# **Enhancing your Interpersonal Communication Skills across Cultures by Donna Humphrey**

#### **Workshop Programme**

Welcome and Coffee Workshop aims and objectives

#### **Introduction to NLP**

The map is not the territory Operating principles of NLP

#### **Exercises**

Excellent communicators: what do they have in common? Key elements of excellent communication

#### **Introduction to Interpersonal Communication Skills**

Building and maintaining rapport

Noticing skills – sensory acuity and calibration

#### **Exercises**

Increasing and decreasing rapport Sometimes we do not see ourselves as clearly as others see us

# **Introduction to Inter-group Communication**

Group purpose Group communication Effective group members

#### **Exercises**

Inspirational team building quote Create your own team building activity

#### **Introduction to Intercultural Communication**

Defining culture
The international profiler
Developing an intercultural mindset

#### **Exercises**

Intelligence Test

Case study: a critical incident

Feedback and a final word

# Aims and objectives of the workshop

The workshop will provide a personal development course for individuals, who seek to enhance their interpersonal communication skills across cultural boundaries. The workshop allows participants to investigate their own communication patterns and begin to identify and acknowledge the communication style of others.

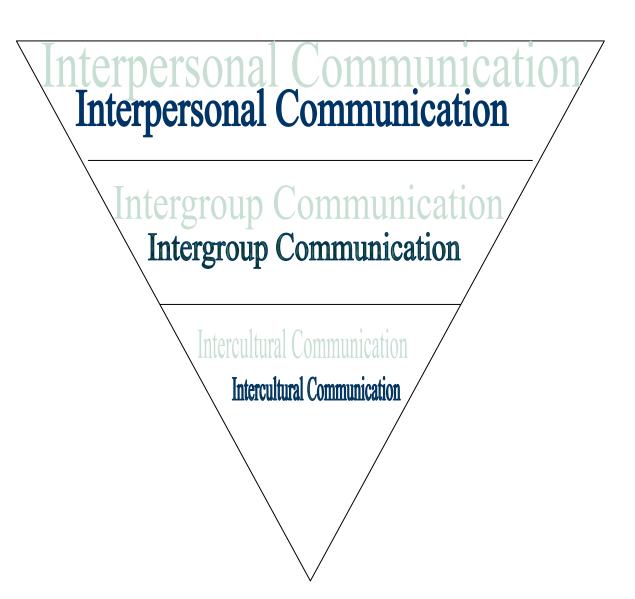
The workshop will focus on communication at three levels: the interpersonal, the inter-group, and the intercultural.

At each level, participants will develop an awareness of their communication skills and behavioural flexibility. They will recognise what creates good communication and begin to understand how and why poor communication occurs.

At the end of this workshop participants will have an enhanced view of how they communicate and how to improve relationships through good communication in both 'one-to-one' and group situations.

The workshop will be dynamic and involve extensive group interaction. In this experiential workshop they will learn skills for developing their personal and professional effectiveness.

# **Enhancing your Communication Skills**



# **Introduction to NLP**

The workshop will use techniques drawn from NLP (Neuron-linguistic programming), which is often described as the "ultimate communications strategy", by enhancing your influencing skills, you can build better rapport and thus increase communication levels. The workshop introduces the major elements required to be successful in relationship building, that is to say rapport, including pacing and leading, high level noticing skills, behavioural flexibility, understanding people's 'strategies' behind their thinking and decision making.

## **Background to NLP**

The co-developers of NLP are two Americans, Richard Bandler, a gestalt therapist and computer programmer, and John Grindler, a linguist professor. At the suggestion of the eminent anthropologist, Gregory Bateson, they analysed some of the most foremost communicators and therapist to find out how and what they were doing to create excellent communication. In particular, they studied Milton Erickson, Fritz Perls and Virginia Satir, all leaders in their field. From these three world-renowned therapists, they identified the specific verbal and non-verbal strategies they used to achieve the success they did with clients.

Many of NLP's tools and applications are widely used in business, sport, management, education, training and therapy. Many of us have encountered and applied these tools and applications in our life, without even realizing that it.

# Making Changes to Our Communication Style: the Map is not the Territory

Once we understand our own map of reality, we can begin to understand the "maps" used by other people. Understanding other people's maps of the world can increase the depth and effectiveness of our personal and professional relationships.

# **Workshop Presuppositions**

This workshop makes presuppositions, based on NLP presuppositions.

Presuppositions or assumptions are the beliefs a person will find useful in effecting changes to themselves and their communication style.

#### Examples of presuppositions:

- ➤ If you always do what you have always done you will always get the same results.
- If what you are doing is not working, do something else.
- People already have all the resources they need to achieve whatever they want to achieve.
- > Behind every behaviour is a positive intention.
- > The meaning of a communication is the response you get.
- If you aren't getting the response you want, try something different.
- There is no such thing as failure. There is only feedback.
- In any system, the element with the most flexibility exerts the most influence.
- The map is not the territory.
- ➤ If someone can do something, anyone can learn it.
- You cannot fail to communicate.
- ➤ Having a choice is better than having no choice at all

# **Communication Excellence**

And so, my fellow Americans: ask not what your country can do for you - ask what you can do for your country.

My fellow citizens of the world: ask not what America will do for you, but what together we can do for the freedom of man.

Inaugural Address by John F. Kennedy - 1961

This is truly a celebration - a celebration of the contributions women make in every aspect of life: in the home, on the job, in their communities, as mothers, wives, sisters, daughters, learners, workers, citizens and leaders.

Women's Rights Are Human Rights Famous Speech by Hillary Clinton, Beijing, China, 1995

You can see that "there is no easy walk to freedom anywhere, and many of us will have to pass through the valley of the shadow (of death) again and again before we reach the mountain tops of our desires.

No Easy Road to Freedom speech by Nelson Mandela, 1953

I have a dream that my four children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character.

I have a dream today.

