



UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE

CROSS-CULTURAL COMMUNICATION IN FRAGILE STATES

NOVEMBER 19-21, 2013

9:00 AM – 4:00 PM

Course Facilitator:
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Time and time again, we have heard the refrain about work in fragile states, “We failed to understand the culture.” Most pre-deployment briefings do not prepare professionals to operate in an environment of sudden stress, to remember key cultural lessons while under pressure.

This course shows how to reframe solutions, to deal with local peoples respectfully while addressing functional problems on the ground. Participants will learn and practice high- and low-context communication styles, individual versus collective organization, power distance, and temporal orientation. Special attention will be given to issues of religion or “deep culture.” In addition, there is a focus on building up abilities in empathy and emotional intelligence for different cultural settings—sensing other’s perspectives as well as taking an interest in their concerns.

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;
- 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 in the USIP Distance Learning platform.

- Log on by clicking at: <http://academyonline.usip.org>
- Your user name is your first initial followed by your last name, for example, Adam Smith would use: asmith
- Your initial password is Usip!123 – this password is case sensitive. You may change your password after your first log-in.
- From the list of courses, choose “Cross-Cultural Communication in Fragile States.”

Course Schedule:

November 19: Engaging in Effective Communication and Interaction

1) 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”

2) 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.

3) Guided Discussion and Exercise: *When you don't know what you don't know*

Participants learn about empathy and “emotional intelligence,” and the related issues of burnout and compassion fatigue. Frameworks are also presented the challenging of understanding traumas, particularly on a large-scale level.

Video Clip: Police Training in Iraq

Recommended Reading:

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

Craig Zelizer, "Trauma Sensitive Peace-Building: Lessons for Theory and Practice," *Africa Peace and Conflict Journal* 1(1): 81-94: 2008.

November 20: Operating Successfully when Culture and Religion Merge (and are very different from your own)

1) Exercise and Small-Group Discussion: *When their Religion is Different, When their Secularism is Different*

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, TBD

Recommended Reading:

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

David Smock, "Religion in World Affairs: Its Role in Conflict and Peace" USIP Special Report 201, February 2008.

November 21: Reframing Solutions

1) Discussion and Exercises: *Reframing vs. Rebranding: What is the Difference?*

Rebranding is simply giving a new name to something in order to improve its image. Reframing, on the other hand, involves conceptualizing complex issues in ways that local stakeholders can process and understand so they can incorporate it into their worldview. Participants will explore the difference with a number of challenging examples.

2) Guided Discussion and Exercise: *Using Ex-Combatants as Change Agents*

Militias commonly form along ethnic and sectarian lines and often constitute prominent sub-cultures within the life of a conflict. They in turn can be important resources for peace. Participants will be asked to make recommendations how to give ex-combatants a more active role in peacebuilding efforts, but in a way that does not undermine disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration (DDR) measures enacted at the end of armed conflict.

Podcast: Marinetta Cannito-Hjort on the Italian Restorative Justice movement's work with young *Mafiosi*

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).