INTERCULTURAL ASPECTS

Learning and teaching in a culturally diverse background

Intercultural input within the entrepreneur training

Whenever people from different cultures meet at training, they encounter a multicultural learning environment. Learning in a culturally diverse environment invites opportunities to share different experiences, multiple perspectives and insights. It can encourage critical thinking and helps build networks and support. Multicultural learning environments require trustworthy relationships, but different communication patterns can at the same time lead to misunderstanding and mistrust.

What does this mean for the work of trainers? What competencies do the trainers need? There are two overarching considerations:

1. Awareness of our own cultural background (worldview)
2. Knowledge, skills and other capabilities

Let's first look at how we can understand the concept of culture and its aspects.

The concept of culture is a very complex one, including different levels and different perspectives. Hofstede's Cultural Dimensions Theory is a framework used to understand the differences in culture across countries. It shows the effects of a society's culture on the values of its members, and it shows **how these values relate to behavior.**

Hofstede's initial six key dimensions include power distance, uncertainty avoidance, individualism-collectivism, masculinity-femininity, and short vs. long-term orientation. Later researchers added restraint vs. indulgence to this list.
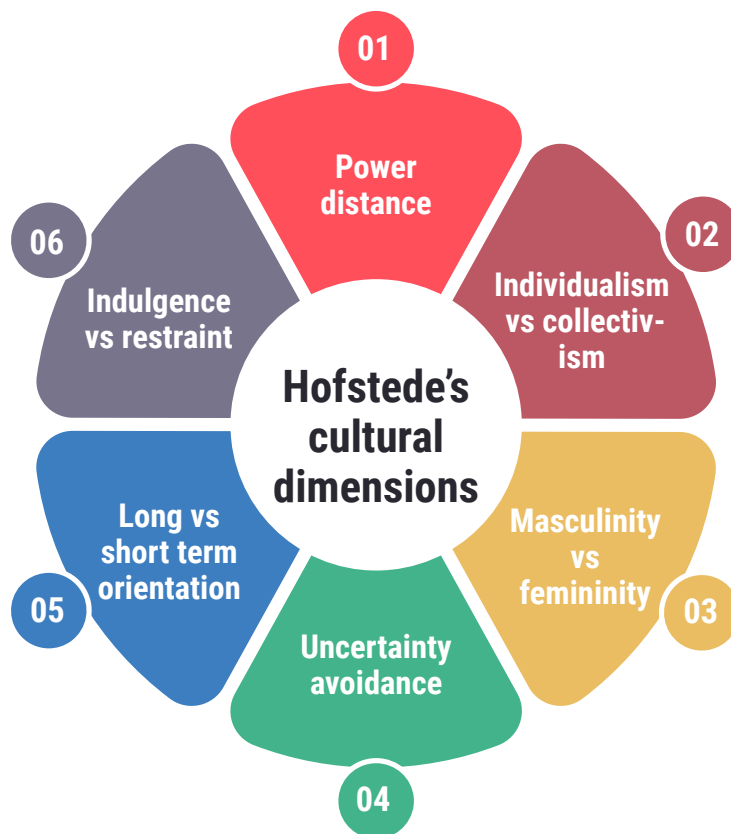
Understanding these potential differences in perception can lead to understanding and the minimizing of conflict between people with different value systems. It can help trainers to adjust their approach in case of misunderstanding caused by cultural or personal differences. For instance, if the trainer assigns a lot of individual tasks to participants who are more used to a collectivist culture, they may feel uneasy and prefer to work in a group rather than independently. Participants with a cultural background of low uncertainty avoidance may have a more relaxed attitude vis-à-vis the trainings' guidelines and instructions, and favor practice rather than rigid codes of behavior.

CONCEPT OF WORLDVIEW

A worldview includes **assumptions about reality, society and existence.** These basic assumptions are taken to be true without question. Worldview determines how people perceive their relationship to the world, nature, institutions, other people, etc. It is the framework through which we interpret reality. Worldview is related to our decisions and our relationships. The way people interpret their everyday livese reflects their personal worldview.