I Have a Dream speech by Martin Luther King, 1963

I have borne thirteen children, and seen most all sold off to slavery, and when I cried out with my mother's grief, none but Jesus heard me! And ain't I a woman?

Ain't I a Woman? Famous Speech by Sojourner Truth

Exercise	Communication		
research of Alb	_	nannels of communica 2), each proportion inf unication.	
Guess the % in	npact of the followir	ng on the messages w	e send
			%
Body language	, gestures, facial ex	pression etc.	
Voice tone, pito	ch, pace, volumeeto	: <b>.</b>	
Actual words u	sed		

We are always communicating

#### **Critics of Albert Mehrabian's Communication Model**

Mehrabian's model is a seminal piece of work, and it's amazingly helpful in explaining the importance of careful and appropriate communications. Like any model, care must be exercised when transferring it to different situations. Use the basic findings and principles as a guide and an example - don't transfer the percentages, or make direct assumptions about degrees of effectiveness, to each and every communication situation.

The model is particularly useful in illustrating the importance of factors other than words alone when trying to convey meaning (as the speaker) or interpret meaning (as the listener), but care needs to be taken in considering the context of the communication: Style, expression, tone, facial expression and body language in Mehrabian's experiments did indeed account for 93% of the meaning inferred by the people in the study, but this is not a general rule that you can transfer to any given communications situation.

The understanding of how to convey (when speaking) and interpret (when listening) meaning will always be essential for effective communication, management and relationships. But using the Mehrabian percentages is not a reliable model to overlay onto all communications scenarios.

For example, Mehrabian's research involved spoken communications. Transferring the model indiscriminately to written or telephone communications is not reliable, except to say that without the opportunity for visual signs, there is likely to be even more potential for confused understanding and inferred meanings.

I am grateful for the guidance of Ben Taylor in revising this guide to Mehrabian's communications theory.

More information about Dr Albert Mehrabian and his fascinating work see his website.

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Exercise	Communication Excellence
What does exc	ellent communication mean to you?
Who is an exc	ellent communicator?
How do you cr	eate excellent communication?

# **Improving Your Interpersonal Communication Skills**

# **Building Rapport**

It is useful to remember that rapport is present in every form of conversation you have at some level. This includes telephone conversations as well as those that happen face-to-face and even written conversations.



#### **What Creates Rapport?**

Gaining rapport is the first important step in effective communication. It helps create an environment of warmth and trust, and is affected by how related or 'connected' we feel. The more we feel in rapport, the better the communication.

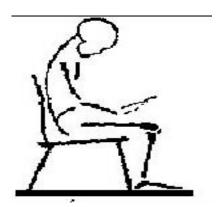
One well-known way of increasing rapport is known as matching. This is based on the skills of noticing and utilising information transmitted, both verbal and non-verbal, conscious and unconscious from each separate individual. Rapport can be built by literally matching the person's communication style with whom you are communicating. You build rapport, for example, by gradually and subtly matching their body language. If they lean forward, you lean in. If the cross their legs you cross yours.

# **Sensory Acuity**

Maintaining rapport is essential for effective communication. Rapport is gained and maintained at different levels:

#### Level 1

Body language/physical gestures



At this level you mirror or match the body language and physical gestures of the person with whom you are communicating such as posture (hunched, leaning back/forward, straight, rigid, relaxed) gestures, range of movements (swaying, tapping, rhythmic, erratic, intermittent), facial expressions, eye contact, energy levels.

#### Level 2

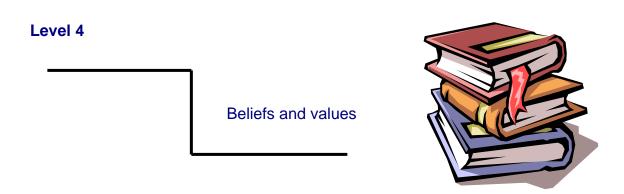
Qualities of voice.



At this level you match the tone of voice (harsh, even, staccato), speed of speech (fast, slow, erratic, even), pitch (low and deep, high, constant, rising etc.) rate of breathing (regular, irregular, held, upper chest, full chest, abdominal)

# Language/words used

Words you can match. Adopting and matching the language, the same words or phrases a person uses.



Sharing similar beliefs and values can create rapport.

This is based on implied like-mindedness.

## When matching actually becomes mismatching?

Don't 'overdo it' in an obvious way or to an extreme level of detail, then instead of building rapport you will in fact alienate the individual. Matching effectively is a subtle art.

Enhancing your interpersonal communication skills across cultures donna.humphrey@ntu.ac.uk **Scale Rapport** 5 The sense that you are positively 'connected'. You feel supported and feel trust. You have a strong sense of familiarity 3 There is a sense of genuine warmth and kinship 2 You are comfortable and familiar There is some warmth Neutral There is some hesitation and 1 trepidation about the situation There is some discomfort and a 2 sense of detachment An awareness of dislike and disassociation 3 Genuine aversion, antipathy, real dislike 4 Inspired by Genie Z. Laborde, in the Coaching Manual, Julie Starr (2003), Pearson

# **Exercise** Increasing and Decreasing Rapport

This is a very simple basic technique for demonstrating our ability to both increase and decrease rapport. It works by increasing or reducing a physical sense of 'sameness'. In a group of three, label yourselves A, B and C.

#### Person A

In the activity, person A. talks for 5 minutes about a topic they are interested in, perhaps a hobby or an experience that made them feel good.

#### Person B

Whilst Person A is talking, Person B matches Person A's communication style, increasing rapport using the following techniques:

- First, focus on Person A., what's happening with them. Do a quick check on the physical posture, voice qualities, amount of energy they're displaying obvious things that you can match.
- Second, make changes as a gradual process, so that Person B does not consciously notice it. For example begin by subtly matching physical posture, so that it fits.
- ➤ Third begin to attune to Person A. and begin to notice the other behaviour patterns. These might include subtle facial expressions; eye contact, skin tone etc.

