



UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

CULTURAL ADAPTABILITY IN COMPLEX OPERATIONS

APRIL 19-23, 2010

9:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Course Facilitator:
Peter Weinberger, Ph.D.

Phone: 202 429 4761
Email: pweinberger@usip.org

Diplomats, military officers, and NGOs alike frequently cite lack of cultural adaptability as a primary obstacle to success. Participants in this course will learn about and practice culturally sensitive communication; negotiating across cultures; understanding the scope and nature of cultural differences as drivers of conflict; identifying obstacles facing organizational designs and their cultural differences; interacting with local populations; incorporating culture into planning; and managing culture shock. The course emphasizes that it is equally as necessary to understand the implicit assumptions and cues behind one's own culture before it is possible to become truly aware of, or sensitive to, other cultures.

Objectives: By the end of this course, participants will be better able to:

- Plan culturally sensitive and customized operations;
- Communicate and negotiate effectively across cultures;
- Understand how culture affects conflict;
- Manage challenges stemming from culture shock;
- Address obstacles posed by organizational culture;
- Understand the potential impact of their own worldviews.

Teaching Methodology and Structure:

The course takes a two-fold approach to teaching. It is largely *elicitive* in nature, meant to draw out and utilize each participant's professional experience. The class also has a *prescriptive* component: new concepts and analytical tools are introduced, but with the aim for each student to identify and articulate how these ideas can be *directly applied* to their work.

A number of *interactive exercises* will be used as learning tools: case studies, role-playing, simulations, guided discussions, etc.

Course Requirements:

Students are asked to attend every session and to participate in all activities and discussions/debriefs.

Recommended readings can be accessed on-line at the USIP iSmart page.

Go to: <http://usipa.ismartsoftware.org/ismartregister/IRegister/login.aspx>

- Enter your email and the password you chose when you applied.
- Go to the course area for “Engaging with Identity-Based Differences.”
- At the bottom of the page, you will see a file that says “course syllabus and readings.” You can access the readings there.

Course Schedule:

April 19: Engaging in Effective Communication and Interaction

1) Exercise: *Personal and Professional Experiences in the Field*

The purpose of the exercise will be for the course participants to 1) map out the wealth of knowledge and experience that is available to them through their colleagues; 2) start to build meaningful relationships; and 3) clarify expectations from the course.

2) Discussion and Small-Group Exercises: *Cultural Carriers*

It is useful to know the guiding assumptions of one’s own culture before it is possible to grasp the nature of other cultures. A discussion of culture as metaphor is used to uncover some implicit understandings amongst the course participants.

3) Guided Discussion and Exercises: *Communication Styles*

On a broad level, communication can be understood in terms of *context*, the environment or setting in which dialogue and interaction occurs. The ideas of “low-context” and “high-context” communication are explored in topics such as running meetings, conducting evaluations, and dealing with seemingly-irrational individuals.

Audio Presentation: “Making Meaning through Interpreters: Lessons Learned from Conflict Zones”

4) Guided Discussion and Exercise: *Individualism and Collectivism*

Individualism refers to cultures that broadly stress individual identity over group identity while collectivism emphasizes the “we” identity over the “I” identity. Themes such as the

need to cultivate relationships and in-group/out-group boundaries are explored in the context of situations such as promoting the rule of law and hostage negotiations.

Recommended Reading:

Robert A. Rubinstein, "Cross-Cultural Considerations in Complex Peace Operations," *Negotiation Journal* 19(1): 29-49, 2003.

April 20: Addressing Challenges of Organizational Culture

1) Guided Discussion and Exercise: *Power Distance*

Power distance is understood as the extent to which the less powerful members of a society accept that power is distributed *unequally*. Exercises explore how differences in attitudes toward hierarchy, age and gender can manifest between international and local actors in interventions.