Many people have difficulty understanding their own ideals and values. Differences between the country of origin and the new country of residence with a divergent culture can provide a basis for understanding issues related to different worldviews.

Lecturers working with people from other cultures should self-reflect and **understand their own worldview and how it affects their approach to people from different cultures.** Both concepts can provide important insights and develop trainers´ awareness. The following table, which lists all the phenomena that fall under the concept of "worldview", can be used as a tool for the trainers. They may use it to reflect on their own worldview and in discussions with other people.

Table 1 - Some elements of the four dimensions of worldview (Van Deurzen-Smith, 1988).

Natural world *Umwelt*	Social world *Mitwelt*	Private world *Eigenwelt*	Ideal world *Oberwelt*
Relation to:			
Food/nutrition	ethnic background	self	spirituality (holiness, tabu, myths, rites)
rest/sleep	social class	intimate people	religiousness
health and illness	other reference groups	feelings	ideology
sex	gender	thoughts	philosophy
sexuality	language	character traits	time and space
fitness/weakness	country	ideas	
body	cultural history	aspirations	
ageing	family	personally meaningful objects	
physical (cultural) environment	work environment	time and space	
nature	authority		
time and space	law		
	time and space		

INTERCULTURAL COMPETENCIES

Lecturers working with people from other cultures should also develop **"intercultural competencies"**. There are many definitions and frameworks available. Most of them have a common element in that they require an understanding and appreciation of one's own culture in order to understand another person's culture. Some definitions underscore the knowledge and skills needed to interact with people from different cultures, while others focus on attitudes.

In order to gain a systematic, in-depth understanding of intercultural effectiveness and the competencies needed to achieve it, it is helpful to use the Competency Framework.

Competencies that are needed for effective intercultural interaction are explained, for example, in the Global People Competency Framework (Spencer-Oatey and Stefanie Stadler, 2009). This framework comprehensively describes four groups of competencies -   knowledge and ideas, communication, relationships

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and personal qualities and dispositions. For each competency the authors give explanations and examples of behavior.

Another Competence Framework (developed by European Training Strategy) describes one intercultural competence, its criteria and indicators. Indicators include different skills, knowledge and attitudes.

Learning intercultural interaction is not easy: we are all culturally based and culturally biased. A change from an ethnocentric worldview to multicultural awareness requires significant attitudinal changes.

In the following table you can find a self-development checklist, which can help you to reflect on your own attitudes and develop more inclusive strategies.

Table 2 - 10 Questions to Self-Reflection

1. What is my definition of "diversity"?

2. What national, cultural, linguistic or religious group(s) do I belong to? How do my teaching practices reflect this?

3. What do I know about the cultural, linguistic, religious and educational backgrounds of my students?

4. How could I learn more about the diversity of my students?

5. What are my perceptions/assumptions of students from diverse cultural groups? Or with language or dialects different from mine? Or with special needs or requirements?

6. What are the sources of these perceptions (e.g., friends/relatives, media, stereotypes, past experiences)?

7. How do I respond to my students (emotionally, cognitively, and behaviourally), based on these perceptions?

8. What experiences do I have as a result of living, studying or working in culturally and linguistically diverse cultures? How can I capitalise on this experience?

9. How can I adapt my teaching practices to be more responsive to the unique needs of diverse student groups?

10. What other knowledge, skills and resources would help me to teach from a more culturally inclusive perspective?

Based on: Barker M., Frederiks E., Farrelly B. *GIHE Good Practice Resource Booklet – Designing Culturally Inclusive Learning and Teaching Environments - Classroom Strategies* Creating a Culturally Inclusive Classroom Environment (griffith.edu.au)

Intercultural competencies are skills acquired over time and only with significant emotional and intellectual investment. It is a long process that must be enthusiastically supported, and we have full confidence in our future entrepreneurs, trainers, and trainees to live up to the task.