#### Optional

If you find this exercise easy, then match and mismatch on any of the following: Person A's breathing, their voice quality- pitch, pace, tone etc. The key words or phrases they seem to use.

Continue doing this until you feel comfortable that you are matching Person
 A. well. Do this for a couple of minutes.

#### Remember

Do this as subtly as possible. Often light adjustments work better than becoming an exact match of the other person.

Once you have established a comfortable situation, Person B decreases rapport by mismatching. Continue talking, and begin to deliberately mismatch what person A is doing. Fold you arms, look away – be really different. Do this until you are sure the mismatch is what you want.

#### Person C

➤ Person C observes both Person A and Person B. During the proceedings take notes in order to give feedback. Us the chart on the following page to make notes.

## **Taking Turns**

Changes places e.g. Person B talks for 5 minutes, whilst Person C matches and mismatches the communication style as described in steps two and three. Person A. acts as the observer, makes notes and gives feedback. Do this until everyone has an opportunity to take each position.

#### Discussion

Discuss what you noticed:

What effect did matching have on you?

What effect did mismatching have on you?

Body Language /physical gestures	
Voice quality	
Language used	
Beliefs and values	



#### **Reviewing Your Own Communication Styles**

Communication styles are very personal and a wide variety of communication styles can be highly effective, depending on the individual and the situation. Since communication is a very personal issue, it is not always easy to honestly assess our own communication style and look for ways to enhance the effectiveness of our communication with family, friends, colleagues and business partners. Yet, it is critical we continually evaluate and refine our communication skills in order to thrive in the fast-paced, ever-changing environment in which we live and work.

Our overall communications style encompasses more than what we say and how we say it and naturally our communication style may vary and can be dependent on the context and/or the person with whom we are speaking. However, it is our attitude, our presence, and our personality, which also influence others' perceptions of our style of communicating. Since communication is a very fundamental skill and since we learn communications behaviours at an early age, it is often difficult to objectively assess our communications patterns and to see ourselves as others see us.

Following is a list of thought-provoking statements for personal review. As you complete the statements think about their impact on others. Add your own thoughts provoking statements to the list. As you work through the list think

about the positive and negative impact your style of communication can have on others if (a) the context is not right or (b) the person with whom you are communicating has a different style of communication to yourself.

After you have done a self-assessment with the questions below, try going over the list with a trusted friend or mentor to see if their impressions of your communications style are the same as yours. Your success as a communicator depends on how well you communicate and interact with others as much as on how well you live and practice your everyday life and profession.

1.	A. I am more comfortable working with people who are detailed and task orientated.	Yes	No
	B. I am more comfortable working with people who are people and communication orientated.		
	C. I prefer to communicate with people who stretch the imagination.		
Potential Positive Impact on			
Communication			
Potential negative Impact on			
Communication			

2.	A. I generally have a positive, can-do attitude to situations and ideas.     B. I often first think of reasons why things could be difficult to achieve.     C. I often see problems first and think of solutions to those problems.	Yes	No
Potential Positive Impact on Communication			
Potential negative Impact on Communication			

3.	A. I listen carefully to what someone says, most of the	Yes	No
	time, before having my say.		
	B. I often have a tendency to talk over others, when I don't		
	agree or like what they are saying		
	C. I have a tendency to keep quiet and listen, most of the		
	time, when communicating with others I do not know or in		
	a group situation.		
Potential Positive Impact on		•	•
Communication			
Potential negative Impact on			
Communication			

4.	A. I often ask those questions carefully and non-critically B. I can be very direct and to the point when I ask questions in order to obtain further information c. I ask pertinent questions that show I understand the topic at hand and help other people define their thoughts	Yes	No
Potential Positive Impact on Communication		-	
Potential negative Impact on Communication			

5.	A. The language and behaviour patterns I use can create	Yes	No
	barriers in our conversation		
	B. I like to foster good working relations in groups		
	C. I easy and approachable in my communication with a		
	wide range of other people.		
	D. I complain a lot.		
Potential Positive Impact on			
Communication			
Potential negative Impact on			
Communication			

6.	A. I share information readily?	Yes	No
	B. I give instructions clearly?		
	C. I give constructive feedback in a timely way?		
	D. I often invite alternative points of views and feedback?		
	E. I often give credit to others when it is due?		
	F. I consistently thank people for their help and support?		
Potential Positive Impact on		1	
Communication			
Potential negative Impact on			
Communication			
	1		

7.	A. I often think about the impact of my communication before I speak?	Yes	No
	B. I sometimes become very detailed and find others stop		
	listening to me?		
	C. I often block other people's creativity by discussing		
	reality too much?		
Potential Positive Impact on			
Communication			
Potential negative Impact on			
Communication			

8.	A. I often get people to agree to a course of action by	Yes	No
	sheer force of will? B. I make an effort to remember		
	names and pertinent information?		
	C. I keep information confidential when it is necessary to		
	do so?		
	D. I often try to make sure everyone contributes?		
Potential Positive Impact on		ı	I
Communication			
Potential negative Impact on			
Communication			

For more information on Personality & Psychological Profiling Instruments and for self-insight, personal development, and enhancement of change-related training programs go to the following website:

#### http://www.wilderdom.com/tools/ToolsPersonality.html

These instruments are commonly used and recommended as comprehensive personality and team profiling tools. These tools are often used by organisational consultants and workplace trainers to help facilitate understanding of:

- \* Personal strengths and weaknesses
- \* Other team members' strengths and weaknesses
- \* A team's overall strengths and weaknesses
- \* An organization's overall strengths and weaknesses

Alternative website: The big Five Personality test - http://www.outofservice.com/bigfive/

Take this psychology test to find out about your personality! This test measures what many psychologists consider to be the five fundamental dimensions of personality. As you are rating yourself, you are encouraged to rate another person. By rating someone else you will tend to receive a more accurate assessment of your own personality. Also, you will be given a personality profile for the person you rate, which will allow you to compare yourself to this person on each of five basic personality dimensions. Try to rate someone whom you know well, such as a close friend, co-worker, spouse, or other family member.

