



## **Culture and Global Leadership Overview**

### **World Affairs Challenge 2017: Smart Cities**

### **Cultural Understanding for Teachers and Students**

#### **Key Takeaway:<sup>1</sup>**

Understanding culture and its impact on behavior can make the difference between success and failure in working to incorporate “change” in a community with a different cultural perspective. This is relevant when developing your presentation on “smart cities” because the country culture and community cultures involved may not see your approach or solution the way you intend or want them to understand. It is important to recognize where “they are coming from” in order to work productively together to implement your desired solution effectively and sustainably. By using this suggested approach to understanding culture, you will:

- Learn more about the cultural context and use the cultural context as a strength instead of an obstacle to achieving your proposed solution and desired outcome.
- Learn skills to interact more effectively with other cultures – to learn from them and build respect and trust – in order to integrate all input for a successful and sustainable solution.
- Learn a framework of cultural values and behaviors that affect behavior and implementation of solutions across cultures.
- Be more effective in developing a solution that will be successful in your “smart city” presentation.

#### **Overview**

- I. What is Culture? Why is Culture Important?
- II. What is a general approach to intercultural understanding?
- III. What are key cultural value orientations to consider when working with other cultures?
- IV. How to implement effective intercultural communication into the “smart cities” presentations?

#### **Section I. What is Culture?**

Definitions of Culture:

1. “Culture is a system of **values and beliefs** which we share with others, all of which gives us a sense of belonging or **identity**. Culture is ways in which people in a particular group, society or organization behave, communicate, think and perceive reality. Each culture exhibits differing value and belief systems, which affect how people perceive reality and react to it.” *Gary Weaver, Culture, Communication and Conflict, 2002*
2. “Culture is the **collective programming (Software)** of the mind that distinguishes the members of one human group from another.” *Geert Hofstede, Cultures and Organizations, 1997*
3. “Culture is the shared ways in which groups of people **understand and interpret the world.**” *Fons Trompenaars, Riding the Waves, of Culture, 1998*

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<sup>1</sup> This material addresses a portion of the **Formal Presentation Rubric on Solution Action Steps** – and the consideration given to **respecting cultural traditions and incorporation of this understanding into your solution and presentation.**



**To help understand the concept of culture, try this exercise:**

Try “walking in another culture’s shoes”. Switch your shoes: Take your left shoe and put it on your right foot; Right foot on your left foot. How does this feel?

Shoes are like culture; you “wear” culture automatically like you wear your shoes. When you change shoes (or switch them), they feel uncomfortable. However, someone else may wear shoes that way. So, you both need to “exchange” shoes to learn how to “walk in another pair of shoes” to understand the “new culture”.

**Key Takeaway: Culture is like “wearing shoes”. Each pair of shoes is a “cultural identity”: a way to view the world or “world view”.**

**Why is Culture important?**

Just like the shoes we wear, our multiple “cultural identities” frame the way we see the world.

Key cultural identities include (but are not limited to):

- Nationality – Chinese, Mexican, U.S. American, Russia
- Ethnicity – Hispanic, Native American, Northern European
- Regional – Southern California, Boulder, Northern Mexico
- Gender – female/male “cultures”
- Age – generational “cultures”: Baby Boomers, Millennials,
- Class – economic level, social status
- Professional – teacher, accountant, animal trainer
- Organizational – school, business, government

**To understand the difference in “shoes” between “your” (US) culture and that of your “smart city”, consider three steps:**

**Step 1:** Identify your “cultural shoes”: as a US student who wants to help “smart cities” be successful.

Exercise: How does culture affect identity and perception?

- List at least three (3) cultural groups with which you identify.
- Rank order the three (3) cultures by importance.
- How do you think this affects your “world view” (the way you view the world)?

1. \_\_\_\_\_

2. \_\_\_\_\_

3. \_\_\_\_\_

Cultural identities and my “world view”: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_



**Step 2:** Identify your target “smart cities” cultures – in order to understand their cultural context. (See Section 3 for a description of general cultural values and how differences affect the success of your solution.)

**Step 3:** Develop ways to work to “Bridge” your cultural perspective with those of the “smart city” in order to empower the local communities to accept and integrate new approaches, ideas, or technology to help your “smart city” be successful. (NOTE: Use the tips in this document, including the next sections and the more detailed descriptions of specific country cultures found in the RWS document “Global Leadership and Intercultural Communication”.)

## **Section II. General Approach to Cultural Understanding**

### **1. Use LOLA**

- **L**earn about the culture
- **O**bserve the culture
- **L**isten to the people in the culture
- **A**sk questions
- Before you **A**ct

For resources about cultures – see Section III on Cultural Values and Impact on Behaviors and the RWS document “Global Leadership and Intercultural Communication”.)

