

Handout 1: Cultural Identity (45 min.)

Building a cultural profile*

Use the following questions to look at various elements of culture. Pick three sets of questions and talk about them in your group. Focus on similarities/difference across cultures. Summarise the outcomes in the table and present the outcomes in a whole group.

1. Family

- Describe what the term “family” means to you.
- When you talk about your family, whom does that include?
- How far is the family involved in making important decisions, like marriage, divorce, profession, job, moving to another place, etc.
- In routine dealings, do you put relationships or tasks first? Give examples.

2. Community

- Describe what the term “community” means to you.
- What are mutual obligations of the individual members and the community as a whole?
- Were you brought up in a community of people from your ethnic background?
- Do you now live in a community of people from your ethnic background?
- What happens if an individual violates rules & regulations established by the community?

3. Work

- Why did you choose the work you are doing now or are planning to do?
- Is this work similar to the work of your parents or grandparents?
- What do you consider to be rewarding work?
- What do you value at work? (e.g., independence, money, friendship, etc.)
- How do you view authority? For example, if a boss asks a subordinate to help with a task outside of work and outside of his or her job description, what would you advise?
- How are you expected to dress for work?

4. Customs

- What language do you use with your family, at work, and in your social environment?
- What occasions and festivals do you celebrate? How many people are invited to a wedding, a New Year or Christmas dinner? Do you celebrate public holidays at home?
- What foods do you like to eat? Have you always eaten these foods?
- Does your culture of origin have special forms of address or titles for people who are older, have higher status, or special professions?

5. Sense of space

- How do you like to be greeted?
- How close or distant do you like people to stand when next to you?
- What voice pitches and volume and what speed of spoken communication are you comfortable with?
- What gestures and body language do you find challenging or confusing? For example, do you make eye contact with some people but not others?
- What does eye contact mean to you?
- How do you define privacy? Which questions do you consider to be an invasion of privacy?

6. Time

- What does time mean for you? Which words do you associate with time?
- What are some proverbs about time in your language? i.e. “A stitch in time saves nine.”
“The early bird catches the worm.”

- What is “late” for you? What is “soon” for you? *“He (the boss) will be back soon.”*
- What do you typically do if you are late?
- How do you react if someone else is late?
- Do you feel that time is plentiful or scarce?
- In your language, do you have words or structures to express uncertainty about time?
E.g. Russian ‘sozvonimsia’ which means “we’ll probably call each other some time in future”, or Mexican ‘*ahorita regreso*’ – literally ‘*I’ll be right back*’, in reality: ‘*I’ll be back at some point, but who knows exactly when*’.

* **Critical Incidents for Intercultural Communication:** An Interactive Tool for Developing Awareness, Knowledge, and Skills. Facilitator and Activity Guide. Developed by Sarah Apedaile and Lenina Schill
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