# **Inter-group Communication**

#### **Group Purpose**

A team is a group of people who come together temporarily to achieve a purpose. There is no magic formula for "building a team". Teams are organic - they grow and change - so make use of the opportunities that change offers.

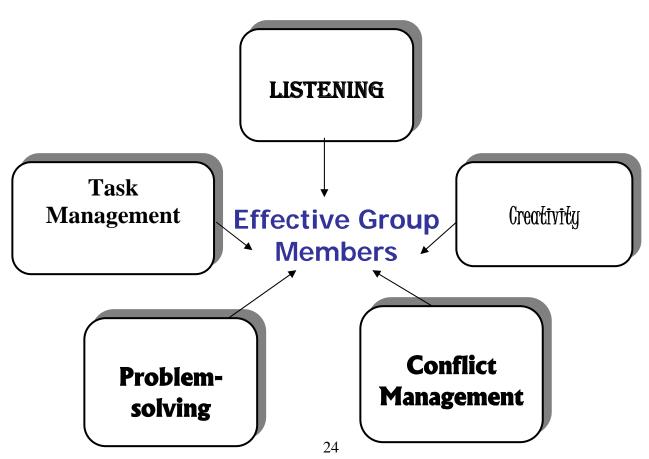
(James Neill, 2005, Wilderdom)

#### **Group Communication**

An interactional process that occurs among three or more people interacting in an attempt to achieve commonly recognized goals either face-to-face or through mediated forms.



(Unknown)



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# An exercise The Inspirational Team Building Quote

In small groups, the challenge is to create the most inspirational team-building quote in a set amount of time. You have 15 minutes to create your quote. Each team reads out their quote and teams vote on the best quote. See examples of team building quotes.

Coming together is a beginning. Keeping together is progress. Working together is success.

- Henry Ford

We must all hang together, or assuredly, we shall all hang separately.

- Benjamin Franklin



Wild ducks make a lot of noise, but they also have the sense to benefit from occasionally flying in formation.

- Unknown

A single arrow is easily broken, but not ten in a bundle.

- Japanese proverb

It is amazing how much people get done if they do not worry about who gets the credit.

- Swahili proverb

Wearing the same shirts doesn't make a team.

- Buchholz and Roth

## **Exercise** Create Your Own Team Building Activity

This small group activity will involve you in designing and presenting a new group activity. A challenging exercise which requires all the elements of teamwork - communication, goal-setting, planning, cooperation, creativity, task orientation, etc.

In groups of 4 or 5, you have 45 minutes to come up with a challenging team building activity. A team building activity is an exercise, which helps build team spirit and problem solving skills. The activity you design should take a maximum of 15 minutes for a team to complete.

You will present your activity to another group and get then to complete it in the specified time.

Be warned: This is harder than it sounds – it requires all elements of teamwork including creativity, communication, trust, problem solving, time management, etc.

The facilitator will check your progress during planning and help with ideas or problem-solving strategies if the group is struggling.

Be creative. Use out-of-the-box thinking e.g., singing, dancing, joke-telling, non-verbal, as well as physical or mental-type challenges.

#### **Equipment:**

No equipment necessary, but you can use the objects supplied by the facilitator to create interesting outcomes, e.g. balls, hats, masks.

# **Exercise** Assessing the group communication

At the finish of the activity as a team assess your group communication. Below is a list of thought-provoking questions for a team review. As you complete the questions discuss your answers with each other. Be as open and honest about your answers as you can. This is not a test but an opportunity to review how and why some teams are successful and others are not. When completing the review focus on the group as a whole and not on individuals in the group.

1. Did the group work well together or did the group have some difficulties

	bonding and did this stop you working together as well as we could have? Explain what happened.
2.	Overall did the group have a good balance of personality types to ensure the task was completed?  Explain the roles taken by each group member.

3	Did the team have a positive can-do attitude to the situation and ideas of did the team get caught up in the detail and focus on things that could be difficult to achieve?  Give examples
	Was each person in the team listened to carefully?  Give examples of this
5	Did some group members have a tendency to dominate the proceeding or did some group members remain quiet most of the time and had difficulties participating?  Explain what happened.

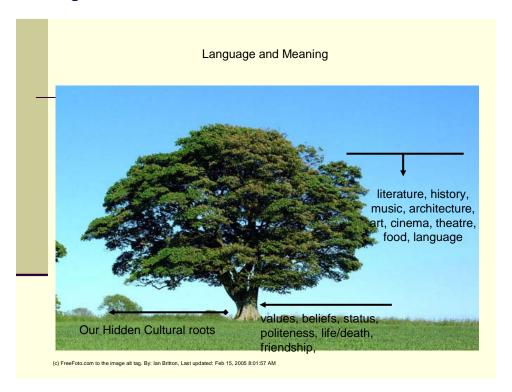
6.	Was everyone able to give alternative points of views?			
	What happened?			
7	Did everyone contribute fairly equally to completing the task?			
7.				
	When did this happen and how?			
	<del></del>			
Overa	all Assessment			
If you	were to improve communication in your group, what would you change and			
how?				

# **Intercultural Communication**

The last decade has seen the rise of international contact, bringing together individuals of varied nationalities and backgrounds. This contact creates unique challenges in communication.

Individuals in communication may not recognise the impact that their differing behaviour, attitudes, perceptions and beliefs may have on others, both personally and professionally, and this can affect our ability to work and live together.