### **2. Build relationships and Trust with the communities in your “smart city”.<sup>2</sup>**

- Use the **“Platinum Rule” – “Treat others as they want to be treated”**.
- We don’t all build relationships and trust in the same way. Some cultures take a long time to learn to trust outsiders – even those who offer to help them. Therefore, take time to get to know individuals in the culture, encourage them to be a part of the work and take ownership for deciding how to implement various aspects of the “smart city” solution.

### **3. Use these Cross-Cultural Adaptability Skills (CCAI) <sup>3</sup>when working with different cultural identities and communities in your “smart city”.**

- **Flexibility and Openness (F/O):** *Non-judgmental, open to different ideas; and able to develop relationships with people who are different.*
- **Emotional Resilience (E/R):** *Bounces back when things don’t go according to plan; has emotional equilibrium; a positive attitude and a sense of adventure*
- **Perceptual Acuity (PAC):** *Observant of cultural context and attentive to verbal and nonverbal cues; empathetic and self-aware*
- **Personal Autonomy (PA):** *Strong sense of identity, acts on own decisions and cultural values while respecting the decisions of others*

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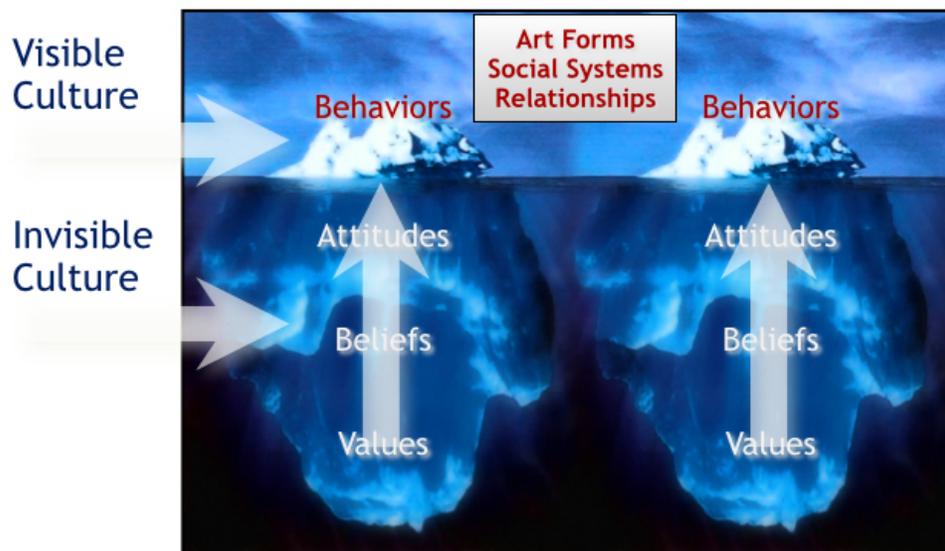
<sup>2</sup> For more information about how to work successfully across cultures, consult the Community Tool Box at <http://ctb.ku.edu/en/toolkits>

<sup>3</sup> The CCAI inventory is available to take by contacting [melinda@realworldsolutions.us](mailto:melinda@realworldsolutions.us)

### Section III: Key Cultural Value Orientations to consider when working with other cultures

**Culture is like an Iceberg.** Only 7-10% of the iceberg is visible above water. Culture is similar to the iceberg because “behavior” is what is visible and is driven by the patterns of values, beliefs and attitudes that are “underneath” the water – in the “invisible” part of the iceberg.

## Iceberg Model of Culture



**Invisible Culture:** Values, attitudes and beliefs that are evident to some extent in all cultures.

**Visible Culture:** Specific behaviors that represent the values.

See examples below:

- **Identity:** (Source of Identity or Focus) Individualism or Collectivism
  - **Individualistic Cultures:** Priority to tasks and attention to individual goals and achievement
  - **Behaviors:** Take initiative, stand out from the group; comfortable with speaking up. This is likely to be the behavior of your team – in contrast to the behavior of the “smart city” culture that is collectivist.
  - US is the most individualist country in the world.<sup>4</sup>

<sup>4</sup> For country comparisons, consult <https://geert-hofstede.com/countries.html>

- **Collective Cultures:** Priority to relationships with people and attention to group affiliation.
- **Behaviors:** Loyalty is to the group. Important to support the group and have consensus decision making.
- Many countries in Latin America, Asia and Africa are collective.
  
- **Implication for Smart City:** It is unlikely that something (new innovation, new methods of technology) will be accepted unless the local “group” is willing. It is also likely that individuals in the group will be unwilling to offer suggestions in a group setting because they don’t want to stand out.
  
- **Communication Style** (Information in the verbal message or in the “context” surrounding the message or event): Direct and Indirect Communication <sup>5</sup>
  - **Direct Communication (Low Context Cultures):** Information is in the language/message; there is less contextual understanding
  - **Behaviors:** Very explicit messages. Tell it like it is. Purpose of communication is to exchange information.
  - US (and Western Europe) tend to be a direct communication culture.
  
