

Intercultural Group Dynamics

Activity 2 Understanding Intercultural Incidents





Programme of this module

- Icebreaker activity
- Programme and intended learning outcomes
- Creating student groups
- **Facilitating intercultural group dynamics**
- Creating a learning environment that supports intercultural engagement in a group setting
- Wrapping up activity





Purpose of activity 2

- Discuss a framework for understanding cultural variation and difference: **the high–low context** continuum (Hall & Reed Hall, 1989).
- Analyse the impact of cultural difference on interaction in the international classroom using the high–low context continuum.





A Cultural Lens

Cultures differ in the extent to which **context** is considered an important element in the communication between its members.

In the literature, this is referred to as the

High–Low Context Continuum

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





High context cultures

Societies or groups in which members are closely connected over a long period of time.

Context understanding: many aspects of cultural behaviour are not made explicit. Cultural values and norms are handed down through the generations.

Information is available in the context for those who belong to the group and are sensitive to it.

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





Low context cultures

Societies or groups in which people are loosely connected and tend to have many connections but of a shorter duration or for some specific reason.

Verbal understanding: in order to function appropriately and effectively, cultural values, beliefs and behaviours are spelled out explicitly.

Information tends to be segmented and formalised in detailed writing. It is shared on a “need to know” basis.

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





General patterns of Behaviour

High Context cultures

- Affiliation to family and community, loyalty
- Context provides many covert, implicit messages
- Focus on non-verbal communication; sensitive to body language
- Shame: personal acceptance of failure
- Relationship focus, collaboration
- Hides emotions

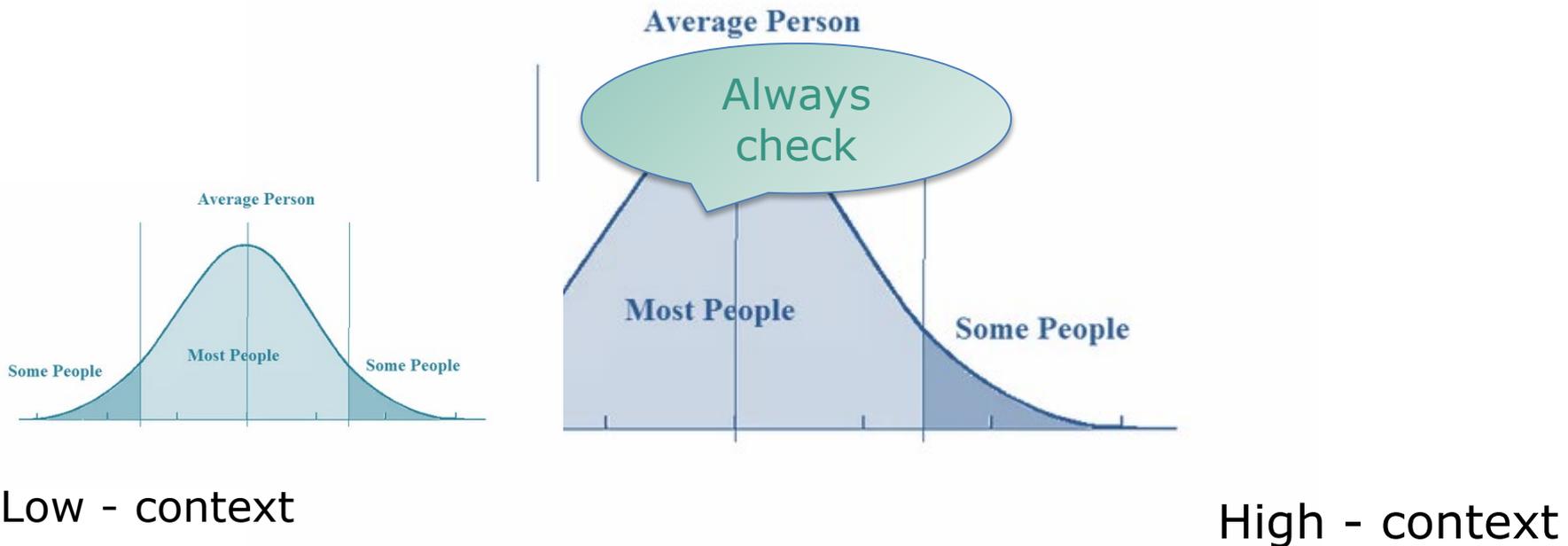
Low Context cultures

- Many connections, fragile functional bonds, privacy
- Overt, explicit messages, simple and to the point
- Focus on verbal communication; less sensitive to body language
- Guilt: blame of others for failure
- Task focus, competition
- Shows emotions





High-Low Context Continuum





Instruction: case study

Individually

- Read the case study to understand the situation presented;
- Analyse the intercultural issues in the case by using the High–Low Context Continuum provided in the handout;
- Write your answers to the questions on your individual sheet.

In your group

- Discuss the answers to the questions and
- Prepare a flip chart with the key (intercultural) challenges this group has presented.

Plenary session

- Share the results from discussion in your groups





Worksheet: Case study

Student	What was the intention of the behaviour?	What are the perceptions of the other students	Which intercultural issues could be at play
Joanna			
Francoise			
Wong			
Renee			
Mohammed			
John			





(Intercultural) Group Work

Top 10 Challenges identified by Turner (2009):

1. Unequal language skills
2. Quietness or silence
3. Leadership or role ambiguity
4. Communication issues
5. Conflict
6. Unequal commitment to the group
7. Time keeping or punctuality
8. Free riders or lack of participation
9. Differing expectations of groups
10. Over-talking or interrupting

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).





Value of the exercise

Reflection

- What was the impact of taking an intercultural perspective?
- What factors were you not originally thinking about that were highlighted by the High–Low Context Continuum?
- What was the impact of discussing this with someone else?
- What else did you learn through this process?
- What does it take to work effectively with this tool?
- How can the tool be useful to you moving forward?





Gaining a 360 degree view of an intercultural / diversity challenge

Look BETWEEN	What role could CULTURES be playing?	How may the COMMUNICATION between the students involved impact the situation?
Look WITHIN	What are the VALUES that could be driving each of the students involved - which are aligned and which seem to be in conflict?	What are the likely GOALS and EXPECTATIONS of the students involved?
Look BEHIND	What PRESSURES and MOTIVATIONS could be influencing the students? What is the impact of this?	What might the HISTORY of the interactions be and what influence does this have?
Look AROUND	What influence could the SURROUNDING SYSTEMS and GENERAL ENVIRONMENT have on all the students involved?	What is the potential impact of when and where the interactions are occurring, in other words TIME and SPACE
Look TO OTHERS	Who are KEY STAKEHOLDERS and what is their potential role in this situation?	What influence could the ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE have on the students involved?





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.

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