#### **Defining Culture**



"Culture is like the water fish swim in – a reality that is taken for granted, rarely examined. It is in the air we breathe and as necessary to our understanding of who we are as air is to our physical life' (Beamer and Varner, 2001)

Culture is learned, shared, patterned, mutually constructed, symbolic, arbitrary and dynamic

Exercise	Intercultura	l Quiz

Test of Intelligence [Source unknown]				
2.	How many lunar months are in a year?			
3.	As wallaby is to animal so cigarette is to			
4.	Three of the following items may be classified with salt-water crocodile.  Which are they? (circle your answers)  marine turtle brolga frilled lizard black snake			
5.	Which items may be classified with sugar? (circle your answers) honey witchetty grub flour water-lillies			
6.	We eat food and we water.			
7.	Sam, Ben and Harry are sitting together. Sam faces Ben and Ben gives him a cigarette. Harry sits quietly with his back to both Ben and Sam and contributes nothing to the animated conversation going on between Sam and Ben. One of the men is Ben's brother, the other is Ben's sister's child. Who is the nephew? (circle your answer)			

a. Sam b. Harry c. Ben

- 8. Suppose your brother in his mid-forties dies unexpectedly. Would you attribute his death to (circle your answer):
  - a. God b. Fate c. Germs D. No-one e. Someone f. Your brother himself
- 9. You are out in the bush with your wife and young children and you are all hungry. You have a rifle and bullets. You see three animals all within range a young emu, a large kangaroo and a small female wallaby. Which should you shoot for food? (circle your answer)
  - a. Young emu b. Large kangaroo c. Small female wallaby
- 10. Why should you be careful of your cousins?

Go to scoring sheet

#### The Original Australian Test of Intelligence

**The Original Australian Intelligence Test** 

The <u>10-item Original Australian Intelligence Test</u> is based on the culture of the Edward River Australian Aboriginal community in North Queensland.

[Source unknown]

#### Scoring Sheet: Original Australian Test of Intelligence

- 1. One, two, three, many....the kuuk thaayorre system of counting only goes to three...thana, kuthir, pinalam, mong, mong, etc. The word mong is best translated as "many" since it can mean any number between 4 and 9 or 10 after which your mong (many figures) would be more appropriate.
- 2. Those who say thirteen are right in European terms but irrelevant in Edward River terms. The speakers of kuuk thaayorre clearly recognise lunar menstruation and possess a notion of the lunar month as calculated as the time between one phase of the moon and the next appearance of that particular phase. However, apart from having no specific word to designate thirteen and thirteen only yurr mong or "very many", is the right answer the annual cycle is crouched in terms of environmental rhythms rather than in terms of fixed, invariant divisions of time. The "year" then is the time between the onset of one wet season and the onset of the next wet season and wet seasons may be early or late, so who can be precise?
- 3. The right answer is "tree". This stems from the kuuk thaayorre speakers early experience with tobacco which was "stick" tobacco, hence it is classified with tree.
- 4. Crocodiles, turtles, birds and frill necked lizards are all classified as minh (which broadly might be translated as animals). Snakes along with eels are classified as yak which may be broadly translated as snake-like creatures.
- 5. All the items are classified with sugar as belong to the class of objects known as may. Broadly translated, may means vegetable food. Even witchetty grubs that are found in the roots of trees fall under this rubric so does honey which is also associated with trees and hence fruit. The kuuk thaayorre language had no problem fitting flour into the may category since it obviously resembled some of their own processed vegetable foods (e.g., yams like Dioscoria sativa elongata). The word may can also mean sweet and hence sugar, which of course does not resemble anything in their traditional culinary.

- 6. "Eat" is the right word well sort of, anyway. Where we make a distinction between "eating" and "drinking", kuuk thaayorre does not and they use the same verb to describe both functions and why not?
- 7. The clues are easy for kuuk thaayorre. An avoidance taboo operates between mother's brother and sister's son and politeness requires that sister's son should never directly face mother's brother nor talk to him directly in company. Sam and Ben are obviously brothers because of their unrestrained interaction while Harry, with his back turned to both his uncles is obviously the respectful nephew.
- 8. Among the kuuk thaayorre God has been equated with a mythological character and he is definitely non-malevolent. Both fate and germs are concepts foreign to the kuuk thaayorre belief system. No-one dies without reason and suicide is unknown to them, so the right answer is SOMEONE which is the case in this sorcery riddled society.
- 9. The small female wallaby is the right answer. Emu is a food that may be consumed only by very old people. Kangaroos (especially large ones) may not be eaten by parents or their children. The children will get sick otherwise. Everyone knows that....don't they?
- 10. Because some of them have to be avoided like the plague. For example, a male must avoid his father's sister's daughter, or anyone classified with her. Such relations are called poison cousins in Aboriginal English.

#### **Cultural Bias in Intelligence Testing**

It is extremely difficult to develop a test that measures innate intelligence without introducing cultural bias. This has been virtually impossible to achieve. One attempt was to eliminate language and design tests with demonstrations and pictures. Another approach is to realize that culture-free tests are not possible and to design culture-fair tests instead. These tests draw on experiences found in many cultures.

Many college students have a middle-class background and may have difficulty appreciating the biases that are part of standardized intelligence tests, because their own background does not disadvantage them for these tests. By doing some intelligence tests which make non-mainstream cultural assumptions, students can come to experience some of the difficulties and issues involved with culturally biased methods of testing intelligence.

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Exercise	Intercultural Contact
In pairs discuss	the following questions:
What advantage	es do you see working across cultures?
What do you fin	d challenging working across cultures?
How does wor	king across cultures relate to your own job role/department?

# **Exercise** A Case Study for Discussion

The case study for discussion is based on a critical incident. A critical incident is a narrative that illustrates a misunderstanding between two or more people from different cultural backgrounds. In the fields of intercultural and cross-cultural communication, it is now a standard training tool (Arthur, 2001; Baxter and Ramsey, 1996; Brislin, 1993; Cushner and Brislin, 1996, 1997). After small group discussions of the case study and the possible explanations behind the misunderstandings, participants are provided with feedback on the choices, with reference to relevant research findings. In the process of discussing the case studies, participants deepen their understanding of the complex cultural factors affecting intercultural encounters.

