40% of the final grade). Over a four week period, the students have been asked to research a topic, provide answers to a variety of questions that will address a number of problems, and then prepare a final report.

Students’ names and nationalities from one of the groups

Joanna – United Kingdom

Wong – Malaysia

Françoise – France

Mohamed - Oman

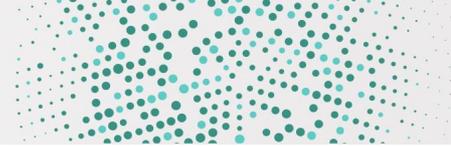
Renee – Netherlands

John - Nigeria

The incident

The students from this group have studied the task and have worked together for one week. During your first facilitated tutorial with them, you notice they have not progressed as far as you would have liked. Joanna, who volunteered to be a coordinator of the student group, is clearly embarrassed and explains that not everyone was able to attend the preparation meeting that she had organized and / or provided the pre-work she had requested. She also felt that she had been undertaking most of the work along with Françoise. She was concerned about the overall grade they may be awarded.

After enquiry with the group as a whole, the students provided you with the following summarized responses:



- Wong was not clear about what was expected of him.
- John claims he was representing the University in basketball but should be able to attend the next meeting.
- Renee felt left out of the group work because, due to the tight deadline, the decision was made to put in the work on a Sunday, which conflicted with her religious obligations (no work on Sunday).
- Mohamed felt his contributions were being disregarded.
- Some group members felt Joanna was only concerned with her grades and not listening to the other members of the group.

Instruction

In terms of understanding and resolving differences, what would success look like for you as the lecturer in this Case?

Write down your answers to the questions on your own individual worksheet (A4), using the framework on the High-Context vs. Low-Context Continuum.

Then, in your snowball groups, and referring to your answers in the handout (A4), discuss the “intercultural / diversity challenges” highlighted in the case study. Then agree and prepare a flip chart with the key intercultural issues of this Case.

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