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Skill Builder
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Visualizing Cultural Dimensions

Each of the images on my vision board expresses one of the five cultural dimensions that I have chosen to expand upon. For this, I have created an imaginary friend to walk me through several theoretical situations. Each situation will not only explain how I express my chosen five cultural dimensions: low-context, monochronic, masculinity/achievement, low uncertainty avoidance, and low power distance, but will also explain how someone from the other side of each dimension might express their cultural dimensions.

To represent myself as a low-context person, I chose to arrange my vision board with as few distractions as possible to emphasize the more direct messages within the board by relying less on visual or outside cues. I chose an image of a blank piece of lined paper as the specific image to show that there is very little to “read between the lines” and that for the most part, my language, or actual words convey the message that I am trying to send. A high-context communicator will focus more on understanding the message without directly expressing the meaning through verbal communication (Martin and Nakayama 2011, pp. 146). When asking a low-context person if they would like to go out to a Chinese restaurant with you, they might respond “I guess that sounds alright.” They might display a few non-verbal cues such as shrugging their shoulder or giving a half-smile or smirk to show their disinterest. As a low-context person, I might not pick up on these cues and convince this person to get in the car with me to get to the Chinese restaurant that I think they want to go to.

While on my way to the restaurant, I might feel as though I am late. Let’s face it, I am always feeling like I am running late, I am monochronic. To represent my monochronic time-

orientation I have chosen to the images of the toy cars in a traffic jam. This is because I place heavy value on time and prioritize time-management over relationships. A polychronic person is one that values relationships over time (Provasi 2012 pp. 1). While I am stressing over how late I am going to be for my own dinner plans, the polychronic person sitting in my passenger seat might be seemingly calm during traffic jam. They might take this as a valuable opportunity to talk about life's happenings and strengthen our friendship.

During this conversation, we might talk about our goals and what we want to get out of life, overall. The femininity dimension values quality of life, service to others, and nurturance whereas the masculine dimension values ambition, and acquisition of material goods (Martin and Nakayama 2011 pp. 49). As a person with an achievement or masculine cultural dimension I might say "Someday I would like to buy a nice house, have a steady income and career that allows me to leave whenever I feel like it, so I can spend the rest of my hefty income on seeing the world." This cultural dimension is represented by the image of the large diamond paper weight which relates to the level of importance of I place on the acquisition of material items. Due to the priority that is placed on nurturance and quality of life, the person in my passenger seat might respond by saying "I just want to have a family and spend the rest of my life with the people that I love."

Since we are still stuck in that crazy traffic jam I decide to pull off the freeway at the next exit I see. I say "this is San Diego, there are restaurants all over the place! We will just go to a different place." I am not only okay with trying new things; I am excited about going into new situations with unknown or new sets of rules. This is because I have a low level of uncertainty avoidance. This is represented by the image of the die with question marks on all visible sides. The question marks represent my level of willingness to go into new situations that exceeds my

willingness to return to the well-known. So long as the situation is at least somewhat healthful and helpful to myself as a person, and is my opinion of a smart decision, I will probably be excited about it. So to me, this new restaurant is an exciting adventure, but my friend in the passenger seat might have a little more hesitance towards the new or unknown because she has high uncertainty avoidance. As written by Clearly Cultural (n.d) “Uncertainty avoiding cultures try to minimize the possibility of such situations by strict laws and rules, safety and security measures, and on the philosophical and religious level by a belief in absolute Truth; ‘there can only be one Truth and we have it’.” This explains my friend’s hesitance when we pull into the parking lot of a new restaurant that looks pretty fancy. She doesn’t know what it will be like or who will be there and that makes her uncomfortable.

I walk up to put our names on the wait list and notice that my friend is hiding in the corner far away from the crowd. I walk up to her and ask “Why are you all the way over here?” and she responds “My boss is over there.” Since I am from a culture with low power distance, I ask her why she isn’t saying hello. Low power distance cultures believe that less hierarchy is better and that good bosses downplay their power and have closer relationships with and accept suggestions from subordinate employees (Martin and Nakayama 2011, pp. 48). This is represented by the image of the suggestion box on my vision board because I usually feel like my suggestions and comments are heard by a higher level. My friend is from a high power distance culture and believes that her boss would feel disrespected if she approached him anywhere, especially in a social situation outside of work. She doesn’t feel like she belongs in this restaurant because of the hierarchy in her workplace. She doesn’t want to look as though she is trying to disrespect her boss’s authority, so she decides that we should leave. I might try to convince her to stay because I am hungry, but she wins this battle and we head for home.

Interacting with somebody with opposite cultural dimensions might cause a lot of confusion and frustration in terms of communication. As a low-context person I might have very direct words at times and may not totally understand non-verbal or indirect verbal cues from my high-context counterpart. Being a monochronic person might make me seem rushed or rude to a polychronic person due to my perceived lack of effort in relationships. My achievement dimension might completely contradict somebody with a more nurturing cultural dimension. Since I have a quite low uncertainty avoidance, activities with a person with high uncertainty avoidance might bore me and my adventurous suggestions might make them very uncomfortable. Cultures with high power distance might be offended by my actions because I am used to workplaces with low power distance. Although in some situations, differences in these dimensions might cause a lot of friction, knowledge of cultural differences can aid in keeping my communication efforts less hostile and more productive.

Works Cited

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