Laura Lee worked in a Hong Kong (HK) University as a Senior lecturer in the Department of Business and Economics. Her previous job was with a Hong Kong international management consultancy company. Her expertise as an international management consultant made her the ideal candidate to head a prestigious project, researching the link between culture and communication in global workforces. The project involved four other University Lecturers representing Italy, Britain, Sweden and Japan. The team would include two women and three men. The language of communication would be English.

She was sent to a U.K University on secondment. Laura had never left HK before but had worked with British counterparts in HK on a regular basis in her previous job and on a less regular basis with colleagues from Japan. She had never worked with colleagues from the other national states. Aware of her lack of experience, she arranged to attend business communication training and read research on doing business with colleagues from Southern Europe and

Scandinavian countries; in particular she studied research done by Hofstede and Trompenaars. She felt confident that she would work well with her colleagues from Britain and Japan as she had had previous contact with people from these countries.

Laura is regarded as very self-confident person with strong values and a clear sense of direction. She is self disciplined and has considerable determination and is very decisive. She is strongly focused on reaching her goals. Laura speaks Cantonese, Mandarin Chinese and English. Her level of spoken English is rated as excellent.

On arrival in the U.K Laura made initial contact with her counterparts via e-mails and had correspondence with them on a regular basis. The first and second meetings were arranged and these appeared to be a success with colleagues eager to start the project. At the third meeting, she met with her counterparts on a Monday morning. Prior to the meeting Laura had set the agenda based on discussions from the previous meetings and sent this by e-mail, giving colleagues time to think about her proposals.

In order to assert herself as head of the project, Laura felt it was important that she clearly state her ideas on how the project should proceed and what goals needed to be achieved. She noted during the meeting that her Italian counterpart, Fabio Grisolli, was nodding agreement, whilst the others remained silent. She explained her ideas extensively elaborating on areas she felt she needed to clarify. She briefly noted the British lecturer appeared to be looking faintly annoyed but dismissed this as her imagination. At the finish of her presentation, Laura opened the meeting up for discussion.

She requested her Swedish colleague, Hannes Johanson, to offer his opinion on her ideas. She had read that the Swedish tended to be very quiet and shy and needed prompting. There was a lengthy silence during which the Italian and

British lecturers began to look uneasy and exchange glances. Hannes began by first outlining his lack of expertise in the area then offered his thoughts on the project slowly and concisely. During his explanation, Fabio interrupts him and begins to question him on some of his ideas. Hannes during the questioning begins to look uncomfortable and becomes quieter then stops. His Italian colleague appears not to notice and continues outlining his ideas on the subject. He becomes more and more animated as he proceeds and his voice tone rises. At this point Fabio moves closer to the Hannes, the Swedish counterpart immediately moves away alarmed by the movement and the Fabio's gestures, leaving Fabio bemused and slightly hurt. The British lecturer interrupts Fabio and offers his ideas on the subject leaving the two colleagues to dominate the meeting for some time, The Japanese and the Swedish lecturers remain quiet.

Laura feels the meeting is beginning to be over-dominated by the Europeans and feels it is important to include the other colleagues in the meeting. Besides she feels too much talking and discussing is going on at the detriment of the project tasks that need allocating. She finds a moment when she can intervene and invites her Japanese colleague, Keiko Funamoto to speak asking her if she could take on one of the tasks. Keiko feels stressed, as she believes more time is needed for negotiations to take place and much more detail required before she can proceed. She says 'Mm. It would be difficult'. The British colleague John Brown frowns and begins to outline possible solutions, Keiko looks puzzled.

Hannes remains passive and still, irritated by the way the meeting is going. He feels the team should negotiate until the team reaches a consensus. Further he is a little suspicious of his Italian and British colleagues' attitude, which appears to be more about self-promotion than working as a team. John Brown, the British lecturer feels too much detail is being discussed at the early stages of the project and more brainstorming for ideas is required. Fabio is uncomfortable with the silence shown by some colleagues, who he feels are not contributing and it is his responsibility to keep the meeting lively and engaging or it will come to halt. He

suggests they meet after the meeting for a meal. Perhaps getting to know each other over dinner would be a good idea to help create trust and openness. John declines as he is scheduled to be on a plane that afternoon to attend a conference.

Laura is disappointed that the meeting is not proceeding as well as she had expected so calls a halt to the proceedings. John Brown is annoyed as he feels the meeting was just beginning to get interesting and his time is very limited, in addition he is distrustful of Laura's motives for stopping the meeting. Keiko feels Laura should have been more decisive as a leader and taken control of the project.

## Possible Answers

## Experience

Laura Lee worked in a Hong Kong (HK) University as a Senior lecturer in the Department of Business and Economics. Her previous job was with a Hong Kong international management consultancy company. Her expertise as an international management consultant made her the ideal candidate to head a prestigious project, researching the link between culture and communication in global workforces. The project involved four other University Lecturers representing Italy, Britain, Sweden and Japan. The team would include two women and three men. The language of communication would be English.

### **Intercultural Experience and Gaps**

She was sent to a U.K University on secondment. Laura had never left HK before but had worked with British counterparts in HK on a regular basis in her previous job and on a less regular basis with colleagues from Japan. She had never worked with colleagues from the other national states.

#### Strategies and problems

Aware of her lack of experience, she arranged to attend business communication training and read research on doing business with colleagues from Southern Europe and Scandinavian countries; in particular she studied research done by Hofstede and Trompenaars. (See criticism of Hofstede and Trompenaars)

#### **Assumptions**

She felt confident that she would work well with her colleagues from Britain and Japan as she had had previous contact with people from these countries.