  - **Indirect Communication (High Context Cultures):** Information is in the situation, group or person (Context): there is very little in the language/message.
  - **Behaviors:** People will tell you what they think you want to hear because this preserves harmony and saves face.
  - Many countries in Latin America, Asia and the Middle East
  
  - **Implication:** If you ask a direct question, you may not get the accurate information. Therefore, you have to pay attention to context, use multiple sources of information and build trust in order to communicate effectively.
  
- **Power:** (Attitudes of Society toward inequality; how power is allocated or earned): Hierarchical and Egalitarian
  - **Hierarchical (High Power Distance):** Acceptance of inequality. Top-down power structure is generally accepted de facto by group. Status, titles and seniority determine who has the power.
  - **Behaviors:** Certain people are expected to have authority and the hierarchy must be respected and followed. Specific instructions are necessary for subordinates to know what to do.

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<sup>5</sup> Edward T. Hall, [Understanding Cultural Differences](http://changingminds.org/explanations/culture/hall_culture.htm).  
[http://changingminds.org/explanations/culture/hall\\_culture.htm](http://changingminds.org/explanations/culture/hall_culture.htm)

- Many countries in Asia and Latin America are Hierarchical cultures.
  - **Egalitarian (Low Power Distance):** Inequality is not accepted. Flat organizational structure is the norm. Individuals are empowered and given decision-making authority.)
  - **Behaviors:** Inequality is not natural so authority is de-emphasized. Subordinates take initiative and are not told what to do.
  - (In theory), the US is an egalitarian culture.
  - **Implication:** Nothing gets done in a hierarchical culture unless the person in charge says it will. Therefore, innovation and other activity must be run through the hierarchy and get approval in order to be implemented.
- **Uncertainty Avoidance** (Views toward change, ambiguity and tradition): Low and High
    - **Low Uncertainty Avoidance:** Positive attitude toward change and ambiguity.
    - **Behaviors:** Individuals are willing to try a new approach or innovation because new could be better and one learns from trial and error.
    - US is a low uncertainty avoidance country.
    - **High Uncertainty Avoidance:** Skepticism toward change and ambiguity. Guided strongly by tradition.
    - **Behaviors:** Individuals are reluctant to innovate without evidence of proven success. Important to share risk and demonstrate other examples of proven benefit.
    - Many countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America are high uncertainty avoidance countries.
    - **Implication:** In some cultures, innovation will not be welcomed and therefore it will be important to take time, demonstrate evidence of other improvements by similar cities – in order to encourage adoption of the innovation and changes.
  - **View of Time** (and View of task/relationships): Controlled and Fluid
    - **Controlled Time:** Time is limited, subject to control. Focus is on task.
    - **Behaviors:** Meetings start on time; schedules are followed because time and work are related (Time = Task)
    - US tends to be a controlled time culture.
    - **Fluid Time:** Time is limitless and circular. Focus on relationships in order to accomplish tasks. (Time + Relationships = Task)
    - **Behaviors:** Time is used to develop relationships because work/tasks are completed because people know and trust each other to get things done.
    - Many countries in Latin America, Asia, and Middle East/Africa tend to be fluid time.
    - **Implication:** In many cultures, it is difficult to complete a project without taking time to develop strong relationships with the community. For example, Peace



Corps volunteers spend 3 months “building relationships” before initiating projects. This creates a strong bond of trust with the community, achieves approval with those in power, and creates a sense of ownership on the part of the community.

Consult the RWS handbook: “Global Leadership and Intercultural Communication” for country specific information.

Other sources include:

- Geert Hofstede – Cultural Dimensions and country comparisons
- <http://geert-hofstede.com/countries.html>
- Wordpress – news and views from around the world. Country Profiles. Country Maps and Profiles - <http://www.wordpress.org/maps2/list.cfm>
- CIA World Factbook - <http://www.ciaworldfactbook.us/countries.html>
- Centre for Intercultural Learning (Foreign Affairs and International Trade Office, Canada) Country Insights - <http://www.intercultures.ca/cil-cai/countryinsights-apercuspays-eng.asp>

#### **IV. How to implement effective intercultural communication into the “smart cities” presentations?**

- Know your own cultural identity and how you would approach the solution.
- Identify the culture of the receiving “smart city” and determine how best to work together to address the problem, develop and implement the solution.
- In the presentation, clearly acknowledge your incorporation of cultural understanding into your solution, recognizing that your approach will take time, working with locals and is subject to a longer implementation time that we might expect.

**Real World Solutions, LLC** provides practical training and coaching in intercultural awareness and competence for professionals and organizations in business, health care, education and community services. Services include seminars and online courses, assessment tools, coaching, translation and interpretation.

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