2) Exercise and Small-Group Discussion: *Uncertainty Avoidance*

Uncertainty avoidance relates to the degree of tolerance of, or avoidance toward, ambiguity and uncertainty. This dimension of organizational culture shapes a discussion of the challenges of promoting cooperation between multinational forces as well those between militaries and international NGOs.

3) Guided Discussion and Exercise: *Temporal Orientation*

Temporal orientation is reflective of the spiritual, relational, and task-oriented attitudes toward the time frame in which communication takes place. Exercises examine how planning and scheduling can be complicated by contrasting "monochronic" and "polychronic" conceptions of time.

4) Guest Talk: TBA

Recommended Reading:

Col. Rickey L. Rife, "Defense is from Mars, State is from Venus: Improving Communications and Promoting National Security" (Carlisle Barracks, PA: Army War College, 1998).

April 21: "Deep Culture" and Accounting for the Impact of Religious Worldviews

1) Small-Group Discussion: *Religion and Politics: Differences in Practice*

Religious traditions underpin and guide politics, even within the largely secular West. The discussion focuses on drawing out these often implicit cultural influences and it is noted how some taken-for-granted principles of peacebuilding are more specifically Western than universal in nature.

2) Guided Discussion and Exercise: *Whose Forgiveness and Reconciliation?*

The exercise covers principles of various religious traditions that promote conflict resolution. It makes use of theological language and concepts to emphasize how differences in religious peacebuilding materialize and become complicated when dealing with Buddhist, Hindu, and Islamic cultures.

3) Guided Discussion and Role-playing Exercise: *Ritual Transformation*

Rituals are crucial tools of peacemaking when there are symbolic dimensions of conflict and parties cannot or will not articulate their true feelings through the use of words in dialogue. Participants will role-play groups in divided societies, and must agree upon the design of either 1) joint mourning rituals or 2) a monument to the deceased (of both groups) as part of a peace process.

Video Clip: Music and Dance in the Bougainville Peace Process

4) Guest Talk: TBA

Recommended Reading:

George E. Irani and Nathan C. Funk. "Rituals of Reconciliation: Arab-Islamic Perspectives" Kroc Institute Occasional Paper # 19: OP: 2, August 2000

April 22: Complex Culture Shock: Remembering Under Acute Stress

1) Guided Discussion: *Intuitive Ways of Knowing*

Some maintain that it is possible to become "fluent" in more than one culture, in much the same way that it is with more than one language. Principles are offered how to intuit certain patterns of behavior of cultural "others," how to anticipate and navigate future situations with them.

2) Guided Discussion and Exercise: *Enhancing Situational Awareness*

Situational awareness means keeping track of what is going on around oneself in a complex, dynamic environment. Participants will be given exercises that test their ability to react under stress and when caught off-guard.

3) Exercise and Small-Group Discussion: *Using a Conflict Log*

Despite our best efforts, there are times when everything goes wrong. Exercises use a "conflict log," a special tool for analysis and critical reflection, as means to identify remedies for "worst case" scenarios.

4) Guest Talk: TBA

Recommended Reading:

Tatsushi Arai, "A Journey Toward Cultural Fluency" in Michelle LeBaron and Venashri Pillay eds., *Conflict Across Cultures* (Boston: Intercultural Press, 2006).

April 23: Culture in Post-Conflict Peacebuilding

1) Small Group Discussion: *The Culture of War and the Process of Numbing*

Refugees and others who have experienced war firsthand are traumatized and have much anger and grief. The discussion focuses on drawing out the dynamics of this process and the psychological need for acknowledgement and healing.

2) Guest Talk: TBA

3) Comprehensive Simulation Exercise: *Myth, Memory, and Refugee Resettlement*

Course participants will be given a case dealing with conflict management in the great lakes region of Africa. As part of peace, they must advise on a plan to begin resettling refugees who fled a war and genocidal campaign years before.

Recommended Reading:

Tatsushi Arai, "A Journey Toward Cultural Fluency" in Michelle LeBaron and Venashri Pillay eds., *Conflict Across Cultures* (Boston: Intercultural Press, 2006).