## **Personal Strengths**

Laura is regarded as very self-confident person with strong values and a clear sense of direction. She is self disciplined and has considerable determination and is very decisive. She is strongly focused on reaching her goals. Laura speaks Cantonese, Mandarin Chinese and English. Her level of spoken English is rated as excellent.

#### **Communication Strategies**

On arrival in the U.K Laura made initial contact with her counterparts via e-mails and had correspondence with them on a regular basis. The first and second meetings were arranged and these appeared to be a success with colleagues eager to start the project. At the third meeting, she met with her counterparts on a Monday morning. Prior to the meeting Laura had set the agenda based on discussions from the previous meetings and sent this by e-mail, giving colleagues time to think about her proposals.

In order to assert herself as head of the project, Laura felt it was important that she clearly state her ideas on how the project should proceed and what goals needed to be achieved.

#### Non verbal communication

She **noted** during the meeting that her Italian counterpart, Fabio Grisolli, was **nodding agreement, whilst the others remained silent.** She explained her ideas extensively elaborating on areas she felt she needed to clarify. **She briefly noted the British lecturer appeared to be looking faintly annoyed** but dismissed this as her imagination. **At the finish of her presentation, Laura opened the meeting up for discussion.** 

#### Verbal and non verbal communication

She requested her Swedish colleague, Hannes Johanson, to offer his opinion on her ideas. She had read that the Swedish tended to be very quiet and shy and needed prompting. There was a lengthy silence during which the Italian and British lecturers began to look uneasy and exchange glances. Hannes began by first outlining his lack of expertise in the area then offered his thoughts on the project slowly and concisely. During his explanation, Fabio interrupts him and begins to question him on some of his ideas. Hannes during the questioning begins to look uncomfortable and becomes quieter then stops. His Italian colleague appears not to notice and continues outlining his ideas on the subject. He becomes more and more animated as he proceeds and his voice tone rises. At this point Fabio moves closer to the Hannes, the Swedish counterpart immediately moves away alarmed by the movement and the Fabio's gestures, leaving Fabio bemused and slightly hurt. The British lecturer interrupts Fabio and offers his ideas on the subject leaving the two colleagues to dominate the meeting for some time. The Japanese and the Swedish lecturers remain quiet.

Laura feels the meeting is beginning to be over-dominated by the Europeans and feels it is important to include the other colleagues in the meeting. Besides she feels too much talking and discussing is going on at the detriment of the project tasks that need allocating. She finds a moment when she can intervene and invites her Japanese colleague, Keiko Funamoto to speak asking her if she could take on one of the tasks. Keiko feels stressed, as she believes more time is needed for negotiations to take place and much more detail required before she can proceed. She says 'Mm. It would be difficult'. The British colleague John Brown frowns and begins to outline possible solutions, Keiko looks puzzled.

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is a little suspicious of his Italian and British colleagues' attitude, which appears to be more about self-promotion than working as a team. John Brown, the British lecturer feels too much detail is being discussed at the early stages of the project and more brainstorming for ideas is required. Fabio is uncomfortable with the silence shown by some colleagues, who he feels are not contributing and it is his responsibility to keep the meeting lively and engaging or it will come to halt. He suggests they meet after the meeting for a meal. Perhaps getting to know each other over dinner would be a good idea to help create trust and openness. Keiko and Hannes feel he is trivialising the proceedings by his attitude and Hanne's feels asking suggesting everyone go out for a meal is not important. John declines as he is scheduled to be on a plane that afternoon to attend a conference.

## **Perceptions**

Laura is disappointed that the meeting is not proceeding as well as she had expected so calls a halt to the proceedings. John Brown is annoyed as he feels the meeting was just beginning to get interesting and his time is very limited, in addition he is distrustful of Laura's motives for stopping the meeting. Keiko feels Laura should have been more decisive as a leader and taken control of the project.

The International Profile

Task

Complete the following chart based on the case study giving examples for each category.

See the example given below.

Experience	Intercultural	Intercultural gaps	Pre-arrival preparation	potential problems with
	Experience			pre-arrival preparations
University as a Senior				
lecturer in the				
Department of Business				
and Economics.				
Previous job was with a				
Hong Kong international				
management				
consultancy company.				
Expertise as an				
international				
management consultant				

Cultural Assumptions	Personal Strengths	Potential problems with	Communication Strategies
		personal strengths as	
		perceived by others	
		possession by senses	

Intercultural sensitivity	Non- verbal Behaviour	Verbal communication	Behavioural interpretations

## The International Profile

Experience	Intercultural	Intercultural gaps	Pre-arrival preparation	potential problems with
	Experience			pre-arrival preparations
<ul> <li>University as a Senior lecturer in the Department of Business and Economics.</li> <li>Previous job was with a Hong Kong international management consultancy company.</li> <li>Expertise as an international management consultant</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Had worked with British counterparts in HK on a regular basis in her previous job.</li> <li>Had worked on a less regular basis with colleagues from Japan.</li> </ul>	Laura had never left HK before     Never worked with colleagues from the other national states	<ul> <li>Prior to leaving she arranged to attend business communication training</li> <li>Read research on doing business with colleagues from Southern Europe and Scandinavian countries,</li> <li>In particular she studied research done by Hofstede and Trompenaars.</li> </ul>	<ul> <li>Lack of training specific to intercultural communication in business</li> <li>Research deals with large culture clusters</li> <li>Research deals with large culture concepts and requires a balance with other types of IC research in to cultural identity and interpersonal communication</li> </ul>

Cultural Assumptions	Personal Strengths	Potential	problems	with	Communication Strategies
		personal	strengths	as	
		perceived	by others		

- She felt confident that she would work well with her colleagues from Britain and Japan as she had had previous contact with people from these countries.
- She had read that the Swedish tended to be very quiet and shy and needed prompting.
   This is a cultural assumption that all Swedes are like this.

