

# Culture Values and Distance Course

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Our values are based on what we believe is good or best in the world around us. Most of our behaviour flows out of our values. Different cultures have different values and the difference between our home and host culture is called "culture distance". In the Culture Values and Distance course we explore some of these values, consider what makes up our home values, and discover the values in our host culture.

The Culture Values and Distance Course is a ten-hour interactive, online course that is run over a two-week period. Within the two-week period you are able to participate at times that best suit you. There are interactive resources for you to work through on your own as well as "real-life" case studies and forums for discussion with the other participants and the facilitator.

Below is an outline of the cultural values covered in this course:

## 1. Behaviour and Values

**Why is culture like an iceberg?** The iceberg has often been used as an illustration for culture. Why is that? Part of the iceberg is visible above the water and part of the iceberg is invisible because it's under water. The visible parts of culture are the ways people behave. The invisible parts are the values and what people think. In this module we are going to look at what culture is.

## 2. Concept of Self

**Why do America and China always disagree about Human Rights?** America keeps pointing out China's problems with human rights and China keeps saying it's nobody else's business. What's happening here? Americans relate to the pronouns "I" and "me" which represent the individual. To them, the rights of every individual are important and nobody should be stepped on to achieve anything. Chinese on the other hand relate more to the pronouns "we" and "us" which represent the group. To them, it's more important that the group be promoted, and if you have to step on a few individual people for the benefit of the group – well that's OK. In this module we are going to look at the concept of self and the difference between individualism and collectivism and see how this difference explains a lot of the conflicts we see between cultures.

## 3. Personal and Societal Obligations

**Why do some people get special treatment?** In the West, laws and rules tend to apply to everyone in the same way. We expect that everyone is the same and equal under the law. There is a sense of obligation to the whole of society. This is called the universalist view. However, in Asia, it seems that some people get treated differently. If a friend or relative is in trouble, then their family and friends will do whatever it takes to help them out, even if it's unfair or not-so-legal. They will use their position and influence to help their friend or relative. This is because there is a sense of obligation to the persons I relate to, above any responsibility I might have to the society. This is called the Particularist view. In this module we are going to explore the difference between the Universalist and Particularist points of view and see how this affects the way people view laws and rules.

## 4. Power Distance the the Source of Status

**Isn't everyone equal?** In the West, we think of everyone as being equal. We know that in reality some people have more power and status than others, but we try to de-emphasise it by playing down positions of power and status, being informal, mixing with people of different status to us, etc. We believe that one's status is earned and anyone can improve themselves if they will just work at it. We think this makes for a harmonious society. However, other cultures feel that differences in power and status need to be clearly shown and emphasised. People should keep to their own circle of friends, you should address superiors by their titles and formality is much more common. In these cultures, status is something you are born with (or without) and you can't really change it. For these cultures, harmony only comes when everybody plays their part appropriately. In this module we are going to look at the concept of Power Distance as well as Source of Status.

## 5. Locus of Control

**Why do people leave so much to fate?** Most Western cultures are active and the people in them believe that they have a great deal of control over what happens to them in their lives. In contrast, many Asian cultures are passive or fatalistic, and people believe that a lot of life is what happens to you and is largely out of the individual's control. People from active cultures who believe they are in control of what happens have what is called an internal locus of control. People from fatalistic cultures who believe that there are many things in life that just need to be accepted have what is called an external locus of control. Internal control cultures value people who will get up and make changes to the world around them, and they find it hard to understand those who sit back and accept the problems that they have. External control cultures value those people who are able to quietly accept all that happens to them, and they find it hard to understand those who are always running around trying to change the many things in our world which are unchangeable. "Locus" means centre, so "Locus of Control" means the centre of control.

## 6. The Concept of Time

**Why can't people queue up?** Is your host culture a place where people don't seem to line up properly? Do you get frustrated when you go to the post office or a shop and people cut in front of you - or worse still just mob the counter? Chances are you are experiencing a different concept of time! Some cultures see time as a fixed straight line. These cultures are called "monochronic" ("mono" meaning "one", and "chronic" meaning "time"). Other cultures see time as an unlimited flexible resource and the best way to do things is to do many things at once. These cultures are called "polychronic" ("poly" meaning "many"). In this module we are going to learn more about different ways of looking at time.

## 7. Communication Styles

**Why don't people just say what they mean?** Some of us come from cultures that value direct communication. Our words mean what we say and the message is contained in the words alone. Some people, however, live in cultures where a high value is placed on harmony and maintaining face. People in these cultures tend to use indirect ways of communicating, where the meaning may not necessarily be in the words but instead it is behind the words, as well as in the surrounding context.