Cross-Cultural Seminar – B8810-001  
Spring 2014

Columbia Business School  

Office hours: By appointment

Overview

This course will focus on national (or organizational) culture in the context of your internship or student experience and beyond. In particular, we will investigate how cultures differ along several dimensions, and how you can identify areas of good and bad fit between a previous culture and the culture in which you now work or study. I will present information on how to classify any culture, how cultural attributes influence organizations and work expectations, and how workers can manage the adjustment to the workplace or academy in non-native cultures. The online class lecture (webinar) will provide you a formal way to analyze how you approach work assignments across cultures and managing cross-cultural teams. At our required class meeting we will have a discussion regarding your cross-cultural (e.g., internship or student) experiences, both in general and with a specific focus on cross-cultural challenges. We will also take time to analyze a cross-cultural business case and to view presentations by your fellow students (see section on Grading and Required Assignments).

Course Objectives

The course is designed to meet two primary objectives. The first is to provide you with an organizing framework for the analysis of culture and its effects on organizations. With this in mind you should complete the course with the ability to identify where a particular nation falls within this classification scheme, whether a particular organizational culture reflects national culture, and how to best navigate work and work relationships in unfamiliar cultures.

The second objective is to understand your own strengths and weaknesses with respect to cultural (and organizational) fit, in which areas you may need to make accommodations to other cultures, and in which areas you may need to operate in a manner consistent with your native culture. You should be able to identify potential cultural pitfalls and turn these to your advantage.

In addition to the lecture and required meeting, I will assign readings from a textbook and several practitioner-oriented periodicals. The lecture materials and readings should be incorporated into the course assignments as a way to organize thought about your cross-cultural experiences, specifically as those experiences relate to culture.

Readings

Course Requirements

1. **Attendance and Participation** (50% of final grade)

You must attend the final class meeting. The meeting will take place on Friday, April 4th, 2014, 1 PM – 2:30 PM, 8th floor conference room, Uris Hall.

Failure to attend the final course meeting will result in an F for the course.

The initial course lecture will be available as a webinar on Canvas. You must watch the webinar in its entirety.

Please be prepared to share quality contributions and insights at our meeting. Comments that analyze your experiences by applying the frameworks we develop are valuable.

Participation also refers to incorporation of lecture materials into your papers. I expect that you will demonstrate that you have viewed the webinar by incorporating lecture material into your journals and final paper. Similarly, I expect that information from the readings will make its way into your written work.

2. **Internship Journal** (35% of final grade)

Written reflection helps in drawing lessons from experience. To this end, you will submit a 4-5 page (double-spaced) internship journal. First, provide a very brief summary (approx one paragraph) of what you did on your internship. There is no need to share confidential or proprietary material. Likewise, you may reveal the company for which you worked or keep this hidden. Next, see the last page of this syllabus for a list of 9 discussion topics that might serve as starting points for your journal. Think about your internship experience with respect to international and organizational culture in addressing these topics. The point is not to answer every question, but to use a subset of these questions to guide what you write. Given the length of this paper, choose two or three that are most relevant to your situation and take it from there. You are not limited to this list of topics. Submit your internship journal via the drop boxes on Canvas (please label files with your name). The Journal is due by our final class meeting.

3. **Optional Final Group Presentation** (15% of final grade)

Students who wish to attempt a grade of H should create a presentation describing recommended practices for doing business in a different culture. In your presentation identify a country (other than the United States) in which you plan to work or do business in the future, or one you find interesting for other reasons. After doing appropriate research, construct a presentation describing business customs and practices in that country. Your task is to prepare a non-native businessperson to act appropriately in one or more business situations (e.g., an office meeting, a project proposal, a negotiation, a dinner meeting, an interview). Be sure to take into account both the cultural practices of this country and the cultural practices of the person for whom you are writing the report (you may be attempting to train a Latin American to do business in China, for example, so you would want to account for typical Latin American business practices when describing how the Latin American should conduct him/herself in China). You should incorporate lecture/webinar material as well as material from the text into the paper.

Each group must consist of four students. The presentation should be 10 minutes or less. You should prepare slides or handouts, as appropriate. You must contact Professor Wallen by March 14th to opt in to this assignment, inform him who is in your group and to discuss this presentation. You will also have to submit your slides via Canvas drop box prior to the class meeting. One group per country only, so it is to your advantage to notify me of your topic sooner as countries will be allotted on a first-come basis.
Potential Internship Journal Topics (select 2 or 3 topics to stimulate your writing)

1) Cultural Assumptions
Think about the assumptions your home culture makes about the world, specifically related to business. How have these assumptions been challenged in the context of your current internship or study experience?

2) Culture-Job Fit
The requirements of certain jobs/tasks may change across cultures. How might your current position or course of study have changed had it occurred in your native country?

3) The Individual and the Team
Cultures differ regarding the extent to which the individual is emphasized vs. the team. Think about how work, credit, responsibility, etc. have been allocated on your current assignment. How much of this allocation is due to the national culture vs. the corporate culture? Is this a comfortable fit for you? Why or why not?

4) Power Dynamics
Cultures have different attitudes toward power relationships, and these attitudes mirror organizational structures in certain ways. Does the organization for which you currently work (or in which you currently study) have a vertical (hierarchical) or horizontal (egalitarian) structure, specifically as it relates to your experience? Is this structure in sync with your home culture’s views on power? With the views of the culture in which this organization is based?

5) The Individual within the Culture
Cultural differences generally describe the “average” member of a given culture, yet people vary widely within cultures. Where do you fall in the distribution for certain key cultural attributes/assumptions? If you see yourself as extreme in some way, has this helped or hurt your comfort and performance in your current position?

6) The Cultural Iceberg
If, as we will discuss, behaviors and institutions constitute the observable effects of a given culture, how are the behaviors that you have observed affected by underlying values, beliefs, and norms? By underlying assumptions? Is this more the product of the national culture or the particular organization in which you are working/studying?

7) Self-awareness and Culture
As part of the core Leadership course, you were given a 360-degree feedback report. Many of you met with an external leadership coach to discuss action steps to address issues described in that report. Do you think the data in that report were influenced by your “home” culture or the culture of your raters? Perhaps the interaction of the two? How might your action plan change as a function of the culture in which you are working or studying?

8) Changing Cultural Lenses
How has your perspective on your host culture changed as a function of working or studying in that culture? Which preconceptions have changed? Have you gained any new insights with respect to your native culture as a result of this experience?

9) Managing Culturally Diverse Teams
Diversity, including cultural diversity, can affect the way teams work together. Think about a team you might be part of currently (e.g., in your internship, your CBS learning team) and describe whether or not you think it is culturally diverse. Is this a good or bad thing (or more to the point, when is this a good thing and when might it be a bad thing)? If you had the ability to create teams in the workplace (both teams that you would manage and teams on which you would work), would you want culturally diverse teams? Why or why not?