- very self-confident person thus very centred and balanced
- strong values which provide consistency
- a clear sense of direction which allows for clarity of thought and purpose
- self disciplined so is not easily diverted form the task at hand
- has considerable determination to succeed
- very decisive so is able to make decisions quickly and when necessary
- strongly focused on reaching goals and is therefore able to see a task to completion
- Laura speaks Cantonese, Mandarin Chinese and English.
   Her level of spoken English is rated as excellent.

- May be perceived as arrogant by others
- Could lead to inflexibility and critical judgement of others
- May lead to lack of understanding of those who are more easily diverted away from set tasks
- May prefer to work with ideas and approaches that are familiar
- May lack understanding that others may approach tasks using different strategies and form different perspectives
- May be quick to jump to conclusions about people she meets or circumstances she encounters.

- Contact with her counterparts
   via e-mails and
   correspondence on a regular
   basis. Initial 1<sup>st</sup> meetings
   arranged.
- Prior to the 3<sup>rd</sup> meeting agenda based on discussions from the previous meetings sent this by e-mail, giving colleagues time to think about her proposals.
- Clear indication of her role as head of the project.
- Clear statement of her ideas on how the project should proceed and what goals needed to be achieved.
- elaborating on areas she felt she needed to clarify
- Opens meeting for discussion
- Creating openness and trust in relations is seen as important by some members

Intercultural sensitivity	Non- verbal Behaviour	Verbal communication	Behavioural interpretations	
Noted the Italian nodding	Nodding agreement	Outlining lack of expertise in	Suspicion colleagues' attitude,	
Noted the silence of the others	• Silence	the area then offered thoughts	which appears to be more	
• Noted look of possible	Look of annoyance	on the project slowly and	about self-promotion than	
annoyance from the British	Lengthy silence before starting	concisely.	working as a team.	
lecturer but decides not to act	to talk	Interruptions and questioning	• silence perceived as not	
on it	Uneasy exchange of glances	during turn taking	contributing	
Aware of the need to offer turn	Uncomfortable during	more time is needed for	Feeling of responsibility to	
taking in conversation to some	questioning	negotiations to take place and	keep the meeting lively and	
colleagues	Gestures animated and voice	much more detail required	engaging or it will come to halt.	
Aware of potential dominance	tone rising.	before proceeding	Perception of meeting being	
by members of the team	Special tension	'Mm. It would be difficult'	trivialised.	
	Gestures.	signals <i>no</i> in some cultures.	Socialising outside the	
	Times and schedules	Difficult signals cause and	meeting is not seen as an	
	Physical passivity and stillness	effect response	important in relationship	
		Consensus seeking	building whilst for others it is	
		Brainstorming and ideas	an important part of business	
		creation versus details and	Feelings of disappointment	
		task allocation	that the meeting is not	
			proceeding as well as	
			expected so a halt is called	
			Perception that the meeting	
			was just beginning to get	
			interesting and time is very	

	limited
	• Feelings of distrust of motives
	for stopping the meeting.
	• Issues of role interpretation
	and leadership

# **The International Profiler**

# **Reviewing your own Profile**

Based on your responses to the case study and in the workshop, which areas do you feel you may need to adjust in order to improve your intercultural communication skills?

Competency	Increase	How?
Become more receptive to new ideas and extending understanding into new and unfamiliar territory		
Become keener to initiate contact and build relationships with new people, including those who have different experiences, perceptions and values.		
Learn to positively accept behaviour that is very different form my own.		

Become more adaptable to a range of different social and cultural situations and be willing to learn a wider range of behaviour patterns.	
Avoid coming to quick and definitive conclusions about new people and situations that I encounter.	
Become motivated to learn and use other languages.	
Develop greater awareness of signals such as body language, eye contact, and intonation act.	
Become more aware of how I come across to others.	
Check and clarify more often what other people are saying and not assume that I have understood.	

Become more conscious of a 'low risk' style of communication that minimises the potential for misunderstanding.	
Learn to build and maintain trust through developing the skill of rapport building.	
Develop a range of communication styles giving a greater capacity to lead a communication partner in a style with which he or she feels comfortable.	
Become sensitive to the needs of the group and the process of team work so that different perspectives are not suppressed but understood and used in the problem solving process.	

# Developing an Intercultural Mindset – Training Implications

Denial	Raise awareness of (superficial) cultural differences.
Defence	Emphasize the commonality of all cultures. Study own culture too.
Minimization	Study cultural differences in depth. Allow for confusion.
Acceptance	Understand underlying value differences. Understand culture as a process. Respect despite disagreement.

Adapted by Don Hassett from A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity, Milton J. Bennett, PhD

## **A Final Word**

"Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, and fabulous? Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There's nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.

# **Feedback**

# **Subject Centre Feedback Form**

**Event:** Enhancing your interpersonal skills

**Location:** Nottingham Trent University

**Date:** 19 April 2006

Name: (Optional)



## Please give your overall opinion of the event

	excellent	very good	good	satisfactory	unsatisfactory
Workshop as a whole					

# Please give your opinion on the following? (please tick the relevant star/s)

	<b>አ</b> ተራተ	<b>☆☆</b>	☆
Relevance of title to contents			
Time allocated to sessions			
Number of sessions/topics			
Administrative arrangements			
Venue			

## Please comment on particular aspects of the event that:

May contribute to your future teaching	
Were of particular interest/relevance to you	
Were innovative	
That you will be sharing with colleagues	

Other comments or suggestions for future events				
How did you beer about this eye	ent 2 (places tick)			
How did you hear about this eve	ent ? (piease tick)			
Subject Centre E-bulletin	Other Email List			
Subject Centre Newsletter	Colleagues			
Subject Centre Website	Other (please specify)			
Area Studies Network List				

<sup>\*</sup> Are you happy for your comments to be quoted anonymously in reports or publicity produced by the Subject Centre? (Please circle reply) YES / NO